Happy Monday to all,

95 years ago today, on September 8, 1930, New York City public schools began teaching Jewish immigrant children in their primary language of Hebrew.  The large Jewish immigrant population in New York City influenced this initiative. Immigrant parents saw public education as a path to social and economic advancement.

Teaching immigrant children in their primary language offers proven benefits across multiple domains, including fostering a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem, improving family and community relationships, and enhancing cognitive and academic development. Children with a strong foundation in their first language tend to learn English more easily and effectively.

Bilingual children often demonstrate increased adaptability and awareness of the world around them, benefiting from diverse cultural perspectives. It allows children to engage with older generations who may not speak English, fostering a sense of belonging and a shared heritage.

Church teaching calls on all Catholics to provide special attention to immigrant populations, promoting the spiritual and physical well-being of immigrants, their families, and the communities that receive them. The principles of Rights and Responsibilities and the Call to Community and Participation suggest that teaching immigrant children in their primary language aligns with respect for their human dignity by fostering their full development and allowing them to participate in society, rather than alienating them.

At Catholic Charities, our immigration services focus specifically on both the legal rights afforded to all residents in our diocese, as well as the overall wellbeing of immigrant families. Our diverse staff makes every effort to ensure that they provide all guidance, resources and services to clients in a manner that is understandable to them.

Earlier this year, cuts in federal funding for immigrant relocation and legal citizenship services required Catholic Charities of Stockton to suspend English as a Second Language (ESL) Citizenship Classes. These classes previously provided an intense learning environment for adult learners to gain English language skills, acquire US history and civics knowledge, and receive counseling on the citizenship exam processes.

Our Civic/ESL program spanned 12 very successful years, supporting thousands of Legal Permanent Residents. Having access to teachers that understood them and taught them from the perspective of a bilingual learner made a huge difference. The program had a 95% success rate at the end of its grant life.

We give thanks for the volunteers who continue to donate their time to hold “mock” interview sessions with some of our clients scheduled for a citizenship interview. Although the absence of funding limits the availability of this service, our clients report that the mock interviews along with guidance from Legal staff give them confidence at their interview.

Although federal grant cuts took a toll on this important service, not only for our local organization but also for Catholic Charity immigration services across the nation, your contributions can bring this- and other- crucial services back.

On the weekend of September 20th and 21st, all parishes will have a special collection for Catholic Charities. We all have an opportunity to make a donation that will contribute to the ability of Catholic Charities of Stockton to maintain existing services, restore reduced or suspended services (such as nutrition, emergency assistance, elder care, and immigration services) and initiate much needed new services.

Let us all reflect on the words of Pope Francis, delivered in his final Easter day address:

*On this day, I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves, or who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas! For all of us are children of God!*

AMEN!

Deacon Mike