

Tennessee faith leaders ask presidential candidates to avoid immigration rhetoric

by [Bob Allen](#)

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) – Tennessee faith leaders called on presidential candidates to refrain from negative campaign rhetoric regarding immigration leading up to the state’s March 6 Republican primary.

“Please keep the highly charged and negative campaign rhetoric, advertisements and promises on immigration out of Tennessee,” the interfaith coalition Clergy for Tolerance said in an open letter to candidates dated Feb. 13.

“Please do not inject our state with the language of ‘illegals,’ the unworkable ideas of deporting millions of individuals and thereby destroying families, and the heated claims that characterize the undocumented and their children as a class of criminals,” urged the letter signed by about 100 clergy members mostly from mainline Christian denominations but also including, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim and Baptist traditions.

Baptist signers included Robert Parham, executive director of the Baptist Center for Ethics.

“Now is the time for us to build the moral capital in houses of faith for the coming tsunami of anti-immigration rhetoric and anti-immigration laws,” Parham said in a comment posted on the coalition website. “Now is the time for pro-active collaboration among good willed people of faith so that we can advance the common good in the state of Tennessee.”

Other Tennessee Baptists signing the letter included Jorge Vasconcelos, pastor of Iglesia Bautista Renacer in Lebanon; Ed Sunday-Winters; Michael Smith, pastor of Central Baptist Church, Fountain City in Knoxville; William Shiell, pastor of First

Baptist Church in Knoxville; Frank Lewis, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Nashville; Todd Lake, vice president for spiritual development at Belmont University; Darrell Gwaltney, interim pastor at Crieveview Baptist Church in Nashville; and Kristina Brown, minister of community ministries at First Baptist Church in Murfreesboro.

Clergy for Tolerance is an interfaith coalition created by Coalition for Education About Immigration. It exists to stand against intolerance, mobilize and educate faith leaders and provide resources and support to increase knowledge on the issue of immigration, according to the group's website.