

# Bishop Anthony B. Taylor petitions Congress on reform

written by Catholic News Service |  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — In a joint letter to members of Congress, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor joined 10 other Catholic bishops and evangelical leaders to plead for “common sense fixes to our immigration policies” by passing legislation this year.

Eleven bishops and a half dozen evangelical leaders said that as religious leaders, “we live every day with the reality that our immigration system does not reflect our commitment to the values of human dignity, family unity and respect for the rule of law that define us as Americans.”

At a briefing in February, the prospects for passage of an immigration bill this term were described as not impossible, but complicated.

Among the Catholics signing the letter were Auxiliary Bishop Eusebio L. Elizondo of Seattle, chairman of the Committee on Migration of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the immediate past chairman, Los Angeles Archbishop Jose H. Gomez.

The key evangelical signers included Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals; the Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference; the Rev. Gabriel Salguero, president, National Latino Evangelical Coalition; and the Rev. Jim Wallis, founder and president of Sojourners.

The letter said the signers each day “witness the human tragedies created by our current system, including the separation of families and the violation of basic human dignity.”

Echoing the language about the “rule of law” used by some opponents of immigration reform, the leaders said “as a nation founded upon the principles of the rule of law and the centrality of family, we can no longer delay fixing this system.”

It said they are hopeful for legislation that “respects the God-given dignity of every person, protects family unity, respects the rule of law, guarantees the integrity of our national borders, ensures fairness for taxpayers and makes it possible for undocumented immigrants who meet the requirements to become citizens if they desire.”

Other Catholic bishops signing the letter included Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, Auxiliary Bishop John R. Manz of Chicago; Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington; Bishop Kevin W. Vann of Orange, Calif., Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn, N.Y.; Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski of Miami; Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City; and Auxiliary Bishop Luis R. Zarama of Atlanta.

In a teleconference about the letter, Archbishop Wenski said, “There is more at stake in this debate than the next election. The outcome will set the tone for the rest of the century. Either we can choose to turn away from our heritage and our track record of integrating immigrants, or we can embrace it and use it to our advantage.”

Bishop DiMarzio said in the teleconference that the political debate over immigration reform often ignores the humanitarian consequences of the current system. "Families are ripped apart, migrant workers are exploited, and human beings continue to die in the desert. This suffering must end."

While Catholic bishops have pushed for immigration reform for decades, evangelicals have come later to the cause. Anderson and Revs. Rodriguez, Wallis and Salguero in particular, have become regular activists in efforts to rally Christians to support comprehensive reform legislation.

The other evangelicals signing the letter were Stephan Bauman, president and CEO of World Relief; Russell D. Moore, president, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; Noel Castellanos, CEO, Christian Community Development Association; and Mathew Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel.

In the teleconference, Rev. Rodriguez said the collaboration by Catholics and evangelicals marked "a new day."

He said it is "morally reprehensible and counter to the teachings of Christ to continue to sacrifice 11 million lives on the altar of political expediency."

Rev. Wallis said the unified voice shows that the Christian community is united in believing "immigration reform should not be a victim of our dysfunctional politics. In an era defined by partisanship, immigration reform should be the great exception, the great exemption, to politics as usual."

At another February briefing on the prospects for reform legislation this term, Kevin Appleby, director of migration policy and public affairs for the USCCB, told participants in a conference on immigrant integration that he believes the door to passage is still open.

Appleby said he's hopeful, despite recent comments by House Speaker John Boehner that "threw cold water" on hopes arising from the announcement a week earlier of Republican principles for reform.

Boehner "said it would be very difficult to pass," said Appleby. "He didn't say it was impossible." Boehner's rationale, that Republicans in the House didn't trust the Obama administration to enforce the law on immigration, was weak, he said.

"The fundamentals are in our favor," Appleby said. Among those fundamentals, he said, is that both political parties need immigration reform to pass before the next presidential election in 2016.