

Dear reader,

The following documents were compiled in preparation for my presentation, “*An Ecclesiological Challenge: Embodying Gospel Citizenship in the ‘Sanctuary City’ of San Francisco*,” at the Spring Institute of Lived Theology 2010 in San Diego, California. The first five articles were first published in *PRISM*, the magazine of Evangelicals for Social Action, based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. “Moving into the Mission District” is an excerpt from a larger piece that traces the history of Grace Fellowship Community Church, the congregation of which I am a member. The final two documents serve to provide some background on our engagement with our city’s sanctuary ordinance. I welcome your responses (see page 17).

- Craig Wong

CONTENTS

Resonant Aliens	2
Immigration, From One Evangelical to Another	4
The Church’s Third Rail of Immigration	6
Border Politics, God & Mammon	8
Embodying Life as God Intended	10
Moving into the Mission District	12
A Letter to the Mayor of San Francisco	14
Opening Statement to the Public Safety Committee	16

Resonant Aliens

Good and just societies require a narrative...that helps them know the truth about existence, and fight the constant temptation to self-deception. – Stanley Hauerwas, *Story-formed Community*, 1981

Earlier this year, I had the privilege of joining a contingent of evangelicals to visit Nogales, a town that straddles the U.S. and Mexico border. There, Cecilia shared her story, weary from a four-day trek across the Sonora desert where she injured her feet and nearly drowned in a flashflood...only to be captured by the Department of Homeland Security and tossed back onto her side of the fence. Some would consider Cecilia fortunate, particularly those who have lost daughters to corrupt “coyotes” who raped, robbed or abandoned their charge.

If Cecilia had successfully evaded the border patrol, she may have made her way to Maricopa County, whose Sherriff has received national attention for arresting over 32,000 illegal immigrants, putting many of them in tent cities, pink underwear and chain gangs. This fate hangs over the head of millions daily, especially in Arizona where Proposition 200 mandated a policy requiring public agencies to ID clients and hand any undocumented immigrants over to government authorities for deportation.

Rejection of the foreigner, of course, is as old as the bible, exemplified by the experience of the Israelites in the land of Egypt. Abraham, the “wandering Aramean,” Moses, Ruth, and Joseph, to name a few, all left their homelands under duress and became resident aliens in a strange and inhospitable land. Hence, whenever God’s people at last settled in a bountiful land of promise, they needed to constantly rehearse their story, one of alien-ness, delivered-ness, and ongoing identity as dependent and beloved people. For the Israelites, their true home was always to be Yahweh Himself, rather than the temporal sands beneath their feet.

As a fifth generation, college-educated, American citizen, my experience does not resonate much with that of weary wanderers like Cecilia. I did not have to leave loved ones, hire unscrupulous traffickers, incur debilitating debt, cross a blistering desert, or cry out to God in a desperate quest for work. I can shop, see a doctor, and go to church without fear. If I’m pulled over, I do not fear being cuffed, separated from my children, and whisked off to a detention facility without legal representation. I can go about my life, enjoying the benefits of a system that rewards me when I play by its rules. Mine is a narrative of privilege. But as a Christian, might I have another?

(Continued on other side)

(Resonant Aliens continued)

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas speaks of the Church as a story-formed people, a community shaped by the event of the cross and thus lives by a different set of rules. Hauerwas asserts that “the Church doesn’t *have* a social strategy, the Church *is* a social strategy,” one that embodies for the world a society that, apart from God, the world cannot pull off. Therefore, faithful congregations live eschatologically, as visible signposts of God’s good future...when the whole of creation will live as one, free of barriers and abundantly fed. We enact God’s big story, in the messiness of the here and now.

Which brings me back to Cecilia. What dark narrative forces her, and millions of others, to leave their families and risk death by dehydration or violence? Hers is a flight from economic despair, a reality uncomfortably tied to America’s attachment to “free market” ideology, concretized with devastating affect in the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. A huge boon for American and Canadian agribusiness, NAFTA changed the game by allowing the dissolution of *ejidos*, i.e. farming collectives, into privately-owned parcels. The resulting multitude of small, independent farmers, unable to compete with the giants of the North, were (and still are) forced to leave to provide for their families. In this picture, the privileged (we Americans, that is) prosper at the expense of our Southern neighbors.

