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Evangelicals endorse immigration reform

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | Oct. 9, 2009

WASHINGTON -- The National Association of Evangelicals on Thursday (Oct. 8) endorsed comprehensive immigration reform, saying new policies should reflect "biblical grace to the stranger."

"We seek fair and human treatment for those who are immigrants," NAE President Leith Anderson told reporters on Capitol Hill, shortly before testifying with other religious leaders at a Senate subcommittee hearing on faith-based perspectives on immigration reform.

Anderson said the NAE board adopted the resolution as growing numbers of immigrants fill the pews of churches affiliated with his organization, which includes 40 denominations and scores of other evangelical groups.

"Many of the immigrants in America are us," he said. "That is, the growing edge of evangelical churches and denominations in the United States is the immigrant community."

The resolution, approved overwhelmingly by voice vote of the NAE board, calls for the government to safeguard national borders, recognize the importance of family reunification and establish an "equitable process toward earned legal status for currently undocumented immigrants."

Asked for specifics of NAE's suggestions about undocumented immigrants, Anderson said the process should be a reasonable one that might require, for example, undocumented immigrants to pay back taxes.

"We are not suggesting that those that are already in the United States without documentation are automatically granted either residency or citizenship status," he said.

The Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, commended the NAE for passing the resolution. He said it demonstrates that the issue is one that concerns not solely Latinos but a wide range of Americans, and represents a "Christian" rather than a political agenda.

"At the end of the day, immigration reform is an issue of justice firmly grounded on biblical truth," he said.

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