

Reflections on the new Arizona Immigration Law

Comments on immigration from an Episcopal Bishop in Arizona by way of the Director of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches - it seems to be a sober evaluation of the situation - blessings, Al.

The Rev. Albert G. Cohen
Executive Director
Southern California Ecumenical Council

The Rev. Gary L. Harke
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

From: Nicholas Knisely ...
Sent: Tuesday, May 04, 2010 11:41 AM

The law as written allows for local police to investigate only after making a "lawful stop" - which specifically means "no fishing". However, the trailer bill that was just adopted and signed broadens the level of infractions to now include civil code violations as well as criminal code violations. Which can mean that complaints about overgrown yards, too many people in the house, etc. have the potential to lead to immigration status checks.

As for Louie's call for a boycott by the House of Bishops, I really don't know what to say. The people who support the legislation as enacted here would actually welcome the cancelation of a visit by the House of Bishops. The Hispanic Episcopalians of the Diocese of Arizona would probably be gratified to know of the support. The question is really though whether that support is better expressed by economic penalties that will hurt the latino community (and which they have called for) or by face to face visits to hear their stories.

We're in a difficult moment in Arizona. The border area is in very bad shape. Law enforcement is being forced to divert resources to deal with folks coming into Arizona looking for work (of which there is hardly any right now) which significantly decreases their ability to apprehend drug and human smugglers. The smugglers are streaming in right now (according to folks near the border) because of the insatiable desire of Americans for marijuana, cocaine and sex - which the present recession has not changed.

Here at our Cathedral we have more than 350 members who are at risk of hassle by law enforcement because of the new law. They (and we) are rightly very nervous. Phoenix has a sheriff who is already under investigation for racial profiling and there's very little trust in the city in his department. What we're hearing is that a number of undocumented workers are planning on leaving Arizona at the end of the month.

Families with children (who are mostly American citizens, having been born in Arizona) are moving north. They can't return to their home country (which is very rarely Mexico) because the children, being American citizens will not be allowed to attend school there.

What would really help frankly would be to heed the call of the Episcopal Church to work across this country for comprehensive immigration reform. The present administration has cut in half the number of people granted work visas per year. We need a legally protected guest worker program down here.

There are crops that are rotting in the fields because no one is harvesting them. We need a path to citizenship for people already here, who were lured here by American companies looking for cheap exploitable labor in a different time, and who can not really return home now because of their children.

If we can do those two things, then I think the existing ICE agents and the border patrol will be in a much better position to deal with the bad people who are exploiting the present confusion on the actual border.

Please pray for us. And for the Episcopalians who are in very real danger of having their families divided right now.

W. Nicholas Knisely
c1, Phoenix, AZ

**Inclusiveness does not set boundaries.
Instead, it works ceaselessly to expand the horizons.**