

Bringing Jesus Into the Immigration Debate

This month a small group of Hispanic and Anglo Christians traveled from Florida to Arizona to pray for immigration reform.

While many Christians are arguing about Arizona's strict immigration law, charismatic pastor Nebby Gomez decided to do something about it. He and his wife, Dee, traveled from Florida to Arizona in early July with three members of their church to address what they believe are the spiritual roots of the crisis.

They prayed on the lawn of Arizona's capitol in Phoenix, where lawmakers passed the controversial SB1070 bill in April of this year amid national protests. Gomez and his friends also prayed on the site of Arizona's oldest Spanish mission near Tucson and on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border in Nogales.

**"We don't want lawlessness. But Jesus said the most important thing about law is love and justice. This Arizona law is about racism and hatred."
—Rev. Nebby Gomez**

They didn't lobby any congressmen, carry any signs or appear on local newscasts. They simply talked to the Lord, blew a Hebrew shofar, poured oil on the

ground and made
prayerful declarations.

“We are not
political activists. The answer to this problem is not
political,” says Gomez, a
former architect who immigrated to the United States from
Ecuador in 1994 to be
a missionary to this country.

☒ Years ago Gomez
began researching the history of Hispanics, and he focused
his attention on the
Spanish Inquisition of the 16th century, during which Catholic
leaders and
Spanish monarchs killed thousands of Jews or forced them to
convert. The pastor
believes that the violence against Jews brought a curse upon
Spanish
territories that resulted in 500 years of exploitation,
corruption and poverty
in Latin America.

“All land that
was once Spanish territory came under this curse because of
the bloodshed,”
says Gomez. “The Lord called us to go there and pray, and to
ask Him to break
the curse and heal the land in the name of Jesus.”

Scott Wood, an Anglo
member of Gomez’s Abba Worldwide Ministries in the Orlando,
Fla., area, said he went
on the trip partly because he believes the Arizona law is
unjust. He cited one
highly-reported incident in which a man of Mexican descent was
jailed in
Phoenix this year after police pulled his car over and

demanded to see his birth certificate. The man was a legal citizen of the United States.

"This [law] is racial profiling. It's just like Nazi Germany," Wood says.

Four years ago Gomez launched The Esther Revolution, a prayer and fasting campaign that mobilizes people to address the spiritual impact of the Spanish Inquisition in Latin countries. In 2009 he took a team to Granada, Spain, where Queen Isabela in 1492 called for mass persecution of Jews. Gomez and his group prayed in Granada, then later took teams to pray in Lima, Peru, and Cartagena, Colombia.

Research shows that thousands of Jews were tortured or burned at the stake by Spaniards, both in Spain and in the New World. The impact was most recently chronicled in the 2007 PBS documentary "Secret Files of the Inquisition."

"All of the turmoil over immigration has a spiritual root," Gomez says of current problems in Latin America. (He includes Arizona in the mix because it was at one time under Spanish control.) "So wherever we go, we pray and ask the Lord for restoration."

Xavier Villacis, a Hispanic immigrant who now has legal status in the United States, accompanied Gomez's team to Arizona. He carries a special burden for immigrants who have either been mistreated or who don't know how to navigate the complicated

process to naturalization. "The innocent blood of the Inquisition is feeding the violence we see today," Villacis told me.

When the group stood in front of the Arizona capitol two weeks ago, they noticed a replica of the Liberty Bell on the lawn—and that inspired more prayers. "We declared a year of jubilee for immigrants," Gomez said. "And we prayed that the American people will see this issue for what it is. We want a fair immigration law."

Gomez, Villacis and Wood all agreed that a truly fair law does not mean allowing just anyone to walk into the country—and they are not calling for U.S. borders to be unguarded. What they want is a compassionate approach to this issue.

Says Gomez: "We don't want lawlessness. But Jesus said the most important thing about law is love and justice. This Arizona law is about racism and hatred."

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