Their plight, shamefully underwritten by my own country’s specious trade policies, further fuels my longing for the Church to *be the Church*, living as a counter-narrative to the deceitful and inhumane scripts of a passing order. The migrant’s tale, like that of Cecilia’s, is an important gift, one that should strike a chord in us who, as God’s people, are called to live as sojourners in hostile territory. Her story should evoke, in our ecclesial conscience, the table at which needy sinners are graciously brought into communion with Christ and one another. We can join in solidarity with the strangers in our midst, together embracing a generous God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, has enough for everyone, and does not need high-tech fences or barb wire to establish His peace on earth.

Immigration, From One Evangelical to Another

Dear fellow evangelical,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to tell you about a wonderful family that our congregation has come to know and love. They migrated to San Francisco from the south of the border at great risk to themselves, a long and perilous journey. Like so many others, they did so because the economic conditions in their homeland had become so bad that they could no longer stay. Therefore, they entered the States without proper documentation, not out of irresponsibility but, on the contrary, in response to the needs of their loved ones.

Although they've pieced together a livelihood, month to month, for several years now, they live with constant fear. Under our current enforcement policies, families like theirs are being precipitously torn apart...children separated indefinitely from their parents...husbands, from their wives. A kindergartner at my child's school suffers from the trauma of being held in a Houston detention facility for months, thousands of miles away from his mother. I listened recently to a family testify of their experience of federal agents entering their home under false pretenses, being told, "Shut up you --cking immigrants!" and hearing the screams of one being handled with enough force to necessitate hospitalization.

The stories my Arizona friends tell me are worse. Their sheriff has erected electrified pens, tent cities to detain thousands of immigrants this past year. He has re-instituted "chain gangs" for men, women and youth, sometimes marching them down the streets for public display. Just a few weeks ago, I heard that a mother of eight and suffering from diabetes was thrown in jail, simply for not having papers.

My friend, there are countless stories, in my city and yours, whether or not we dare to hear them. They are chilling stories of human cruelty that, regardless of where you or I might sit on the political spectrum, should bring both to our knees before Jesus to seek His mind, heart, and marching orders for His Church in such a time as this.

As you're probably aware, the national conversation about "comprehensive immigration reform" is heating up once again. The pundits and spin doctors are up and running. But as followers of Christ, we are not constrained by the confines of political messaging. We know that the wisdom of man is the foolishness of God. And

(continued on other side)

(Immigration, From One Evangelical to Another continued)

though we may have already learned to tune out the vitriolic banter of talking head media, we must insist on going deeper, being careful, as Colossians warns, that no one take us captive through human philosophy or empty deception.

Brother, we must be prepared to hear those who will dismiss our call to “welcome the stranger” as well-meaning but naïve, at which point we must say, “You are right. A Christian response to immigration is not about compassion as much as it is about allegiance... to a God who sees His world and its inhabitants very differently than we do.” If we consider the God of Genesis 1 abundance, or the Jesus who bewilderingly multiplies loaves and fishes, then the politics of scarcity (e.g. “It’s good to be charitable but we simply can’t absorb all these immigrants!”) suddenly begins to lose its power.

We must also expect silence about the economic plight of our Southern neighbors, for it is not in the interest of fallen people, you and I included, to discover our culpability for our neighbors’ misery when comes at the costs our own material comfort.

Alliegance to the self-emptying Christ of Philippians, which calls us to look not only to our own interests, would strongly suggest that turning a blind eye to trade policies that reinforce another nation’s poverty is profoundly un-Christian.

We can probably assume that we will not agree on many of the fine points of immigration reform policy, a truly complex endeavor. But we can agree that when dehumanization prevails in our own backyard, we must be willing to ask ourselves if “submitting to our authorities” has more to do with convenience than obedience. Jesus calls us to give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s. Perhaps our problem is that we’ve failed to give attention to what actually belongs to God.

Friend, as we engage the current immigration crisis, let us commit to asking better questions...ones that begin with God and nothing else. Not the economy. Not our national security. Not our environment. Not our family's welfare. Only our God. And let’s do this together, shall we?

