

# **Religious alliance calls for compassion toward immigrants: Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

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While immigration reform is necessary, four Christian leaders said in a joint appeal last month in Washington, the faith community needs to help bridge the gap between immigrants and a society that often rejects them.

“We call on people of faith to stand with immigrants as fellow human beings deserving of God’s love and to advocate for effective immigration policies consistent with our history as a nation,” said James Winkler, who heads the United Methodists’ Board of Church and Society.

As part of the group Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, the four leaders said a new attitude toward the ongoing immigration debate is just as necessary as new legislation.

“How we talk about undocumented people is a matter of . . . life and dignity,” said Jim Wallis, founder and CEO of Sojourners/Call to Renewal.

According to a report released by CCIR, the talk about immigrants has worsened recently, resulting in what Winkler called the “demonization of immigrants.” The report documents “the increasing prevalence of mistreatment of immigrants” in the United States and says “immigrant families are ripped apart and individual undocumented immigrants are treated as less than human.”

Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference, said that although CCIR does not foresee immigration reform being debated in Congress until early 2009, the group is concerned with how immigrants will be treated in the meantime.

CCIR believes that U.S. Christians should reach out to immigrants with compassion, an issue at the very heart of the Christian faith, said Catholic bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City, chair of the Catholic bishops' committee on migration.

"When Jesus spoke those words in Matthew's Gospel—when you welcome the stranger, you welcome me—I can't help but think he was thinking of his own beginnings when he became one of us," he said.

Wallis voiced concern that Christian ministry to immigrants is close to becoming illegal, but he doesn't doubt that the church will defy civil laws and do what is right. "I think you're going to hear from people in churches across the political spectrum that 'if you tell us Christian ministry is illegal, we will go ahead and do Christian ministry, whether it's legal or not,'" he said. *-Religion News Service*