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Immigration reform ... now

Michael Sean Winters | Jun. 17, 2009 NCR Today

It would be difficult to conjure in the imagination a church more redolent of nineteenth century White Anglo-Saxon Protestantism than the Church of the Epiphany in downtown Washington, D.C. The large white structure boasts a Tiffany stained glass window, an Aeolian-Skinner organ from Boston, and is home to a low-church liturgy: While planning my best friend?s funeral at the church in 1989, the rector declined the use of incense because the congregation was "unused to such a symbol." That rector, Dr. Edgar Romig, was widely considered the best preacher in the city and preaching was the focus of the service. He was a lovely man and, in archetypal WASP fashion, he summered at the Cape.

Today, however, Epiphany is hosting a distinctly non-WASP event: a prayer vigil for immigration reform that will include prayers from a rabbi, a Unitarian minister, an evangelical pastor and a Roman Catholic priest. What has brought this diverse group together is the recognition that whatever one's political or ideological dispositions, the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures cannot be read in any faithful manner that would allow one to ignore the plight of undocumented workers in the United States.

Immigration reform is not only a cause found among old-line, more liberal Christian churches. The heartless raids in poultry and other plants have seen children separated from their parents and wives separated from their husbands. Anyone who claims the mantle of being ?pro-family? can see how current immigration laws and practices are both un-American and un-Christian.

On July 31, 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill cabled President Franklin Roosevelt. (Both men would feel quite at home worshiping at Epiphany!) He was requesting the use of 50 old destroyers from the United States for help in fending off U-boat attacks in the North Atlantic. He wrote: "Mr. President, with great respect I must tell you that in the long history of the world, this is a thing to do now." The reason people from such diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds are gathering at Epiphany today is much the same. With Democrats in control of Congress and a President pledged to immigration reform (and who won Nevada, Colorado and New Mexico largely on the strength of the Hispanic vote), immigration reform is a thing to do now.

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