



Religious groups call for civil approach to immigration

Written by
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The leaders of 16 local religious denominations and organizations - with a collective congregational membership in the hundreds of thousands - will make a unified call Thursday for a civil and just approach to the contentious issue of immigration in Ohio.

Members of the Metropolitan Religious Coalition of Cincinnati (MARCC) have signed a five-point declaration of principles that they want to guide discussion and policy.

From origins in Southwest Ohio, organizers plan to gather support throughout the state and hope to come up with an Ohio Compact, similar to the Utah Compact formed in December 2010. "A clearer expression of good sense and sanity than Utah's would be hard to find," wrote the New York Times in a Dec. 5 editorial.

Religious leaders in Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky and Southeast Indiana have patterned their document after Utah's. "Our judicatory leaders are speaking out for fairness in immigration policy with the moral authority of their elected offices," said Margaret Fox, executive director of MARCC.

Of MARCC's 16 judicatories, 14 have signed on and the other two are still discussing the declaration. Two organizations outside of MARCC have also signed the declaration and the coalition hopes more will sign it in the future.

Leaders of major religious groups signing the document are the Most Rev. Dennis Schnurr, Catholic Archbishop of Cincinnati; the heads of three Jewish organizations, including the Board of Rabbis of Greater Cincinnati; and the top officials of several protestant denominations, counting the region's two largest associations of African-American churches.

MARCC plans a news conference Thursday morning to announce its "Declaration of Principles to Guide Ohio's Immigration Discussion." Its five points:

Federal government: "Immigration policy is the responsibility of the federal government. ... We urge passage of fair and equitable immigration policy throughout the United States while protecting (the) borders."

Law enforcement: While respecting the rule of law, "Using local law enforcement to apply immigration policy increases the cost of local policing and opens the door further to racial profiling."

Families: "We stand with families in opposition to any program or policy that would disrupt or unnecessarily separate them. We call for policies that unify and support the health and well-being of children and families, regardless of their (immigration) status."

Economy: "We respect the economic contributions immigrants make as workers and taxpayers to build this economy." A free society: "Ohio needs to reflect the principles of a free society by establishing policies that welcome and support immigrants." Once the principles are formally announced, MARCC will send them and letters of support from religious leaders to Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine. Ultimately, the responsibility for enforcing in statewide law enforcement policy would fall to the attorney general's office.

MARCC delegates met in November and voted on two social issues – immigration and homeless/affordable housing – that they wanted the coalition to focus on in 2011.

Delegates said they were required to step into an issue that has grown into one of the nation's most divisive. "To do any less rejects God's call to serve those who are tired and poor and come to our communities to contribute and build better lives for their families," Fox said.

Signatories

The following leaders of religious organizations have signed the "Declaration of Principles to Guide Ohio's Immigration Discussion," organized by the Metropolitan Religious Coalition of Cincinnati.

Archdiocese of Cincinnati, the Most Rev. Dennis Schnurr, archbishop.

Association of Unity Churches, the Rev. Doris Hoskins.

Baptist Ministers Conference of Greater Cincinnati & Vicinity, the Rev. Doc Foster.

Board of Rabbis of Greater Cincinnati, Rabbi Margaret Meyer.

Cincinnati Conference Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. Diane Schwiger-Alexander, president.

Cincinnati Islamic Center, Imam Ilyas Nashid.

Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio, the Right Rev. Thomas Breidenthal, bishop.

Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, the Rev. Gregory Chandler Sr., president.

Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation, Gary Greenberg, president.

Ohio River Valley District of the United Methodist Church, the Rev. Jocelyn Roper, assistant to the district superintendent.

Presbytery of Cincinnati, the Rev. James Di Egidio, general presbyter.

Religious Society of Friends of Greater Cincinnati, Frank Huss.

Unitarian-Universalist Council of Greater Cincinnati, M. J. Pierson, president.

United Church of Christ, Southwest Ohio Northern Kentucky Association Ohio Conference, the Rev. Ruth Brandon, Association Minister.

Organizations that have also signed the declaration, but are not MARCC members:

American Jewish Committee, Cincinnati Region, Barbara Glueck, director.

Faith Community Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, the Rev. Rousseau O'Neal, president.