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Catholics, evangelicals work toward Congress' passage of comprehensive immigration

Pat Perriello | Aug. 28, 2013 NCR Today

The congressional recess seems to be providing a vehicle for some movement on the immigration bill stalled in the House of Representatives. We are seeing evangelicals applying pressure [1] to resistant members of Congress to support comprehensive immigration.

Evangelicals are asking their congregations to contact their legislators and pray for reform. They are targeting specific representatives in Illinois and across the country to gain support for the passage of this reform legislation.

The Evangelical Immigration Table, which includes groups both conservative and liberal and everything in between, is sponsoring a series of ads. Additional support comes from Barrett Duke, the vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who spoke on a conference call supporting the ads.

Support also comes from the Catholic Alliance for the Common Good [2], which has been targeting individual members of Congress. According to the group, several conservative members of Congress have changed their minds and agreed to support the bill. The alliance has enlisted the words of Pope Francis and Catholic social teaching in their efforts.

It is heartening to see evangelicals and Catholics working toward the same goal. It would be even more powerful if they would actually work together and coordinate their efforts. It seems that a wide array of voices is speaking out to highlight the importance of passing this legislation. These voices include not only those from the world of religion, but also those from the business, political and entertainment communities. It is good to see various elements of the community united in their efforts to advance a realistic measure to deal with an ongoing dilemma that has vexed this country for far too long.

This current effort is reminiscent of the unity generated during the civil rights era of the '60s, which we remember at this time in the context of the 1963 March on Washington and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. If you look at the pictures of that day, you will be struck by how integrated the gathering was. You will also see significant numbers of Catholic clergy marching arm-in-arm with participants. To now see significant numbers of evangelicals and a number of important Catholic organizations working to achieve the same important goal reminds us of the enduring power of the Christian message. It is a message that can overcome fear and hate with compassion and understanding.

We have to hope that these and additional efforts will turn the tide and produce a fair and reasonably just solution to the immigration problem that will be signed by the White House. It has been far too difficult to achieve anything in this year's Congress. Serious budget issues affecting the poor and needy throughout our land lie in wait for the Congress this fall. The passage of landmark immigration legislation could serve as a reminder that it is still possible for our government to accomplish something worthwhile.

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[1] http://www.suntimes.com/news/22056293-418/evangelicals-take-to-illinois-airwaves-to-promote-immigration-reform.html
[2] http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/home.html