



Archbishop Daniel N. DiNardo answers questions from the media during a noon press conference at the downtown chancery, April 24. The news conference was sponsored by Catholic Charities and The Metropolitan Organization. Religious leaders expressed their support for "fair and just" comprehensive immigration reform. Pictured: Archbishop DiNardo and Rev. David Meeker Williams, a United Methodist Church pastor.

## Area religious leaders call for 'just' immigration reform

By ERIK NORIEGA, Herald Staff Writer

HOUSTON— Leaders and representatives from the Catholic, United Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, and Baptist faiths gathered at the downtown chancery to show their support for "just" comprehensive immigration reform at a mid-day news conference, April 24.

The event was co-sponsored by Catholic Charities of the archdiocese and The Metropolitan Organization.

"Today, as we speak, the U.S. Senate is poised to consider legislation which could change how our nation responds to the newcomer, the downtrodden, and the oppressed who come to our shores seeking a better life," said Deacon Joe Rubio, vice president of Community Relations & Development for Catholic Charities.

"It is an important time in our history and it is vital that all American citizens, most particularly members of faith communities understand the present moment in which we live and to ensure that our nation does not forsake her immigrant history," Deacon Rubio continued.

"As we all know illegal immigration is not a simple issue, but rather one that evokes strong passions and economic, legal, social and national security debates," the deacon said. "We are here today representing our faith communities because we believe that immigration is not just a theoretical policy issue, but ultimately a humanitarian issue that impacts the basic dignity and life of a person, created in the image and likeness of God.

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"It is because of its impact on basic human dignity and human life that we believe that immigration is first and foremost a moral issue," Deacon Rubio said.

"It is our sincere hope that each of the senators will return to Washington (this week) with a renewed spirit to continue their work on creating a just solution to the complex questions that they and we face," said Archbishop Daniel N. DiNardo.

"We have joined together today to call upon the Senate to enact comprehensive immigration reform legislation that establishes a safe and humane immigration system. The dignity and worth of the human person is fundamental in all deliberations," the archbishop said.

For a complete transcript of Archbishop DiNardo's comments, please see page 3.

Both Archbishop DiNardo and Rev. Jim Foster, Area Provost, Texas Annual Conference of United Methodist Church, touched on a passage from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:33-34) in their comments: "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

"This passage served as the basis for the statement the United Methodist Church adopted in 1996 to love the sojourner. We reaffirmed that again at our recent general conference in 2004," Rev. Foster said.

"It's what we are called to do as a people of faith. I join with my brothers and sisters in faith in lifting up the high ideals of our respective faiths to call upon our leaders to pass humane immigration reform which reflects the spirit of openness and compassion and hospitality to the sojourners among us," Rev. Foster added.

"TMO stands for comprehensive immigration reform because it is the right thing to do for our economy and for your country," said Rev. John Bowie, pastor of True Light Missionary Baptist Church and clergy co-chair of TMO.

"It is also the just thing to do. As faith leaders we cannot turn our backs on strangers because God's people were once strangers.

"Many people in my community have misconceptions about immigrants. They have been told that immigrants are taking their jobs, placing burdens on schools and paying no taxes. This is not true," stated Rev. Bowie.

"I have worked side by side with immigrant families in TMO and I have heard their stories and heard their struggles. Immigrants come to the United States to work hard to make a better life for their families and to be part of a democracy."

Rev. Bowie urged people to "educate themselves" and not be swayed by fear.

"As African Americans we have felt the brunt of discrimination over and over again. We cannot stand by as our brothers and sisters are forced to hide in the shadows, working for slave wages," Rev. Bowie said.

During the question and answer portion of the news conference, Archbishop DiNardo reminded those in attendance that the U.S. bishops have been advocates for immigrant rights for more than 25 years, and that today's news conference was a continuation of those efforts and not a reaction to recent events.

Also present at the news conference was Peggy Contos Hahn, assistant to Bishop Paul Blom, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Gulf Coast Synod. □