

## Workshop Summary:

### “CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF NAZARETH?” -- MIDDLE EASTERN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

As it was at the time of Jesus, when the people of Nazareth had a bad reputation (John 1:46), people of the Middle East now have a bad reputation in the U.S. The goal of this workshop was to present a more accurate and truthful picture of the diverse peoples who come to the U.S. (both immigrants and refugees) from the diverse cultures of the Middle East.

#### Who are they?

The first wave of immigration from the Middle East was from 1880 to 1915. It involved Syrians, Assyrians and Armenians, who came seeking economic opportunity and to escape persecution by the Ottoman Empire; virtually all were Christian. A second wave began in 1965 and continues at present. These migrants are mostly from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel-Palestine, Iraq and Egypt; while more migrants from this wave are Muslim, the higher percentage is Christian. In the first decade of this wave, immigrants were largely educated and from the middle- and upper-classes. They came seeking better living conditions and/or to escape war. From the 1980s to the present, there has been increased religious and socio-economic diversity among both immigrants and refugees; still, 2/3 of Middle Easterners coming to the U.S. are Christian.

#### Why do they come?

The Israeli Occupation, growth of political Islam in Egypt and elsewhere, and the war in Iraq are major reasons cited for current migration from the Middle East. Also cited are the yearning for freedom and opportunity and the perception that the U.S. is “paradise.”

Less than 20 million Christians remain in the Middle East.

In the U.S., first wave immigrants were rarely singled out; they assimilated well. Since the 1970s, however, anti-Arab stereotypes have affixed a stigma on Arab ethnicity. This has been especially exacerbated since September 11, 2001. In fact, most Muslims in the U.S. are not Middle Eastern, and most Middle Easterners are not Muslim.

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) there are about 50 Middle Eastern congregations and fellowships, with four language groups (Arabic, Armenian, Assyrian and Farsi).

Developed from workshop power point materials