

A HOUSE DIVIDED

WHY AMERICANS OF
FAITH ARE CONCERNED
ABOUT UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

**Christians for
Comprehensive
Immigration
REFORM**

CHRISTIANS FOR COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM
NOVEMBER 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform undertook an examination of how the debate on immigration has impacted our communities. What we found is that our values are being undermined and our communities divided in this increasingly bitter debate. Like it or not, a battle for the soul of America has begun over the place of undocumented immigrants in our society, and people of goodwill cannot wish it away just because it is ugly or controversial. This report focuses on three areas of humanitarian and moral concern for the faith community:

- We demonstrate that the tone of the national debate over immigration is being set by organizations deeply rooted in hate. Too many people, from the media to community leaders, have stood aside as pro-eugenics and other hateful sources have updated the tactics of Jim Crow for the more sophisticated media environment of the 21st century. The result is a movement able to flood Congress with phone calls and a notable growth in hate groups nationally that is attributable to anti-immigrant sentiment. It is noteworthy that outrageous statements have become the norm – consider Arizona talk radio host Brian James, who had this idea for dealing with border crossings into his state: “What we’ll do is randomly pick one night every week where we will kill whoever crosses the border...step over there and you die. You get to decide whether it’s your lucky night or not. I think that would be more fun.”
- We show that this hateful debate is not only playing out in Washington D.C., but that at a state and local level, communities are being ripped apart. Bloggers discuss ridiculous accusations linking immigrants to scourges from leprosy to pedophilia, and counties pass stringently anti-immigrant ordinances. The loudest voices are winning, and they are not voices of understanding or mercy, but of anger and division.
- As a result of this debate, we are witnessing the endangerment of the Christian and American values of compassion and respect for the human dignity of every person, as immigrant families are ripped apart and individual undocumented immigrants are treated as less than human. In the Latino community, even 3rd and 4th generation American citizens are being made to question their acceptance in society. Raids are threatening family unity both through physical separation and economic insecurity, victimizing many children who are American citizens and expressing an unwillingness to welcome even those who came to this country as young children.

The religious community is uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge across our differences on immigration and a source of healing and reconciliation. We as Christians are pledging to do more to unite our communities and restore the fabric of our society that this growing hate threatens to tear apart. Through *Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform*, Christian leaders are speaking out through the media, educating their congregations about biblical responses to immigration, and mobilizing the voices of people of faith.

*“When I was a stranger you took me in ... whatever you do for the least of these brothers of mine, so also you do for me.”
(Matthew 25:35,40)*

INTRODUCTION: A LOSING BATTLE?

Our policymakers have failed to address the escalating crisis in our immigration system. Perhaps worse, as a whole our society has failed to live up to its values. The tenor of our debate has frightened immigrants and emboldened the purveyors of hate. Brave voices have, and are, stepping up in important ways to remind us that our debate around illegal immigration must begin at a place that recognizes the humanity and dignity of all people—but unfortunately these voices have been too few and too dispersed.

A battle for the soul of America is being fought, and more people of good will need to engage in this conflict that we cannot wish away just because it may be ugly or controversial. The religious community is uniquely positioned to unite us despite our differences and serve as a source of healing and reconciliation. The church in particular stands at the crossroads of power and is bridging the gap between theological and political differences to protect the dignity and lives of the weakest and most marginalized among us.

This report documents the increasing prevalence of mistreatment of immigrants in contradiction to Christian and American civic values. It focuses on three areas of humanitarian and moral concern for the faith community, including increases in hate speech and hate groups linked to the anti-immigrant movement; the upswing of harshly anti-immigrant local and state ordinances; and the impact of raids on immigrant families living in our country’s shadows.

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Through *Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform*, Christian leaders are speaking out through the media, educating their congregations about biblical responses to immigration, and mobilizing the voices of people of faith. This report demonstrates that mainstream dialogue in this country has been steered astray by radical groups who have been given the opportunity to control dialogue about this issue of pressing moral and political concern. As a consequence, we are seeing a notable increase in immigration enforcement measures that undermine our country’s traditional commitment to family and humanity.

There is no doubt that fear and hate have greater mobilizing power than mercy and justice. However, we are also certain that many Americans, and Christians in particular, are caught in a crossfire of extreme public opinion that blocks real dialogue and leaves little opening for our compassion to take root. These same Americans are concerned about the rule of law and protecting our nation’s borders, but are also supportive of a humane response to the undocumented immigrants currently in our country. Thus, while we applaud those Christians

who have given voice to the serious moral concerns around our current treatment of immigrants in our midst, we urge more people to engage on this critical issue.

