

World & Nation

Despite risk of prosecution,

Workers advocate defiance of immigration laws

By Laurie Hansen

Washington (NC) — Tired of working through the system in an effort to change what they consider unjust aspects of U.S. immigration law, a growing number of Catholic Church workers are deciding to go around it.

Just as parishes and religious congregations risked prosecution by becoming sanctuaries for Central American refugees fleeing their homelands, church leaders in Los Angeles, New York and Chicago have announced in recent months they will knowingly violate federal law and hire immigrants without regard to legal status.

They also advocate that other employers follow suit.

To help the estimated 88 percent of Los Angeles-area illegal aliens who will not qualify for legalization under terms of the 1986 immigration reform law, "we are asking employers to take a risk," said Jesuit Father Michael Kennedy, one of 53 Los Angeles priests, nuns and lay people urging employers to violate the law.

"We don't take lightly this idea of committing civil disobedience," said Divine Word Father James Liebner, a member of Chicago's Hispanic Caucus, a group of Chicago parish leaders that has similarly urged employers to hire illegal aliens.

He said members of the Hispanic Caucus back the efforts of concerned citizens who lobby Congress to change unfair legislation, "but in the meantime we're not going to turn our backs on the poor."

By hiring illegal aliens, employers subject themselves to fines ranging from \$250 to \$10,000 for each illegal alien hired. The 1986

immigration reform law allows for criminal penalties, including six-month jail sentences, for "a pattern or practice of violations" by an employer.

The sanctions are called for in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, the same law that grants amnesty to immigrants who can prove they have resided illegally in the United States since before Jan. 1, 1982.

History has shown, said Father Liebner, that Congress is capable of making unjust laws. "If it weren't for people raising their voices, we'd still have prohibition of women's right to vote and the owning of slaves," he argues.

Darlene Cuccinello, a spokeswoman for the Manhattan-based Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace, said members of religious orders have been working for seven years to try to get fair immigration legislation on the books.

"I think we can honestly say we've exhausted all legal avenues ... if we wait for passage of Moakley-DeConcini (a bill to grant temporary legal status to Salvadorans and Nicaraguans) we could be waiting years," she said.

Her organization has begun to hold workshops at which representatives of religious orders can reflect on the effects of employer sanctions and question experts, including lawyers, on what sort of prosecution they should expect to face if they choose to make the hiring of illegal aliens a policy of hospitals, schools and other institutions they operate.

Not everyone, of course, agrees with this approach.

Chicago Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin,

for example, issued his own statement the same day the Hispanic Caucus called on employers to violate the law. While he, too, expressed sharp criticism of current immigration law, he urged appealing for changes by working "through democratic processes."

Not surprisingly, the branch of the federal government responsible for enforcing employer sanctions has frowned on the

church groups' efforts.

In a January 14 interview, Verne Jervis, spokesman for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in Washington, called it "irresponsible for anyone to publicly advocate violation of American law."

He predicted that the church workers' statements would have no effect on employers' decisions to comply with the law.

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Pope calls for intensified prayer for unification of Christian faiths

By Greg Erlandson

Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II heralded the start of Christian unity week with a call for Catholics to pray more intensely for unity.

In inaugurating the 80th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the pope told pilgrims and visitors in St. Peter's Square January 17 that "unity is a gift of God."

Speaking after his regular Angelus address, the pope said that "while the ecumenical movement advances, there is always a great need for illumination and heavenly strength."

Prayer increases faith in God and brotherly love while freeing Christians from "mistrust, suspicion and mutual fear," the pope added.

During the Angelus address, the pope continued his meditations on Marian shrines around the world with a survey of such sanctuaries in Egypt.

The shrines, which recall the flight of the

Holy Family to Egypt, are venerated by Catholics, Orthodox and Moslems, the pope said.

These shrines are of "special interest from an ecumenical point of view," the pope said, "owing to the devout attendance on the part of faithful belonging to difference confessions."

One Coptic Catholic monastery outside Cairo is dedicated to the memory of the flight into Egypt because its members pray "in a special way for all those who, for various motives, are persecuted and are forced to leave their country and seek refuge in foreign lands," the pope said.

Another shrine, near the ancient city of Fostat, Egypt, is cared for by the Coptic Orthodox Church and at one time was rebuilt by the 12th-century Moslem ruler Saladin, the pope added.

In the evening, the pope met with about 200 members of Italy's Foreign Press

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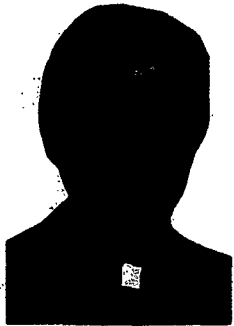
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