

# IMMIGRATION:

---

## CHANGING THE PUBLIC DISCOURSE

# INTRODUCTIONS

**WHAT ARE VALUES, ISSUES, IMAGES OR EMOTIONS ARE EVOKED BY THE WORD “IMMIGRATION” OR THE PHRASE “IMMIGRATION REFORM”?**

**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

# 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"
- ▶ 2000 U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity"



# 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
  - DaysNational Migrant Week
- ▶ Multi-sectoral – employers, unions, police, public officials, civic associations, civil rights groups & immigrants

# WELCOMING AND INCLUDING THE NEWCOMERS

## 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

# ADVOCATING FOR IMMIGRANT JUSTICE

- ▶ 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)

# 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)



# GREYSTONE COMMUNITY CHURCH, GA

- ▶ 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

# CONCLUDING REMARK



## FINAL WORDS

“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