SECTION 1: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (LEVITICUS 19:18) – IMMIGRATION RESTRICTIONISTS AND HATE GROUPS

Passions surrounding immigration have grown dramatically in recent years. Unfortunately, while there is need for healthy debate on policy issues, much of the public discussion of immigration—and of immigrants—has compromised our values, hardened divisions, and brought to the mainstream hateful rhetoric that we hoped had become a vestige of the past. These hateful comments do not merely violate Christian teachings: They have influenced the debate, intimidated immigrants—both documented and undocumented—and generated regressive political outcomes.

Regardless of where one stands on the policy debate, the dehumanization of immigrants is at clear odds with Christian values of compassion, mercy, and dignity.

Arguably, most troubling of late is how hateful language is being treated as acceptable in the mainstream media and all too many other public places. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has issued a series of reports about the growing influence of groups purveying virulently anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic rhetoric. The ADL notes that several of these groups have been empowered by the media to position “themselves as legitimate, mainstream advocates against illegal immigration in America.”ⁱ

Anti-immigrant groups of today are savvier than the most divisive groups of the past. They employ “more subtle language to demonize immigrants and foreigners” than either the Ku Klux Klan or neo-Nazis.

Regardless of where one stands on the policy debate, the dehumanization of immigrants is at clear odds with Christian values of compassion, mercy, and dignity.

As a result the media quotes them frequently, and they often receive invitations to meet with members of Congress and are even asked to testify as experts in the public interest. “However, under the guise of warning people about the impact of illegal immigration, these anti-immigrant groups often invoke the same dehumanizing, racist stereotypes as hate groups.”ⁱⁱ

Despite mainstream approval and frequently being identified by the neutral phrase “anti-illegal immigration advocacy groups,” these organizations are closely tied to the most extreme anti-immigrant voices. And these organizations “distort the debate over immigration by fomenting fear and spreading unfounded propaganda.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Hate groups have been able to grow nationally by tapping into fear about immigrants. With the issue of immigration drawing much media coverage and anti-immigrant views receiving such widespread acceptance as part of the political debate, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has noted a rise in hate groups nationally. From 2000 to 2006, the number of functioning hate groups in America rose from 602 to 844, an increase of 40 percent. Much of

the expansion has been driven by hate groups' exploitation of the issue of illegal immigration, which most Americans see as a pressing concern.^{iv}

Just how hateful are these groups? Rev. David Ostendorf, executive director of the Center for New Community, compiled the "Top 10 Most Offensive Quotes from Anti-Immigrant Leaders" this spring amid the tumult surrounding the Senate's consideration of a compromise on comprehensive immigration reform.^v Some quotes from people with significant constituencies include:

- Frosty Wooldridge, anti-immigrant author and activist, summed up the message delivered by a KABC-AM talk radio host to a Federation for American Immigration Reform director's meeting as, "The brown toxic cloud strangling Los Angeles never lifts, and grows thicker with every immigrant added. One can't help appreciate the streets of Paris will soon become the streets of L.A. However, Paris' streets erupted, while L.A.'s shall sink into a Third World quagmire much like Bombay or Calcutta, India. When you import that much crime, illiteracy, multiple languages, and disease, Americans pick up stakes and move away."^{vi}
- California anti-immigrant leader and publisher Brenda Walker wrote, "Mexican men have a reputation for leering and worse at little girls, which shouldn't surprise us, since sex with children is socially acceptable in Mexico."^{vii}
- The co-founder of the Minuteman Project and president of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, Chris Simcox, urged National Guard efforts to "round them up," because the "them" – undocumented immigrants – "have no problem slitting your throat and taking your money or selling drugs to your kids or raping your daughters, and they are evil people."^{viii}
- Arizona talk radio host Brian James had this idea for dealing with border crossings into his state: "What we'll do is randomly pick one night every week where we will kill whoever crosses the border ... step over there and you die. You get to decide whether it's your lucky night or not. I think that would be more fun."^{ix}
- Phil Valentine, anti-immigration talk radio host on Nashville's WWTN, had shorter advice for Border Patrol agents during an anti-immigrant rally in Franklin, Tennessee, April 27, 2006. "Shoot him."^x

While these are extreme examples, they define the pattern of rhetorical approaches used by anti-immigrant spokespeople as a successful tool in whipping up fears and shutting down productive dialogues in our communities. The ADL identifies some of the more important and common themes:

- Describing immigrants as "third world invaders," who come to America to destroy our heritage, "colonize" the country, and attack our "way of life." This charge is used against Hispanics, Asians, and other people of color.
- Using terminology that describes immigrants as part of "hordes" that "swarm" over the border. This dehumanizing language has become common.
- Portraying immigrants as carriers of diseases like leprosy, tuberculosis, Chagas disease (a potentially fatal parasitic disease), dengue fever, polio, and malaria.

