

Justice through Immigration Reform

Much of what I do serving as pastor in an urban church, directly or indirectly, addresses matters of immigration. These are the most impoverished populations in this country and most often they are people of color. Consequently their individual struggles are compounded by the absence of a rational and consistent federal policy on immigration and the legacy of racism that sadly remains woven within the fabric of our society. We work directly supporting individuals and also try to influence what is happening legislatively at the state and federal levels. By reaching out to church and interfaith groups, we are able to share our experiences and perceptions, and encourage dialogue on the subject of immigration. We encourage others to join in the conversation, reaching out to other churches and faith groups in your own communities to give common witness.

Our work has led us to travel to Arizona to better understand the source of SB 1070 thinking and acting. It has involved presentations to church groups, Lutheran and non-Lutheran. We (1) joined the Steering Committee of the Interfaith Coalition of Rhode Island to address the needs of the poor, (2) continue to work with the Rhode Island State Council of Churches and (3) joined with the Rhode Island Civil Rights Roundtable specifically to address matters of immigration in the State. We drafted position papers and proposed language that was approved at the Synod Assembly for the New England Synod Council position on this subject. These are all additional ways for you and your church's leaders to get involved and I would be glad to work with you on these matters.

In Arizona we touched base with the Lutheran Bishop serving that State (and others), and the head of the equivalent of the Council of Churches in Arizona, also a Lutheran. We maintain close contact with LIRS which is a national and regional leader in matters dealing with refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants. Our church is thankfully playing a major role on the national stage on immigration and other issues impacting "the least of these." And you can, too.

While we engage in advocacy and accompaniment, encouraging and challenging our legislative representatives and others in power to remember the poor, the disenfranchised and the oppressed in their deliberations, the work is really about discipleship. We do not support political parties or their candidates. We focus on specific initiatives and legislation impacting the most vulnerable, and we believe that this work is the heart of the mission of proclamation of the Gospel in our time and place.

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