

# Bishop Clark, other religious leaders to hold prayer vigil for comprehensive immigration reform

Rochester, New York (Wednesday, May 23, 2007) --Bishop Matthew Clark and other Rochester area religious leaders will lead " An Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Comprehensive Immigration Reform." . Nearly every major faith group will be represented. The rally is aimed at sparking "**A Day of a Thousand Conversations: Twenty-four hours to engage your neighbors, colleagues, families**" on the issues of immigration reform.

The rally will be held on Wednesday, May 23, from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at Washington Square Park in downtown Rochester (corner of Clinton and Court). Both St. Mary's Church and First Universalist Church, adjacent to the park, will be used during the rally.

This issue is especially pertinent locally because we have a very large number of migrant worker here. For more information, contact Sr. Janet Korn or Ruth Putnam, 328-3210.

## **The rally calls on people to call their senators and educate the public on five immigration principles:**

- To make family a priority in immigration law
- To insist the worker programs contain protection for U.S. and migrant workers
- To allow for an earned legalization program for the undocumented in the country
  - To restore due process protections
  - To respond to the economic, political, and social root causes of migration.

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*The following essay appeared in the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle on Monday, May 21, 2007.*

## **Treat all people as God's family in new U.S. immigration policy**

**By Bishop Matthew Clark and Imam Muhammad Shafiq**

Guest Essayists

On what basis should the U.S. Congress decide immigration policy, now that the White House and key senators have agreed on a bipartisan proposal?

From one perspective, there are opinions fed by our fears and hostility in the aftermath of violent acts. From another perspective, the economic impact is hotly debated. From a third perspective, the traditions cherished by our various faiths proclaim that all of us are sisters and brothers in God's family.

As leaders of local faith communities, we urge revision of federal immigration law based on these principles:

The human dignity and rights of immigrants should be respected regardless of their legal status. It is shameful to detain undocumented immigrants in deficient facilities or among convicted criminals, especially unaccompanied minor children who often have no access to family or counsel.

All U.S. citizens come from immigrant roots, including African Americans descended from people transported against their will as slaves, and Native Americans whose ancestors presumably came from elsewhere.

Nations have the right to secure their borders and control immigration; however, when they are able to protect and feed their residents, they have a greater obligation to welcome immigrants.

When people are deprived of their human right to find opportunities in their homeland (as has unfortunately happened in Mexico), they are driven to risk their lives in seeking survival for themselves and their families.

We oppose punitive, burdensome measures such as the criminalization of persons whose presence is undocumented, particularly in the case of asylum-seekers who are unable to secure valid documents from their governments.

We encourage members of our faith communities to urge Congress to pass legislation that includes the following:

Justice for those trying to immigrate legally.

A viable path to earned citizenship for the 11 million to 12 million undocumented people in the country;

A temporary-worker program that protects the rights of workers, and includes a path to citizenship for those who choose it.

A family-based immigration reform to reduce waiting times for family reunification.

Restoration of due process protection.

Policies that address the root causes of migration.

We speak out of awareness of the lessons taught by God's messengers: of Abraham, who was called to a land unknown to him; of the deliverance of Israel out of the land of slavery; of Ruth and Esther, who surmounted difficult boundaries; of Jesus and Muhammad, who had to flee for their lives; of Gandhi and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose nonviolent strategies embraced even their oppressors and whose deaths intensified their message around the world.

Their lessons repeat the theme that the whole earth belongs to God. As managers and stewards of its resources, we are challenged to give account of how we are mindful of the poor, the widow, the orphan and the foreigner in our midst.

*Clark is bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester; Shafiq is imam/executive director, Islamic Center of Rochester. This essay also was signed by Rabbi Alan J. Katz, Temple Sinai; Bishop Jack McKelvey, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester; the Rev. Richard Myers, chair, Greater Rochester Community of Churches; Sister Gaye Moorhead, president, Sisters of Mercy of Rochester; Sister Janice Morgan, president, Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester; and the Rev. Alan Newton, executive minister, American Baptist Churches of the Rochester Genesee Region.*