

The GlobalChurch Project

[www.theglobalchurchproject.com](http://www.theglobalchurchproject.com)



## Noel Castellanos

### Local Church Small Group Resource

This resource is designed to help your small group discussion. It's shaped to inspire you to consider new ways for understanding the mission of the church. Questions are organized in themes. Consider choosing the themes appropriate to your small group context. You don't need to cover all the questions. Allow for a time of response.

#### Small Group Preparation:

1. Video: Noel Castellanos, 35 minutes.

- **Noel's Personal Journey into Community Development**
- **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities**
- **Engaging with Other Cultures**
- **Unique Features of Latino/Latina Faith and Theology**
- **Incarnation as Foundational for Mission and Service**
- **Nehemiah and Principles of Community Development**
- **Valuing the Image of God in the "Other", and Valuing Diversity**
- **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized "Other"**

2. Scripture reference: Luke 10:25–37 & Nehemiah 11:1–2.

3. Participants are encouraged to bring their own journals or writing materials.

## Beginning the conversation

Consider the questions suggested below to start the conversation for your small group. They'll consolidate the content of the video, after you've viewed it.

1. What were the major themes in Noel's responses?
2. How does Noel describe how he grew a passion to serve among undocumented people?
3. Discuss the difficulties of the content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
4. Theological method: How is Noel's theology informed and shaped by his practical ministry? What approaches does Noel take in understanding God in the context of his ministry in urban environments, and ministry among undocumented people?

## Going deeper

Explore the major themes raised in the video. Critically engage with Noel's theology. Consider the questions that respond to the issues raised in your preliminary discussion.

1. **Noel's Personal Journey into Community Development:** As you listen to Noel share his story, what strikes you about the way God was shaping him for community development and service among undocumented people?
2. **Noel's Personal Journey into Community Development:** Why does Noel begin a book on a theology of urban mission and community development, with autobiography?
3. **Noel's Personal Journey into Community Development:** How does Noel's personal story set the scene for the way he does theology and mission and ministry?
4. **Noel's Personal Journey into Community Development:** How did God use Noel's experiences to sensitize him to the needs of undocumented people?
5. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** There are about 50 million Latinos/Latinas in the US, and about 12 million are undocumented. In the next 30 to 40 years, there will be 132 million Latinos/Latinas in the US, and the majority of them will be in the US legally. What does this growing demographic, many of whom are Christians, and many of whom are a part of an undocumented underclass, mean for the identity of the US church today? What about for the politics, mission, diversity, theology, and future of the US church? If you're not a North American, how does immigration (and refugees and asylum seekers) in your setting force you to ask similar questions?
6. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** The mainline churches are declining in the US today (and this is true in many parts of the West). But it's the immigrant (diaspora) churches that are growing, evangelizing, and healthy. What does this tell us about what God is doing in the US and in other parts of the West today?
7. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** If so many of these undocumented migrants are Christian, how can the US church (and churches in other parts of the world with large groups of refugees and asylum seekers) seek to integrate these people into worship and community (committing to their wellbeing and flourishing)? How can they be integrated into the fabric of North American (and other Western) expressions of Christianity, and being to transform, revitalize, and renew those very forms?
8. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** Do you view the church in your country as captive to a white cultural bias and perspective?
9. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** Because white Euro-American perspectives dominate so much theology and church life today, people of other groups are forced to engage these

perspectives. (African, Asian, Latin American, and indigenous Christians, for instance, are forced to engage with white Euro-American perspectives and theologies). Do you agree that it's time that white Euro-Americans engaged with theologies, perspectives, and traditions of other cultures as well?

10. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** When your culture is the dominant standard by which everything else is measured, what does this do to the way you see the world? How does it make you blind, at times, to other cultures, theologies, and ways of seeing Christian faith and the world?
11. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** How do marginalized or undocumented people suffer in society? How does the church sometimes (and often inadvertently) contribute to this suffering?
12. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** How can the church help people reclaim the cultural identity that's often taken away by society and church? How can the church lift up, preserve, and affirm cultural difference? And, as the church does this, how can it celebrate diversity in a way that honors the "new creation" and the "new humanity" in Jesus Christ?
13. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** What does it mean to enter into people's pain and reality and meet them where they are?
14. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** Noel says: "When you are in power, your reality becomes the standard, and everyone needs to assimilate to that standard." Do you agree?
15. **Unique Features of Latino/Latina Faith and Theology:** According to Noel Castellanos, what are some of the unique ways in which Latinos/Latinas do faith and theology?
16. **Unique Features of Latino/Latina Faith and Theology:** How does a communal and familial focus unfold?
17. **Unique Features of Latino/Latina Faith and Theology:** Listen to what Noel says about the translation of "righteousness" in the English and "justice/righteousness" in the Spanish. What effect might this have on the faith, theology, and activism of Spanish speaking Christians?
18. **Incarnation as Foundational for Mission and Service:** According to Noel, why is the incarnation foundational to mission and service?
19. **Incarnation as Foundational for Mission and Service:** What happens to your theology, faith, and service when you think about Jesus as a marginalized "Galilean Jew"?
20. **Incarnation as Foundational for Mission and Service:** "Christ was crucified outside the city gates", identifying with the most despised people of the world. The location of God's salvific work in the world was at the margins. How does this effect the way we relate to the poor, despised, and marginalized? How do we see them at the center of what God is doing?
21. **Nehemiah and Principles of Community Development:** How does the story of Nehemiah shape the way Noel thinks about community development?
22. **Nehemiah and Principles of Community Development:** Noel shows how the story combines politics, prayer, community development, faith, and worship. A community developer (who's a layperson and a politician) works alongside a priest to rebuild a city. What does this story tell us about community development (and the renewal of cities) today?
23. **Nehemiah and Principles of Community Development:** How does this story challenge us to more than aid and handouts? How does it challenge us to consider and address systems, institutions, laws, and structures that support injustice, racism, oppression, and so forth?
24. **Valuing the Image of God in the "Other", and Valuing Diversity:** How does valuing the image of God in the "other", and also valuing diversity, change the way we relate to undocumented people, and "other" cultures, religions, ethnicities, etc.?
25. **Valuing the Image of God in the "Other", and Valuing Diversity:** Why would it help to see diversity as a blessing to the world and the church?

26. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized “Other”:** Noel says that inner-city church plants often focus on young, hip, wealthy/middle-class, cool neighborhoods, but avoid the areas populated by poor, “colored”, marginalized people. Why is this so? How can the church change this in its urban mission, and when people move into the city to plant churches?
27. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized “Other”:** “God puts the margins at the center of his love and concern. The question is: What will it take for the church to do the same thing?” Discuss.
28. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized “Other”:** Noel says that putting the marginalized at the center of our concern is theological work, but it’s also about unwrapping the relationship between our faith and our national identity (e.g. unwrapping or untangling our sense of being an Australian or North American or some other nationality from our sense of being a Christian). Are we kingdom people first, or are we Australians, North Americans, etc. first? Do you agree? Why or why not?
29. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized “Other”:** What would it mean to say with Nehemiah, “Lord send 10% of us into the city, to rebuild the city for your glory”? What effect would this have on the city and on the church?

## Application

Ensure the discussion is specifically drawing on your local setting. Make sure the discussion is relevant to the lives of faith for your small group. Encourage relevant and thoughtful examples from each participant.

1. **Noel’s Personal Journey into Community Development:** As you listen to Noel share his story, what strikes you about the way God is shaping you for mission and service, especially among those at the margins of society?
2. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** Is your area becoming ethnically diverse? Are Africans, Latin American, Asians, or other groups moving into your neighborhood? What does this mean for your church’s sense of identity? What about for your politics, mission, diversity, theology, and future?
3. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** The mainline churches are declining in the US today (and this is true in many parts of the West). But it’s the immigrant (diaspora) churches that are growing, evangelizing, and healthy. Is this happening in your city or neighborhood? What does this tell you about what God is doing in your suburb, neighborhood, or city? How will you connect with these groups, welcoming them into your neighborhood and city? How will you let their Christian faith and vitality influence you?
4. **Undocumented People in the US: Challenges and Opportunities:** How can your church serve non-Christian undocumented peoples (and asylum seekers or refugees)? How can your church seek to integrate these people into worship and community (committing to their wellbeing and flourishing)? How can they be integrated into the fabric of your neighborhood and your worship gatherings? How can they begin to transform, revitalize, and renew those very forms?
5. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** Is your church, ministry, seminary, or college captive to a white cultural bias and perspective? What will you do to change this?
6. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** How can you seek to engage with theologies, perspectives, and traditions of other cultures?
7. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** if your culture is the dominant standard which measures everything else, how do you think this might have made you blind to other cultures, theologies, and ways of seeing Christian faith and the world? What will you do to address this, and to become more aware of other ways of living, theologizing, worshipping, and seeing the world?

8. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** Are there ways that your church contributes to the suffering of undocumented people (or refugees and asylum seekers)?
9. **Engaging with Other Cultures:** How can your church help people reclaim the cultural identity that's often taken away by society and church? How can your church lift up, preserve, and affirm cultural difference?
10. **Unique Features of Latino/Latina Faith and Theology:** Come up with a list of ways that you'll listen to and learn from Latino/a-American, Asian-American, African-American, and Native American faith, theology, and spirituality.
11. **Incarnation as Foundational for Mission and Service:** Is your ministry incarnational? Are you engaged in earthy, grassroots, and on-the-ground ministry with people (in their neighborhoods, lives, and situations)? Is the incarnation truly foundational to your mission and service?
12. **Nehemiah and Principles of Community Development:** Noel shows how the story combines politics, prayer, community development, faith, and worship. A community developer (who's a layperson and a politician) works alongside a priest to rebuild a city. Now, think about what this means for community development in your neighborhood, city, or suburb. How can you begin to combine the various professions and gifts that are in your church for the sake of the wellbeing and flourishing of your area and your city?
13. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized "Other":** "God puts the margins at the center of his love and concern." The question is: What will it take for your church, ministry, family, and life to do the same?
14. **Urban Mission, and a Focus on the Poor, Marginalized "Other":** Have you unwrapped or untangled your sense of being a North American (or Australian, or some other nationality) from your sense of being a Christian? Are you a kingdom person first? Or are you an Australian, North American, etc. first?

## Informing community

Facilitate the space for your group to respond to the discussion. You might consider this section as a personal time of written journal responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging me, our small group and our community, to do?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask God for forgiveness in? How do I need to change? What does God want me to stand up for?
3. How do I need God to minister to me and my community, for us to better engage with the contextual issues of our community?
4. How can I gain a better understanding of undocumented people (or refugees and asylum seekers)? How can I better understand the challenges they face and the gift they are to the church? What do we ask that God would do in our hearts?

## Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you've learnt.

Invite the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify, heal, and inspire change for your participants and communities.

## Links

**Website:** [www.theglobalchurchproject.com](http://www.theglobalchurchproject.com)

**Book:** Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)