

Undocumented yet baptized: A quandary for Southern Baptists

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A Southern Baptist Convention official says evangelicals are galvanizing around immigration reform because increasingly the issue affects someone they know.

“A primary motivating factor for us is this has become personal for us,” Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research for the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, said October 29 in a panel discussion before 600 national leaders who converged on Washington to lobby Congress to pass immigration reform.

“Evangelicals . . . share the gospel with anyone who will stand still long enough to have a conversation with them,” Duke quipped, “and of course many of those folks end up trusting Christ as savior.”

“We tell them: ‘Now that you’ve come to know the Lord, you should join a church; you should be baptized and join the church.’ So many of them follow that path and now they are members of our churches.”

“What are we going to do?” Duke queried. “Are we going to say now that you’ve done all that and you’ve joined our church it’s time to leave? It’s not going to happen.”

“These folks have now become part of our congregations,” he said. “We recognize that they are good people. They are strong, family-oriented people. . . . So evangelicals in large measure are now calling for an immigration reform that will treat them with the dignity that they deserve.”

The Southern Baptist Convention, with 16 million members the nation’s second-largest faith group behind Catholics, passed a resolution in 2011 calling for immigration reform that includes “a just and compassionate path to legal status.” The resolution specified that it was “not to be construed as support for amnesty for any undocumented immigrant.”

Duke and other panelists said there is no way to reform America's broken immigration system without figuring out what to do with an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants already in the United States.

In another speech in Washington, Duke said there is presently a window of opportunity to enact immigration reform, because most of the proposals before Congress have already ironed out many of the major differences.

"We're not talking about amnesty; we're not talking about mass deportation," he said. "We're in this narrow range that most people can agree on. Now is the time to get this done, not later. We're almost there. Congress just needs to finish the job it's already started." —ABP