



LEFT: More than 2,000 people show their support for immigration reform during an Aug. 17 rally in the gym at St. Elizabeth Elementary School in Oakland. Members of St. Anthony, St. Elizabeth, St. Jarlath, and St. Louis Bertrand parishes were among the participants. **RIGHT:** Participants draw attention to their need for health care reform.

CHRIS DUFFEY PHOTOS

Groups rally for health care, immigration reform

By Sharon Abercrombie
Staff writer

More than 2,000 people from four East Bay community activist organizations packed the gymnasium at Oakland's St. Elizabeth Elementary School Aug. 17 to press for comprehensive health care and immigration reform.

Organized by Oakland Community Organization (OCO), a grass roots federation of congregations, schools and allied organizations representing thousands of families in Oakland, the meeting also drew members from BOCA (Berkeley Organizing Congregations for Action), CCISCO (Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization), and COR (Congregations Organizing for Renewal). It featured testimonies from undocumented immigrants who worry about deportation and from individuals who lack medical coverage.

Giving personal accounts were a single mother and a college student whose lives are negatively affected by the present realities around health care and immigration. The mother, a part-time worker, told of the hardships she and her daughter face because she cannot get health insurance.

"No child should be struggling like my daughter does, and no parent should be unable to provide a healthy life for their child or children," she said in calling for affordable health care.

An Asian immigrant related that he cannot get a legal job, or a driver's license or financial aid because of his immigration status.

He invited "Congress, the Senate and President Obama to please fix the immigration system and allow the 12 million people like me to serve this country in a better way by allowing us to have our legal documents."

Two representatives from U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Lee's office assured the gathering that Lee backs its positions on both health care and immigration. "She supports health care as a right for all human beings, regardless of their work status or a piece of paper. She knows that the 50 million people without insurance include immigrants," said Daniela Quintanilla.

Sandra Andrews said she was honored to convey to Lee "what I have heard here. Health care is not a joke. It is a right, not a privilege."

Religious leaders from several denominations gave supportive testimonies as well.



Ignacio De La Fuente, Vice Mayor of Oakland, talks with Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone during the Aug. 17 rally for immigration and health care reform.

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Oakland Bishop Salvatore Cordileone said that human dignity is God-given, “no one can take from us,” and it is the bedrock of humane health care and immigration reform. This dignity, he added, is “innate and doesn’t depend on one’s legal status or financial resources.”

The bishop lifted up in prayer “those who are among the most vulnerable in our midst: who fear being torn from their families because they are given a paycheck but no security in the law, or fear illness because although they are given a paycheck, it barely helps them live at the level of subsistence.”

Father Jesus Nieto, pastor of St. Anthony Parish in Oakland and co-chair of OCO, said that volunteers conducting one-on-one listening sessions with Oakland residents learned of “the pain that our communities struggle with, regarding lack of accessible health care and the situation of hundreds of families living in the shadows because of their undocumented status.”

Nationally, about 50 million people lack access to health care, said Father Nieto. “The only way they will be able to be seen by a doctor is when they must go to the emergency room.”

The priest said that health care “is a human right, not a privilege. Now is the time to send our message to our Congress and our president, asking them to fix our health care system by creating a program accessible and affordable for all of us.”

Father Nieto called immigration “the other painful issue.” He drew attention to the nearly 65,000 high school graduates who can’t continue their education because they are undocumented. Most of them were brought to the U.S. when they were very young. Father Nieto added that thousands of children are also suffering because one of their undocumented parents has been deported.

Speaking on behalf of Lutheran Bishop Mark Holmerud, the Rev. Lucy Kolin, OCO co-chair and pastor of Resurrection Lutheran Church in Oakland, said, “Everyone should have health care, regardless of their circumstances. Other countries currently do it, and they bear witness to the U.S.’s failure.”

Rabbi David Cooper from Kehilla Community Synagogue in Oakland told the assembly that the Jewish Torah — the first five books of the Bible, — “is clear about what is justice and not justice. It never says, ‘Beware of the immigrant and kick them out.’ It does not say, ‘Make life hard for the immigrant and do not let the laws of your land protect them.’ What it says is that you will have the same laws, the same protections and the same responsibilities for the citizen and everyone else. That is justice.”