

A CATHOLIC DIALOGUE ON IMMIGRATION

St. Andrew Parish hosts A Catholic Dialogue on Immigration

By Fr. Tom Stabile, T.O.R., Pastor

On September 8th, over 100 people from 14 Catholic Parishes and 4 non-Catholic Churches came together at St. Andrew, in the Diocese of Ft. Worth, to learn and dialogue on issues of immigration from a Catholic perspective. The idea and energy came from Alice Curran, our Family Life and Adult Formation Director and our Peace and Justice Task Force. A team was organized from St. Andrew and other parishes, Catholic Charities, the Diocesan Office and Allied Communities of Tarrant (ACT), to insure the event would be inclusive and far reaching.

The evening began with a simple bowl of rice, beans and tortillas, lovingly prepared by a St. Andrew Parishioner. After the opening prayer, I welcomed everyone and introduced Bishop Vann. The Bishop shared that growing up in Illinois he was aware of the prejudice against the new immigrants to the region – the Irish. The Masons were the majority and controlled the only cemetery for many miles around. Catholics had to deny their faith before they would be permitted burial in that cemetery. He said, although the present debates over immigration have political ramifications and raise different issues, the fact remains that we are called to be Christ to our brothers and sisters in Christ. He expressed joy at the attendance and encouraged those present to take seriously the challenges regarding immigration.

Next, to help us stay focused we heard two presentations. Mr. Peter Fears, the executive director of ACT, gave a summary of the Old and New Testament references to how the foreigner/alien among the faithful people ought to be treated. Sr. St. John Begnaud, SSMN gave a summary of Catholic Social Justice. In a phrase, the promotion of the good of an individual actually promotes the common good of the human person, collectively! We promote more than simple justice of giving someone what they are due or social justice that considers some of the impact of actions on others. No, Catholic Social Justice begins with the most vulnerable among us and recognizes that my ultimate good depends upon the good being done for that person.

We then watched the DVD, “Dying to Live,” followed by a panel who responded to written questions from the floor. The panel included Fr. Esteban Jasso, T.O.R., who is the pastor of a large Hispanic parish, Sr. St. John (already mentioned), Xergio Chacin and Sharon Darnell of Catholic Charities, Fr. Carmen Mele, O.P., who heads The Light of Christ Institute and Martin Pena who is employed by one of the largest parishes in the diocese as their coordinator of justice issues.

We are grateful to Br. Paul McMullen, T.O.R. who served as moderator for the entire event. The outcome of the evening was a follow-up meeting of the organizing team, plus others who found themselves inspired toward involvement. Cooperation is being worked out between the parishes who have so far expressed an interest, the Diocesan Office of Social Justice, Catholic Charities and ACT.