The Church's Third Rail of Immigration

‘If you hold back from rescuing those taken away to death, those who go staggering to the slaughter; if you say, ‘Look, we did not know this’—does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it? And will he not repay all according to their deeds?’ - Proverbs 24:11-12

Save us now from satisfaction when we privately are free, yet are undisturbed in spirit by our neighbor's misery. - Elton Trueblood, in the hymn, “Christ Whose Purpose Is to Kindle,” 1966

The political theater around the topic of immigration can best be described as painfully comic, as each presidential hopeful frets and spins in a clumsy attempt to communicate a coherent position. It reminds me of that scene in the comedy *Meet the Parents* where a panic-stricken young man feigns love of cats in order to score points with his future father-in-law. Beads of sweat appear on the candidates' brows as the questions fly through their minds: *How can I prove tougher than my opponent on illegals? How do I do that without sounding like a racist? What if they ask me about those sanctuary ordinances? The driver's license proposal? My gardener? Will a compassionate stance make me look soft on crime and terrorism? How about the Latino vote? How do I explain my “yes” vote on the 700-mile fence? Should I divert attention to tough employer sanctions? Those law-breaking meat-packing plants? What if that alienates my business constituency? Is it more politically expedient, at the given moment, to emphasize affection for cats or disdain for dogs?*

While some might derive cynical pleasure from watching would-be leaders dance and stammer, the morally spineless nature of such issue-skirting is no laughing matter. A political “third rail” (i.e. touch it and die) issue like immigration is particularly subject to duplicitous sound-bite posturing that, more often than not, hides ugly realities few dare to address. At best, experienced politicians keep the conversation safe, striking an ideological balance between imperatives of “enforcement” and “earned citizenship” or waxing eloquent about the rule of law or the historic role of immigration. Such rhetorical surface banter, I would argue, is buffering our collective conscience from the inhumane treatment we as a nation are currently inflicting upon “the strangers in our midst.”

While left and right engage in fruitless dialogue about “comprehensive immigration reform,” real people are suffering under the increasingly heavy hand of our own government. We have all heard about the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) raids ordered by the Department of Homeland Security's Michael Chertoff (“Operation Return to Sender”). Few are aware of the recent

(Continued on other side)

(Church's Third Rail of Immigration continued)

push to implement “no-match” (of Social Security IDs) letters to force employers to fire their undocumented workers. Fewer still know that hundreds of millions in tax dollars are being spent on private contractors to erect mass detention facilities throughout the country. And almost absent in the media are human faces to the state-sanctioned cruelty being committed within our own borders. The following snapshots, paraphrased from the report *Over-Raided, Under Siege* (available at nriir.org/resources), are just three of hundreds of documented accounts over the past two years alone:

“ICE agents stormed the home of Nelly Amaya, entered her bedroom, and conducted a search without identifying themselves. ICE roughed her up as they frisked and arrested her, twisted her arm, aggravating an existing injury. Her arm was swollen and bruised after the handcuffs were put on. On the way to the station, she suffered an asthma attack, which went untreated.”

“After the trauma of the ICE raid at the plant, electronic monitoring shackles were placed on the ankles of 33 women who were released but kept under house arrest. Almost all being mothers, and the sole providers for their family, they faced insurmountable barriers to provide for their families because they were not allowed to work.” “ICE forcibly separated an 8-year-old girl from her pregnant mother and left her alone for four days at a residential facility. The mother and child cried inconsolably after they were awakened as the mother was taken away. Having fled Honduras earlier to escape an abusive relationship and gang violence, they were denied asylum. The mother and child were only reunited after being deported back to Honduras.”

Over 27,000 immigrants in detention facilities last year; 4,000 workplace arrests; 5,000 reported border deaths (since 1994); over 220,000 deportations. Social vilification. Separation of families. With- holding of health services. Physical abuse. We are being told to accept, essentially, that this is just what happens to those who “don’t play by the rules.” God’s people, however, are called to live by a different set of rules. The current immigration crisis, therefore, represents a moral “third rail” for the American church. How we engage it can be the difference between life and death.

Border Politics, God & Mammon

Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. - Leviticus 19:33-34

I thoroughly hate the barbarians because they do not respect justice. They continually promulgate harsh laws to show off their prowess. They oppress [our people] and also violate treaties. They examine for bookworms and practice hundreds of despotic acts. - Chinese detainee at the Angel Island Immigrant Detention Center, San Francisco, 1920s

My grandmother, in one desperate moment as a young woman, contemplated suicide. Such an impulse was not uncommon among the female peers with whom she shared several months of harsh and humiliating detainment. Held on an island just a few short miles off the longed-for mainland, as many as 500 detainees at a time occupied barracks characterized by unsanitary conditions, poor diet, and cramped living space. Perhaps greater than the physical hardship, however, was the loneliness of separation from loved ones, combined with the despair of repeated failure to satisfy stringent interrogatories for their release. The inability to recall the minutest of details (“How many steps were there to the front door of your house?”) or the presence of treatable parasites could instantly terminate one’s arduous quest of becoming an American citizen.

