

## PASTOR'S PAGE – MAY/JUNE 2006

Why shouldn't they come? Why shouldn't they be welcomed with open arms? Why shouldn't they be included in the fabric of America? Call me naïve if you want, but I just don't understand why.

Immigration has poured onto the front pages of our newspapers and it fills the evening news of our televisions. It is the big story of this particular point in time. Yes, the war still continues. Yes, the Bush Administration is still the most corrupt administration in the history of our country. Yes, Barry Bonds moves inexorably toward overtaking Babe Ruth. But, at this point in time immigration is what has captured the imagination (and lack of imagination) of the American people.

Thousands march. Nay, hundreds of thousands march! Across the breadth of this land immigrants and their supporters have taken to the streets to say "We want a change!" It's not hard to understand why. You don't have to be a liberal to know what is wanted. Conservatives can understand the arguments also. They might both reach different conclusions, but both can understand the arguments (if they look at things with an open mind).

Let's start with the economy. If companies stopped hiring immigrants (either documented or undocumented) they would stop coming. It is a matter of supply and demand. If an immigrant could not find a better job in the United States than he or she could find at home, they would stay at home. But, and this is a huge but, our economy needs the workers. What would happen to the grape crops, the tobacco crops, the sweet potato crops, the tomato crops, the Christmas tree farms and a hundred other farm labor issues without immigrant workers? Who would clean our hotel rooms? Who would pick up the brooms and the dust rags of janitors? The list goes on and on. The bottom line is that our economy would go a long ways toward collapsing without immigrant workers.

Let's look at the tax base – income tax, local taxes, Social Security. What would be the hit to the bottom line of American income if immigrants no longer paid income taxes (taxes that they don't get refunds on the way others of us do)? What would happen to the economy of California without the 4 million undocumented workers who contribute to our local tax base as they buy groceries, gas, clothing, jewelry and other items? What would happen to the economy of California if all immigrants stopped buying these things? I don't know about you, but whenever I fill out a form on the internet and put down a number I am immediately told whether that is a good number or not. I can't be convinced that the same is not possible in our Social Security system. In fact, SS numbers used by undocumented workers are flagged, with the money placed into a suspense account. But, employers are not notified and (in general) workers are not questioned. Wonder why? Think no further than that it amounts to 3 to 4 Billion (with a B) yearly, and our government wants the money more than it wants to find a worker using a suspicious Social Security number.

Let's look at the charge that "they are taking our jobs". What a crock! When was the last time that the American public was scrambling to be hired to work in the fields -- with little water, few bathroom breaks, and sunstroke the order of the day? What a crock! When was the last time that there was a huge push to be able to go into office buildings at night to empty trash cans and bush a broom? What a crock! When was the last time that we were clamoring to be able to clean 4 hotel rooms an hour, for a 10 hour shift, at minimum wage? What a crock. They're not taking out jobs. They're taking jobs that we don't want, even in a down-turned economy!

Let's face it, our country has set up an economic system that is in need of more workers than we have working age citizens – or in need of more workers that we have working age citizens who are willing to work at particular jobs. Rather than keeping people out, we should be actively recruiting people to come and work. We should be smoothing the way by offering papers for entry and an easy route to citizenship if people want to live here.

Rather than arguing about documented and undocumented workers, we should be working to fully establish God's Sabbath Economic, where all workers are engaged in a sustainable livelihood and where all people are accorded a sustainable life.

When we do we can stop arguing about lines that are arbitrarily drawn upon a map and about who should be allowed on which side of the arbitrary lines. Then we can get on to some important business.

### Recommended Radio:

KQKE            960AM            Air America – Talk Radio from the Left

### Recommended Movie/DVD Rental:

#### **Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary**

This film tells the real story of immigration to the United States. Filmmaker Arturo Perez Torres follows in the footsteps of two friends traveling over land from Nicaragua, across multiple borders to the US. On their journeys, they encounter merciless gangs and vigilantes, as well as border patrol. But these immigrants navigate real-life nightmares with uncanny calm, grace, even humor.

Winner: Top 10 Favorite Hot Docs, Toronto Film Festival, 2005. Winner: Audience Award, Chicago Latino Film Festival, 2005. Winner: Spectrum Award, Full Frame Festival, 2005. This is a must-see movie for anyone trying to understand the current immigration debate in the United States.

#### ***Director's Statement by Arturo Perez Torres***

*Illegal immigration into developed countries is a daily event and a source of heated debate. Thousands of illegal immigrants from Latin America travel north each year. Some come fleeing persecution; most simply come in search of a better payday. Some stay for the rest of their lives; others become seasonal workers and eventually go back to their countries of origin. Regardless of what our political view might be on illegal immigration, the fact is that each year illegal workers contribute to an underground albeit vital part of the North American economy.*

*Illegal immigration has been dramatized before. Movies like **El Norte** gained considerable success in the box office and have today achieved textbook status when it comes to educating the resident population about Latin American illegal workers. The downfall, however, is that most of these movies (including **El Norte**) tell a story which at the end makes the viewer feel pity for the characters and not necessarily respect.*

*Coming to North America without papers has been a source of shame and alienation. The determination of illegal immigrants of making it to their destination is perceived with pity at best or as a crime at worse. There is no reward or recognition for wanting to make a better life for them and their families. On the contrary, upon arrival the illegal immigrant will live a life of secrecy without a past. Maybe in the future their stories will join the ranks of European pilgrims coming to North America in search of a*

*better life or East Germans fleeing communism. But for now, their journey remains untold, strange. Alien.*

*The intention of this documentary is to put a human face on illegal immigration and to reposition the journey of the “wetback” as what it is: an act of freedom and bravery.*

**[Note: Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary will be shown at the next Holy Conversations, June 10, and will be the basis for a discussion concerning immigration. Everyone is welcome.]**

### Recommended Book:

**Wetback Nation**  
**The Case for Opening the Mexican-American Border**  
by  
Peter Laufer

The border between the United States and Mexico has long been a crossing point between hope and despair, a marker of frustration between the aspirations of many Mexicans and the nativist impulses of many Americans. Despite U.S. legislation and law enforcement, great numbers of Mexicans continue to come north illegally – and paradoxically, they are often welcomed.

Peter Laufer’s explosive proposals for the U.S.-Mexican border go far beyond tepid initiatives to ease restrictions on immigration. Mr. Laufer argues for the free movement of Mexicans back and forth across the border. Free movement, he insists, would end a deadly charade that only taunts and abuses Mexican workers who are desperately needed by the U.S. Economy. And it would in fact make it easier for the United States to enforce restrictions against those people it wants to deny entry to the country.

*Wetback Nation* also provides the background for an understanding of the current state of Mexican immigration: the story of how the border had become a fraud, resulting in nothing more than the criminalization of Mexican and other immigrants, the bloating of the mismanaged Immigration and Naturalization Service, the deterioration of living standards along the frontier, and the enrichment of American employers. Placing the border in historical perspective, Mr. Laufer shows how circumstances have deteriorated to the present crisis, and why the region and the sometimes deadly immigration through it cannot be ignored.

(from the dust jacket of the book)

**[Note: The reading of *Wetback Nation* would be great background for the Holy Conversations taking place on June 10.]**

### Quote of the Month:

*Good neighbors don't close their borders to their neighbors*

*Condoleezza Rice*  
*(on Syria's slowing of traffic from Lebanon)*