IMMIGRATION: CHANGING THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE
INTRODUCTIONS
WHAT ARE VALUES, ISSUES, IMAGES OR EMOTIONS ARE EVOKED BY THE WORD “IMMIGRATION” OR THE PHRASE “IMMIGRATION REFORM”?
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RECOVERING THE HUMAN FACE OF IMMIGRATION IN THE US SOUTH
3 KEY QUESTIONS

1. How can faith leaders change the negative and polarizing discourse around immigration?

2. How can faith leaders, faith-based organizations and congregations engage in effective advocacy in support of immigrant justice?

3. How can faith leaders more effectively welcome immigrants into their congregations that in turn will lead to greater inclusion?
GOAL: Offer strategies to tackle the challenges of immigration integration and advocacy, not only at the level of the pew and grassroots but also at the level of policy.
FEAR

- CULTURAL AND ETHNIC “OTHER”
- INVASION NOT ASSIMILATION
- NATIONAL SECURITY – TERRORISTS AND DISEASES
ECONOMICS

- Depressing wages
- Taking away jobs
- Using services without paying taxes
- Sending their earnings home
- Driving down home values
RULE OF LAW

- Lawbreakers and Criminals
  - Gangs & Drugs

- Disorder and Insecurity

- Wait in line!
IGNORANCE

- Historic, economic & geopolitical roots
- Theological and biblical perspectives
- Demonizing myths
SILENCE

- Lack of compassionate response
- Need more people to counter the negativity
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Framework of Faith and Morality
2. Dialogue with immigrants and opponents
3. Communications rooted in prayer and religions symbols
4. Multi-faith and multi-partner collaborations
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FAITH AND MORALITY

- Migration in the scriptures
- Anawim
- Jubilee (forgiveness, reconciliation, amnesty and pardon)
- Hospitality
- Human dignity and rights
OFFICIAL STATEMENTS

- 2009 Statement of the National Association of Evangelicals on Immigration Policy
- 2000 National Council of Churches USA “Resolution on Immigration and a Call for Action”
DIALOGUE

- New immigrants and long-term residents face to face genuinely listening
- Joint pastoral missions to and with immigrants
- Between people of faith who disagree on immigration policy
COMMUNICATION OF VALUES

- Into public media:
  - Convey messages
  - Encourage advocates
- Stories
- Religious symbols
- Special services
- Prayer for, with and over
COLLABORATION

- Multi-faith – joining hands to influence
  - Ecumenical Advocacy
  - Days National Migrant Week
- Multi-sectoral – employers, unions, police, public officials, civic associations, civil rights groups & immigrants
WELCOMING AND INCLUDING THE NEWCOMERS
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MODELS OF WELCOMING AND INCLUDING THE NEWCOMERS

1. The shared congregation
2. National/ Ethnic Churches
3. The Mission Church
4. Collaborating Congregations
5. Multi-Congregational Churches
6. “Nested” Congregations
7. Base Communities
ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE WELCOMING OF NEW IMMIGRANTS

- Communication
- Culturally Appropriate
- Skilled Leadership
- Space for diverse & inclusive Worship & Faith expressions
- Stewarding and sharing Resources
- Respect for each other
Influencing decisions within political, economic and social systems and institutions.

Requires:
- Meaningful encounters between immigrants and non immigrants
- “Prophetic leadership” and capacity development
- Partnerships
- Public events and rituals
- Advocacy resources
BEST PRACTICES IN ADVOCACY -- EXAMPLES

- Holy Spirit Church, Rio Grande Valley, Texas - Ann Cass
- Alterna Community, La Grange, Georgia - Anton Flores
- Catholic Teach-Ins, New Orleans, Louisiana - Fr. Fred Kammer and Sue Weishar
- Greystone Community Church, Loganville GA - Pastor Jim Hollandsworth
- St. Thomas the Apostle, Atlanta, Georgia - Estella Martinez
HOLY SPIRIT CHURCH, RIO GRANDE TX

- Baptism program – parents visit ministries with poor immigrant families
- Sister church relationship with parish in El Salvador – back and forth immersion experiences
- Speakers from partner NGOs
- Peace and Justice Commission organizes letter writing after Mass (4-5 times a year)
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ALTERNA COMMUNITY, LA GRANGE, GA

- Bilingual intentional community - citizens to undocumented
- Share meals, pray together, open their homes, community garden and chicken coops
- Accompanying in legal or medical crisis - court, detention, jail ministry
- Education programs for churches, schools - Border Crossing immersion with meal prepared by immigrants
- Holy Week pilgrimage for immigrants and protests at Detention Center
CATHOLIC TEACH-INS ON MIGRATION

- Hosted by Parishes in partnership with the Congress of Day Laborers
- Week night, beginning bilingual prayer, video and presentation about roots causes and crisis
- Immigrants tell stories then Catholic social teaching presentation
- Facilitated and translated table discussions, using listening guidelines between immigrants and non-immigrants - creating a safe space for interaction
- Review suggestions for actions (includes advocacy activities)
Evangelical Immigration Table -- Engaging evangelical pastors and leaders in joint pastoral mission to immigrant children and youth, ministering to Christian legislators and public witness

Pastor Hollandsworth - began Path Project ministering to immigrant youth and families in trailer park in Gwinnett County GA

250 non-immigrant church volunteers for Path Project

Resources from Evangelical Immigration Table used to educate other Pastors and Christian legislators, taking fellow Pastors on immersion experience at the Border

Pastors and Immigrant youth meet with legislators
ST. THOMAS THE APOSTLE, ATLANTA GA

- Estella Martinez, DREAMer and youth pastor
- Life Teen curriculum and immigration education with 300 Hispanic youth (100 undocumented)
- Building self-worth, awareness of blessing, understanding of immigration roots and policy
- Youth participate in Pilgrimage for Immigration, help to educate and gather signatures from congregation
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CONCLUDING REMARK

[Image of people at an event]
“We are called to be uncomfortable. We are called to step out of our comfort zone when we are following God in our faith. When we become comfortable in our faith we become stagnant and there is no growth.... Our faith is not just saying an Our Father... and grace before our meals... A faith that is bold is a faith that says that is my brother, that is my sister and I love them and I will stand up for them...Besides from praying, we need to step into action. That our prayers not just stay on our lips and our hearts, but become the hands and feet of Christ.”

Estella Martinez, DREAMer
THANK YOU!

- Research & Studies
- Grant