

Why the Church Should Respond to the DACA Repeal

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) repeal affects more of the church in North America than you may want to admit.



Friends and family forged in the bonds of worship and community. The DACA repeal may threaten families in this new fellowship.

In Columbus, Ohio we built a multi-cultural/multi-lingual ministry in a historically English-speaking, African-American Church. Homogeneous churches in non-homogeneous cities are virtually ineffective at living out the Gospel of Christ. So, we launched and sustained successful Spanish language worship experiences, small groups and public evangelistic series.

That church subsidizes a pastor for Hispanic ministries, and that ministry became a flywheel of exponential growth. Young adults came to the church because it represented their worldview of diversity.

This is only an example, a small fraction of the impact that the Latino community has had on Christianity in America. Pentecostal pastor Wilfredo de Jesus of Chicago goes even further in saying, “[Hispanic growth] is saving American Christianity. No doubt, every denomination would have decreased in membership if it had not been for Hispanic growth...”

Measured Impact of Hispanics in American Christianity

“Nationally, more than eight million Americans identify themselves as Latino evangelicals, according to the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference which also reports that over a third of the 52 million Hispanics in America now call themselves ‘born-again [Christians].’” In addition to the Protestant Christian community one-third of the 72 million Catholics in the United States are Hispanic.

According to PEW Research, 15% of the Seventh-day Adventist church (like the one in Columbus) in the United States is Hispanic. The strongest growth area

of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the U.S. is in immigrant growth. This is especially true in the Hispanic community.

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In light of these staggering numbers, Christians in America should take a careful look at how the repeal of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) order will impact the families of its adherents. This is no issue that should be ignored, but as I survey the chatter on this topic I am picking up on an eerie silence from religious leaders.

Why So Quiet?

Many Christians believe that the church should be apolitical. These persons are accurate in committing to this notion. One does not have to engage politics to provide a ministry of compassion, however. I believe in making the place of worship a safe place for those affected by the repeal of DACA to come and be heard and prayers offered. Being a safe-haven for persons that are in need of spiritual support is not political at all.

Further, taking a stand is not limited to marching in protests or collaborating with politicians. There are so many opportunities for us to reveal the love of God to hurting people when our nation faces times of ethical and moral crisis. The important thing for us to remember is that when we reflect Christ's best we will find ourselves among those that are the social, political and religious "other."

I believe that DACA was a valiant effort to protect those precious souls that are in America by means over which they had no control. As faith leaders we are called to uphold the laws of the land, when they do not oppose the laws of Heaven. This is an opportunity for faith leaders to help America navigate the balance of law and liberty. Ways forward include a resolve to seek meaningful legislation from our lawmakers that reflects the spirit of American democracy and freedom.

Close to Home

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I grew up in South Florida. All of my life I was surrounded by people from Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Many of our members in Columbus have families who will be affected by the repeal of DACA if no solutions are put in place. Many of my colleagues are the children of immigrants and now serve as Chaplains in the military, pastors of vibrant congregations, and business owners who provide wonderful services to the communities in which they are established.

One of my long-time friends came to America at age 12. His parents were undocumented, and I remember how excited he was when President Obama issued DACA in 2012.

"John, why am I good enough to work here, go to school here, and own a business here, but I am not good enough to be considered an American," he asked me this week.

"This is the only home I know, and I feel that this is all going to be taken away from me. I can hardly remember Mexico. This is my home."

One of my pastor friends who is Hispanic felt this way: "I am an immigrant—proud of where I came from and proud of where I am. I have been in America since 1992 and this is the only home I know now. I'm not sure what

will happen, but I will not sit by and be a victim. If there is a way to help my people we will find it.”

Smart Fight Forward

Language barriers and cultural practices inhibit many Hispanic faith leaders from engaging the public arena. This is definitely a problem that needs interfaith leaders to help navigate the solutions. Historically, the interfaith community has risen in times of moral crisis to turn the tide of unethical policies. This should be one of those times.

Here are several solutions that can help provide the ministry of compassion:

1. Write a sermon that highlights the moral responsibility of your faith to care for those that cannot care for themselves.
2. Organize a gathering with your faith community to discuss how it can help those persons affected by the repeal.
3. Write your congressperson and request support in drafting solutions for those affected in your community.
4. Create a safe space in your place of worship for those that fear deportation. Invite them to come for prayer, have their questions answered, and provide a listening ear so that they do not feel more excluded than they already do.
5. Reach out to the Latin Affairs Commission in your state to determine if there are any opportunities for you to help as faith leaders and church members.
6. Do not act alone. Foster an environment around yourself that allows you to dialogue with persons that have opposing views and use your influence to create solutions.
7. Visit with your local civic leaders and ask them to help you develop solutions to serve your community. Remember, you serve the same constituents.

There is no better time for faith leaders to shine than right now. In times like these it is critical that the church provides moral leadership that is not charged with political rhetoric or power plays driven by fear. The announcement to repeal DACA is a cue for faith leaders to bring the light of Christ to a world that needs to find its way.