

National/International Report

Parishes mobilize nationwide to aid legalization effort

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — Across the nation, parishes and dioceses are mobilizing to assist illegal aliens who qualify for legalization under the new federal immigration law.

Lines are already forming at some of the makeshift offices that have been established nationwide to help illegal aliens determine if they qualify for legalization, and to help qualifying aliens gather necessary documents and complete application forms.

Parish volunteers — who will staff many of these offices — may help as many as one million illegal immigrants to legalize their status, estimated Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refuge Services, in a statement issued in late December.

Parishes have been chosen as the basic church unit to work with illegal aliens seeking legalization, because "these people live in parishes," said Monsignor DiMarzio.

The new federal immigration law passed by Congress in October allows immigrants who arrived in the United States before 1982 — and who have resided here illegally and continuously — to apply for legalization. Church agencies are among those agencies the federal immigration department has asked to help with the legalization process.

In California, the Los Angeles Archdiocese opened 20 centers to help immigrants legalize their status, under the terms of the new immigration reform law.

More than half of the illegal aliens counted by the U.S. Census Bureau in 1980 lived in California, with 58,000 in Los Angeles County alone.

Four thousand persons registered during one week at the archdiocesan center located at Holy Family Parish in Wilmington, Calif., according to Oblate Father Luis Valbuena, pastor.

"I talked to a lady in line yesterday and told her I was sorry she had to wait," Father Valbuena said. "It's only been 20 minutes," she said. "I've been waiting 20 years."

The priest said there are 100 volunteers at his parish helping illegal aliens register. "We've



ALIEN APPLICATIONS-Wylie Thompson of Statistica, Inc., goes through several of the applications received from illegal aliens seeking amnesty. NC photo

been training them since the law passed," he said. Twenty volunteers are available at a time.

At San Gabriel Mission at the other end of the archdiocese, a total of 125 bilingual men and women have volunteered to register applicants who want to begin the process of legalizing their status.

The centers are in all five pastoral regions of the three-county archdiocese that extends 225 miles along the California coast. These centers are run by the immigration and citizenship division of the archdiocesan Department of Catholic Charities, which has a 40-year record of offering legal and resettlement assistance to immigrants ranging from World War II displaced persons to current refugees from Europe, Asia and Latin America.

Elizabeth Kirsnis, director of Catholic Charities' immigration and citizenship division, said immigration authorities have agreed to honor registration cards from Catholic Charities as evidence of eligibility, should they apprehend an illegal alien before the process is complete.

She said her division will have processed applications ready in May, when the immigration department begins accepting applications for legalization.

Cardinal John O'Connor of New York announced plans in December to establish centers throughout the 10 counties of the Archdiocese of New York, to assist illegal aliens applying for legalization.

In a letter, to pastors of the archdiocese,

Father Joseph T. O'Keefe, vicar general, asked them to suggest parish facilities that could serve as legalization centers, and request pastors look for volunteers from their parishes to staff these centers.

While the number of aliens eligible for legalization is unknown, Monsignor DiMarzio said that according to "soft figures" based on the 1980 census, three million illegal aliens may apply for legalization and "possibly one million will be assisted by the Catholic Church structure."

Nearly 160 of the 183 U.S. dioceses have appointed legalization directors to work with parishes on the project, said Monsignor DiMarzio, who added that Migration and Refugees Services offices in New York, Washington, San Francisco and El Paso, Texas, will coordinate Church involvement in the legalization program.

Training materials for volunteers are being developed, he said, and the program will be explained in detail in late January to diocesan personnel through a nationwide teleconference arranged by the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America.

Parish workers will need to be fluent in Spanish and English, Monsignor DiMarzio said, because about 75 percent of immigrants eligible to apply for legal residency are Hispanic.

The new immigration reform law will allow an untold number of illegal aliens nationwide to apply for legal status. But thousands who have come since 1982, or who do not qualify for other reasons, will continue to be classified by the U.S. government as illegal, facing possible deportation.

Contributing to this story was Al Antczak in Los Angeles.

Coalition prepares local response to immigration law

Churches in the Diocese of Rochester have a history of reaching out to refugees, from slaves on the underground railroad to the Cuban and Haitian boat people of the 1980s.

As the federal government prepares to implement the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 this coming May, a local coalition of church groups is upholding that tradition by preparing for the opportunities and difficulties the new legislation will bring.

The coalition, known as the Rochester Interfaith Council on Immigrants and Refugees (RICIR), is headed by Gregory Zuroski, program specialist for the Diocesan Office of Social Ministry.

Zuroski does not expect nearly the num-

ber of people to be affected by immigration reform here as in the country's western and southern states. Nevertheless, RICIR members plan to offer training sessions as they receive more detailed information about how the government will implement the immigration reform act.

Through parishes and regional offices of social ministry, diocesan officials hope to accomplish dual goals: to reach migrants and unregistered aliens affected by immigration reform, and to recruit and train volunteers to inform and assist such migrants and aliens.

"What I would foresee is a few key offices in the 12-county area that would offer more formalized assistance on legalization, and then a network of less formal

centers — in locations such as parishes or migrant farmworker centers — that would function as part of the information pipeline," Zuroski said.

Those refugees who qualify for legalization are not the only ones who will need assistance.

Advocates will also be needed to monitor the effects of the law and to document and challenge any discrimination that may result from its passage.

The biggest obstacle to any local response is funding. Zuroski estimated that some federal funds may be funneled through large national agencies such as the U.S. Catholic Conference, but that most of the money for area programs will have to be generated locally.

Archbishop 'asked' for visit of the pope

Detroit (NC) — When it was first announced that Pope John Paul II would be coming to the United States in 1987, Archbishop Edmund C. Szoka invited the pope to stop in Detroit too. He repeated his invitation during a papal audience last fall.

"I had asked and I had hoped," he said in an interview with The Michigan Catholic, newspaper of the archdiocese, after receiving confirmation of the pope's Detroit visit.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops announced Jan. 28 that the city had been added to the pope's itinerary, bringing to 10 the number of stops he will make.

The U.S. trip, beginning Sept. 10 in Miami, was to end Sept. 18 in San Francisco, but the NCCB announcement said the pope is expected to fly from San Francisco to Detroit that day, arriving around 9:30 p.m. local time. He is expected to leave at 9 p.m. the following day for Rome.

Archbishop Szoka said the pope's decision to include Detroit was "a compliment to the people of the Detroit Archdiocese. He is coming here to see them...the priests, Religious and lay people."

"The Detroit Archdiocese has long been in a position of leadership in the church. He knows of its fidelity, its loyalty and the generosity of our people," he added.

The visit to Detroit would be the pontiff's first as pope. He came to Detroit twice as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, in 1969 and 1976.

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