

Called by God to Help

Leader: God of love help us to acknowledge God's presence in each one of us.
(*Moment of silence*)

For our reflection, you are invited to think about the many efforts underway in our country and agencies to *welcome the stranger*. In recent weeks we have worked hard to encourage our legislators to support a comprehensive reform of immigration laws. We are still uncertain what will be the outcome. Yet, as believers and certainly as a committee we remain hopeful that just legislation will come to pass and confident that God will hear our prayer.

Our first reading this morning is an article on Immigration Reform by Cardinal Roger Mahony that appeared in the *New York Times* on March 22, 2006. The theme of our prayer this morning, *Called by God to Help*, was the title of his article. (*Leader invites committee members to read a separate bullet*)

- I've received a lot of criticism for stating last month that I would instruct the priests of my archdiocese to disobey a proposed law that would subject them, as well as other church and humanitarian workers, to criminal penalties.
- The proposed Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control bill, which was approved by the House of Representatives in December and is expected to be taken up by the Senate next week, would among other things subject to five years in prison anyone who "assists" an undocumented immigrant "to remain in the United States."
- Some supporters of the bill have even accused the church of encouraging illegal immigration and meddling in politics. But I stand by my statement. Part of the mission of the Roman Catholic Church is to help people in need.
- It is our Gospel mandate, in which Christ instructs us to clothe the naked, feed the poor and welcome the stranger. Indeed, the Catholic Church, through Catholic Charities agencies around the country, is one of the largest nonprofit providers of social services in the nation, serving both citizens and immigrants.
- Providing humanitarian assistance to those in need should not be made a crime, as the House bill decrees. As written, the proposed law is so broad that it would criminalize even minor acts of mercy like offering a meal or administering first aid.
- Current law does not require social service agencies to obtain evidence of legal status before rendering aid, nor should it. Denying aid to a fellow human being violates a law with a higher authority than Congress? the law of God.

- That does not mean that the Catholic Church encourages or supports illegal immigration. Every day in our parishes, social service programs, hospitals and schools, we witness the baleful consequences of illegal immigration.
- Families are separated, workers are exploited and migrants are left by smugglers to die in the desert. Illegal immigration serves neither the migrant nor the common good.
- What the church supports is an overhaul of the immigration system so that legal status and legal channels for migration replace illegal status and illegal immigration.
- Creating legal structures for migration protects not only those who migrate but also our nation, by giving the government the ability to better identify who is in the country as well as to control who enters it.
- Only comprehensive reform of the immigration system, embodied in the principles of another proposal in Congress, the Secure America and Orderly Immigration bill, will help solve our current immigration crisis.
- Enforcement-only proposals like the Border Protection act take the country in the opposite direction. Increasing penalties, building more detention centers and erecting walls along our border with Mexico, as the act provides, will not solve the problem.
- The legislation will not deter migrants who are desperate to survive and support their families from seeking jobs in the United States. It will only drive them further into the shadows, encourage the creation of more elaborate smuggling networks and cause hardship and suffering. I hope that the Senate will not take the same enforcement-only road as the House.
- The unspoken truth of the immigration debate is that at the same time our nation benefits economically from the presence of undocumented workers, we turn a blind eye when they are exploited by employers. They work in industries that are vital to our economy yet they have little legal protection and no opportunity to contribute fully to our nation.
- While we gladly accept their taxes and sweat, we do not acknowledge or uphold their basic labor rights. At the same time, we scapegoat them for our social ills and label them as security threats and criminals to justify the passage of anti-immigrant bills.
- This situation affects the dignity of millions of our fellow human beings and makes immigration, ultimately, a moral and ethical issue. That is why the church is compelled to take a stand against harmful legislation and to work toward positive change.

- It is my hope that our elected officials will understand this and enact immigration reform that respects our common humanity and reflects the values ? fairness, compassion and opportunity ? upon which our nation, a nation of immigrants, was built.

Roger Mahony is the cardinal archbishop of Los Angeles.

Silent reflection followed by reflections on article

Reader: Listen to the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans:

I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourself to this age but be transformed by renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.
(Romans 12:1-2)

This is the Word of the Lord

All: Thanks be to God.

Intercessions:

For peace in the world, that a spirit of respect and forbearance may grow among nations and peoples, let us pray.

Response: Hear us O God.

For the Church and its leaders, that it may be filled with truth and love, let us pray.

For those in positions of public trust and leadership, that they may serve justice and promote the dignity and freedom of all people, let us pray.

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger, that they may be relieved and protected, let us pray.

For a blessing upon our colleagues who serve in Catholic Charities and in ministries to the poor and vulnerable, let us pray.

And for what else shall we pray...

Closing Prayer:

Lord God, be with us this day. Help us to put our faith into action, to work in love, to persevere in hope through your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