- Depicting immigrants as criminals, murderers, rapists, terrorists, and a danger to children and families.
- Propagating conspiracy theories about an alleged secret “reconquista” plot by Mexican immigrants to create a “greater Mexico” by seizing seven states in the American Southwest that once belonged to Mexico.^{xi}

The results of these tactics have been profound. When e-mails from organizations whip up hatred, when callers to talk radio programs are organized, when talk radio hosts promote a sense of besiegement in communities, they open the door to a hysteria that is seeping into mainstream media and the public sphere. How widely does the virus of hate spread?

Sadly, the ADL report concludes, “This anti-immigrant propaganda and rhetoric, once the domain of hate groups, is now part of the lexicon used by anti-immigration advocacy organizations, politicians, and media figures considered mainstream.”^{xii} It is unfortunate that media outlets consistently turn to people to comment on immigration whose bigotry would normally be expected to exclude them from mainstream society.

Consider the case of the American Immigration Control Foundation (AICF) and its president, John Vinson. Vinson co-authored the League of the South’s *The Greybook: Blueprint for Southern Independence*. This book, with a racist perspective one might infer from the name, is often quoted by newspapers seeking an expert voice on immigration. Vinson is never identified as a white supremacist who desires a new Confederacy.^{xiii}

But AICF is dwarfed in media prestige by two of its anti-immigrant peers, NumbersUSA and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). They are the largest and most well-known of the national anti-immigrant organizations. Both are critical—FAIR is among the most widely quoted organizations discussing immigration policy, and many credit NumbersUSA for organizing the outpouring of opposition to this spring’s comprehensive immigration reform bill.^{xiv}

Frank Sharry, executive director of the pro-immigrant advocacy group the National Immigration Forum, noted of his adversaries,

“NumbersUSA initiated and turbocharged the populist revolt against the immigration reform package. Roy Beck takes people who are upset about illegal immigration for different reasons, including hostility to Latino immigrants, and disciplines them so their message is based on policy rather than race-based arguments or xenophobia.”

So from where did FAIR, NumbersUSA, and other organizations capable of galvanizing the grassroots emerge? As the Center for American Progress’ Henry Fernandez has noted, their primary progenitor is neither well-known nor mainstream. John Tanton operates in the shadows and outside the broader public’s awareness, but he has founded or served as a key early funder of nearly all of the major national organizations promoting an anti-immigrant agenda, including, by his own admission, FAIR and NumbersUSA.^{xv}

Why would Tanton, a man who has been enormously successful in promoting his policy goal of opposing comprehensive immigration reform, stay under the radar? Perhaps it is because his other associations would undermine the effectiveness of his allies if better understood. As explained by Fernandez,

[t] he Tanton-owned Social Contract Press publishes the views of white nationalists such as John Vinson, including a gem about how God prefers racial separation. Tanton also published *Camp of the Saints*, a racist creed that uses fiction to warn white Europeans about an impending invasion of immigrants from India who will overrun the government, kidnap white women, and make them into prostitutes.

But perhaps more astonishingly, the media rarely mentions that the Southern Poverty Law Center has demonstrated that one of Tanton’s key lucrative early donors to FAIR was “the Pioneer Fund, possibly the last remaining funder of eugenics in the country.”

As Fernandez notes, the “best-known proponents [of eugenics] were the Nazis who tried to demonstrate the power of this pseudo-science by executing millions of Jews, disabled people, and others who did not meet their views of racial purity.”^{xvi} The Pioneer Fund’s Web site features “biographies of board members and grant recipient scholars who support such ideas as black people having smaller brains than people of European or Asian descent, and women being genetically predisposed to have lower IQs than men.”^{xvii}

Tanton’s organizations received funding from the Pioneer Fund at least through 2002. According to documents that nonprofit organizations must file with the federal government (known as 990s), the heavily Tanton-funded Project USA received a general operating support grant in that year and the prior one from the Pioneer Fund. Project USA’s 990 for 2002 lists its address as the same as NumbersUSA’s Washington, D.C. office.

