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Religious leaders battle Alabama immigration law

Kent Faulk Religion News Service | Aug. 22, 2011
Immigration and the Church

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- Alabama religious leaders have filed statements in federal court expressing their concern that a new immigration law would interfere with the practice of their religion and Christian mandates to minister to all people.

Bishops in the Episcopal, United Methodist and Roman Catholic churches and 17 other church ministry leaders on Wednesday (Aug. 17) filed affidavits in the federal court lawsuits that seek to block enforcement of the new law.

Their lawsuit was consolidated with those filed by the U.S. Justice Department and Hispanic advocacy groups that also sought to void the new state law.

Most of the provisions of Alabama?s new immigration law go into effect Sept. 1.

The bishops in their affidavits described their churches? ministries, including those designed to help feed, clothe and shelter the poor.

?In providing or supporting these ministries, we do not?and would not?refuse to assist any person in need because he or she lacked legal immigration status,? said Episcopal Bishop of Alabama Henry Parsley.

The new immigration law would make providing those ministries and services a crime, the bishops and others who filed affidavits wrote.

State officials said church leaders? concerns about what religious activities would fall within the new state law are ?exaggerated.?

Sections of the law were modeled after existing federal law, state attorneys said.

?The church leaders apparently do not view their activities as violating federal law, and they have failed to point to a single federal prosecution under the federal law?which again was the basis for Alabama?s statute?for any type of ministry activities,? state attorneys said.

[Kent Faulk writes for *The Birmingham News* in Birmingham, Ala.]

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