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# **“Welcoming the Stranger”: The Catholic Church and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles**

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## “Welcoming the Stranger”: The Catholic Church and the Struggle for Immigrant Rights in Los Angeles

“For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.” Then the virtuous will say to him in reply, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you; or thirsty and gave you drink? When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome; naked and clothe you; sick or in prison and go to see you?” And the King will answer, “I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”

*Gospel of Matthew 25:35-40*

### Introduction

During the spring of 2006 millions of immigrants and their supporters took to the streets across the nation to protest “enforcement-only” legislation that criminalized undocumented immigrants and service providers. Although these demonstrations surprised the nation by their seemingly spontaneous nature, a significant number of immigrant rights organizations have mobilized and continue to mobilize around immigrant rights.<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles, in particular, has a rich history of immigrant rights activism.

Prior to the heightened attention to immigration policy in the mid-2000s, the 1990s were marked by collective demonstrations across California to combat restrictive immigration policy and anti-immigrant sentiment.<sup>2</sup> Of the various organizations that were involved in the 1990s movement for immigrant rights in Los Angeles, the Catholic Church was especially active, belying its previously mixed reaction to the broader Immigrant Rights Movement (IRM).<sup>3</sup> For example, the LA Church was lauded during this time by Antonio Gonzalez of the *Southwest Voter*

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<sup>1</sup> Diaz, Jesse. Forthcoming. *Organizing the Brown Tide: La Gran Epoca Primavera 2006 in Los Angeles, an insider's story*. Dissertation, University of California, Riverside.; Heredia, Luisa. 2008. *Faith in Action: The Catholic Church and the Immigrant Rights Movement, 1980-2007*. Dissertation, Harvard University.; Navarro, Armando. 2005. *Mexicano Political Experience in Occupied Aztlan: Struggles and Change*. Walnut, Ca: Rowman Altamira Press.

<sup>2</sup> Acuña, Rodolfo. 1996. *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*. New York: Verso.; Garcia Bedolla, Lisa. 2005. *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.; Gutierrez, Daniel. 2004. *Wedges and Quakes: New Landscapes for Latino Politics in California*. Doctoral Dissertation, Ohio State University, Department of Political Science.; Ramakrishnan, S. Karthick. 2005. *Democracy in Immigrant America: Changing Demographics and Political Participation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Davis, Mike. 2006. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. New York: Verso.

*Registration and Education Project*, for its “courageous leadership on th[e] issue [of immigrant rights] for a community that was sorely lacking leadership.”<sup>4</sup>

The Catholic Church’s teachings, as well as its religious texts, and its values are central to its immigrant rights advocacy and activism. In one of the often-cited biblical texts that underlie its activism, Jesus instructed his followers to “welcome the stranger.”<sup>5</sup> The Church has observed this imperative by standing firmly with immigrants in its campaigns to impact immigration policy.<sup>6</sup> In this same vein, Cardinal Roger Mahony has also observed this imperative over the past two decades by committing the Los Angeles Archdiocese to the struggle for immigrant rights.

In this paper the Catholic Church’s immigrant rights advocacy in Los Angeles surrounding two campaigns in the 1990s and 2000s is examined. It is asserted that the Church’s campaign during the 1990s utilized the internal structure of the Los Angeles Archdiocese to reach out to Catholics through their parishes. It is further asserted that during the mid-2000s campaign, the archdiocese added to its campaign a more developed series of events that it unilaterally organized, organized with its immigrant rights allies and through coalition building. During both periods, the Church utilized its moral and political voice to legitimize its own activities as well as the activities of individuals and parishes.

### **Contextualizing the *City of Angels*: Catholics, Latinos, and Immigrant Rights**

The Los Angeles Archdiocese is the largest archdiocese in the United States. It encompasses 288 parishes within three counties across the Los Angeles metropolitan area.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the role of the Catholic Church as a mobilizing agent within the Latino community<sup>8</sup> is heightened in Los Angeles because of its high levels of Latino membership; Latinos make up 70% of the Catholic population in Los Angeles.<sup>9</sup> However, at the national level Latinos only comprise 39%

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<sup>4</sup> Martinez, Ruben & John Ross. 1994. “Churches Behind Anti-187 Vote Could be Force for Organizing.” *National Catholic Reporter*. December 9.

<sup>5</sup> The Gospel of Matthew 25:35-40 quoted at the beginning of this paper.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that although the Church as an institution supports immigrant rights and participates in campaigns, individual dioceses and parishes are not required to participate in the Church’s campaigns.

<sup>7</sup> The Los Angeles Archdiocese encompasses Los Angeles, Ventura, and Santa Barbara Counties. Los Angeles Archdiocese website. Accessed May 29, 2009. <http://www.archdiocese.la/about/index.php>

<sup>8</sup> Espinoza, Gaston, Virgilio Elizondo, & Jesse Miranda, editors. 2005. *Latino Religious and Civic Activism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.; Jones-Correa, Michael & David Leal. 2001. “Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?” *Political Research Quarterly* 54(4): 751-770.

<sup>9</sup> Rodriguez, Gregory. 2004. “Tamed Spaces: How Religious Congregations Nurture Immigrant Assimilation,” in *Immigrants, Religious Congregations, and the Civil Society*. Faith and Public Policy Report Produced by The Davenport Institute and Pepperdine University School of Public Policy.

of Catholics.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, as a community Latinos are overwhelmingly Catholic, with just over 70 percent identifying as such,<sup>11</sup> while fully 94 percent of Latinos report having a religious affiliation.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, the Church continues to dominate the religious landscape among Latinos in Los Angeles.

