

Cardinal Mahony tells candidates to focus on immigration

LOS ANGELES - In letters to all the presidential candidates sent Dec. 12, Los Angeles Cardinal Roger M. Mahony urged them to “show leadership on the issue of immigration” and to work to find a “humane and comprehensive solution to our broken immigration system.”

The cardinal expressed disappointment at the tone of the immigration debate and urged the candidates to replace verbal attacks on immigrants with a focus on policy solutions.

“I am deeply disturbed that, to date, the discussion on immigration has failed to significantly focus upon policy solutions to illegal immigration,” he wrote.

“Rather, the debate has been characterized by verbal assaults on undocumented immigrants, assaults which have had the effect of alienating immigrants to our country - not only the undocumented but also legal immigrants and newly naturalized citizens,” he said.

Cardinal Mahony also reminded the candidates they have a responsibility to outline a vision for the future of the country that includes leadership on immigration reform.

“Americans will support a candidate who leads on vital questions,” he wrote, urging them to “end the polarizing and dehumanizing rhetoric against immigrants and bring Americans together to support a common-sense plan.”

He said recent discussions about immigration in the presidential campaign could give the impression that America is no longer “open to newcomers and to the contributions they make to our communities.”

“It is my belief that the emerging vision is incompatible with the views of the majority of the American people who understand the importance of embracing our heritage as a nation of immigrants,” he added.

The cardinal noted that the current U.S. immigration system is “outmoded and is in need of major reform.”

He said immigrants are needed to work in industries yet there are insufficient visas to allow them to work legally and undocumented immigrants work hard and pay taxes yet they live in fear and hiding. He also said that “despite enforcement efforts” at the border to stop illegal immigration “tragically human beings continue to die in the American desert.”

Tod Tamberg, spokesman for the Los Angeles Archdiocese, said the letter was a “collective message” to all the candidates, but he noted that their positions on immigration reform are varied.

“The cardinal understands that some of the candidates have addressed the issue responsibly and courageously, while others have used attacks against immigrants as a campaign tactic,” Tamberg said in a statement.

Salt Lake City Bishop John C. Wester, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration, similarly addressed verbal attacks made on immigrants, noting that “some elected officials and presidential candidates have joined the chorus.”

In a opinion piece published Dec. 1 in the Salt Lake Tribune daily newspaper, he said, “Political venting toward immigrants has done little to repair our immigration system or any of the other challenges we face as a nation. In fact, it diverts attention from meaningful reform.”

The bishop said Americans cannot benefit from the labor of immigrants “yet deprive them of the protection of laws that ensure their rights in the workplace.”

He said recent polls indicate the American public understands and supports the need for comprehensive immigration reform.

“Unfortunately, we may have to endure more flailing and political posturing before our public leaders understand it,” he wrote.