

# Maryland Catholics urged to engage in immigration dialogue

The Maryland bishops launched a campaign Nov. 19 urging the state's 1 million Catholics to engage in a faith-filled dialogue on immigration.

Under the banner of the Maryland Catholic Conference, the social policy arm of the state's Catholic hierarchy, parishes all over the state have received an information packet about immigration issues concerning the country, state and potential legislation that may arise.

According to Julie Varner, associate director for social concerns at the Annapolis-based MCC, the goal is a healthy involvement of the faithful on the topic of immigration.

The MCC is asking parishes to insert a statement in their bulletins from Baltimore Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl and Wilmington Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, beginning Nov. 27, illustrating their collective views on immigration and their expectation that Catholics educate themselves on the matter, Ms. Varner said.

"Questions of legality, economics and the mix of cultures often dominate the immigration debate," the statement reads. "As Catholics, we must move past divisions and remain focused on the dignity of the human person and the welfare of families."

The information provided to parishes includes facts about the immigration process in the United States, historical information about migration over the centuries, statistics on legal and illegal immigrants living in this country and how it affects

citizens, and the root causes for relocation by foreign nationals.

Though the bishops agree U.S. laws must be respected, they stress discussion must not end there and that Catholics need to consider the needs of undocumented immigrants, their families and what motivates them to migrate.

“The legality of a person’s entry into the United States is one issue, our response to him now that he’s here is a separate one,” the statement reads. “The former is the government’s responsibility, the latter is ours. When we exercise that responsibility, we should keep in mind the command of the Lord in the Old Testament: ‘You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you, too, were once aliens in the land of Egypt.’”

The MCC is urging parishes to hold events that will educate parishioners about immigration issues, Ms. Varner said.

“There are a lot of creative people out there and our hope is they will come up with ways that will really engage the masses in a thoughtful, prayerful and thorough dialogue on immigration,” she said. “In the Diocese of Wilmington, they are holding small events where parishioners have a meal with immigrants and get to know them in their own parishes.”

Leaders at St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea, have organized events that encourage parishioners who regularly attend the parish’s weekly Spanish Mass to mingle with the English-speaking members.

“It’s harder to write someone off when you know them personally,” said Father James D. Proffitt, pastor of St. Michael the Archangel. “Our impressions tend to change when we have met immigrants and gotten to know them.”

In a parish like St. Michael the Archangel where many Latino immigrants attend

Mass, Father Proffitt said he not only welcomes the immigration dialogue among his parishioners, he plans to promote it from the pulpit.

“As a church, we need to be able to minister to people here,” he said. “We’re never going to have a position where we make people show their passport before they come to Mass.”

To view the bishops’ statement and facts on immigration issues, log on to the MCC’s Web site at [www.mdccathcon.org](http://www.mdccathcon.org).