

CLERGY VOW BATTLE VS. IMMIG LAWS

CALL NEW RULES 'UNJUST'

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Body

Saying the new immigration law violates human rights, clergy members from around the city vowed yesterday to get the federal government to repeal it.

Two dozen priests and nuns gathered in St. Teresa's Church on the lower East Side to take a public oath of service to immigrants.

"This law is unjust, unfair, and we are going to work to change it," said the Rev. Bryan Korvelis of Transfiguration Church in Brooklyn, surrounded by immigrants whose lives in the U.S. could be severely threatened by the new law.

Yukling Ng, a 72-year-old Manhattan resident, came to the U.S. from China 12 years ago. Federal welfare reform will strip legal immigrants like her of Medicaid, food stamps and other benefits starting in August.

"I won't have any money to eat," Ng said through tears.

Panchita, a 69-year-old immigrant from the Dominican Republic who has lived here legally for 15 years, could also lose her benefits because she is not a citizen. Three strokes left the Brooklyn resident partially paralyzed, and she can't utter the oath of allegiance needed to get citizenship.

The group of religious leaders, which calls itself Voices for Immigrant Justice, said the new laws go against basic human dignity.

"What's happening here is immoral. This law is against God, and what is against God is against humanity," said the Rev. John Duffell of Ascension Church in Manhattan.

"All the provisions of this law violate human rights," added Korvelis.

Immigrants rights advocates welcomed the clergy's show of support.

"Parts of the Church are finally waking up and speaking against this," said Sebastian Quinac, from the Center for Latin American Workers.

The Rev. Kevin Sullivan, chief operating officer for the Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of New York, assured the immigrants that the Church will stand by them through these difficult times.

"Do not be afraid that the Church will stay with you. From Long Island to Manhattan to Queens to Brooklyn and the Bronx, to Newark, this movement doesn't stop here," said Sullivan.

Graphic

KEITH TORRIE DAILY NEWS FEAR OF SEPARATION: George, Mirella and baby Victoria Hidalgo listen to clergy in Manhattan vow to fight new immigration laws.

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