

*"Strangers and sojourners in our midst"* - All through the Scriptures, God reminds His people, Israel, that they are to treat the foreigners in their midst with compassion and dignity, charging them to remember that they once, too, were strangers and sojourners in a foreign land. (Lev. 19:34 – You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.) How much more so for the Christian who recognizes that his promised land is in heaven, and that we are all strangers and sojourners in this foreign land of Earth! (1 Peter 2:11) So our ministry to the foreigner in our midst is very much a Biblical and a moral imperative for us. No matter what our political sensibilities may be in the broad spectrum of legitimate positions that fall under the category of prudential judgment, we have an obligation to care for every fellow human being in our parish.

On August 17th, we had a meeting of leaders representing the Basilica's two Hispanic "houses of prayer," as well as some leaders who are not connected with either house of prayer. These houses of prayer serve as two neighborhood centers for evangelization of the local Hispanic community. The Basilica parishioners of each house of prayer community fully cover the rent for these two facilities, which they use chiefly on Saturday evenings for prayer and worship services. Through these houses of prayer, the community offers outreach to many Hispanic families in the community, by providing them a support group for the various challenges they face (fears due to their immigration status, poverty, alcohol, violence, and sexual abuse) – from within a safe community, as they do not have easy access to established social programs offered to citizens. When new people come to the prayer events at the houses of prayer, the community always invites them to attend Holy Mass at the Basilica. And by the continued growth in our Hispanic population attending Mass on Sunday, we see that this outreach is bearing fruit!

The immediate need that prompted this meeting is that one of the houses of prayer, *Santa Cruz*, in the Oak Grove/Highland Park neighborhood, wants a new building that can accommodate more people for their Saturday night prayer meetings, praise concerts, and community dinners (normally 200+ people). Their current space is too small to house the growing number of attendees; it is hot; and it does not have sufficient parking or restrooms to meet the current needs.

These limitations mean that they cannot serve as many people as would like to come. Also, some people in the neighborhood want them to move. This prayer community would like to invest in a new facility that meets their needs. At the same time, our second and larger house of prayer, *Casa Inmaculada*, serves the East Lake neighborhood (about 300-400 people each Saturday), and it has its own needs. Finally, the Hispanic community of the parish as a whole has needs for space and otherwise, especially as we anticipate the loss of All Saints Academy. The leadership team discerned three primary needs:

1. Space (expanded, with additional rooms, kitchen, and sufficient parking and restrooms);
2. Integration with the Anglo community (language and community); and
3. Immigration resources (legal, tax, medical/dental services)

One of the leaders offered the following concluding thoughts: Even though our houses of prayer serve different groups/neighborhoods, we are not divided. We are united because we come together for the Holy Eucharist at the Basilica. We serve those who come to our houses of prayer with love, through the Word of God.

The group plans to meet again to discuss solutions. Before this meeting, we will be looking into legal and financial considerations for the proposed non-profit organization to purchase a building for one of the houses of prayer as well as to support our growing Hispanic parish ministries.

I am grateful to our Basilica Hispanic community for their missionary efforts to grow the kingdom of God. Thank you for the support of those who have joined our Help Our Immigrants cause. It was the ideas from this group that led to this meeting and discussion and - we hope - an eventual solution to the space needs. Please note that the signup list for this cause is available in the vestibule. By signing up, you will receive updates and notifications about opportunities to offer help using your talents and abilities as needs arise within our Hispanic community.

*Rev. J. David Carter*