

Hispanic Trump adviser acknowledges widespread fear

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(RNS)—Samuel Rodriguez, a Hispanic evangelical adviser to President Donald Trump, is urging government leaders to recognize the “innocent people” who are being swept up in detention quotas.

Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference and pastor of New Season Church in Sacramento, Calif., cited significant drops in church attendance in the face of immigration raids and mass deportations.



Masked federal agents wait outside an immigration courtroom on Tuesday, July 8, 2025, in New York. (AP Photo/Olga Fedorova)

In an Oct. 16 interview, he noted some churches in the NHCLC network are seeing Sunday attendance drop by 25 percent to 35 percent due to fear of immigration raids.

Other leaders of Latino and immigrant congregations throughout the United States have reported drops in Sunday attendance, especially in

Washington, Chicago and Los Angeles, where the Trump administration has launched major federal operations.

“In my conversations with the White House, with members of Congress and so forth, there is a constant affirmation that the priority is deporting the criminal element,” Rodriguez said.

But, in his view, “the 25 percent to 30 percent that are being deported that are not the criminal element are a direct result of a daily quota of 3,000 deportations,” referring to goals set by the Department of Homeland Security.

Urging support for the Dignity Act

Rodriguez said he has been mobilizing Latino evangelical Christians to support the bipartisan immigration reform known as the Dignity Act, urging them to gather at church to pray for Congress to pass the bill, led by U.S. Reps. María Elvira Salazar, R-Fla., and Veronica Escobar, D-Texas.

Department of Homeland Security spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said in late September, 70 percent of Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainees are “criminal illegal aliens who have been convicted or have pending charges in the US,” but data at the time of her statement shows 36 percent of those arrested have no criminal record.

Rodriguez supports the deportation of criminals but claimed ICE is forced into making arrests of criminals and non-criminals alike, because leaders in blue states won’t grant ICE access to their incarcerated populations.

“Let’s say, hypothetically speaking, they reach 2,500 a day that are complete criminals, gang bangers, pedophiles, rapists, drug dealers, et cetera,” Rodriguez said.

“If the blue states primarily don’t cooperate and give ICE access to their

prisons and jails, then they have to find the other 500 because they have a quota of 3,000. ... Not that I'm affirming that. I'm not celebrating that."

Hold asylum seekers in 'humanitarian campuses'

At the NHCLC's annual summit on Oct. 14, the organization heard from Salazar, whose bill would increase enforcement resources at the U.S. borders while allowing unauthorized immigrants without criminal records who have been in the country more than five years to earn legal status if they pay taxes and \$7,000 in restitution.

The bill would expedite the asylum process but would hold asylum seekers in "humanitarian campuses," rather than releasing them into the United States while they wait for a court decision, as has been the practice for decades.

It would pay for U.S. citizens to receive workforce training, funded by the immigrants' restitution payments. It would also make changes to immigration visas.

"There's never been a more conservative proposal. None ever, ever, ever," Rodriguez said. "This does not grant citizenship. This is the opposite of amnesty."

'Don't have to live in fear'

Instead, he said, it offers the chance for immigrants who have entered illegally to work legally.

"You don't have to live in fear," he said. "It gives people dignity, and that dignity status to me is beautiful. It's because we're all created in the image

of God.”

Rodriguez did not express confidence in the bill’s swift passage.

“Right now, I think I have faith, and hopefully that faith will convert to hope, because faith is the conviction of things hoped for and the assurance of things not seen.”

He asserted “the same administration that brought an end to a war in Gaza” was capable of immigration reform, calling it “a layup in comparison.”

Focus on antisemitism

The Dignity Act is just one priority of the NHCLC’s newly launched Center for Public Policy, which will focus on antisemitism through a partnership with the Anti-Defamation League.

“Latino evangelicals must be at the forefront of protecting our Jewish brothers and sisters around the world, speaking up on behalf of the nation of Israel,” Rodriguez said.

“It doesn’t mean that we are in perfect alignment with everything (Israeli Prime Minister) Benjamin Netanyahu says or does. That’s silly. No politician is perfect. No administration is above criticism, but we are in favor of the state of Israel.”

Another partner will be the Faith & Freedom Coalition, an evangelical voter-turnout organization long aligned with the GOP.

“We don’t lean right. We don’t lean left,” Rodriguez said. “We stand on the finished work of Christ.”

The center’s other priorities will include “issues that impact life from womb

to tomb,” family tax credits, early childhood education and parental rights, a priority often intertwined with anti-LGBTQ+ positions.

Last year the organization launched the Center for Ministerial Health, which hosted 15 mental health symposiums in the past year.

“The response has been more than amazing, literally saving families, marriages, ministries and lives,” Rodriguez said.

The NHCLC celebrated its recent expansion internationally, an effort to establish chapters in Latin America, Spain and Latino diasporas in other Western countries, led by Colombian pastor Iván Delgado Glenn.

Build a ‘firewall’ against encroaching Marxism

“We’re going to build a firewall against ideologies that take away our rights, our freedom of speech, our freedom of religious liberty, and so if the church rises up, light wins and darkness loses because we believe in the image of God,” Rodriguez told RNS.

“The majority of countries already have the national evangelical alliances. We’re not there to replace them at all. We’re there to resource them.”

The new initiative will assist in “building a firewall against the encroachment of Marxism” in foreign policy, including in Venezuela, said Rodriguez.

On this score, Rodriguez blamed the leftist President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva for the seizure of prominent Brazilian pastor Silas Malafaia’s passport, calling it a religious liberty issue.

Malafaia, who has been linked to dominion theology—the idea that

Christians should control all aspects of society—is an ally of former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, recently sentenced to 27 years in prison for planning a coup.

While fighting on these fronts abroad, Rodriguez advised his organization's constituents to brave the pressures of immigration enforcement at home, telling them to go to church.

“Church is the safer space. There is no safer space than the church,” Rodriguez said. “We need to come together and believe that the God of the impossible who changed the hearts and minds of leaders in the Old and New Testament will do it again for us.

“He doesn't change. So, we believe the Holy Spirit is still moving. He can change hearts and minds. So, go to church.”