Demographically, Los Angeles is home to a large Latino and immigrant population. Latinos comprise about 45% of Los Angeles County's total population, while foreign-born Latinos comprise 22% of Los Angeles County's total population.<sup>13</sup> Los Angeles' Latino population is comprised of a large proportion of immigrants. Indeed, 49% of the Latino population in Los Angeles County is foreign born.<sup>14</sup> Los Angeles' demographic makeup, a fast-growing Latino and immigrant population, forms the backdrop to the city's immigrant rights struggle.

The Los Angeles IRM can be traced back to before the 1960s, making Los Angeles the bedrock of the immigrant rights struggle.<sup>15</sup> In the past two decades the Latino and immigrant rights communities—including ethnic-oriented and immigrant-serving organizations, churches, and unions—have consistently, and in some cases collectively, mobilized against heightened legislative attacks targeting immigrants; as such, the Catholic Church's efforts form part of this broader movement for immigrant rights. Therefore, in order to contextualize the Los Angeles Church's 2006-2007 campaign, their activities during the 1994 campaign must first be examined.

### **The 1990s: Working Internally to Mobilize A Catholic Voice in Immigrant Rights**

Because of the heightened anti-immigrant sentiment reflected in statewide and federal legislation and public rhetoric, the 1990s are frequently characterized as a heightened anti-immigrant period.<sup>16</sup> In California, over thirty immigration-related bills introduced into the state legislature

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<sup>10</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Hispanic Affairs website, Demographics section. <http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/demo.shtml>. Accessed December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Rodriguez, Gregory. 2004. "Tamed Spaces: How Religious Congregations Nurture Immigrant Assimilation," in *Immigrants, Religious Congregations, and the Civil Society*. Faith and Public Policy Report Produced by The Davenport Institute and Pepperdine University School of Public Policy.

<sup>12</sup> Espinosa, Gaston, Virgilio Elizondo and Jesse Miranda. 2003. "Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings," *Interim Reports*, vol. 2003.2. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies.

<sup>13</sup> Author's Tabulations. Census 2000, SF4, tables PCT1 and PCT46

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Diaz, Jesse. Forthcoming. *Organizing the Brown Tide: La Gran Epoca Primavera 2006 in Los Angeles, an insider's story*. Dissertation, University of California, Riverside.; Garcia, Mario T. 1994. *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

<sup>16</sup> Acuña, Rodolfo. 1996. *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*. New York: Verso.; Garcia Bedolla, Lisa. 2005. *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles*.

in 1993 targeting unauthorized immigrants manifested the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment.<sup>17</sup> The brunt of the bills aimed to restrict unauthorized immigrants' access to public and state benefits including "education, health services, workers' compensation, housing, [driver's licenses], and other needed services."<sup>18</sup>

The Catholic Church embarked on a public campaign that responded to the multitude of anti-immigrant legislative proposals before California legislators. The California Catholic Conference (CCC), the state-level arm of the Church, actively monitored these legislative debates, issuing a public statement that challenged these restrictive measures and urged California legislators to withdraw their bills and to vote down any similar legislation.<sup>19</sup> Even the national branch of the Church, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB), called on California legislators and voters to defeat this restrictive legislation, deriding aspects of the legislation that sought to "restrict basic health and educational services which are due by right to every human person."<sup>20</sup>

The Catholic Church also confronted California's increasing anti-immigrant public sentiment. In his homily at an annual multiethnic mass, Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony called on Catholics to "see Jesus in today's immigrants...[and] to resist the temptation to join in the mean-spirited scapegoating which is becoming contagious." He urged parishioners to understand that, "our faith tradition calls us...[to] raise our voices against this trend and create a climate of mutual respect and dignity."<sup>21</sup>

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Los Angeles: University of California Press.; Ramakrishnan, S. Karthick. 2005. *Democracy in Immigrant America: Changing Demographics and Political Participation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Bedolla, Lisa Garcia. 2005. *Fluid Borders: Latino Power, Identity, and Politics in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. For a more in-depth discussion of this and other legislation in California during this time see chapter 2 section "The 1990s: Recession, Direct Democracy, and Racial Threat."

<sup>18</sup> According to the California Bishops, "Some sections of these bills would deny education, health services, workers' compensation, housing and other needed services to persons suspected of being undocumented..." California Catholic Conference. May 12, 1993. *Statement By the California Catholic Conference Opposing Anti-Immigrant Legislation*. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187-Statements Re: Proposition 187 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration. November 16, 1993. Statement. "Immigrants and Refugees in the United States Today: A Call to Solidarity."

<sup>21</sup> Mahony, Roger. Los Angeles Archdiocese. October 9, 1993. "You Have Entertained Angels Without Knowing It!" Annual Multi-Ethnic Mass and Celebration, St. Vincent's Church. California Catholic Conference Archives. Hispanic Ministry Collection. Box 2B, Immigration Statements: Re: Anti-Immigration Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

The *Statewide Taskforce on a Pastoral Response to Immigrants* (STPRI) was the Catholic Church's response in California to the increasing anti-immigrant sentiment and state level legislation during the early 90s. Representatives from Catholic Charities, Hispanic Ministry, and Social Action, formed the taskforce and developed a pastoral plan to be coordinated by dioceses. STPRI's plan included educational and political action components, consisting of training programs for clergy and lay leaders, as well as citizenship and voter registration drives.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, a coalition of anti-immigrant groups, under the banner of *Save Our State*, brought the ongoing legislative debates directly to California voters by introducing Proposition 187 to the 1994 ballot. This state ballot initiative would have denied educational services and medical care to unauthorized immigrants and would have required teachers, doctors, and nurses to report individuals that they "suspected" were unauthorized. Titled after the coalition and by its sponsors as the "Save our State" Initiative, it was the first piece of statewide legislation to receive national attention in the 90s.

