

Catholic bishops push (again) on immigration reform

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WASHINGTON (RNS) Catholic bishops returned to Capitol Hill on Thursday (May 29) with a renewed push for immigration reform, as Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski called the failure to address immigration reform “a stain on the soul of our nation.”

Before fanning out to meet with lawmakers, members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Migration held a Mass at a Capitol Hill church that recalled a dramatic Mass they held April 1 along the U.S.-Mexican border.

Wenski, the committee’s chairman, said, “When laws fail to advance the common good, they can and they should be changed.”

The bishops’ push was accompanied by a separate open letter to House Speaker John Boehner, a Catholic, signed by 30 Catholic leaders, including the Rev. Larry Snyder, CEO of Catholic Charities USA, and the Rev. Thomas H. Smolich, who oversees Jesuit priests in the U.S.

“Legislative obstruction in the face of preventable suffering and death is not only a failure of leadership. It is immoral and shameful,” the letter said. “The eyes of our God—who hungers for justice and commands us to welcome the stranger and bind the wounds of those left by the side of the road—are on us.”

Advocates have been pushing the House to pass an immigration bill for months; the Senate passed the bill last June but it has faced steep opposition in the Republican-controlled House, where Boehner says it lacks the votes to pass.

Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, Arizona, said that the prelates planned to tell some of the stories from the border Mass to lawmakers to humanize the immigration debate because “when there’s a faceless person, it’s easy to reject or ignore or put aside that person.”

During Wenski's homily, he said the immigrants aren't criminals and are looking to "regain themselves with honest work."

"They aren't outside the law because they want to be," Wenski said, adding that undocumented immigrants should have the chance to earn U.S. citizenship.