

Bishops Change Tactics On Illegal Immigrants; Catholic Campaign Seeks Lay Backing

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Body

U.S. **Catholic bishops** launched a **campaign** yesterday to **change** the country's immigration system, saying they would reach into the pews to build support for proposals that would grant residence to millions of people here illegally.

"Our immigration system is badly broken and needs repair," said Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, archbishop of Washington, speaking at a news conference announcing the **campaign**.

McCarrick also said that the U.S. **bishops** were disturbed by a growing "anti-**immigrant** fervor" since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, which he said was expressed in TV and radio shows and in more restrictive immigration laws.

"Before we can **change** our laws, we must **change** attitudes, including those of many of our own flock," he said.

Catholics make up about one-quarter of the U.S. population. Officials with the U.S. Conference of **Catholic Bishops** said the **campaign** is aimed at the roughly 30 percent of U.S. **Catholics** who do not have strong opinions about immigration. An additional 25 percent to 30 percent are likely to share the church's views on immigration policy, while the rest are firmly opposed, officials said.

Yesterday's announcement appeared to reflect a shift in **tactics** for the **Catholic** Church. For years, its leaders have supported proposals to give legal status to undocumented workers but the new **campaign** focuses on the grass roots by, for example, providing outlines of sermons to priests and enlisting **Catholic lay** groups to promote the church's message, officials said.

"Every diocese, hopefully, will have its own program," said McCarrick, who is a consultant to the **bishops'** committee on migration.

What effect those programs will have is unclear. Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which is critical of U.S. immigration levels, said he doubted many **Catholics** would be swayed.

"When the political climate **changes** for other reasons, as it's now doing because of concerns for security, the law will **change**, and there's really not that much the **Catholic bishops** can do about that," he said.

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He added that it was "unseemly" that the **bishops** were announcing their program just days before Sens. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) are expected to introduce sweeping immigration legislation, including a guest-worker program.

The **bishops'** statement "is clearly coordinated with this week's release of the Kennedy-McCain bill," Krikorian said.

Mark Franken, executive director of Migration and Refugee Services for the **bishops** conference, denied any such coordination, saying the church initiative had been in the works since last summer.

President Bush has urged Congress to establish a guest-worker program that would absorb at least some of the country's 8 million or more **illegal immigrants**. But many Republican legislators have resisted, believing it would reward people working without authorization.

The **bishops' campaign** reflects the dramatic **change** wrought in the U.S. **Catholic** Church by decades of high immigration levels. The church is about 40 percent Latino, including both **immigrants** and U.S.-born citizens. About 300,000 **Catholics** immigrate legally to the United States every year, according to the **bishops** conference. Tens of thousands of others move to the country illegally.

McCarrick said priests and **Catholic** organizations are being asked for help constantly by **immigrants** who lack legal status or who have been separated from their families for years because of delays in processing immigration applications.

"Our people have these problems every day," he said.

McCarrick, when asked about his view of Bush's immigration proposal, said that it provided workers with a route toward legalization but "doesn't go far enough" to help families divided because of immigration problems.

Asked whether it was realistic to think the church would succeed at a time when many Americans are wary of high immigration levels, McCarrick smiled. "Hay que soñar," he said in Spanish. You have to dream.

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