

MIGRANTS

Continued from page 1
fight for better living and working conditions.

"They won't complain because they are afraid of being deported," said Tellez, who also represents the Farmworker Women's Institute, an FLSNY project that seeks a safe forum for farm working women to voice their concerns.

Salgado, who also spoke at the evening teleconference, stated that the status of "illegal" can lead to widespread harm for farm workers and their families. "If you're outside the law, you can be abused by employees, community, schoolmates," he said.

And yet, due to their willingness to work long hours for low pay, the migrants are a vital part of the farming industry. "The growers can't find other people to do the work," said Marvin Mich, director of Catholic Family Center's Social Policy and Research Office. Mich said the average salary of migrant workers on farms in the Diocese of Rochester is \$6 per hour, with an annual average income of \$7,500.

"It's a very hard life," said Paz, who attended the afternoon teleconference while her brother, Josephino, took her place at the evening

gathering.

Paz said she was fortunate to obtain citizenship not long after moving to the Rochester area from Mexico 15 years ago, and to go on to obtain a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Rochester Institute of Technology. However, the Brockport resident said her family has dispersed because some have not gained legal status.

Mich charged that these farm workers are often pawns in agreements made between the U.S. government and the farming industry. When the workers' quality of life becomes seriously jeopardized, he said, church activists feel compelled to step in.

On the other hand, Mich said, that feeling is not shared by Catholics who perceive the laborers as law breakers and job swipers. The reality of that perception, he said, needs to be weighed before the petition-signing drive takes place in diocesan parishes Feb. 7-8.

Participants at the teleconferences said one potential way to change such thinking would be for parishes not only to distribute informational material, but also to invite



Renan Salgado



Librada Paz

migrant farm workers to be guest speakers. Paz, for one, said she would be willing to volunteer in such a capacity.

"That was probably the best idea to come out of the day," Mich remarked.

RAISING AWARENESS

The teleconferences were a first-time effort by organizers, drawing approximately 50 people in all. Father Brian Cool, who moderated both conferences from the Pastoral Center location, said he was "very excited from the result."

"What highlighted that it worked is that when we broke off into local groups, people came back with different ideas of how to advocate in their own locations. That gave me a sense that they heard our speakers, and that the speakers had the same impact in other places as at our table," said Father Cool, who chairs the diocesan Public Policy Committee.

Mich said the teleconferences, along with the establishment of Public Policy Sunday, are signs of the Public Policy Committee's increasingly cohesive approach to promot-

ing its concerns. "The committee really needs to make Public Policy Sunday a regular (annual) event so the parishes can get a rhythm going," he said.

Mich also said the committee plans to move up its annual timetable for identifying topics for the following year, so that publicity can begin circulating sooner. Among the committee's other top priorities in 2004 are education about Catholic teaching on matters related to bioethics and reproductive technology, as well as a continuation of the 2003 diocesan petition promoting quality, affordable health care for all.

Salgado, for one, said he's counting on the Catholic Church to make a difference for migrant workers, saying the church "is in a great situation because it can network worldwide."

It appears that Salgado can expect continued support from the Rochester Diocese.

"Advocacy is just as important in our Catholic Charities works as direct services," Jack Balinsky, director of diocesan Catholic Charities, observed during the afternoon teleconference.

"The diocese, we as Christians, have put our hand to the plow. And we are not going to let go," Mich added.

President Bush outlines guest-worker proposal

Patricia Zapor/CNS

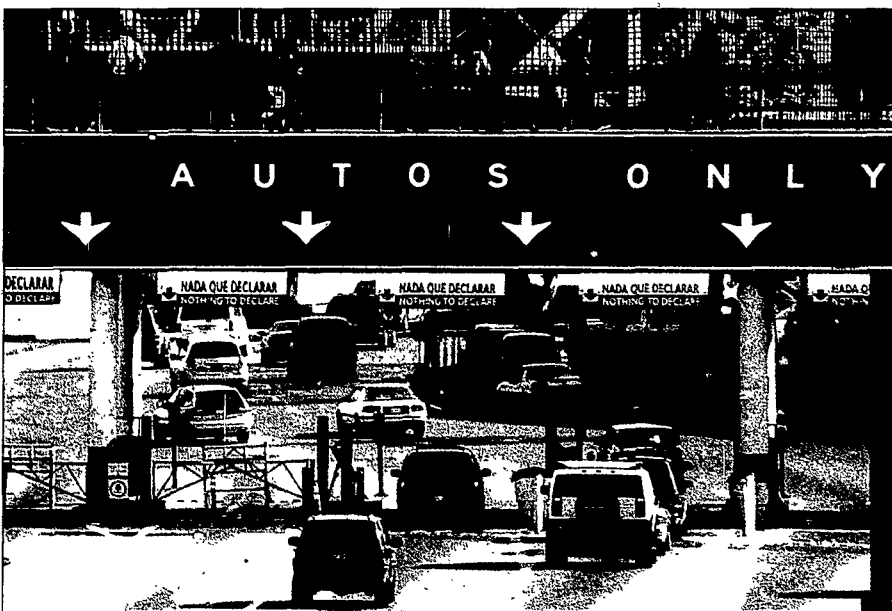
WASHINGTON — A new guest-worker proposal by President Bush may address some of the goals of Catholic and other immigrant advocates, but they say they are worried about the lack of details on his plan.

Bush on Jan. 7 announced a proposal for allowing temporary workers from other countries to be admitted to the United States to take jobs which employers cannot fill with people already in the country. The plan includes giving at least some of the estimated 8 million illegal immigrants already in the United States permission to stay here temporarily, as long as employers demonstrate a need for their labor.

The chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration, Coadjutor Bishop Thomas G. Wenski of Orlando, Fla., praised Bush's decision to bring up the issue of immigration again with his proposal.

Bush's proposal, however, "does not provide a solution to the serious problems we experience as the result of continued undocumented migration and an immigration system that is broken."

Bishop Wenski said, "What is needed ... is truly comprehensive



Reuters/CNS

Vehicles and pedestrians navigate the border crossing between the United States and Mexico at San Ysidro, Calif., Jan. 7. President George W. Bush has proposed changes to the nation's immigration laws.

immigration reform that will provide opportunities for legalization for the undocumented currently living in the United States, temporary worker programs with full worker protections and a path to permanency, as well as a reform of our family immigration system that will allow

immigrant families to reunite in a timely fashion."

Bush's proposal would allow immigrants to obtain three-year permits to work in the United States. They would be entitled to bring family members in with them, as long as they can support them. And the im-

migrants could legally leave the country for visits and return without liability.

Bush's plan would include temporarily legalizing the status of illegal immigrants already here, as long as they are employed, he said, thereby bringing undocumented workers "out of the shadows" and under the protection of labor laws.

Father Brian Cool, chair of the Public Policy Committee in the Diocese of Rochester, N.Y., said he was pleased with the president's concern on this topic.

"We're still waiting for the complete details. But the very fact the president has moved it up to the level he has, is very energizing and comforting to me," Father Cool said. "He's using better language in terms of undocumented workers; he seemed to be referring to the human need and the human person."

Ouisa Davis, director of Migration and Refugee Services for the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, said she's glad Bush is "getting the immigration dialogue going again," but as to his specific proposals, she added, "I'll believe it when I see it."

Contains reporting by Mike Latona in Rochester.