All of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, must stand up and reclaim our national dialogue. If the media will not make everyone aware of how extreme our national conversation as become, then we have an obligation to... do it for them.

Those who glamorize NumbersUSA’s “David vs. Goliath” grassroots approach, including

CNN and other networks, fail to make the connections to its dubious roots. And indeed, FAIR and NumbersUSA expend a great deal of effort “proving” that they are not racist. And yet FAIR has had staffers speak on its behalf to “the Council of Conservative Citizens,” which “oppose[s] all efforts to mix the races of mankind” and is the successor organization to the White Citizens Council—whose membership terrorized African Americans attempting to register to vote or enroll in public schools following *Brown vs. Board of Education*.^{xviii}

How often does the media note that NumbersUSA and FAIR have deeply problematic associations? A Center for American Progress review of the Lexis-Nexis database found that of the 42 news articles from May 7 to July 6, 2007, that feature NumbersUSA and FAIR as experts, “only two made any mention of these organizations’ problematic backgrounds. In both cases this was an acknowledgement of FAIR’s connections to either Tanton or the Pioneer Fund.”^{xxix}

It is clear that the anti-immigrant effort is very successful at several of its most critical goals: moving public opinion, generating activism, effecting public policy, and hiding its origins. But the speech that they incite is disturbingly reminiscent of a part of America’s past we thought we had moved beyond. All of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, must stand up and reclaim our national dialogue. If the media will not make everyone aware of how extreme our national conversation has become, then we have the obligation to stand in the gap and do it for them.

SECTION 2: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” (LEVITICUS 19:18) – AGGRESSIVE ORDINANCES PITTING NEIGHBOR AGAINST NEIGHBOR

The spread of hate is not limited to Tanton-funded national organizations or talk radio. These groups, seeded by hate, have spawned an entire forest of detestation. Some of the most deeply rooted progeny are to be found in the unregulated online world. The spread of anti-immigrant messaging online is having significant consequences both nationally and in smaller communities around the country where recent ordinances targeting undocumented immigrants are fueling racial and economic tensions.

Indeed, consider the national attention given to Virginia’s Prince William County and the controversy over the anti-immigrant ordinances they have passed. Much of the considerable anti-immigrant sentiment in Northern Virginia has actually been fomented and organized by a single person, Greg Letiecq, through his popular blog, Black Velvet Bruce Li, (“Blog-Fu for Prince William, Manassas, and Manassas Park politics”)

As noted by *The Washington Post*, some of Letiecq’s claims have included worrying that “[i]llegal immigrant ice cream vendors might be spreading leprosy in Manassas”; “Prince William County has been infiltrated by ‘unassimilated marxist radicals’”; or that “Manassas Park police covered up the predations of five Hispanic men who gang-raped a woman in the street in June.”^{xxx}

The *Post* has noted that the voice behind Black Velvet Bruce Li is noted for “often making up in passion what it lacks in proof.”^{xxxi} Unfortunately, as the paper also notes, he “is not some mouse-pushing crackpot with a keyboard and an Internet connection. In the past 18 months, Letiecq has leveraged his blog to help elect allies, kill off opponents’ campaigns, and shape local public policy. Peers call his site the most influential local blog in Virginia.”^{xxxii}

Letiecq’s hateful but savvy organizing, along with his “Help Save Manassas” colleagues, led to a unanimous anti-immigrant vote to cut off as many services to undocumented immigrants

as was deemed legally possible. Letiecq’s online forces overwhelmed impassioned pleadings by immigrants seeking to have their worth as people acknowledged by their public officials and fellow residents of Prince William County. “[E]ven when both sides spoke English, even when both sought to underscore their basic humanity, the divide was deep; the antagonism, palpable.”^{xxiii}

...these efforts are leading to deepening divisions in our communities and growing fear and distrust

The scene surrounding the vote may have been almost as disturbing as the vote itself. The *Post* reported that, “[m]ore than 1,200 people packed the county government complex in Woodbridge and the streets outside yesterday afternoon, creating a charged—and at times tense—atmosphere.” Fights broke out as the “Help Save Manassas” groups shouted, “This is America!” as they were restrained by police. “Opposite them, several hundred residents, mostly Hispanic, responded with a deafening chant of ‘Si, se puede!’ (‘Yes, we can!’).”^{xxiv}

