



---

**STRENGTHENING OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 10, 2011

Contact: Carolina Fritz (703) 581-4797  
Sarah Kellogg (202) 277-8859  
press@esperanza.us

**African-American and Hispanic Pastors Call for Unity on Immigration Reform**

WASHINGTON – African-American, Caribbean-American and Hispanic pastors called Tuesday for U.S. opponents to halt their scurrilous attempts to divide ethnic groups in order to derail congressional passage of comprehensive immigration reform legislation.

Pastors from across the country have formed the African American Clergy for Comprehensive Immigration Reform (AAC CIR), to advance immigration reform initiatives in Washington and to point out the flawed and divisive rationale of their foes, many of who have charged that Hispanic immigrants are stealing jobs, public resources and civil rights advancements with African Americans and Caribbean Americans.

“Anti-immigration groups portray immigrants largely as Hispanics who flout the legal immigration system and deliberately displace American workers, damaging the opportunities and freedoms of African Americans. These images are a divisive tactic used to prevent the possibility of true transformation in our system,” says Reverend Dr. Derrick Harkins, senior pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. and co-chairman of the AAC CIR.

The coalition includes clergy representing several of the largest African American denominations, including the National Baptist Convention, US, the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Progressive National Baptist Convention, as well as Esperanza for America, a national grassroots campaign to support comprehensive immigration reform.

“Blaming a particular group of people will never lead to real solutions for our nation,” says Rev. Luis Cortes, Jr., president and founder of Philadelphia-based Esperanza, one of the nation’s largest faith-based Hispanic organizations. “We recognize that fear of those who are different will greatly hinder our nation’s progress, and we must actively expose and uproot this element of the current debate.”

Esperanza’s members are in the nation’s Capitol this week for the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast and Conference, which runs May 10-12. Attendees will meet with members of Congress and policymakers in the Obama Administration to discuss immigration reform as well as federal education, housing and health care policy. President Obama will deliver the keynote address at the National Hispanic Prayer Breakfast on Thursday, May 12 at 7 a.m.

The coalition favors a comprehensive approach to fixing the broken U.S. immigration system and addressing the fate of the 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States today. By overhauling the antiquated and unfair system, rather than passing limited workplace or border enforcement measures, Congress will create a system that is just, efficient and timely for immigrants and their families, employers and workers, and states and municipalities.

“Those of us who make up the faith community have not the luxury of tempering our comments based on ethnicity but bear the burden and the responsibility of speaking to the injustices of society as viewed through the lens of our faith,” says Rev. Harvey Clemons, Jr., pastor at the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Houston, Texas. “Wherever darkness appears, light is obligated to illuminate. Our coming together for the events of this week are for the purpose of illuminating the injustice of the failed immigration policies of our nation with the hope of liberating the victims of the systemic problems of the United States immigration policies and laws.”



## STRENGTHENING OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY

The reality of the impact of immigration on American workers is far different. In recent years, think tanks and government agencies have concluded that immigration does not significantly impact native-born workers in a negative way, and often improves their salaries and wages.

A 2010 Economic Policy Institute study found that between 1994 and 2007, immigration helped raise the wages of workers born in the United States by 0.4 percent (or \$3.68 per week), and to lower the wages of foreign-born workers, relative to U.S.-born workers, by 4.6 percent (or \$33.11 per week). The overall effect of immigration on wages is similar for white non-Hispanic U.S.-born workers (+0.5 percent) and black non-Hispanic U.S.-born workers (+0.4 percent).

For those without a high school diploma, the effect of immigration was similar to the overall result. U.S.-born workers with less than a high school education saw a relative 0.3 percent increase in wages (or \$1.58 per week), while foreign-born workers without a high school degree saw a relative 3.7 percent decrease in wages (or \$15.71 per week).

Similarly, a 2006 study for the National Bureau of Economic Research estimated that immigration, between the years of 1990 and 2004, had slightly reduced the wages of Americans without high school diplomas by 1 to 2 percent. Yet it increased wages for the more than 90 percent of U.S. workers with high school diplomas by 0.7 percent in the short term and 1.8 percent in the long term.

“As leaders and men and women of faith, we see immigrants differently,” says Rev. Harkins. “We are called to care for the poor and welcome the stranger, and we stand on the principles of Dr. King and others who proclaim that God gave all people human dignity and value, regardless of race or position in life. This means keeping children and parents together, and establishing pathways by which our immigrant brethren may seek a better life for themselves and their families.”

The coalition urges Congress to retain important immigration protections, including controlling the border and enforcing workplace immigration laws to protect workers from unscrupulous employers who lower the bar for all workers by subjecting immigrants to substandard working conditions and wages.

“Comprehensive immigration reform is the solution we seek,” says Rev. Bishop Orlando Findlayter, chairman of Churches United to Save and Heal of New York, NY. “It is both practical and just; and it reflects the direction and goals we should desire for our nation. Most importantly, it will begin to liberate us from the divisions we currently face, so we can turn our attention to the real challenge: how to build an economy and society that integrates and rewards anyone who wants to make a positive contribution to our nation’s welfare.”

The coalition will actively recruit clergy, plan joint education programs that bring together African-American and Hispanic congregations and look for opportunities to engage members of Congress and the Obama Administration.

### Current Coalition members include:

**The Reverend Derrick Harkins**, *Nineteenth Street Baptist Church, Washington DC*

**The Reverend Luis Cortes, Jr.**, *Esperanza, Philadelphia, PA*

**Bishop Orlando Findlayter**, *Chairman, Clergy United to Save and Heal, New York, NY*



---

**STRENGTHENING OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITY**

**The Reverend Harvey Clemons, Jr.**, *Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Houston, TX*

**The Reverend William Shaw**, *National Baptist Convention USA*

**The Reverend Wallace Smith**, *Shiloh Baptist Church, Washington, DC*

**The Reverend Cecil L. “Chip” Murray**, *Professor of Religion & Holder of the John R. Tansey Chair in Christian Ethics, University of Southern California and former Senior Pastor, First AME Church in Los Angeles*

**The Reverend David Bigbsy**, *Gamaliel Foundation, Chicago, IL*

**The Reverend Gabriel Salguero**, *Princeton Theological Seminary, NJ*

**Servant Brian K. Woodson, Sr.**, *Founding Pastor, Bay Area Christian Connection, Evangelical Covenant Church, San Francisco, CA*

**The Reverend Juan Martinez Ph.D.**, *Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA*

**The Reverend Walter Contreras**, *Coordinator, Hispanic Ministries, Evangelical Covenant Church, CA*

**Lisa Sharon Harper**, *Cofounder and Executive Director, New York Faith and Justice, New York, NY*

**The Reverend Dr. Samuel C. W. Vassel**, *Senior Pastor, Bronx Bethany COTN, Bronx, NY*

**The Reverend Dr. Oliver Phillips**, *Director, Urban/Multicultural Ministries, Church of Nazarene, Olathe, Kansas*

**The Reverend Joshua Rodriguez**, *Lead Pastor, The Cityline Church, Jersey City, NJ*