Once Proposition 187 was introduced as a ballot initiative for the 1994 election, the Catholic Church focused its campaign on defeating the anti-immigrant initiative. A variety of offices within the Church hierarchy publicly stated their opposition to Proposition 187 while urging California voters to reject the referendum. The CCC issued a statement "urg[ing] our brothers and sisters within the Church and in the community at large to rise above the fears that plague us...[and] to reject this initiative."<sup>23</sup> Asserting the Church's opposition, Cardinal Roger Mahony stated, "Proposition 187 does nothing to reform immigration policy while imposing punitive measures against any person suspected of being undocumented."<sup>24</sup>

The Los Angeles Church's campaign against Proposition 187 was coordinated by the offices of Justice and Peace and Hispanic Ministry, and formed part of the statewide STPRI campaign. The mobilization strategy was comprised of educational and political action components that were dependent on the LA Archdiocese's organizational infrastructure.

The education component was implemented through the deaneries of the pastoral regions and also via local parishes. The Office of Justice and Peace scheduled workshops targeting parish leaders and clergy, who would in turn educate their congregations about the Catholic Church's response to 187. The archdiocese also organized training workshops for parish leaders to implement voter registration campaigns in their own parishes. Thus, the Church's education

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<sup>22</sup> Statewide Taskforce on a Pastoral Response to Immigrants. April, 15, 1994. Memo To the California Catholic Conference Re: Update on the October proposal for a statewide pastoral response to the anti-immigrant rhetoric." Bishop Jaime Soto, Diocese of Orange, personal files. Immigration: 94-95, La Campana (Prop. 187) Folder. Orange: Diocese of Orange.

<sup>23</sup> California Catholic Conference. August 25, 1994. Statement. "I was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me," in *Parish Kit, Proposition 187: Background Information*. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Mahony, Roger. September 1994. Statement. "...For You Were Once Strangers..." in *Parish Kit*. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation Proposition 187 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

efforts targeted Catholics, urging them to consider immigration from a religious perspective and subsequently vote down the initiative. The Church also organized a more direct political action component focusing on voter registration and “Getting Out The Vote” campaigning.

The Hispanic Ministry office was particularly involved in reaching out to Latino parishioners in a direct attempt at increasing the Latino voter pool.<sup>25</sup> Working collaboratively, the Hispanic Ministry and the Industrial Areas Foundation developed a targeted voter registration campaign, on one hand selecting a variety of parishes in which they implemented voter registration programs, and on another targeting predominantly Latino parishes.<sup>26</sup> The Hispanic Ministry’s office assigned a representative to each of the five pastoral regions to coordinate the voter registration drives throughout the archdiocese.

The 1994 campaign utilized two informational packets, developed at the state and archdiocesan levels, to aid local parishes in their efforts against Proposition 187. Aside from general information on Catholic social teaching and the Church’s assessment of 187, the parish kit included information on specific archdiocesan-wide actions, such as guides to help clergy develop masses and sermons centered on immigrant rights.<sup>27</sup> The parish kits also included a “...How to Organize a Voter Registration Drive in Your Parish” how-to guide, to aid parishes in developing their own voter registration programs.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the archdiocesan packets were meant to provide parishes with relevant information to become active in its campaign in a relatively short period of time. Because the LA Archdiocese developed its own parish kits, it tailored these kits directly to its own campaign.

In November of 1994, the California electorate passed Proposition 187, however it was never implemented because of its unconstitutionality. Although struck down in the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, it would serve as the precursor to future state and federal legislation that would enact similar and

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<sup>25</sup> The Hispanic Ministry office also engaged Latino Catholics in other ways, the most inspiring of these, and the activity of which the leaders of that time still reference was a live *Stations of the Cross* against Proposition 187.; Personal Interview, Humberto Ramos, former Associate Director, Hispanic Ministry at the Los Angeles Archdiocese.; Personal Interview, Louis Velasquez, former Director of Hispanic Ministry at the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

<sup>26</sup> Chabolla, Thomas A. August 23, 1994. Memo to Cardinal Roger Mahony re: *1994 Voter Education Plan and Budget*. Mission Hills, CA: Archdiocese of Los Angeles Archival Center.; Personal Interview, Humberto Ramos, former Associate Director, Hispanic Ministry at the Los Angeles Archdiocese.; Personal Interview, Louis Velasquez, former Director of Hispanic Ministry at the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

<sup>27</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles. 1994. “Homily Notes for October 15-16, 1994” in the *Parish Kit*. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

<sup>28</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles. 1994. “Voter Registration/How to Organize a Voter Registration Drive in Your Parish,” in the *Parish Kit*. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

sometimes more restrictive policies.<sup>29</sup> Thus, even though the Catholic Church pursued a vigorous and coordinated response to defeat Proposition 187, the initiative was still approved by Californian voters.