Throughout the history of U.S. immigration, the promulgation of harsh laws and barbaric treatment was not confined to processes of entry. Foreigners suffered the imposition of exorbitant mining taxes during the Gold Rush, costly regulations regarding housing rentals, laws that prohibited harmless cultural practices, enforcement dragnets to expel the undocumented and draconian measures like the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese Internment and California’s Proposition 187 aimed at Latino immigrants. Legislation was accompanied by informal oppression of all kinds, including ridicule, exploitation and violence. Such social subjugation is exemplified by the experience of the mass famine-related immigration of the Irish in the 19th century. Upon arrival, they quickly fell victim to unscrupulous landlords and employers, forced into squalid shanty-towns, scammed of personal assets, and relegated to the most undesirable jobs.

(Continued on other side)

(Border Politics, God & Mammon continued)

One can describe America's anti-immigrant pathology in terms of bigotry and racism, but it is economic preservation, or the fear losing "the American way of life," that ultimately sits at the heart of every such episode. Throughout our history, and without exception, immigrants have played the role of scapegoat in times of recession, under-employment, and national insecurity. This, of course, is merely a logical extension of the fact that well-being in our society is evaluated almost solely in terms of material wealth and possession. Described sociologically, America puts its trust in the rewards and "virtues" of free-market capitalism. Biblically, to put one's ultimate trust in anything or anyone other than God is idolatry.

The inability of the American church to confess its economic idolatry is evident in the immigration policy debate. We are more responsive to *legality* than *hospitality*. We have essentially reduced human beings to economic commodities, labeled as either assets or threats to the American economy. We affirm "pathways to naturalization" while empowering enforcement agencies with greater latitude to detain or deport. Proposals to brand the undocumented as felons, or to criminalize those who extend them mercy, do not appear to disturb many of us. We demonstrate little discomfort with the institutionalization of under-paid foreign labor pools that serve primarily to maintain high corporate profit-margins. Perhaps most egregious is our silence about the relationship that exists between illegal border crossing and the desperate economic conditions created by U.S.-propagated free-trade policies in Latin America. Bowing to the market, our hearts are darkened and we are morally blinded. Under such a spiritual condition, people are dehumanized, and lives are inevitably crushed.

Stuart Shepard, representing *Focus on the Family*, is accurate when he recently maintained that the immigration issue is not something that has traditionally defined a (mainstream) evangelical. That immigration policy is largely off the evangelical radar betrays a failure to recognize that how we treat people, regardless of their origin or commercial value, is a profoundly Christian issue. The disposition of the American evangelical church to pick-and-choose what it cares about may be consistent with a pluralistic, democratic society, but it eschews biblical integrity. Are we not called to extend mercy to the widow, the orphan, the stranger in our midst? Are we at liberty to relegate God's commands beneath the economic imperative of self and state, thereby serving more than one Master? We must ask ourselves how it is we can exuberantly proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord in this country...while quietly kneeling at the altar of Mammon.

Embodying Life as God Intended

“When we talk about the church in ‘the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’, we are presupposing that the community between people and God, which is the work of the Spirit, reaches out *beyond* the church...The church has no monopoly of the Holy Spirit. Nor is the Spirit under its control. The precise opposite is the case: The Spirit binds the church to itself and has the church under its control. It is concerned about the church ...*for the sake of the rebirth of life and the new creation of all things.*”

- Jurgen Moltmann, *The Source of Life: The Holy Spirit and the Theology of Life*

Earlier this year, I was blessed with the opportunity to spend a week with a small group of academics and “urban ministry practitioners” at the *Spring Institute of Lived Theology*, led by Charles Marsh of the University of Virginia. Visiting theologian Jurgen Moltmann, who grew up in Nazi Germany, spoke from life experience about the darkness of humanity lived apart from the Spirit of God. Quoting Vladimir Lenin who said, “Trust is good, control better,” Moltmann presented a cautionary word about the evolution of a “security state” whenever a society’s government operates out of fear and distrust, particularly of its own citizens. A culture of control prevails, accompanied by mechanisms of total surveillance, leading inevitably to political repression and violence. “Controls spread mistrust, and mistrust turns the truth into lies; but the lie is the power which destroys life,” explained Moltmann.

