

Jesus and the Immigrants

God's perspective isn't based on right-wing or left-wing rhetoric.

Most evangelical Christians stand united in their opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage and gambling. But if you bring up the issue of immigration reform, the temperature drops and icy walls appear between whites and other ethnic groups. We all read the same Bible, but many Hispanic church leaders look at it from a different angle.

Luis Perez, 51, runs an inner-city ministry affiliated with Bethel Christian Fellowship in Rochester, New York. He spends much of his time working with Ethiopian, Ukrainian and Hispanic immigrants—many of whom harvest corn, cabbage and tomatoes at area farms. A U.S. citizen of Puerto Rican heritage, Perez hopes our government will be merciful as leaders construct a policy to deal with the nation's 7 million illegal immigrants.

"As Christians we must take care of the aliens. They are here in our midst and we must help them," says Perez, admitting that he has encountered subtle anti-Hispanic racism among both white and black Christians.

Perez does not believe the U.S. government should be lax about border controls. He also tells immigrant pastors living in this country that they should become U.S. citizens. But he does not support wholesale deportation because it splits up families and is often harshly enforced.

"This is an issue of justice," Perez says, using a biblical word that is rare in the typical conservative Christian's

vocabulary.

Most Hispanic pastors working in the United States echo Perez's views. Some of them recently opposed the U.S. House of Representatives immigration reform bill, H.R. 4437, which called for stricter border controls, a crackdown on illegals and criminalization of those who aid them.

Sammy Rodriguez, a California-based Pentecostal, calls the House bill anti-Hispanic, anti-immigrant and anti-Christian.

"There is serious dialogue needed between the white evangelical church and the Hispanic evangelical church in America," Rodriguez says. "We carry around on our wristbands the WWJD?—'What Would Jesus Do?' We really need to ask the question, 'What would Jesus do in respect to immigration reform?'"

While our lawmakers are hammering out a final immigration bill for approval, God's people should be asking the tough questions, which include the following:

1. How would Jesus counsel an immigrant pastor whose congregation consists primarily of illegal Mexicans? Should the pastor send them to apply for citizenship, knowing that they might be sent home immediately?
2. How would Jesus treat poor families from Guatemala that sneak into Texas hoping to get jobs that pay enough to feed their children?
3. What would Jesus do if the government told Him to report all illegal aliens visiting His soup kitchen?

Polls indicate that white evangelical Christians (whose

ancestors, you may recall, came here as immigrants from Europe), favor strict measures to solve the crisis—including walls along the Mexican border and swift deportation programs. Jim Backlin of the Christian Coalition, for example, recently issued this policy statement: “The Bible says national borders are to be respected, and we need to respect the rule of law.”

I suppose that’s one way of looking at the Bible. But before we round up all the migrant workers from Mexico and send them back to Juarez without their wives and kids, we ought to spend a few minutes listening to our Hispanic Christian brothers—some of whom have fresh memories of what it is like to live under dictatorship.

We might discover that God’s perspective isn’t based on right-wing or left-wing rhetoric but on a higher law of love that transcends divisive politics.

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