

National/International Report

Church enters unlikely relationship with immigration service

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — Most observers agree that the U.S. Catholic Church and federal immigration authorities make strange bedfellows. For years — while U.S. border patrol agents raided field and factory, and rounded up Mexican aliens wading across the Rio Grande — the U.S. Catholic Conference was busy lobbying Congress to grant aliens amnesty. Meanwhile, Church groups nationwide were offering aliens food, clothing, shelter and legal advice.

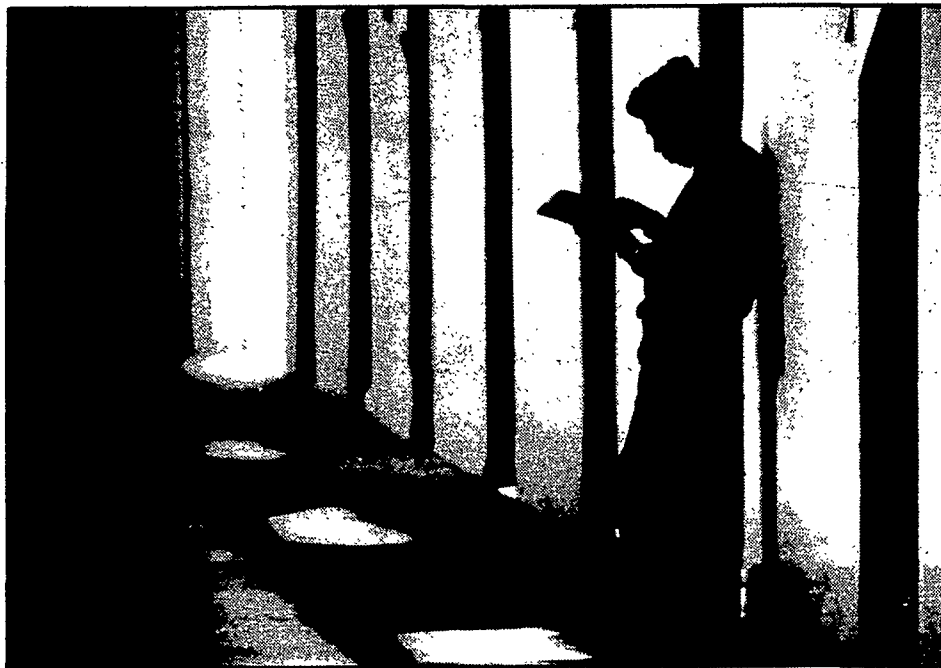
Yet, in order to implement the immigration-reform law passed by Congress in October, the Church and the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service may need to work hand-in-hand this year.

Amnesty provisions of the law allow immigrants who began living illegally in the United States before January 1, 1982, to apply for legalized status.

The USCC's Migration and Refugee Services and countless Church agencies throughout the nation are considering signing a contract with immigration authorities that would make them "qualified designated entities" — the title given to those officially charged with helping aliens apply for legalization under the new law.

Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio, executive director of Migration and Refugee Services, is quick to admit that he is a little uncomfortable with the prospect of working with federal immigration authorities — whose policies the Church has long protested.

But if the Church were to decline participation in the legalization process, Monsignor DiMarzio said, "it wouldn't be INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) that would be in trouble, it'd be the



WAITING — A Central American refugee passes the time while awaiting permission to enter Canada. He is one of about 140 Hondurans, Salvadorans and Mexicans staying in a converted warehouse in Plattsburgh, N.Y., about 25 miles south of the Canadian border. Many illegal aliens in the United States, fearing deportation under the new immigration law, are seeking to live in Canada.

people ... that would lose out. That's the problem."

Anticipation of the unlikely church-state alliance has provoked concern among those who work with Hispanics, the largest group of those who will apply for legalization.

In November, shortly after passage of the new law, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las

Cruces, N.M., warned that the participation in the legalization program "could have serious implications for the Church, eroding the trust and credibility it now enjoys" among illegal immigrants.

He said he wanted to be certain that "none of the people who approach us to apply for legalization will be hurt or suffer as a

consequence" and that the Church not become "an instrument that causes suffering."

Echoing Bishop Ramirez' concerns about the unlikely alliance, Joseph Trevino, executive director of the League of United Latin American Citizens, Inc., cautions that the Church must take care that aliens not find it guilty by association.