In the aftermath of the proposition's affirmation, the Catholic Church continued its pro-immigrant public advocacy and service. The California bishops sided with other pro-immigrant organizations, approving the numerous lawsuits against the initiative and making clear that the anti-187 struggle was not over.<sup>30</sup> Speaking to the Church's dedication to service, the NCCB reaffirmed the "commit[ment of] our Catholic agencies, Catholic Charities services, our educational, healthcare institutions to serve all our people who are in need of them,"<sup>31</sup> irrespective of legal status.

Responding to the mounting fear among the Latino community, Bishop John Cummins, then President of the CCC urged immigrants to continue sending their children to school and to continue seeking out medical assistance. He implored the community "*No teman!* Do not Be Afraid!"—because the Church was with them.<sup>32</sup>

### **The 2000s: Working Externally to Mobilize A Catholic Voice in Immigrant Rights**

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<sup>29</sup> During the 1990s other restrictive policies that immigrants' rights activists are still attempting to repeal were also enacted. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996; The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996; Furthermore the U.S.-Mexico border was militarized through a series of campaigns that fall under the "prevention through deterrence" models beginning with Operation Gatekeeper.

<sup>30</sup> Cummins, John S. Press Statement. *El Obispo John S. Cummins, Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal Catolica de California, Envía Un Mensaje de Apoyo A La Comunidad Inmigrante de California*. California Catholic Conference. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 after it Passed, Nov. 8, 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.; Keeler, Cardinal William. November 17, 1994. "Welcoming the Stranger: A Reflection on the Current Immigration Debate" Statement of William Cardinal Keeler, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Brown Accordion Files. Immigration, Cardinal Keeler 1995 Statement, Welcoming the Stranger Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.; Sly, Julie, Associate Director for Social Welfare and Communications. November 9, 1994 "California Bishops' President Responds to Passage of Proposition 187." Press Release, California Catholic Conference. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 after it Passed, Nov. 8, 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

<sup>31</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops. November 17, 1994. Statement of William Cardinal Keeler, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Welcoming the Stranger: A Reflection the Current Immigration Debate." Brown Accordion Files, Folder: Immigration, Cardinal Keeler, 1995 Statement, Welcoming the Stranger. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

<sup>32</sup> Cummins, John S. Press Statement. *El Obispo John S. Cummins, Presidente de la Conferencia Episcopal Catolica de California, Envía Un Mensaje de Apoyo A La Comunidad Inmigrante de California*. California Catholic Conference. Hispanic Ministry Collection; Box 7; Legislation, Proposition 187 after it Passed, Nov. 8, 1994 Folder. Sacramento, CA: California Catholic Conference Archives.

Beginning in the mid-2000s federal immigration reform took center stage and the main wedge driving and dividing legislators was whether or not to legalize a portion of the estimated twelve million unauthorized immigrants living in the US. In general, the policy proposals being debated in the House of Representatives were “*enforcement*” bills, excluding any type of legalization program altogether, whereas those debated in the Senate were “*comprehensive*” bills, including some form of an “earned citizenship” program.<sup>33</sup> Border and interior enforcement and a guest or temporary worker program were also being debated during this period.

The recent immigration debates have unquestionably been shaped by the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, attacks, and the ensuing alarm for national security. Along this vein, during the 109<sup>th</sup> Congressional session, House Representatives James Sensenbrenner, and Peter King, introduced HR4437, the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, an immigration reform bill that solely focused on border and interior enforcement. HR4437 would have criminalized undocumented immigrants and anyone that aided them.<sup>34</sup> It authorized the construction of 700 miles of fencing along the Mexico-US border,<sup>35</sup> and also authorized local law enforcement officers to enforce federal immigration laws. Furthermore, the bill targeted unauthorized workers by seeking to increase fines levied against employers who hired undocumented immigrants and excluding temporary worker or legalization provisions altogether. Essentially, HR4437 set the stage for the resulting mass mobilizations to defeat the bill’s passage, and also made issues of national security the framework within which further immigration debates would take shape.

The national arm of the Catholic Church, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), had launched their *Justice for Immigrants: A Journey of Hope* (JFI) campaign in 2005. Comprised of a variety of Catholic organizations with national networks, JFI intended to “reach beyond the networks of the participating national agencies, and to enlist the support of *Catholic individuals and institutions* in dioceses throughout the country.”<sup>36</sup> It was “designed to unite and mobilize a growing network of Catholic institutions, individuals, and other persons of good faith in support of a broad legalization program and comprehensive immigration reform principles.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, the Church rejected any enforcement-only style provisions and bills.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> For example, compare HR6061, the Secure Fence Act, with S2611, the Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006.

<sup>34</sup> HR4437 charged unauthorized status and aiding undocumented immigrants as felonies.

<sup>35</sup> HR4437 also required a study on erecting a fence along the US-Canada border.

<sup>36</sup> Emphasis added. Kerwin, Donald. 2005. *Justice for Newcomers: A Catholic Call for Solidarity and Reform*. Catholic Charities 2005 Policy Paper. Mirna Torres Personal Files. Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc: Washington, DC.

<sup>37</sup> Kerwin, Donald. 2005. *Justice for Newcomers: A Catholic Call for Solidarity and Reform*. Catholic Charities 2005 Policy Paper. Mirna Torres Personal Files. Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc: Washington, DC.