Ultimately, however, his public lecture, “In God We Trust, in Us God Trusts: On Freedom and Security in a Free World,” pointed us to the one through whom trust is made possible. Trust, which is “the necessary habitat for freedom,” is founded on the loving God of the universe, who endures our sickness, bears our sins, and shares our grief and sorrows. Moltmann compelled us to marvel in a gracious God that invites sinners into a covenant relationship of mutual trust. He entrusts His Church with the task of manifesting His glory on earth, which is demonstrated when our trust in God, rather than Mammon, produces joyous community where trust and freedom flourishes, and no one is in want. The Spirit of God enables us to pursue such community with confidence, despite our own fallen-ness, through the gifts of confession, forgiveness, and repentance. Life *as God intended* is born anew, and the watching world is given a sign of hope.

I could not listen to Moltmann without thinking about our nation’s college-educated, gainfully employed congregations, including our own in San Francisco. Are we

(Continued on other side)

(Embodying Life As God Intended continued)

embodying life as God intended, to those we reach out to? Or are we simply mirroring the American cultural disposition to control? Is our community life being shaped by the Spirit of God, or by the impulse to secure, by whatever means necessary, our economic well-being, career advancement, retirement accounts, children's future, materially-equipped homes, physical safety, social standing, or respectable religiosity? Is it evident to others that "in God we trust" or are we merely bearing witness to our ability to work the system to our advantage? Are we simply state-protected, market beneficiaries clothed with a thin, religious veneer?

Through our neighborhood ministries we, who are accustomed to *being in control*, are becoming increasingly aware of others being adversely affected by *institutions of control*. Such encounters are eye-opening. A pastor advocates for a family inadvertently caught in the middle of an Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid. A college student is deported back to South America by the Department of Homeland Security simply because she was short a single credit for the semester. A young woman is forced to return to Central America immediately after being physically assaulted at an increasingly militarized border. Low-income families face aggressive military recruiting among their children at the local high school, due to the student records access provision embedded in *No Child Left Behind*. An aunt grieves how numb to violence her teenage nephew has become, hearing him brag about the shooting and maiming he "got to do" in Iraq. A wife despairs over the angry and detached man her wounded husband has become, after extended National Guard duty.

Fear breeds mistrust, which inflames the need to control. Institutional controls spread further mistrust, turning truths to lies, which ultimately destroy life. The Spirit of God fosters lives of confession, forgiveness and repentance, regenerating human community the way God intended. Moltmann graciously confronts us with an uncomfortable choice. Trust or control. Life or death. Which will it be? What will characterize our collective lives? Are we able to tell the difference, discern the fruit, or read the signs? If so, are we prepared to choose?

Moving into the Mission District

An important moment for our congregation, Grace Fellowship Community Church, came in 1992, when a large building became available to us in San Francisco's Mission District. Located in a considerably more diverse and needy area, it seemed to us a gift of providence in light of our gospel reflections as a congregation. It was a formative experience for us to discern such a move corporately, entering into a dilapidated old building in a largely Latino neighborhood with which we felt neither familiar nor comfortable. Perhaps most importantly, it represented that place where we could begin to establish an enduring gospel presence...to *be the Church* for the long haul.

While we did our homework and conducted a neighborhood demographic study, the most significant step we took to connect with our neighborhood happened when our church secretary simply met with the local elementary school on our behalf, and asked, "Is there any way we can be of help?" As a result, we painted their library, laminated their books, tutored in their classrooms, conducted dental screening and, shortly after, began hosting summer day camps and after-school tutoring for the children and youth. In 1994, I was called onto the church staff to bring greater structure and coordination to the task of ministry development, establishing a separate nonprofit corporation, Grace Urban Ministries (GUM), Inc. two years later. This would be a parachurch organization committed to developing ministry that flowed from, rather than competed with, the life of the congregation. GUM would eventually host a variety of community services, including after-school tutoring, youth job-training, adult education, advocacy, immigration forums, and community health fairs.

