

# Baptists must do more to help immigrants, advocate says

June 19, 2015

DALLAS (BNG)—Baptists no longer can stand by and watch as Catholics, Mennonites, Methodists and other Christians take the lead in ministering to immigrants, a Baptist scholar and immigration advocate told members of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America.

But that's been a tough sell to Baptists in Texas and elsewhere, said Jesus Romero, director of [Immigration Service and Aid Center](#), or ISAAC, a Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission initiative.

"It's been hard to convince the body of Christ immigrants are people we should care for," said Romero, who also serves as professor of Spanish and chair of the department of modern languages at the [Baptist University of the Americas](#) in San Antonio.

## **Obstacles to involvement**

Romero spoke at the Baptist Peace Fellowship breakfast in Dallas, held in conjunction with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship general assembly. He covered many of the obstacles—most of them intellectual—Christians face to getting involved in immigration ministries.

Language that has grown up around immigration and immigrants creates one major hurdle. Using words like "illegals" to refer to immigrants must stop because they judge a person's character and life based on their legal status or actions, he said.

"There is no one in this world who is illegal," Romero said.

Another obstacle is lack of awareness about the ways open to help

immigrants.

Two years ago, ISAAC began offering legal services to immigrants. Few know churches can offer legal services, even without immigration attorneys on staff. It just takes attending a 40-hour course in basic immigration law, Romero noted.

### **Ministering to the whole person**

Nor do many know that offering legal services opens the door to ministering to the whole person, he said.

“They come with all these immigration needs ... and it turns out the immigration needs are just the tip of the iceberg,” he said.

Ignorance also surrounds the detention centers where immigrant children and older youth are incarcerated in the United States. The conditions are deplorable and do little more than heap more emotional abuse on youth already traumatized by the ordeal of crossing the border, he asserted.

Romero also criticized the failure to see the connection between the plight of Hispanic immigrants along the U.S. border and the biblical personalities many Christians claim to know.

Many forget Abram was an immigrant, commanded by God to wander into foreign lands. Joseph was a victim of human trafficking when sold into slavery. Jesus and his family were immigrants in Egypt, fleeing there to escape persecution in their homeland, he said.

“They would have been turned away at our borders,” Romero said.