<sup>38</sup> The Catholic Church also held the position that nation’s had the right to protect their borders.

Upon HR4437's passage in the lower House, the national IRM galvanized to educate the immigrant community about the bill, to voice its opposition to its various provisions, as well as to rally immigrants and their supporters to fight HR4437's passage by the Senate and its implementation as law. Different offices within the Catholic Church hierarchy came out against HR4437, urging legislators to take up comprehensive immigration reform instead.

Bishop Gerald Barnes, the Chairman of the USCCB's Immigration Committee, condemned the Sensenbrenner/King immigration bill because of its "enforcement only focus and absence of reforms in the US legal immigration system that would address our current immigration problems more comprehensively."<sup>39</sup> Bishop Barnes instead proposed "a comprehensive solution to our immigration crisis, which includes legal status for migrants and legal avenues for migration, is needed to fix a broken immigration system that exists in our country today."<sup>40</sup> This time, the charge was led by the Church at the national level, however Los Angeles' efforts gained national standing.

The IRM in Los Angeles has always been one of the most visible and active sectors in the country. The Los Angeles Archdiocese followed in this tradition, when in March of 2006, Cardinal Roger Mahony publicly instructed Catholic priests to engage in acts of civil disobedience if HR4437 were to be implemented. Mahony's instruction heightened the awareness of the Congressional immigration debates; it also underscored the public's role and the role of Catholic values as they relate to the immigration question. Most poignantly, however, it signaled the commitment of the Catholic Church to stand with the immigrant community, thereby squarely interjecting the Church and its religious values into the broader immigrant rights struggle. It was an apparent turning point for the archdiocesan immigrant rights campaign.

The Los Angeles Archdiocese employed one of the most public campaigns as part of the Catholic Church's national JFI effort. Mirroring the goals of the national JFI campaign, the LA Archdiocesan steering committee had committed to "educat[ing] Catholics throughout the Los Angeles Archdiocese about immigration issues and how our faith calls us to be in solidarity with the plight of immigrants and their families," and to also "mobilize large numbers of Catholics in favor of immigration reform."<sup>41</sup> However, when HR4437 passed the House, its defeat became the centerpiece of the Church's effort. As part of this effort, local parishes committed their own JFI campaigns to the struggle against HR4437 and for comprehensive reform, or participated in events coordinated by the LA Archdiocese.

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<sup>39</sup> Barnes, Gerald. December 14, 2005. Press Statement and Letter. *Statement of Most Reverend Gerald R. Barnes, Bishop of San Bernardino, California, Chairman, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration In Opposition to The Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005*. USCCB/MRS Website, 2005 Bishops Statements. <http://www.nccbuscc.org/mrs/hr4437.shtml>. Accessed June 12, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Justice for Immigrants Steering Committee. No date. *Justice for Immigrants, Draft Work Plan*. Joan Harper Personal Files. Los Angeles, CA: Archdiocese of Los Angeles Office of Justice and Peace.

Three types of events exemplify the activities that the LA Archdiocese helped organize to mobilize Catholics around Southern California. First, the archdiocese attempted to outreach to parishes and parishioners by providing them information on the Catholic Church's religious teachings regarding immigration, and its assessment and stance on immigration reform legislation. The Los Angeles Archdiocese developed internal forms of communication including memo updates sent from Bishop Oscar Solis, the Chair of the JFI Steering Committee, and email alerts via the Office of Justice and Peace. The national JFI campaign aided in the Los Angeles Church in this effort by developing and distributing parish kits to dioceses and parishes to aid them in launching their own local JFI campaigns. In this case, these professionally developed tri-folded informational folders were intended to aid in building a broad network of parish-based JFI campaigns, thus, plenty more general information was incorporated into the packets.

Compared to the 1994 campaign, each of the JFI parish kit sections was more developed, providing parishes with easy to read, in-depth materials on Catholic social teaching and how-to guides for visiting elected representatives and writing them letters, for example.<sup>42</sup> These parish kits were also supplemented with a JFI website that provided timely information and action alerts pertinent to federal legislative debates. At different times the website offered information on political activities, provided sample letters, and information to contact elected representatives. Additionally, JFI paraphernalia—including posters, wristbands, brochures, and prayer cards—were made available to parishes to support their efforts. While these informational packets were more advanced—providing more general information for individual parishes to get involved—they were not specifically tailored to the LA Archdiocesan campaign.

Secondly, the archdiocese committed standing religious events to raising the issue of immigration reform. In 2006, the archdiocese dedicated its annual César Chávez celebration—that it coordinates with the United Farm Workers—to the struggle for immigration reform. Aside from commemorating Chávez's life's work, the procession and mass would “also serve as a call for action to follow in Chavez's example and work for just and humane immigration reform.”<sup>43</sup> In another 2006 event, the archdiocese dedicated its annual Labor Day mass and celebration—that it coordinates with labor unions—to the role of the immigrant as “laborer.”<sup>44</sup> During his homily at the September 4<sup>th</sup> mass, Cardinal Roger Mahony placed the Church's campaign to enact comprehensive immigration reform squarely before Catholics when he

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<sup>42</sup> Justice for Immigrants Parish Kit. *Tips for Legislative Advocacy. Communicating with Elected Officials. Media Outreach Tips. Guide for Communicating with the Media.* These documents are all found in the Action section of the Parish Kit. This information was also similar to the information posted on the website, though the website was more comprehensive as it also provided “action alerts” with time sensitive issues and actions to participate.

