



Illegals living in 'state of terror'

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DURHAM -- At a prayer vigil at an Hispanic church Durham church Wednesday, Latino immigrants and supporters said treatment of undocumented immigrants is not fair.

Immigrants are living in a "state of terror," said Martha Ramirez, wife of the Rev. Julio Ramirez, the pastor of Iglesia Presbiteriana Emanuel -- Emanuel Hispanic Presbyterian Church -- at 2504 N. Roxboro St., which hosted the bilingual service.

About 50 gathered at the church, which shares a sanctuary with Northgate Presbyterian Church. Northgate holds Sunday services in English at 11 a.m., and Emanuel follows with a service in Spanish at 1 p.m.

The Rev. David Keck, a former Northgate pastor, gave a scripture lesson based on Leviticus 19:34, which says the "stranger who resides among you" must be treated as a "native," and speaks of the plight of the Jews in Egypt, a comparison that several speakers mentioned.

Members of the Hispanic congregation related tales of family members and friends deported after arrests for minor crimes such as parking violations and possession of a few pirated movies.

Current practices split families, force children to leave school and contribute to an increasing rate of suicide among Hispanic youth, Julio Ramirez said. Part of the reason for the vigil Wednesday night, Ramirez said, was to give members of Emanuel a chance to pray and talk about the problems they face, which can help alleviate the depression and anxiety they feel.

Several speakers urged those gathered to write their congressmen and senators to urge passage of immigration reform. The vigil was part of a nationwide Interfaith Immigration Coalition effort to hold prayer vigils this week in support of reform.

"We don't wish to criminalize people who are here looking for a better life," said the Rev. Roger Velâ??squez, chaplain at Duke University Medical Center and pastor of Cristo Vive, a Durham Hispanic ministry.

After Keck's message, those assembled formed a circle around the sanctuary holding candles as pastors from around Durham offered prayers.

Ramirez asked everyone to take the hand of the person to their left.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked. "That is your neighbor."

Then he asked everyone to switch places with someone else in the church, "to put yourself in the shoes of your neighbor."

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