

Q&A with Fr. Clete Kiley

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 23, 2010 | Distinctly Catholic

All this week we have been discussing immigration reform here at Q & A. Our final interviewee is Father Clete Kiley, Director of Immigration Policy at [UNITE HERE](#) [1], and recently president of the [Faith & Politics Institute](#) [2].

The question: What will it take to get immigration reform passed and what are the prospects for passage.

Father Kiley: First and foremost, there needs to be a national consensus that the current system is broken and that there are various parts of the current immigration system that contribute to this brokenness. It is not one singular aspect of the system that is broken. It is the cumulative effect of these broken parts that must be considered if we will fix the system. There are 11-12 million people currently in the United States without documents. Simply removing these people would create a humanitarian disaster. Citizens living along our national borders experience a lack of security, in spite of increased law enforcement presence. Employers and workers have a lop-sided playing field that favors employers who do not follow the law, and keeps too many workers unprotected and living in the shadows. The system is broken in many of its parts, not simply in one. The sooner we all face it the sooner we will get on to fixing the problem. And we need to commit to fixing all of the parts, not just one part.

What will it take to get immigration reform? Once we as a Nation have admitted we have a complex problem we need a framework for fixing it. The components of such a framework are pretty easily identified. Employers, Labor, the Religious community, Republicans, Democrats, immigration reform advocates and countless commentators have identified the basic components: fix the border, find a pathway for the 11-12 million here without documents, develop a mechanism that levels the playing field for employers and workers.

What are the prospects for passage? First, we need to be clear that immigration is a federal question, not a state question. Our federal political leadership, starting with the President and Congress, must pick up the ball and take the lead before more governors and state legislatures feel compelled to weigh in.

Second, we need to find the political will for immigration reform. Frankly, that does not exist at the moment except among a few political leaders. One hears lots of reasons: it is an election year; we just did a comprehensive framework for health care and can't do another one just now; we won't do anything on this until we address one aspect of the overall problem first; the economy needs our attention; we'll wait to see what the other side comes up with. Without the political will, you can forget about seeing reform. Political leaders need to hear loud and clear from the public and from the pews that now is the time.

Third, there are some troubling attitudes we have to face. There is a lot of political blaming for how we came to have such a broken system. It has taken decades to get us here. Leadership from both political parties failed to fix this system in the past. There is a good deal of fear mongering. This is an unfortunate and reckless aspect of our current political life. People have some honest fears. These do not need to be fanned. This only brings division where we need to find consensus. It brings political paralysis when we need action. It fosters an atmosphere that does not promote respect for the human dignity of others. That is an old, old road in America

that we do not want to walk down again. Feeding these attitudes serves to stir up lots of political agita and may make a political career or two. But it dims the prospects for real reform. All of us need to attend to the tone of this dialogue, and safeguard the human dignity of all involved.

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[1] <http://www.unitehere.org/>

[2] <http://faithandpolitics.org/home>