<sup>43</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles. March 24, 2006. “Hundreds of Farm Workers, Jornaleros, Braceros and Labor Union Members to Honor the Memory of Cesar Chavez.” Press Release. Carolina Guevara, Media Relations, personal files. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Archdiocese.

<sup>44</sup> Archdiocese of Los Angeles. October 27, 2006. Labor Day Mass. Archdiocesan News Archive. Archdiocese of Los Angeles Website, Archdiocesan News Archive. Accessed June 13, 2009. <http://www.archdiocese.la/news/story.php?newsid=773>

informed parishioners of his intent to vote for a candidate based on his or her stance on immigration policy.<sup>45</sup>

Thirdly, the archdiocese also helped to organize mass-based political actions through the coalitions it formed with other organizations. As part of a national day of action on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006, the archdiocesan JFI campaign united with organizations under the banner of *Today We Act, Tomorrow We Vote*, to organize a candlelight vigil and procession.<sup>46</sup> Cardinal Mahony called on Catholics to join the vigil and procession and to pray for federal legislators that would decide the fate of immigration reform.<sup>47</sup> The Church continued this alliance, when those organizations formed the *We Are America Coalition* (WAAC)—a coalition comprised of local community based organizations including faith-based, immigrant rights, and labor organizations.<sup>48</sup> Working with WAAC, the Los Angeles Archdiocese coordinated the Catholic portion of a Postcard Campaign. Over 151 parishes in the archdiocese collected signatures on postcards addressed to then Senate Majority leader, Bill Frist, and Senate Minority leader, Harry Reid, urging them to “...enact realistic and humane comprehensive immigration reform this year.”<sup>49</sup>

The Los Angeles Archdiocese, however, did not ally itself with all of the pro-immigrant organizations that were organizing as part of the LA IRM. In aligning itself with the organizations under the WAAC, the archdiocese eventually organized in opposition to the other major immigrant rights coalition in Los Angeles, the *March 25<sup>th</sup> Coalition*—a coalition comprised of community based organizations including immigrant rights, leftist, educational,

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<sup>45</sup> Field notes, September 4, 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Justice for Immigrants. Flyer, April 10 National Day of Action, Candlelight Vigil and Procession. Joan Harper, Office of Justice and Peace, personal files. Los Angeles: Los Angeles Archdiocese.; *Today We Act, Tomorrow We Vote*. Flyer, April 10 National Day of Action, Candlelight Vigil and Procession. Accessed on December 01, 2007 from the We Are America southern California website [http://todayweact.org/en/April\\_10\\_National\\_Day\\_of\\_Actions#Downtown\\_L.A..2C\\_5:00\\_pm\\_.40\\_La\\_Placita](http://todayweact.org/en/April_10_National_Day_of_Actions#Downtown_L.A..2C_5:00_pm_.40_La_Placita)

<sup>47</sup> The vigil and procession began at *La Placita* and ended at Fletcher Brown Square where a rally took place.

<sup>48</sup> The *We Are America Coalition* of southern California forms part of a national *We Are America Alliance*. Although these groups worked together to organize the April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006 procession, they did not coalesce under the *We Are America* banner until afterward. Several of the over 100 organizations in the Coalition include the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights in LA (CHIRLA), Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), and SEIU. The Los Angeles Archdiocese forms part of the steering committee for the Coalition. We Are America Coalition 2006. *May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006, Media Packet*. We Are America Coalition Website, Past Action (5/1). Accessed November 16, 2007. [http://todayweact.org/en/images/6/68/Los\\_Angeles\\_5-1-06\\_Media\\_Packet.pdf](http://todayweact.org/en/images/6/68/Los_Angeles_5-1-06_Media_Packet.pdf); Truax, Eileen. 2006. Hora cero para el ‘gran boicot.’ *La Opinion* (online). May 1.

<sup>49</sup> We Are America Coalition. May 9, 2006. *Postcard, Attached to Cardinal Mahony Statement, Postcard Campaign for Immigration Reform*. Archdiocese of Los Angeles Website, Archdiocesan News Archive. Accessed June 11, 2007. [http://www.archdiocese.la/news/pdf/news\\_744\\_Microsoft%20Word%20-%20PostcardWeAreAmerica-Archdiocese%20FinalEdited.pdf](http://www.archdiocese.la/news/pdf/news_744_Microsoft%20Word%20-%20PostcardWeAreAmerica-Archdiocese%20FinalEdited.pdf).

and labor organizations.<sup>50</sup> For example, as an alternative to the “Great American Boycott” that was organized by the *March 25<sup>th</sup> Coalition*, the LA Archdiocese instead allied with the WAAC to organize an afternoon demonstration on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006.<sup>51</sup> In the end, HR4437 did not pass the Senate and was never implemented as law; however, during that Congressional session, neither did any federal reform legislation.<sup>52</sup>

Although immigration reform has yet to be enacted the immigrant rights community continues in its struggle for the passage of immigration reform, against enforcement only legislation, as well as for the rights of the immigrant community. Aside from simply struggling for policies, the Catholic Church continues to serve as an advocate for the immigrant community adding its voice to the broader movement. For instance, after the “May Day Melee” of 2007—when the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) disrupted a peaceful demonstration, calling for comprehensive immigration reform, by shooting rubber bullets and clubbing participants to disperse the crowd—the LA Archdiocese alongside a number of other organizations and legal representatives stood firmly with immigrants during these challenging circumstances.

