

The Undocumented Church by Rev. Sam Rodriguez

Any given Sunday in the pews of America's Hispanic Churches sits two types of worshippers. The difference is not black or white, rich or poor, catholic or evangelical, Republican or Democrat, nor is it G12 or seeker. The difference between these two types of Hispanic believers not only affects the dynamics of ministry but it catapults the church into the political battleground of the moment, immigration. Any given Sunday, lifting hands and offering sacrifice of Praise, are Born Again Latinos that are in this country legally and those that are not.

Immigration is the political hot button issue of the moment. According to many political insiders, the stance major politicians take on this issue will determine their political viability for the upcoming mid term and 2008 elections. Without question, 9/11 transformed the attitude of many Americans towards immigrants. Cable pundits and the Minute Man project, a militia type organization on the Arizona/Mexico Border, exasperate the call for border security and immigration reform. Although we would all agree that America needs to protect our borders from the entry of individuals that want to do us harm, the question we must confront as Christians is what do we do with the undocumented or illegal immigrants currently here? It is, after all, the moral, political, and legal juxtaposition of the moment for the Evangelical Church.

Up to now, the Evangelical church in America has stood primarily silent on this issue. Why you may ask? The answer stems from the fact that we as Evangelicals have historically resonated with the conservative driving tenants of law and order within our society. **The issue of immigration demands that the church reconciles a society founded on the Judeo Christian value System, with the pillars of law and order and the promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Only the Church can bring these three elements together.** It's time to take the lead. Here's how:

First address the realities. The legislation recently passed in the House of Representatives, known as the Sensenbrenner Bill or HR 4437 would in essence deport the 10 to 13 Million undocumented or illegal immigrants currently in America. In effect, the children born here can stay and the parents who are undocumented must be deported to their country of origin. This would devastate and disenfranchise over 10 million families. The psychological, economic, spiritual, and social effects of such action would be destructive and insurmountable. In addition, the 20 million strong Hispanic Evangelical church would be devastated. "We could easily loose from 30 to 40 % of our church members," stated Rev. Felix Posos, Assemblies of God Northern Pacific Latin American District Superintendent. "Rev. Gilbert Velez, Policy Director for The National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and Senior Pastor of Mercy Church in Laredo, Texas shares an additional concern. "The fastest growing segment of Born Again Believers in America today is of Hispanic descent. This legislation and others like it would not only change our nation, it will change the very make up of the Church," stated Velez. Moreover, many Hispanic Pastors fear that the federal government could even require Pastors or Faith Based Supervisors to report undocumented workers or loose their not for profit status.

Secondly, we must present a comprehensive solution based on biblical principles. Does the bible provide any guidance in respect to immigration? Leviticus 19:33-34 teaches us, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." God requires that we demonstrate compassion to the immigrant. In Deuteronomy 10:18-19, the bible teaches us that "God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food, and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens,"

Born Again Christians need to be concerned with the security of our nation and the simultaneous well being of our immigrant families of which the majority is of Latin American descent. We need to support

immigration reform based on our Judeo/Christian value system that empowered this nation of immigrants to thrive while preserving standards of compassion and humane treatment to all who seek a better life

As Evangelicals we appreciate the need to secure our nation and apply the rule of law. Undocumented individuals may have violated the immigration law by entering this country illegally, however the vast majority have done so for nothing else than the desire to feed their families and give their children a better life. It's time to stop illegal immigration and incorporate a Pro Legal Immigration policy based on Biblical values. We believe that we can protect our borders, implement current immigration laws, and present a viable solution to the undocumented immigrants currently in our nation within the framework of Biblical mandates and our Judeo/Christian Value System. A viable and sustainable comprehensive package would be the following:

1. Border enforcement and protection initiatives that include the application and enhancement of technological, military and law enforcement capabilities that will protect our borders while enabling and facilitating the implementation of our nation's immigration policy.
2. Temporary designation for immigrant workers and their families who upon satisfaction of criteria and due process, begin the path towards permanent residency and citizenship
3. Overhaul of immigration quotas and current tenants in the family reunification process with the purpose of drastically reducing the waiting times for separated families while increasing the number of visas granted to individuals that will contribute intellectual, spiritual, and economic capital to the American Experience.
4. A viable guest worker program that will strengthen the economic vitality of both employer and employee.

Thirdly, we must speak up as the future of our nation is at stake. There is a cultural war in America. The war is between the secularists and the believers, those that believe in biblical truth and those that adhere to moral relativism. More than ever the war is fought in the ballot box, mass media, school boards, and court rooms. The church needs the Hispanic Christian to arise. The political irony in all of this is that political parties that usually count with the Evangelical vote particularly on social issues may alienate the core constituency that will determine the outcome of national elections for the next generation. Hispanic Evangelicals could easily be the constituency that will transform the political spectrum in our nation.

Any given Sunday throughout the Hispanic Churches across America sit people that embody the driving principles of our founding fathers. If Washington, Jefferson, Adams, or Madison would look at America today and discover that there are people coming to America who love God, family and hard work, who share a dream, based on the Judeo Christian ethos, to enrich their families and country, how would they react? I wholeheartedly believe they would be pleased, very pleased.