

# Convocation urges immigration reform

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**By Craig Bird**

*Baptist Child & Family Services*

ATLANTA (ABP)—The central question in the debate on immigration reform is not about economics or politics, Hispanic Baptist leaders told the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

“The basic issue is whether Jesus still has a mission to the poor,” Albert Reyes, president of Baptist University of the Americas, explained as he introduced a document titled “Proclamation for Immigration Reform” at a solemn assembly held during the CBF general assembly.

Hispanics are called to a prophetic role on immigration reform, Reyes told about 80 participants: “Our role is not to make law; we are not legislators. But we are called to encourage those who do make the laws to take a Jesus-type of action.”

Albert Reyes
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The National Convocation of Hispanic Baptist Leaders also focused on the 1-year-old convocation’s purpose—“to create a national network of Hispanic Baptist leaders who work together to provide leadership,

encourage ministry and share strategies for Christian impact.”

The one-page immigration proclamation opens by noting, “Our beloved United States of America, a nation of immigrants, is in the midst of the most dramatic immigration policy reform in the 21st century.”

It affirms reforms championed by the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and others that urge “more responsive legal avenues for workers and their families to enter our country and work, the option ... to apply for permanent legal status and citizenship, and border-protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values.”

The document also cites a Hispanic Baptist Convention of Texas resolution encouraging “proactive involvement of ministry activity among immigrants, documented and undocumented, through prayer and action.”

Jesus “placed the poor and the oppressed at the center of his mission on earth,” the document notes. Congress should “pass just and compassionate legislation that addresses stronger border security, respect for the law and a process for citizenship with regard to U.S. undocumented immigrants,” it adds.

The issue reaches beyond the borders of the United States, stressed Javier Elizondo, vice president of academic affairs at Baptist University of the Americas.

“When we pray, we should also pray for the governments of Mexico and Guatemala and Chile—whichever countries the undocumented come from,” he urged.

Focusing on the National Convocation of Hispanic Baptist Leaders’ purpose statement, Reyes reported that it embraces seven goals:

- “Help Hispanics of all ages excel in their education by completing high

school or obtaining a GED (high-school equivalency certificate), and graduating from college.”

Reyes noted the national His-panic school dropout rate is 30 percent to 40 percent. Hispanic Baptists can’t prevent all young people from dropping out of school, but “we can concentrate on the youth in our churches and promote higher education,” he said.

“We need to focus on educating our pastors, because he is the stabilizing force to be passionate about preventing dropouts. It is not a sin that we let them drop out, but it’s very close.”

- “Support Hispanic Baptists who desire to pursue graduate studies and earn doctoral degrees.”

Over time, many Hispanic Baptist leadership positions will become vacant, he said, calling for convocation members to locate doctoral candidates and other potential leaders.

- “Assist in training leaders for Christian ministry among the Hispanic community.”

“In February 2003, Hispanics became the largest ethnic minority in the United States,” Reyes said, noting Hispanics will comprise a majority in Texas by 2015. Those statistics illustrate the need for leaders to start and guide churches.

- “Encourage Hispanic congregations in the U.S. to start churches, evangelize the lost and participate in global missions.”

- “Affirm ministry leadership among Hispanic Baptist women and youth. We have not taken advantage of feminine leadership,” he said. “We can’t wait. The needs are vast.”

- “Connect Hispanic church leaders to Spanish Bible study and discipleship

resources.”

- “Promote Hispanic cultural awareness among Baptist churches in the United States.”

“We find ourselves in a global, multicultural context,” Reyes said. “People from all over the world are right here in our communities. We need cross-cultural understanding.”

*Marv Knox contributed to this article.*

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