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Bishop visits activists fasting for immigration reform

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 14, 2013 Immigration and the Church
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The tents on the southeast corner of the National Mall were nearly empty this afternoon, with the activists inside receiving visitors quietly and with little fanfare.

Just two blocks west of the U.S. Capitol, those inside have pledged [1] to a daily fast until Congress passes comprehensive immigration reform.

Organizers of the campaign, called "Fast for Families: A Call for Immigration Reform and Citizenship," have set up visits to those fasting by members of Congress, prominent organizers, and faith leaders.

Salt Lake City Bishop John Wester was among those making a visit Thursday. He stopped by for about half an hour in the afternoon, and spent about 20 minutes with the people fasting, who are not speaking publicly or taking interviews during their witness.

Speaking to *NCR* after making his visit, Wester said he was "taken and touched by their commitment to immigration reform."

"I?m very grateful because I?m hoping that it will communicate to our people in the United States the need for immigration reform -- that it?s not just politics," he said.

?This is a human issue that calls for courageous action on the parts of our elected officials. And for every day that they dally and dither and don?t do anything, people are suffering.?

While the Senate passed an immigration reform bill in June, House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) said Wednesday he would not be allowing his chamber to take up the measure before the end of the year.

Organizers of the tent fast have set up similar campaigns in states across the country and hope their witness will pressure Boehner to allow a vote on the issue.

On Wednesday, the Catholic lobbying group NETWORK delivered more than 11,000 postcards to House members calling for reform.

Asked how he would speak to Catholics who are not supportive of immigration reform, Wester said "you can?t ignore what?s going on because it?s a human issue."

"We?re called to go and announce the Gospel of the Lord at the end of Mass," he said. "This is how we announce the Gospel of the Lord, by reaching to our brothers and sisters in need."

"In my diocese of Salt Lake City, 80 percent of the Catholics speak Spanish," he continued. "So we can?t just ignore them and pretend it doesn?t exist. We have a moral responsibility to speak up and to let our elected officials know this is urgent and we have to reform. If we don?t do that, then our elected officials won?t get the

message."

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