

ISSUES AND ACTIONS

Sisters of the Holy Family, P.O. Box 3248, Fremont, CA 94539

December 2011



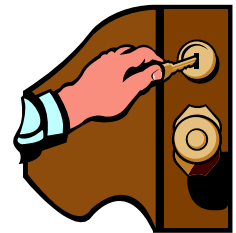
The mission of the Earth Charter Initiative is to promote the transition to sustainable ways of living and a global society founded on a shared ethical framework that includes respect and care for the community of life, ecological integrity, universal human rights, respect for diversity, economic justice, democracy, and a culture of peace.




The Christmas season has arrived. It would be wonderful if we could just focus on **welcoming Jesus!** Why can't we calmly, peacefully, empty our minds and center our thoughts on this happening, and toss the commercial aspects, the 40, 50, 60% SALE, and the department store with doors that swing open at 12:00 Midnight, and with a welcoming staff no less?



Recently, we have been made aware of other doors displaying opposite values from the "open door" policy. These doors are the "NEW IMMIGRATION LAWS", that close with a snap and impose harsh punitive consequences as they seek to capture, detain, jail and deport not only the "illegal" (the undocumented), but anyone who may be doing simple neighborly tasks for them.



HB56

The state of Alabama has created one of the most harsh and controversial laws ever. HB56, (which is being appealed by the Federal Government), establishing many new requirements and enforcement procedures. For example:

- ♦ it requires public schools to check student immigration status;
- ♦ criminalizes giving an undocumented immigrant a ride anywhere for any reason;
- ♦ requires employers to use E-verify to check potential employee status,
- ♦ instructs police to check the immigration status of anyone they may stop for traffic or vehicle infractions.

A warning notice posted in the offices of a public water company in the small town of Allgood, Alabama is the most graphic illustration yet of the draconian new immigration law coming into effect in the state.” (www.guardian.co.uk/world). The notice reads: “Attention to all water customers. To be compliant with the new laws concerning immigration you must have an Alabama driver’s license or you may lose water service.” Allison Neal, legal director of Alabama branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, said: “If you want to see the harm that the law will cause, then you can’t get much clearer than cutting off water services.” **HB56** is wide enough to lawfully deprive even the basic essentials of life. Another result of this law affects the most vulnerable - children - who have now stopped attending school. “Many families have mixed status and it is difficult to know the ties people have, so kid’s with U.S. status are affected because a family member may be undocumented.” (Mary Bower, legal director of the Southern .Poverty law center)



Father Jack Kane, a Catholic priest in Opelike, Alabama, explained that the churches in Alabama “were supposed to have been exempted from prosecution for providing services like driving undocumented immigrants to the hospital. But this law removes these protections.”

Alabama law enforcement officers are now required to investigate the immigration status of anybody they stop for routine safety checks, for traffic violation incidents or at established “check stops”. If the officer has a “reasonable suspicion” this individual might be illegally present in the state the officer must arrest and transport the person to the police station for further investigation.



When Arizona initiated random police checks on immigration status, another consequence resulted. The Arizona Chamber of Commerce estimated that Arizona lost 15 to 150 million dollars in tourism proceeds, convention revenues and saw the boycott of its products as the nation displayed its disgust for this hard line stance.

Georgia and Alabama, as they experiment with the same kind of law, are experiencing a shortage of workers in key sectors of their work force such as agriculture and service industries, as the immigrant population exit. Other vital statistics are surfacing as well:

- 1) Nearly 2300 students on the first day this law went into effect skipped classes. This about “doubled the absentee rate“ states the Alabama Department of Education. (To date Alabama has suspended the check into a child’s immigration status.)
- 2) 25% of Alabama’s commercial building work force has fled the state even though there is an abundance of rebuilding to be done following the Alabama killer

tornados that devastated the state. This is a huge economic loss for the construction industry currently facing financial difficulties.

3) 50% of the tomato crop farmers face huge economic losses. The crops are left spoiling in fields because the migrant workers needed to harvest the crop have disappeared enmasse. Local farmers have tried to hire local workers but, “it ain’t about the money, it’s about the hard physical work; and as for next year, if nothing changes, there won’t be a tomato grown here.” (Chad Smith, Alabama tomato farmer)

THE PROBLEM

Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution gives authority to Congress to “establish a uniform rule of naturalization” and therein lies the problem. Congress has been reluctant to undertake immigration reform for a very long time. In **2006** Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn told a Congressional subcommittee that comprehensive immigration reform legislation is the best way to secure the nation’s borders and ensure that immigration laws are just and humane. Yet here we are in December 2011, and House Representative Shiela Jackson Lee, (D-Houston) laments, “We are witnessing firsthand the chaos that the delay in addressing immigration reform at the federal level is reaping across the nation and how individual states are making matters worse by enacting their own laws.”



Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles said that we should approach the immigration issue “not as Democrats or Republicans but as people who recognize the dignity of all God’s children no matter where they were born or what their immigration status.”

Hopefully, new laws of welcoming and acceptance will evolve since, unless we are 100% American Indian, each one of us comes from an immigrant ancestry, looking for a better life.

For more information:

www.huffingtonpost.com

www.immigrant-kids

www.catholicsinalliance.org

www.usccb.org

Prepared by the Peace and Justice Committee