Religious Leaders’ Offer Civil Disobedience to Expose Unjust Immigration Laws

SILVER SPRING (October 22, 2013). On October 8th, a coalition of 210 people risked arrest for the sake of exposing the injustice of our immigration laws. This group included 8 U.S. congresspersons, many union leaders, and at least 8 religious leaders. Along with Catholic priest Rev. Clete Kiley, Eli McCarthy, PhD who works as the Director of Justice and Peace for the Conference of Major Superiors of Men was one of the Catholic leaders who participated in this civil disobedience.

Civil disobedience is not a light decision or a common practice. However, it has been drawn on by many of the most inspirational and transformative leaders of human history—St. Paul and many early Christian martyrs, Thoreau, Gandhi, Ghaffar Khan, Dorothy Day, Rosa Parks, King, Cesar Chavez, Archbishop Oscar Romero, etc.

But, one might ask why this issue and at this time? Dr. and Rev. Martin Luther King explains that a just law “squares with the moral law or the law of God” and “uplifts human personality” (dignity), whereas an unjust law would fail these criteria.

Dignity is uplifted when we treat each person as a gift, particularly as a gift from God out of love and for love. When we divide families, which are a key organ of love, ignore the gifts that immigrants are to our society, and become possessive about our land and resources then we are not acting in accord with human dignity. Laws that perpetuate these behaviors are not just. Laws that make people wait 10-20 years to enter the country are unjust, particularly when they are seeking basic needs or are separated from family.

In this context, along with the shifting attention toward the government shutdown, the time was ripe for civil disobedience to bear fruit personally, socially, and politically. There was need to bring attention back to the immigration issue, to signify the urgency as the political window appears to be fading, and to embody the de-humanization of the present system. Many of the religious leaders’ discernment arose out of participating in the 40 days (Sept. 9- Oct. 18) of fasting, prayer, and advocacy with the Interfaith Immigration Coalition and over 10,000 people in 46 states across the nation. The activity also built on the increasing escalation of civil disobedience by a broader network of immigration organizers, which included 40 arrests in August, 100 in September, and now over 200 in October.

The full reflection can be found at this link.

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The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men’s religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are nearly 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.