I cannot overemphasize how patient and perseverant my pastors had to be with me as I took on the role of urban ministry development at GFCC. Driven by my own brand of achievement-orientation, and heavily indoctrinated by the distinct cultures of corporate America and campus-based parachurch ministry, I took on executive director role in ways that often did more harm than good. I hastily set out to replace leaders, revise mission statements, re-organize ministry teams and, in some cases, simply dismantled them according to my shortsighted and limited wisdom. I ran roughshod over my fellow parishioners in the name of serving the church. My pastors, in addition to helping pick up the pieces, helped surface the idolatries that tyrannized my life and adversely affected the way I served the whole, even if well-intentioned. These experiences were crucial, as they helped me recognize the powers that the prevailing American culture has over our lives, such deeply embedded values as

(Continued on other side)

(Moving Into the Mission District continued)

individualism (“life revolves around me”), pragmatism (“there is a practical and measurable solution for everything”), and optimism (“I can fix anything if I just try hard enough”).

These middle- and upper-class propensities continue to surface regularly among our congregation, particularly in the context of our outreach ministries. Blind to such inclinations, we often end up repelling the very neighbors we are seeking to attract. We’ve lost all too many working Latino parents, for example, at our Friday night adult outreach because of our rigid, self-serving time schedules and pressured expectations. We’ve unintentionally made adults feel guilty for missing a computer-literacy session or ESL lesson, because they don’t live up to our sense of what’s important. We have often prematurely shut down important relational moments in our youth-job training program because of our pre-occupation with “staying with the program” and keeping on time. We’ve reduced the children we tutor into projects when we’ve drawn pragmatically-driven distinctions between “teaching” and “being relational,” as if the two were mutually exclusive experiences. And our gross paternalism too often rears its ugly head when we impose our middle-class solutions on others, rushing to “fix” our neighbor’s problems rather than befriend them amidst life’s struggles. We fail to live out the notion that people need to be loved, not fixed.

But the hope of the gospel is that Jesus can use a congregation like ours to bear witness in the world not because our education and impressive resources, but because of his gracious call to repentance. Twenty years have passed since our inception, and we continue to resist joining the Apostle Paul in counting our myriad credentials as rubbish. However, in God’s peculiar methodology, even worldly idols, once repudiated, can be used for the Church’s witness in the world, for the power of the gospel is not demonstrated in the worldly effectiveness of individuals, but rather through the God-shaped love of a faithful people.

By way of illustration, there is a struggling Asian immigrant family who came to us through Kaleo, our adult education and general support ministry. Several of our Kaleo staff have served them in small but practical ways, tutoring English and citizenship, searching for affordable rental housing, advocating in a landlord-tenant dispute, helping move furniture, and exploring ways for them to generate supplemental income with their artistic talents. They have struggled in post-911 America, with scarcer job opportunities, tighter governmental restrictions, and budget-strapped social services. America has not been hospitable to them, and some members of their extended family have already returned to their homelands in disillusionment. “But we have a reason to stay,” one of the sisters told us, “because since we came to this country, your church has become a family to us.”

A Letter to the Mayor of San Francisco

October 15, 2008

Mayor Gavin Newsom
City Hall, Room 200
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

re: Renewed Commitment to the Sanctuary Ordinance & Request for Meeting

Dear Mayor Newsom:

Writing with one voice as the San Francisco Interfaith Coalition on Immigration (SFICI), a growing body of religious leaders and organizations advocating for the dignity and well-being of the immigrant community, we entreat your renewed and ongoing commitment to uphold the sanctuary status of this beloved city. We ask to meet with you to discuss the besieged ordinance, and how we can work with you on its behalf.

As you'll recall, many of us stood by you on April 2nd at your press conference where you publicly sanctioned the full force of your government to "stand up and fight for people so that they live their lives out loud in the light of day with dignity and respect." We joined in solidarity with your board of supervisors, chief of police, school superintendent and, notably, your juvenile probation commission, because we recognized that your moral leadership on that day rang true with our faith-centered calling to "welcome the stranger in our midst." Rev. Phil Lawson drew that morning from the Hebrew scriptures to remind everyone present that San Francisco's sanctuary ordinance finds its roots in the historical mandate to create "cities of refuge" for the accused (falsely or not) to seek safety and receive a fair hearing (Numbers 35:9-34, Old Testament).

