

NAE leader steps softly into immigration debate: Leith Anderson supports immigration reform

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The president of the National Association of Evangelicals has taken a rare step into the immigration debate, saying that the long waiting period for citizenship must be shortened and that other reforms should be pursued.

“There are inconsistencies and many outdated aspects of immigration laws, and I think they are therefore unjust and unfair,” said Leith Anderson, president of the National Association of Evangelicals.

The NAE has 79 member denominations and parachurch organizations—one reason Anderson said he is hesitant to make strong statements on immigration. The NAE is drafting a resolution on this issue, and Anderson said the first draft found support at a board meeting in March.

“There was a very positive response that this was an important issue, and I think that makes sense because so many of our evangelical denominations have significant growth through the Hispanic community, and the Hispanic community is increasingly a major part of the evangelical movement through the United States, so of course we care about that,” Anderson said on March 31.

Anderson, a megachurch pastor in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, acknowledged the economic challenges facing lawmakers, but said government leaders can begin with the most obvious issues—one of them being the long waiting period to gain citizenship.

“Immigration policy in the United States has changed a lot of times throughout our history, and it is time for immigration policy to change again,” Anderson said, “and in terms of what that means, it means fairness, it means family, and it means finances.”

Don Golden, senior vice president of the NAE's Baltimore-based humanitarian arm, World Relief, said his agency has seen the consequences of a broken immigration system. Although he supports border security, Golden also said he supports further legal means of attaining citizenship, including a policy to expedite family reunification.

"Earned legalization will allow our immigrant brothers and sisters to come out of the shadows toward restoration and full integration, lessening the fear many immigrants feel in communities across the nation," Golden said. *-Religion News Service*