For example, Trevino said, it is not unlikely that aliens will go to Church-run legalization offices "thinking 'el padrecito' (the good pastor) will fix things for me."

The Church must make sure aliens understand the truth, Trevino said, that "God and the parish priest have nothing to do with who's eligible and who isn't. INS makes the decisions." The Church's good intentions aside, those turned away because they don't qualify for legalization are bound to feel betrayed, he said.

Despite immigration authorities' promises that they will not use information obtained in the process to deport anyone, Trevino warned that the Church must take care that data it collects on aliens who do not qualify does not get into the wrong hands.

The fact that federal immigration authorities have been responsible for massive deportation, violation of aliens' rights and the fostering of nativist, discriminatory attitudes is "precisely why the Church has to get involved," said Father Vicente Lopez, associate director of the USCC's Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs.

"If the Church doesn't get involved, who is there to safeguard the rights of the immigrant, to ensure that the procedures followed are credible and effective?" he asks.

USCC official says regulations threaten Church role in legalization process

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — The formal role Church and community agencies planned to take in the alien legalization process is threatened by government regulations, a U.S. Catholic Conference official contends.

The Church's commitment to help aliens apply for legalization should not be interpreted as a willingness to accept an "unworkable cooperative agreement and regulations that are contrary to the intent of Congress," said Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio, executive director of the USCC's Migration and Refugee Services.

His views were expressed in a letter to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization commissioner March 10. In the letter, Monsignor DiMarzio and 29 groups requested a meeting to resolve serious concerns affecting their consideration of formal roles as "qualified designated entities," the title given to those entering into agreements with the federal government to aid aliens applying for legalization.

The letter said the groups had five major areas of concern:

- The way in which legalization regulations affect agencies that agree to help process aliens.

- The language of the cooperative agreement between those agencies and the federal government.

- Levels of funding for legalization programs set up nationwide.

- The structure of legalization-program funding, including start-up costs for various centers.

- A cap on counseling fees to be paid by alien applicants.

Among agencies signing the letter — which was addressed to Alan C. Nelson, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service — were the American Jewish Committee, the National Council of La Raza, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the American Council for Nationalities Service, the United Farm Workers of America and the American Civil Liberties Union.

The groups asked for an immediate meeting with INS officials, in order for them to meet the timetable set up by INS.

"We and hundreds of other organizations

and communities are committed to the total success of the legalization and special agricultural-workers programs," Monsignor DiMarzio wrote. "We intend to participate in counseling and representing applicants to the best of our abilities," he said.

Wells Klein, executive director of the American Council for Nationalities Service, said one major concern is the manner in which the regulations of the legalization and agricultural programs affect the "workability and fairness of the program."

The purpose of the legalization program, said Jay Mazur, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, is to "legitimize the status of persons who have lived in the shadows of society for far too

long.

"It is imperative that the INS abandon its restrictive approach and work with the Congress and groups throughout the country to craft a program that can work," Mazur said.

In an unusual move, Immigration and Naturalization Service unofficially released the proposed legalization regulations January 20. They were to be officially unveiled at a news conference March 6, but immigration authorities canceled the conference after the Office of Management and Budget said it needed more time to review the proposals.

The regulations are to go into effect after public comment and final review.

Church will pay high legalization fees for qualified aliens

Washington (NC) — The Church will come to the aid of aliens who cannot afford to pay high legalization fees, a USCC official said March 17. "I believe the Church will pull together and assist" those who cannot pay the fees, said Monsignor Nicholas DiMarzio, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference's Migration and Refugee Services.

Hispanic advocacy groups have said the fees are so high they will prohibit qualified aliens from applying for legalized status.

"I don't think anybody's not going to

be able to find funds. If they qualify for legalization, they're going to be able to pay the fees) one way or another," Monsignor DiMarzio said.

He urged parishes to create "revolving loan funds" to help individuals who cannot afford the fees.

The fee schedule, detailed in proposed regulations issued March 16 by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, calls for charging \$185 for each adult and \$50 for each dependent child under 18. The regulations establish the maximum

family fee at \$420.

Despite two hours of negotiations with Immigration and Naturalization officials on March 12, Monsignor DiMarzio said, Migration and Refugee Services and Church agencies have yet to decide whether they will act in a formal role as "qualified designated entities" to which aliens can come for legalization assistance.

He said the decision does not have to be made until April 10, the application deadline for "qualified designated entities."

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