

U.S. to recruit churches to aid immigrants

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The Bush administration plans to deepen its collaboration with religious groups by recruiting the Roman Catholic Church and other organizations to help set up a mentoring program for new immigrants, a U.S. official said yesterday.

The program, to be launched on a pilot basis within six months, will pair new immigrants with host families that will help them better adapt.

But with funds in short supply to reach out to more than one million legal immigrants coming into the country each year, the government plans to look to outside entities to help.

"Our resources are limited," said Alfonso Aguilar, chief of the Office of Citizenship, part of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Homeland Security Department.

The groups, he said, will include religious ones "like the Catholic Church, which has an extraordinary network of services for immigrants."

About one in five new immigrants are Mexican, a vast majority of them Catholics.

The administration wants religious charities that provide social services to compete for \$28 billion in federal funds. Some opponents say that would be an unconstitutional violation of separation of church and state.

Proponents said the State Department already used religious groups to settle refugees.

Daniel Kane, a spokesman for Citizenship and Immigration Services, said, "It is important to note that faith-based organizations will be precluded from using any funding to promote religion."

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