

Evangelicals ask candidates: Seek biblical immigration solutions

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GREENVILLE, S.C. (BP)—The Evangelical Immigration Table and World Relief issued a letter Jan. 11 to U.S. presidential candidates urging them to consider biblical principles when drafting solutions to the immigration crisis.

The groups announced the [letter](#), signed by more than 500 evangelical Christians, in a press call featuring leaders from Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina in advance of the Jan. 15 Iowa Caucuses.

Concurrently, the groups issued the [“I Was a Stranger” Challenge](#), a 40-day Scripture reading and prayer guide designed to lead candidates and the Christian public to view immigration matters through a godly heart.

Biblical immigration policies would be nonpartisan and embrace a respect for both the law and immigrants, who are made in God’s image. Biblically based policies would promote family unity, civility and order, panelists said, and would avoid harsh, unbiblical language.

Anthony Beam served as a panelist in his capacity as a policy consultant for the South Carolina Baptist Convention and senior director of Church and Community Engagement and Public Affairs at North Greenville University.

Find a solution grounded in the Bible

Despite varying views, Christians should find some agreement among themselves in solving the complicated issue of immigration, Beam said,

because any solution we choose should be grounded in Scripture.

“God’s word affirms the role of government in maintaining order and security, which is why evangelicals tend to insist on secure borders,” said Beam, an Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission trustee. “But it also affirms the dignity of each person as being made in the image of God.”

While the *imago Dei* often is cited in pro-life circles, Beam pointed out its application in all considerations of life, including immigration, immigrants and their families.

“Everyone, whether they be a sojourner—if we use the biblical term—whether they be an immigrant, someone coming to this country, a refugee, they are made in the image of God,” and they are important to God,” Beam said.

“And that’s why evangelicals also insist on the importance of making sure that we treat immigrants with respect and with love, and to try to help to meet their needs.”

Many refugees are fleeing religious persecution suffered for practicing their faith in Jesus, Beam emphasized.

“We want the United States to continue to offer refugees ... that are fleeing persecution, a place for them to come and to be safe,” he said, “and a place for us to minister to them in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Joining Beam as panelists were Greg Christy, president of Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa; Joel Kok, senior pastor of Covenant Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Center, Iowa; Neil Hubacker, director of Cornerstone’s Church Ambassador Network of New Hampshire; Kevin McBride, senior pastor of Raymond Baptist Church, a Conservative Baptist Churches of America congregation in Raymond, N.H.; and Mekdes Haddis, project director for the National Association of Evangelicals’ Racial Justice

and Reconciliation Collaborative in Fort Mill, S.C.

Moderators Chelsea Sobolik, World Relief's director of government relations, and Gabriel Salguero, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, also added perspective to the Immigration Table's goals.

Loving and welcoming immigrants

Loving, welcoming and seeking justice for immigrants should accompany secure borders, Salguero said.

"The Scriptures affirm the role of government, which is why we believe it's appropriate to insist upon secure borders, but they also repeatedly command God's people to love, welcome and seek justice for immigrants," Salguero said.

"Most Latino congregations have done so for many years and have many immigrants among them as a result, so a commitment to immigration reforms has become very personal. And we take harsh, unbiblical rhetoric about immigrants personally, as well."

"We don't find it helpful for any candidate to use demonizing rhetoric about any community," Salguero said. "We think the gospel has called us to, when we disagree, do it with deep conviction, but always with civility. It is for us at the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, profoundly disappointing and disconcerting when rhetoric around any community demonizes that community. We have said so publicly."

While encouraging presidential candidates to take seriously the 40 Day Challenge, Sobolik said World Relief hopes other governmental leaders and congregational members will do so as well.

"We're not, obviously, endorsing political candidates or policy

recommendations with this challenge,” Sobolik said. “We are simply saying, ‘Let’s spend 40 days looking at what the Bible has to say on immigration.’”

Salguero expressed a need to disciple Christians on what the Bible says about immigration, particularly among church congregations. Hubacker said he has been able to promote biblical approaches to immigration among small group meetings with various candidates through his work with the Church Ambassador Network.