

Faith leaders challenge Alabama's immigration law

by [Kent Faulk](#)

August 2, 2011

(RNS) Leaders of the Episcopal, Methodist and Roman Catholic churches in Alabama filed a federal lawsuit on Monday (Aug. 1) to stop enforcement of the state's new immigration law, which they say could strike at the core of their ability to worship.

The lawsuit was filed by: the Rt. Rev. Henry N. Parsley Jr., bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama; Rev. William H. Willimon, bishop of the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church; the Most Rev. Thomas J. Rodi, Roman Catholic archbishop of Mobile; and the Most Rev. Robert J. Baker, Roman Catholic bishop of Birmingham.

According to the lawsuit, "the bishops have reason to fear that administering of religious sacraments, which are central to the Christian faith, to known undocumented persons may be criminalized under this law."

The new law is set to go into effect Sept. 1.

The Justice Department also sued on Monday to challenge the law. The lawsuit names Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley, Alabama Attorney General Luther Strange and Madison County District Attorney Robert L. Broussard as defendants in the civil lawsuit. The lawsuit was filed in the U.S. District Court for northern Alabama.

"Motivated by God's mandate that the faithful are humbly bound to welcome and care for all people, the leaders of the Episcopal, Methodist and Roman Catholic Churches of Alabama respectfully request this Court to stop the enforcement of Alabama's Anti-Immigration Law," the lawsuit states.

The lawsuit states that it seeks to prevent "irreparable harm" to the 338,000 members of the three churches in Alabama. It calls Alabama's new law "the nation's most merciless anti-immigration legislation."

"If enforced, Alabama's Anti-Immigration Law will make it a crime to follow God's command to be Good Samaritans," according to the lawsuit.

The law, if enforced, will place Alabama church members in the "untenable position of verifying individuals' immigration documentation" before being able to provide things such as food, clothing, shelter and transportation to those in need, according to the lawsuit.

Among the lawsuit's other claims are that the new law violates:

- The First Amendment rights of church members.
- Rights of Alabama residents to freely assemble "and welcome all people to the altar."
- The ability of the churches to freely contract through the management of denominational thrift stores and church day cares and the performance of marriages, baptisms, and counseling services.