(Continued on other side)

(Letter to Mayor continued)

We also stood by you a year prior at St. Peter's Church on April 22, 2007 where you personally declared, "I will not allow any of my department heads...to cooperate in any way, shape or form with these raids. We are a sanctuary city, make no mistake about it." We applauded your condemnation of the inhumane actions of the federal government's ICE activities, which tore (and continues to tear) apart hard-working families in the name of law enforcement, because our faith requires us to embrace the worth, dignity, and welfare of *every* human being.

Later that year, we joined you on September 15th at your Immigrant Rights Summit held at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, where we hosted workshops on the faith-based Sanctuary Movement, new and old. Lastly, we commended your appointment earlier this year, of Ms. Sheila Chung Hagen as your Immigrant Rights Administrator, with whom we have enjoyed ongoing dialogue about rapid response planning for ICE raids and the role of the faith community.

We therefore must express our collective and profound disappointment in what appears to be an alarming retreat from your sanctuary convictions, first in the precipitous compromise of sanctuary policy regarding juveniles (e.g. handing over arrested youth to ICE without due process) and, next, in the suspension of the municipal ID program. Yet, we all know that policies that promote fear of local law enforcement, combined with increased social vulnerability, among the immigrant community, will ultimately jeopardize the well-being of *all* San Franciscans.

Thus, we respectfully but urgently request a meeting with you to discuss the current status of the Sanctuary Ordinance, to gain understanding about the challenges being faced, and to collectively re-affirm our moral responsibility to serve, and advocate for, the thousands of immigrant families that live, work and go to school in our city.

Sincerely,

The San Francisco Inter-Faith Coalition on Immigration

Opening Statement to the Public Safety Committee

Public Hearing, Monday, October 5, 2009 - Item 3, No. 091032
[Confidentiality of Juvenile's Immigration Status]

My name is Craig Wong and I am a member of Grace Fellowship Community Church, a Mission District congregation, and I am here to represent the *San Francisco Interfaith Coalition on Immigration*, a broad base of congregational leaders, religious organizations and advocates representing all faiths, primarily Jewish and Ecumenical communities of Catholic, Mainline Protestant and Evangelical tradition. Indeed, we are strange bedfellows apart from the delightful unity we've experienced these past two years...as a result of our shared and *growing* concern about how *immigrants*, in this moment in our nation's history, have been treated, particularly by our own government.

We first came together to discuss what a *new* Sanctuary Movement should look like today, to discern the role of faith communities in advocating for at-risk immigrants as we did for Central American refugees in the 80s. Our resolve to speak on their behalf, and to push for just and humane immigration reform, was further fortified as the DHS' commando-style raids and detainments not only proliferated across the country but swept into our own backyard. In response, we organized to hold immigration forums, collaborate with rapid-response networks for families hit by ICE raids, and to offer a "ministry of presence" for individuals facing deportation in the courtrooms of DOJ's Executive Office of Immigration Review.

So what brings us here today? To answer this, I quote a Hebrew scripture: "Don't mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God." We celebrate our "sanctuary city" status because we believe it reflects the very *heart* of this scripture, that is, a *Creator* who deeply *loves* the *whole* of His creation, *every* human being, and He expects us to do *likewise*. We believe His heart is reflected when we extend *to all people*, health care, social services, *and the due process of law*, especially for vulnerable youth.

(*Continued on other side*)

(*Opening Statement* continued)

Please know that this posture neither condones violent acts nor disregards the requirements of public safety. On the contrary, we believe that public safety is enhanced when ALL members of a community are extended equal dignity, sense of belonging, and protections under the law. Public safety policies driven by fear ultimately breeds further fear, distrust, and violence. As people of faith, we believe that love casts out fear.

For this reason, we fully support Supervisor Campos' legislation to help turn back the tide of fear-driven scapegoating we are seeing in our nation today. Thank you for your efforts.

Responses to these writings are welcomed.

Craig Wong, Executive Director
Grace Urban Ministries*
3265 16th Street
San Francisco, CA 94103-3323
(415) 703-6094
cwong@gum.org

**Grace Urban Ministries* is a congregation-based 501(C)3 nonprofit corporation which serves, and connects, congregations in their task to bear witness to the just and compassionate reign of Christ in San Francisco, through ministries of service and advocacy among children, youth and families in the city's vulnerable communities. For more information: www.gum.org

