



Religious reasons exist for supporting immigration reform

By: Rick Plum – May 30, 2013

Matthew's Gospel message reminds us to welcome everyone among us and Leviticus indicates that the "Aliens who reside with you shall be to you as citizens among you."

America has a great heritage as a nation of immigrants and we have the opportunity to continue our tradition of welcoming the tired, poor and huddled masses and provide a path to permanent citizenship with pending immigration reform law.

We are a nation of immigrants, including my grandfather, who emigrated to the U.S. during the early part of the 20th century. Just as my grandfather and his children assimilated into American society, the newer immigrants are doing the same, as reported by a U.S. Census Bureau study indicating that 90 percent of children of recent immigrants speak English.

We have addressed the challenge of immigration reform in the past and we can do it again.

In 1986, President Reagan realized the importance and benefits of providing a path to citizenship for 2.7 million undocumented immigrants. The law he signed provided permanent residency visas and allowed them to bring their families to the United States. Reagan realized that this law was the right and moral thing to do and the country financially benefited from his decision.

A study by the Cato Institute indicates that a new immigration law, similar to the 1986 law, would provide a path to citizenship for approximately 11 million individuals and generate an economic boost to our economy of approximately \$1.5 trillion over a 10-year period. Studies by Harvard University and the Congressional Budget Office confirmed that an immigration reform law would provide an estimated federal revenue surplus of \$25 billion a year.

The Texas comptroller of public accounts indicated that the 1.6 million undocumented immigrants in our state provide \$17.7 billion to our gross state product and that these individuals paid \$1.6 billion in taxes with associated costs of only \$1.2 billion (primarily education and health care expenses), resulting in a surplus of \$400 million to the state. Immigrants pay sales tax on products they purchase and part of their rent or house payment goes toward paying property taxes.

Undocumented immigrants also pay Social Security taxes. The Social Security Administration indicates that the Earnings Suspense File includes a total of \$836 billion

in mismatched wages and a major portion of these earnings is from undocumented workers. The Social Security Trustees' report indicates that increases in immigration helps to improve Social Security's finances.

As the 77 million baby boomers begin to retire, immigrants will play a critical role in replenishing the labor force and paying taxes. Although we need more people to replace the retiring baby boomers, the percentage of immigrants in the U.S. is actually lower today at 12 percent as compared to a hundred years ago, when the rate was 14.5 percent.

Faith-based groups are recommending immigration reform. The Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution calling on the government to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, including "a just and compassionate path to legal status."

The Catholic bishops called for providing permanent residency for undocumented immigrants with a path to citizenship. The church's Catechism states that there is a duty to welcome the foreigner out of charity and respect for the human person. The bishops have stated, "People have the right to immigrate to support themselves and their families in order to survive and nations should accommodate this right."

The 2008 General Conference of the United Methodist Church asserted that immigrants are children of God and affirmed the labor and struggle of the undocumented worker. The General Conference urged Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that makes family unity and a reasonable path toward citizenship a priority.

Based on our faith, compassion and economic benefits, we need to urge Sens. Ted Cruz and John Cornyn, along with Rep. Mike Conaway, to support comprehensive immigration reform. It is the right action for our country to take.

The Bible provides excellent guidance in the Gospel of Matthew concerning the final judgment: "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

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