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www.welcometheimmigrant.org

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North Carolina Faith Leaders Welcome Immigrants People of Faith Mobilizing for Immigration Reform

(RALEIGH, NC) – On October 7, North Carolina religious leaders issued a statement calling on people of faith to welcome immigrants as a matter of religious responsibility. Rev. George Reed (Executive Director, NC Council of Churches), Bishop Michael Burbidge (Roman Catholic Diocese of Raleigh), Rabbi Eric Solomon (Beth Meyer Synagogue), Imam Oliver Muhammad (As Salaam Islamic Center of Raleigh), and Rev. Cookie Santiago (Director of Hispanic/Latino Ministries of the NC Conference of the United Methodist Church) announced the formal launch of the NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants. They also highlighted the importance of reforming our broken immigration system, treating immigrants with respect, and engaging one another in positive dialogue across the political spectrum.

These faith leaders discussed the growing movement and mobilization of people of faith in support of immigration reform. Rev. Reed said, “We are here today to speak out *for* people of faith, and *to* people of faith about the call of our Scriptures to welcome immigrants – not to exclude them, or belittle them, or stereotype them, or threaten their lives.” He went on to outline the purpose of the newly-announced Coalition: “The NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants is a very loose coalition of individuals, not organizations, who have come together for the one specific purpose of calling people of faith to practice the teachings of our faith regarding immigrants in our midst. We seek to bring about some change in the vitriolic anti-immigrant climate in which we find ourselves, to move our state from hostility towards hospitality.”

Bishop Burbidge outlined the religious ethical imperative to welcoming immigrants: “My moral and pastoral concerns around the question of immigration – both in the U.S. and in North Carolina – reflect the longstanding biblical and theological tradition of my Church.” He continued by saying, “It is time for us to push beyond rhetoric and ineffective enforcement practices. I join with my brothers and sisters as a signatory of the statement of the NC Religious Coalition for Justice for Immigrants in proclaiming that: ‘We call on all people of faith to stand with immigrants as a matter of religious responsibility, to advocate for their well-being and protection, and to educate our local communities about issues affecting immigrant peoples.’”

Rabbi Solomon added, “When we stand by and listen to elected officials talk about other human beings as if they’re less than human simply because they come from a different culture, we are denying what is written specifically in the Torah... This is personal for us in the Jewish community. I am representative of many who come from immigrant backgrounds, and we will not forget what happened to us, and we will not let it happen to anyone else.”

Imam Muhammad called on “our elected officials to demonstrate the moral courage to pass immigration reform that will uphold the moral fabric of our nation, and protect the dignity and human rights of all people, and restore the rule of law. We call on local officials to put their energy and money into creating opportunities for all people instead of targeting those people who are in poverty or are downtrodden.”

Rev. Santiago, herself a Latina minister, described the human cost of failed policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric: “When a woman comes into my office, and drops her eyes to the ground, and says two words to me, ‘Soy ilegal’ which means ‘I am illegal,’ I have to stop her and say, ‘You are not illegal. You may not have the documents that some require of you but God created you and God does not create illegal people. You are a woman, you are a mother, you are a wife, you are a friend and you are valuable.’ And her eyes fill with tears, and I have to wonder why it has to be so complicated for human beings to be allowed to feel like human beings.”

To date, almost 1,000 people of faith – including over 275 clergy – from across the state have signed onto the Coalition’s one-page statement. The full statement and list of signees can be viewed at: www.welcometheimmigrant.org



Rev. George Reed speaking
Background (L-R): Imam Oliver Muhammad, Bishop Michael Burbidge, Rev. Cookie Santiago, Rabbi Eric Solomon



The media films the press conference.



Rev. Cookie Santiago speaks, with a crowd of about 50 supporters.