The consequences? Not merely tense physical confrontations at key legislative moments, but an overall atmosphere that leaves the broader Latino population, legal and undocumented alike, targeted and afraid. Feeling singled out and victimized, Latinos in Prince William County, including both “illegal immigrants and the many legal immigrant relatives and friends who live with them, have been moving out of Prince William ever since July, when county supervisors first approved the plan’s outline.”^{xxv}

The breadth of locations offering local ordinances concerning immigration is staggering. The National Conference of State Legislatures noted that “[a]s of April 13, 2007, state legislators in all of the 50 states had introduced at least 1,169 bills and resolutions related to immigration or immigrants and refugees. This is more than twice the total number of introduced bills (570) in 2006.”^{xxvi}

While not all of these ordinances are “anti-immigrant,” the vast majority are punitive in nature. One recent law in Oklahoma is indicative of the depths to which some are sinking in response to the goading of hate groups and the failure of Congress to address the failed immigration system. In this vacuum created by failed federal legislation, these local resolutions are increasing the polarization around the country. Local officials in some areas are responding as much to fears of changing demographics and rapidly growing Latino populations as to the actual consequences of residents with illegal status. In addition to creating a patchwork of laws that are difficult to enforce, these efforts are leading to deepening divisions in our communities and growing fear and distrust.

Oklahoma’s House Bill 1804, authored by state Rep. Randy Terrill, is considered the strictest law in the country thus far, and has among its provisions that it is illegal to harbor or transport illegal aliens in this state. This provision has specific implications for the faith community as it would make illegal the very work of ministering to the poor and outcasts in our society—many of whom are undocumented immigrants.

William O’ Brien, a local attorney from Edmond, Oklahoma, wrote a powerful op-ed calling attention to this fact:

That law serves to criminalize the work done by a variety of clergymen and women throughout the state of Oklahoma who minister to the needs, both spiritual and temporal, of undocumented workers and their families. Many of them have indicated they will not cease their activities despite the law's passage.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop Eusebius Beltran of Oklahoma City issued a statement that called the law "unjust," and had delivered to the governor's office a petition signed by thousands of people who objected to it. There have been numerous demonstrations in Oklahoma City and Tulsa against the law since it took effect last week.^{xxvii}

O'Brien went on to expose how Oklahoma House Bill 1804 was all too reminiscent of some of the darkest moments in America's past. He noted that the 1850's Fugitive Slave Act criminalized the act of harboring a runaway slave—indeed, any assistance to a slave who had managed to escape their "master" was rendered a federal crime so as to push off America's reckoning with slavery.^{xxviii}

Rev. Wolf's call should be a reminder to all people of faith to stand up for the vulnerable among us rather than letting fear and hatred continue to divide communities.

Despite the law's troubling implications, diverse leaders who led a rally against the law in Oklahoma City would suggest there is cause for hope. A patriotic crowd of hundreds, including Rep. Al Lindley, D-Oklahoma City, and Oklahoma NAACP President Roosevelt Milton, gathered on November 1, 2007, to wave flags, recite the Pledge of Allegiance, sing the national anthem, and pray that normalcy would return to Oklahoma. One speaker noted the bill's manifold ironies:

Oklahoma "defines itself by those who settled here illegally," said the Rev. Don Wolf, a priest from Duncan, referring to the Sooners who sneaked into Oklahoma ahead of the April 22, 1889, land run. He also referred to the classic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which tells the plight of Oklahomans traveling to California during the Dust Bowl days.

"The most famous book about Oklahoma is about Okies who became economic refugees," he told the crowd.

Wolf said that the law's purpose is to cause fear and misery. "We stand against the misery that this law causes," he said. "We stand with all of those who can't speak because they're afraid."^{xxix}

Rev. Wolf's call should be a reminder to all people of faith to stand up for the vulnerable among us rather than letting fear and hatred continue to divide our communities. This call reminds us that harsh, enforcement-only measures will only serve to force immigrant families further underground and deepen tensions in our communities. Considering the proliferation of

these punitive ordinances, it is all the more urgent that the U.S. Congress return to the work of forging sensible and humane federal legislation to end the chaos of a proliferation of competing and contradictory local resolutions.