Speaking out for the immigrant community immediately following the LAPD attack, Cardinal Mahony stated, “I have seen very clear images of women and children trying to get out of the way of the police, people very frightened, but being treated as if they were criminals. There is no excuse for the unprovoked attacks upon these people....”<sup>53</sup> Protecting the rights of

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<sup>50</sup> The March 25<sup>th</sup> Coalition, was launched after these organizations worked together to organize *La Gran Marcha* on March 25th, the first large-scale mass mobilization against HR4437 in Los Angeles. Several of the over 100 organizations in the Coalition included all of the factions of La Hermandad Mexicana, United Teachers LA, International Socialist Organization, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), Latino Movement USA, Grupo Pro-Uno, and Casa del Mexicano. Communication with Jesse Diaz, one of the co-founders of the coalition, June 14, 2009.

<sup>51</sup> In Los Angeles, the opposition to the boycott and alternative march did not significantly hamper attendance in the “Great American Boycott” march. For a related perspective on the effects that church support or lack thereof has on immigrant mobilization, see, Cano, Gustavo. 2009. *Political Mobilization of Latino Immigrants in American Cities and the US Immigration Debate*. Institute of Latin American Studies, Columbia University. Working Paper Series (online). [http://ilas.columbia.edu/images/uploads/workingpapers/Gustavo\\_Cano-Political\\_Mobilization\\_of\\_Latino\\_Immigrants\\_in\\_American\\_Cities\\_and\\_the\\_US\\_Immigration\\_Debate.pdf](http://ilas.columbia.edu/images/uploads/workingpapers/Gustavo_Cano-Political_Mobilization_of_Latino_Immigrants_in_American_Cities_and_the_US_Immigration_Debate.pdf). For more information on the points of division and unity within the Immigrant Rights Movement see, Diaz, Jesse. Forthcoming. *Organizing the Brown Tide: La Gran Epoca Primavera 2006 in Los Angeles, an insider’s story*. Dissertation, University of California, Riverside.; Heredia, Luisa. 2008. *Faith in Action: The Catholic Church and the Immigrant Rights Movement, 1980-2007*. Dissertation, Harvard University.; Watanabe, Teresa. 2006. “Immigrants Divided on Boycott.” *LA Times* (online). April 20. <http://articles.latimes.com/2006/apr/20/local/me-boycott20>

<sup>52</sup> HR6061, the Secure Fence Act, did pass both houses and was signed off by the President, however, this is considered “piecemeal” legislation because it only dealt with one aspect of reform.

<sup>53</sup> Mahony, Roger. May 4, 2007. “Statement on May 1<sup>st</sup> Violence at MacArthur Park” Attached to, *Cardinal Mahony urges Full Immigration Immunity be Given to Witnesses in May 1 MacArthur Park Violence*. Archdiocese of Los Angeles Website, Archdiocesan News Archive. Accessed May 26, 2009. <http://www.archdiocese.la/archbishop/story.php?newsid=878>.

unauthorized immigrants, Mahony demanded a moratorium on deportations so that they could freely file claims against the LAPD. In line with the tradition of immigrant rights activism in LA, the Los Angeles Archdiocese continues to publicly advocate for the rights and protection of unauthorized immigrants and the Latino community, as well as for the policy issues that affect them.

### **“Welcoming the Stranger” in the Catholic Church’s Immigrant Rights Campaigns**

Clearly, the Catholic Church in Los Angeles has been an active advocate for the immigrant community in the past two decades as evidenced by its participation against Proposition 187 and HR4437. While there are slight differences in the strategies used for each campaign, the LA Archdiocese’s involvement in the 1994 campaign set the groundwork for the Church’s involvement in 2006-2007.

Proposition 187 was a state ballot initiative, giving California voters the final say in the initiative’s passage. The Catholic Church’s goal was to use its moral authority to mobilize Catholics and the California electorate to defeat the initiative at the ballot box. More specifically, education about the social and ethical aspects of immigration and mobilizing the vote, especially the Catholic and Latino vote, were central components to the Church’s campaign. On one hand, the Los Angeles Archdiocese used its internal organizational structure to outreach to parishes and draw them into the campaign. On the other, the Los Angeles Archdiocese launched a public effort to present the ethical and social issues raised by Proposition 187 and the poor treatment of immigrants.

Reflecting on the struggle around Proposition 187, even a renowned critic of the Catholic Church, Rodolfo Acuña, stated “the position of the Catholic Church on 187 was a positive one.”<sup>54</sup> Indeed, even though Proposition 187 was passed by California voters, the Church’s public immigrant rights campaign solidified its leadership role within the immigrant and Latino communities, making its involvement in the immigrant rights struggle of 2006-2007 inevitable. The Catholic Church’s JFI campaign intended to influence federal immigration debates that commenced anew in the mid-2000s. The Church had a much taller order this time around, to mobilize Catholics and influence public sentiment on behalf of immigrants, in order to pressure legislators to enact “comprehensive” immigration reform. Again, the Church used its moral authority to mobilize within and outside of the Church. However, in order to get the attention of national policy makers, the IRM and the Los Angeles Archdiocese focused on organizing large-scale mass actions, making the Church’s coalitions and organizational allies a more integral part of the archdiocesan campaign. When the House of Representatives passed HR4437, these mass actions were integral to the Church’s overall strategy because they reinforced the national voice of the Church. The national JFI campaign also reinforced the Church’s role as a legitimate advocate for the immigrant and Latino communities.

