ICO Leaders Join Cross-Country Pilgrimage for Immigration Reform; Local Solidarity Prayer Vigil on March 21

Three ICO leaders have joined fellow immigration reform activists from across California for a cross-country bus pilgrimage. The pilgrimage departed from Sacramento on March 17, and is scheduled to arrive in Washington DC for a rally on the Capitol steps on March 21.

The bus pilgrimage has rallies scheduled for Reno, NV, Salt Lake City, UT, Denver, CO, Kansas City, MO, and Columbus, OH, before arriving in Washington. The goal is to rally support for moving comprehensive immigration reform through Congress.

Locally, ICO leaders are joining other immigrant rights organizations and local faith congregations for a solidarity interfaith prayer vigil at First Congregational Church UCC on Sunday, March 21, from 4:00-6:00pm. Joining First Congregational and ICO are: the Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition; Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice; the Social Action Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Long Beach; Trinity Lutheran Church; the Social Concerns Committee of the South Coast Interfaith Council; Centro CHA; and Centro Shalom.

ICO Holds Citywide Leadership Meeting; Leaders Hear Air Quality, Homelessness, Immigration Updates

Leaders from nine member and interested congregations gathered at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church March 6 for a citywide leadership meeting. Leaders from the Unitarian Universalist Church of Long Beach and Bay Shore Community Congregational Church UCC shared updates on ICO’s work around housing and homelessness. Evelyn Knight from St. Lucy’s Catholic Church talked about the ongoing efforts in downtown and West Long Beach to improve local air quality, and Esther Del Valle from St. Athanasius Catholic Church talked about ICO’s immigration reform and citizenship work.

Also joining the meeting were Annette Quintero from the Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition and Gary Hytrek, a professor of Sociology at California State University Long Beach. Annette
talked about the English-as-a-Second Language and citizenship classes offered at St. Athanasius Catholic Church and efforts to meet with the new Long Beach Police Chief and to get the City to respond to local raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Gary delivered some preliminary results of a West Long Beach community survey conducted in partnership with ICO to measure community attitudes about air quality and health and where they get their information.

Leaders also shared a set of next steps across issues areas, including:

• **Air Quality**
  
  o **Mitigation:** There is funding for a variety of mitigation efforts, including air filtering, window improvements, landscaping and health care. ICO leaders will work with schools and community groups to submit mitigation funding requests to the citizens advisory board and the Port of Long Beach;
  
  o **Railyards:** The Environmental Impact Reports for the ICTF and SCIG railyard expansion/development projects are now expected in the fall. In the interim, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) is negotiating with the railroads to clean up existing railyards. ICO leaders will work to push CARB to require railyard clean-up, and is also seeking a meeting with Long Beach Mayor Bob Foster to update him on community concerns about the railyards and local air quality:
  
  o **Survey:** The survey is completed, comprising 204 completed questionnaires from Westside households. The analysis is being completed and should be expected shortly.

• **Homelessness and Housing**
  
  o **Cars:** After a research visit to Santa Barbara, which has a support program for homeless individuals and families living in cars, ICO leaders are meeting with Police and Health Department representatives on outreach strategies and support for this population in Long Beach;
  
  o **Christian Outreach in Action:** ICO leaders are testing with member congregations interest in working to expand support for this long-standing homelessness services agency.

• **Immigration**
  
  o **National Reform:** Three ICO leaders will be taking part in a cross-country bus trip, stopping at several locations to rally in support of national immigration reform, culminating in a March 21 rally at the Capitol in Washington, DC. A local prayer vigil in solidarity will also be held March 21, at 4:00p.m. at First Congregational Church UCC, at Third Street and Cedar Avenue;
  
  o **ESL/Citizenship:** Classes continue at St. Athanasius Catholic Church, which in 2009 helped 400 immigrants
achieve citizenship. Volunteer teachers are always appreciated.

- **PICO National Efforts**
  
  - **Foreclosure:** ICO is a member of the PICO National Network, whose members across the country are working on holding banks accountable for their mortgage lending practices. PICO is focusing on Bank of America, attending a February Shareholders meeting and demanding that Bank of America stop foreclosures and take immediate and substantial steps to modify existing mortgages and invest more money in at-risk communities. PICO leaders are also asking faith congregations to consider divesting or moving their accounts from Bank of America until the bank proves more flexible;
  
  - **Health Care:** ICO leaders are urged to continue contacting federal representatives to insist that whatever form of health care legislation is passed contain strong affordability standards.

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**North Long Beach Residents Gather for Immigration Prayer Vigil**

More than 100 residents attended a powerful and moving immigration reform prayer vigil was held on the evening of March 3 at St. Athanasius Catholic Church. The vigil included remarks from two college students about their struggles accessing higher education, a call to action from St. Athanasius ICO leader Josefina Castellanos, who will be traveling to Washington, DC, on the immigration reform bus pilgrimage, and a sermon by Fr. Ruben Rocha, along with singing and readings from the Bible.

At the end of the vigil, attendees walked to the front of the church and signed a poster of the United States of America flag, where the 50 stars were replaced by a variety of faces reflecting the rich diversity of Long Beach, and of the country as a whole. ICO leaders are taking the signed flag with them on the cross-country pilgrimage.