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Pastors for Reform: They went to Washington to fight for us

They say that many residents lack understanding of the issue.

By Jose Cusicanqui

Raleigh - The support of the American churches in North Carolina in favor of an immigration reform is a powerful tool that has begun to be utilized in the state to accomplish unity and understanding of Americans who are still divided on this issue.

Chris Liu-Beers, director of the Immigrant Justice Program for the state Council of Churches, says that more and more religious congregations are educating and sensitizing themselves around the support that undocumented immigrants should receive as "brothers and sisters" in faith.

Last week, Liu-Beers was in Washington, DC, sent by his organization, which joins the 16 most powerful religious denominations and those with the greatest capacity to call on people. His work was to meet and lobby at the Capital and, through his position, to push for a reform of the immigration system.

"We have advanced greatly over the last few years", said Liu-Beers, who has been representing the state Council on aspects of immigration since 2005. "Still, much more needs to be done; we cannot deny that within the Anglo and African-American churches there still exists division, a gap, having to do with immigrants."

For Liu-Beers, the topic of education among the US population is fundamental to achieving positive results and establishing a structural change of the negative stereotypes that are normally assigned to undocumented immigrants.

"That is the key; education," said the activist. "By measuring the way that we distribute the information to the churches, pastors and the faithful of US churches, we can see a favorable response. Many people are coming to understand the reasons that force someone to abandon their country and their family. They are realizing the contributions that Latinos make here. We are seeing positive changes in attitudes."

To accomplish this transformation of the mentality of the US religious community, the Council began a series of 30 breakfasts with diverse religious leaders in different regions of North Carolina. The average attendance of each event is between 30 and 35 people from different denominations at each gathering.

"It is a controversial subject," said Liu-Beers. "There is still a lot of misunderstanding about the reality; we need to keep moving a better understanding. Either way, my presence in Washington, representing the Council, is a showing that our institution treats this as an important topic."