SECTION 3: FAMILY UNITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY FOR ALL GOD’S PEOPLE

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and the Urban Institute all agree—“work-site enforcement actions,” or “raids,” have been increasing^{xxx} and have “resulted in large-scale sweeping operations in many states.”^{xxxix}

These raids have been disastrous for families and for the sense of belonging felt by many Latino citizens or legal immigrants. While the raids are intended to deter undocumented adults from working, they invariably impact whole families—potentially scarring children for life.

This report is not an attempt to argue against border enforcement specifically or the rule of law more generally. Instead, we hope that society would consider those issues in a more complete context that accounts for the costs to community and to families. We believe that our policies can, and ought to be, more humane, and that the decline of our debate has led to a moral callousness to the costs that affect us all.

Consider what has become, sadly, fairly commonplace—the story of Latinos falsely presumed to be illegal. This example from Long Island, New York, is all too familiar:

When Hempstead residents Cecilia and Fernando presented their passports to federal immigration agents during a raid to prove they were U.S. citizens, authorities accused them of having fake documents. Fernando said Immigrations and Customs Enforcement agents pulled him aside last Wednesday and forced him to wait downstairs until they were convinced that he was a citizen. He asked to see a warrant, but said he was ignored.

“What they did to us is humiliating,” said Fernando, 22, who declined to give his last name. Cecilia, 21, who also did not give her last name, said, “[Just because] we look Spanish doesn’t mean that everyone is an immigrant.”^{xxxix}

Rev. Luis Cortes of Esperanza USA made reference to this issue of racial profiling as one of increasing concern to the Latino community in testimony before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration: “Even I wonder whether I need to carry my passport. For thousands of third, fourth, and even fifth generation American citizens their color now defines the limits of their rights. The color of our skin or the sound of our accent now provides us the privilege of being detained, harassed, or accosted in an effort to determine our status.”

However, the greatest suffering from raids does not come from the inevitable and widespread problem of “false positives,” but the unique tragedy that occurs when a family is ripped apart. A recent report generated by the Urban Institute at the request of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) details how children are significantly affected by the raids. And while

damaging any child should be an act that carries significant moral weight, it is noteworthy that the majority of children in undocumented families are U.S.-born citizens. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of children with undocumented working-age parents are citizens, and this is even more characteristic of those children under the age of 6 (84 percent). Worksite enforcement actions thus are affecting a large number of citizens in addition to undocumented immigrants.^{xxxiii}

In the three high-profile raids studied with particular care by the Urban Institute, fewer

... the greatest suffering from the raids ... come[s] from... the unique tragedy that occurs when a family is ripped apart.

than 1,000 undocumented workers had between them more than 500 children, the majority of who are likely U.S. citizens. For instance, of the 90 children of workers from the Greeley, Colorado, raid of a Swift & Company meatpacking plant, 66 percent were U.S. citizens.^{xxxiv}

It is difficult to catalogue with brevity the array of difficulties that these raids pose for families, but the deleterious effects on children are clear, as the NCLR/Urban Institute study revealed:

The large-scale worksite enforcement actions in the three study sites created crisis scenarios in terms of the care arrangements for the hundreds of children who temporarily lost their parents. In all three locations, the sudden and large-scale nature of the raids—combined with the lack of communication by ICE and lack of community understanding about what was going on—led to a general sense of chaos and fear. On the day of the raids, family members, service providers, and the general public did not know whether or when parents would be released. As knowledge of the raids spread across the communities, concern grew about how to secure care and protection for the children in the short term, including who would pick up children after school and after work hours; provide milk, food, diapers, medicine, and clothes; and feed infants who were accustomed to breastfeeding. This situation deteriorated further toward outright panic as rumors—some of which were accurate and others that were not—spread by word of mouth from family to family during the first 24 to 36 hours after the raids. In addition, ICE continued to conduct small-scale raids in other workplaces and homes in both Greeley and Grand Island—further heightening fears and tensions.^{xxxv}

Unsurprisingly, review of the situation in communities that have undergone raids reveals real harm. From emotional trauma caused by the dislocation of family, to membership in anxious communities—the distress these children face is tremendous.

Just how many children are potentially caught up in raids? NCLR and the Urban Institute estimate that 4.9 million children (under the age of 17) live with a working-age adult; the average number of children per working adult is 1.4 children.

If raids continue to rise in number, so will the numbers of affected children. Parents and other relatives will also be faced with the difficult decision of where children who are U.S. citizens should reside in the aftermath of a deportation. These children, who know no country other than the U.S., could leave the country with their families to face what is to them an entirely foreign set of experiences. Or they could stay in the U.S.—potentially with relatives in their extended family or without their family’s breadwinner, often straining further the finances of the working poor and breaking up the nuclear family unit.

