Hispanic evangelicals break ranks, advocate immigration reform: Legal status for undocumented immigrants

by Religion News Service staff in the March 7, 2006 issue

Breaking rank with leading evangelical groups that have chosen to stay out of current immigration debates, a new coalition has formed to represent more than 20 million Hispanic evangelicals and to denounce Congress's handling of immigration issues.

At an inaugural news conference February 3 in Carrollton, Texas, the Hispanic Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform called on Congress to create ways for undocumented immigrants to apply for legal status while seeking full citizenship.

"We are deeply concerned with many of the anti-immigrant provisions that have been introduced and some of which were passed by the House of Representatives," said Lynn Godsey, a minister who is founder-president of Alianza Hispana Evangelica del Metroplex, a Dallas-area group.

Speakers criticized a House-passed bill that would penalize people who provide for the needs of undocumented immigrants. The bill would also open the door for the federal government to build a fence along 700 miles of the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border.

By getting involved in immigration reform, these Hispanic evangelicals are parting company with high-profile evangelical organizations like Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council that have said immigration reform is not a priority item.

Hispanic evangelicals urged legislation to allow "hard-working immigrants who are already contributing to this country to come out of the shadows" and seek legal status. They also urged "border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect."

"We need to find a way to stop the flow of illegal immigration, but find a way to deal humanely and compassionately with the undocumented workers currently in the country," said Sam Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference. *–Religion News Service*