Overall, the Proposition 187 campaign had a strong element of mobilizing Los Angeles Archdiocesan parishioners to register to vote, to vote, and to vote no on the initiative. Whereas, the 2006 campaign moved beyond the congregant approach to engage with coalitions on a much broader campaign that focused on organizing citywide and national activities in which parishes

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<sup>54</sup> Acuña, Rodolfo. 1996. *Anything but Mexican: Chicanos in Contemporary Los Angeles*. New York: Verso. p. 160.

could participate. To be clear, the distinctions between the two campaigns are not invariable—the Catholic Church joined coalition efforts against proposition 187, and engaged in parish efforts against HR4437. However, these distinctions do provide an accurate assessment of the Church’s foci during each campaign. The different campaigns exhibit the evolving strategizing of the Church as each campaign laid the foundation for future campaigns.

For example, one of the communication tools the Catholic Church has developed and refined to reduce the costs associated with launching an immigrant rights campaign is the parish kit. These informational kits generally include information on Catholic social teaching regarding immigrants, assessments of immigration policy, political action guides, and statements by clergy and various arms of the Church. Not surprisingly, the parish kit developed during the latter campaign was more advanced and was expanded to include a variety of supplemental resources. However, even with these resources, parishes were generally responsible for developing and carrying out their own activities under the archdiocesan and national campaigns.<sup>55</sup> Still, the Church’s religious values remained central to its immigrant rights advocacy and activism. A mainstay of the Catholic Church’s immigrant rights campaigns has been to educate parishioners about immigration in order to enlist their support. This education occurs along two veins, the social and economic impacts of immigration, and the religious foundation for the Church’s immigrant rights advocacy. The Church provides its congregants with pertinent information about immigration, and facilitates awareness of its religious values and teachings as they relate to immigration, thus raising an ethical dimension to accompany ongoing immigration debates. Supporting immigrants, or “welcoming the stranger” calls parishioners to actively live their faith. By interjecting a moral aspect into the immigration debates the Church has aimed to impact legislators and the general public, attempting “a conversion of hearts and minds resulting in Christian attitudes towards immigrants.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Examining the Catholic Church’s activities over the past two decades, aimed at impacting public and policy debates relative to immigration, reveals that the Church relies on a basic set of strategies that it builds upon and incorporates into pursuant campaigns; in other words, its repertoires of action. Given the Church’s involvement in the struggle for immigrant rights up to the present time, it is clear that it will continue to raise its moral voice in immigrant rights debates and on behalf of the immigrant community well into the future.

In some respects, this case study of the Catholic Church’s involvement in the IRM in Los Angeles is so unique that inferences to other dioceses across the nation are not easily drawn. However, this Los Angeles study points out one of the most important aspects of the Catholic Church’s activism on behalf of immigrants: the Church stands with immigrants.

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<sup>55</sup> However, there were instances in which the archdiocese took a more active role in drawing parishes out to participate. For example, during the 1994 campaign the Office of Hispanic Ministry aided predominantly Latino parishes in carrying out voter registration campaigns and, and albeit less directly, during the 2006-2007 campaign the LA Archdiocese provided parishes with postcards as part of the Postcard campaign directed at the Senate.

<sup>56</sup> Barnes, Gerald. January 2006. Letter from Most Reverend Gerald Barnes to Parish Leaders. In Justice for Immigrants Parish Kit.

The Catholic Church serves as an immense institutional ally for immigrants, not only in regions like Southern California where there is an abundance of Latino and immigrant faithful, but also in new destination areas where strong immigrant serving organizations and communities are few. Although the Church is not the only institution to which these groups have access, its reach into these communities makes it a vital institutional ally, especially for unauthorized immigrants in the US that have endured constant legislative attacks.<sup>57</sup>

The Los Angeles Archdiocese stood as a public advocate for the immigrant community by drawing on the Church's religious teachings and values to legitimize its participation and strengthen its political voice in the broader IRM. In this regard, the Church has responded to Latino expectations whereby fully 74 percent of Latinos "want their churches or religious organizations to aid undocumented immigrants even when providing such help is illegal."<sup>58</sup> Thus, even in a city with a long history of immigration, with a strong organizational community supporting immigrant rights, the Church's moral voice on immigration still matters for the immigrant community; and, as related to the Latino community's expectations, this is a role that the Church is expected to fulfill.

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<sup>57</sup> For more on this point, see, Cano, Gustavo. 2009. *Political Mobilization of Latino Immigrants in American Cities and the US Immigration Debate*. Institute of Latin American Studies, Columbia University. Working Paper Series (online). [http://ilas.columbia.edu/images/uploads/workingpapers/Gustavo\\_Cano-Political\\_Mobilization\\_of\\_Latino\\_Immigrants\\_in\\_American\\_Cities\\_and\\_the\\_US\\_Immigration\\_Debate.pdf](http://ilas.columbia.edu/images/uploads/workingpapers/Gustavo_Cano-Political_Mobilization_of_Latino_Immigrants_in_American_Cities_and_the_US_Immigration_Debate.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Espinosa, Gaston, Virgilio Elizondo and Jesse Miranda. 2003. "Hispanic Churches in American Public Life: Summary of Findings," *Interim Reports*, vol. 2003.2. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, Institute for Latino Studies. Pg.17.

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