From the emotional trauma caused by the dislocation of family, to membership in anxious communities – the distress these children face is tremendous

Consider, along those lines, the dilemma posed by the story of Tam Tran. The 24-year-old college graduate is the daughter of a man once imprisoned by the Vietnamese communist government for anti-communist activities. Tam and her younger brother, Thien, were born in Germany after their family was picked up by the German navy following their escape from Vietnam.

Tam and her family have lived in the U.S. for 18 years, and Tam received her bachelor’s degree from UCLA with honors in American literature and culture in December.^{xxxvi} Tam has also been a prominent advocate for the DREAM Act, which would give children of illegal immigrants a chance to obtain citizenship if they earn a high school degree and complete two years of postsecondary education or two years of military service. As *USA TODAY* put it, a mere

“[t]hree days after a 24-year-old college graduate spoke out on her immigration plight in *USA TODAY*, U.S. agents arrested her family — including her father, a Vietnamese man who once was confined to a “re-education” camp in his home country for anti-communist activities. Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., who chairs the House immigration subcommittee, on Tuesday accused federal officials of “witness intimidation” for staging a pre-dawn raid on the home of Tuan Ngoc Tran.^{xxxvii}

The purported grounds for this dramatic arrest? The Trans were arrested as “fugitives from justice even though the family’s attorneys said the Trans have been reporting to immigration officials annually to obtain work permits.”

The case raises an excruciating question—even if one believes this family ought to be deported, to what location? The Board of Immigration Appeals has determined that Vietnam is not an option out of fear of renewed political persecution. And German authorities will not give the family a visa, putting the Trans among “more than 324,000 people living in the USA who have been ordered deported but who can’t be sent away because no country will accept them.”^{xxxviii} If Tran is not an American by culture, by academic expertise, and by life experience, what nationality does she possess? As with the children of workers caught up in raids, Tran knows the United States well, but knows nowhere else meaningfully.

In response to these messages of fear and xenophobia, the Christian message is clear – we must demonstrate love and compassion for our neighbors.

Christians have a history of standing up for family values and family unity as a cornerstone for building a strong society in the United States. For this very reason, we should be at the forefront of ministering to and speaking out on behalf of these families who are suffering and living in fear of separation. We must be thorough and effective in securing our nation's border, but at the same time maintain respect for the God-given rights and dignity of all immigrants, especially by minimizing the separation of families.

SECTION 4: CALL TO ACTION: REMAINING TRUE TO OUR BEST CHRISTIAN AND CIVIC VALUES OF COMPASSION, MERCY, AND JUSTICE

There is overwhelming evidence that the climate in the United States is shifting toward intolerance. From the prevalence of hate groups given credence in the media, to the divisions deepening in communities debating local ordinances, to increased racial profiling of Latinos, the tide is changing. In response to these messages of fear and xenophobia, the Christian message is clear—we must demonstrate love and compassion for our neighbors.

In the midst of the growing tensions around the recent debate and ordinance targeting undocumented immigrants in Prince William County, Virginia, Tom Melli felt compelled to write this to his local paper:

[...] next Sunday when I walk out of church to my car, I expect to find any number of fliers tucked under my windshield wipers. Candidates running for everything from commissioner and delegate to senator will be trying to win my vote by appealing to my faith and beliefs, showing me that they are also faithful servants of the Lord.

Sadly, some of them will also be firmly in the camp of those using vitriolic rhetoric on cracking down on illegal immigration.

My question to them, since they are appealing to me on the basis of faith, is simple: What would Jesus do on this issue? Would Jesus have instructed his disciples to check for green cards before distributing the bread and fish after multiplication? Would Jesus have asked for proper documentation from the blind, the crippled, the leper, the mute, the needy before healing or helping them? How would Jesus interpret the parable of the good Samaritan in the light of the illegal immigrant? Which examples would Jesus use today about the woes of the Pharisees for obeying the minutiae of the law but forgetting mercy? Would Jesus have made cutting services to illegal immigrants a campaign issue or would He have been crying with the poor that were about to become further isolated?

And I could go on.

While illegal immigration is out of control and both parties should work to find a solution, I believe it is absolutely unnecessary to foment hate and create division in our community.

We should not lead Virginia back to the times of white robes or illegal interracial marriages, turning Hispanics into the second-class citizens of the 21st century.

Illegal immigrants ... do not come here intent on doing us harm. They are the people who clean our houses, pick our crops, collect our garbage and build our homes. ...

If you are a Christian candidate and are planning to appeal for my vote next Sunday at church, please note that I would like to see a message of love, reconciliation and generosity.^{xxxix}

Brave voices like Tom Melli's represent Christian values in this debate. These are precisely the type of values we need to see more of in order to return to a respectful debate on immigration reform in this country.

As Christians we are called to stand with the unwanted and the outcasts in our society. The church must be willing to act according to biblical values, even when these may be politically or socially inconvenient. We must also learn from the numerous effective grassroots initiatives going on around the country, such as:

- **The Iowa Interfaith Immigration Coalition** is a recently formed group calling for signatures to a petition designed to raise the voice of Iowans of faith who favor moral treatment of immigrants. The petitions will be sent to presidential candidates as a call from people of faith that the candidates take seriously the need for laws that uphold the rights and dignity of immigrants. (<http://www.iowatia.org/ImmigrationPetition.htm>)
- The **Justice for Immigrants** campaign is an initiative of the Catholic Church and has been one of the leading voices and mobilizing forces in the immigration debate. Justice for Immigrants is continuing to raise awareness from the parish level to the national level through events, preaching material, and action alerts. (www.justiceforimmigrants.org)
- **Welcoming Tennessee** is a campaign by the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC). Two theology students from Vanderbilt Divinity School founded "Strangers No Longer," the faith outreach branch of the Welcoming Tennessee initiative. They give presentations in churches, universities, and community groups, educating the faith community about the positive contributions that immigrants bring to the state, and dispelling the many myths that exist about undocumented immigrants and immigration. (<http://www.welcomingtn.org>)

- **Justice For Our Neighbors**, a project of the United Methodist Church, provides monthly immigration legal clinics, run by volunteers and a paid attorney, for immigrants and refugees in need. Clinics currently occur at some 20 sites in eight states and the District of Columbia. (<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/work/immigration/jfon>)
- The **New Sanctuary Movement** is a grassroots interfaith effort by congregations around the country who have felt the call to publicly provide hospitality and protection for immigrant families whose legal cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system. Many of these congregations are also providing spiritual support for undocumented immigrants and actively working to build support for legislation that would change the situation of these immigrant families. (www.newsanctuarymovement.org)

These are only a few examples of the critical work that people of faith are doing around the country to engage the spirits of religious people and open up healthy dialogue around the immigration issue. *Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform* is adding to these efforts, working with ecumenical leaders around the country to expand their capacity to educate and mobilize people of faith. Among the national groups signed on to the campaign are the General Board of Church and Society of the United Methodist Church; World Relief; the Church World Service Immigration and Refugee Program; Christian Community Development Association; Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; Mennonite Church USA; Evangelicals for Social Action; and Presbyterian Church (USA). Some of our initiatives include:

- A rapid response media team of approximately 50 religious leaders around the country to respond to instances of intolerance with a strong moral voice. This network of dynamic voices will also be engaging proactively with the media to begin to change the tone of the debate in key areas with a welcoming, pro-family, Christian message on immigration.
- Equipping churches and clergy with effective materials to build bridges in their communities and to open hearts and minds on this issue that so often results in extreme and heated discussions. Our upcoming work will include trainings with clergy concerning how to most effectively engage their congregations and communities, as well as key meetings with evangelical clergy to open dialogue between white and Latino leaders on an issue that is key to the growth and spiritual health of thousands of churches around the country.
- Encouraging and mobilizing our congregations to oppose punitive laws that fail to take a comprehensive approach toward the immigration questions facing our nation and our communities. Most importantly, we see our education and communications efforts as part of a critical strategy to keep Christians engaged in a productive debate on immigration, despite the increasingly negative rhetoric that surrounds it. Through these efforts we will continue to build support for a humane and holistic solution to

immigration reform at the federal level and to hold our politicians accountable for this type of truly comprehensive reform.

Through these efforts faith leaders around the country will continue to educate and mobilize their congregations around a message that acceptance and welcome to all immigrants in our communities is not inconsistent with securing our borders and maintaining our identity as Americans. While the small efforts and victories of people of faith standing with our immigrant brothers and sisters will only yield a sea change as efforts multiply, it is heartening how some Christians have taken, and continue to take, bold positions in their communities to bring a message of love, mercy, and justice to an otherwise toxic environment.

ENDNOTES

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