

Active in immigration debate

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A thousand people turned out Jan. 12 to participate in the Reform Immigration FOR America Campaign at St. Paul Baptist Church.

There were so many attendees that the event had to be moved from the old sanctuary to the new one to accommodate everyone.

Faith leaders were in attendance as well as politicians and a few blacks that shared their support of immigration reform.

Maudia Melendez, executive director of the Jesus Ministry Inc. and a coordinator of the Charlotte event, said it was important for the Latin community to have hope.

“People have lost hope about immigration reform and just by looking at this crowd we see a ray of hope with the people,” Melendez said. “These people live in the shadows.”

Melendez spoke about programs like 287(g), which law enforcement uses to check the immigration status of those who have been arrested, in addition to others that have affected Latino communities.

“They don’t go out or drive for fear of being arrested,” Melendez said. “But by being here they are showing a huge effort in the hopes that in 2010 there may be immigration reform.”

She highlighted the importance of hosting the forum at an African American church, where Gregory K. Moss is pastor.

“We wanted to thank Pastor Moss because this is a predominant black church and to have this many Latinos in this church sends the message that our black brothers and sisters have also struggled in the past,” Melendez said. “But by coming together they overcame their hardships and we hope we will also overcome the hardships of immigration.”

Ruben Campillo, state director for Reform Immigration For America, shared that sentiment.

“African Americans understand many of the challenges that other races share,” Campillo said.

Campillo said immigration affects the whole community, not just Latinos, and the U.S. immigration system has been broken for too long.

“It’s time for our leaders to tackle reform,” Campillo said. “Maintaining the status quo does not reflect the true values of our country.”

LaWana Mayfield, the Mecklenburg Justice program coordinator for Grassroots Leadership, supports reform, but was not impressed by the lack of blacks in attendance.

“This is one of the largest African American churches. Where are all the members?” she said. “I’m calling all African American pastors to step up and do what you are required to do by God.”

Mayfield, who grew up in Miami, which has a large Latino population, said all ethnic groups should look at immigration reform from a religious aspect and do what the Bible says, which is to welcome everyone.

“We need to stop the anger and hatred,” she said. “Separating families and creating fear does not represent the America I know and love.”

Mayfield said more minorities should understand the struggles of all immigrants.

“I’m here because I recognize the important role I have in talking to other people and letting them know that the lies of immigration need to stop,” she said. “There are a lot of contributions made by immigrants specifically in Mecklenburg County.”

Mayfield said immigrants work jobs that Americans don’t want, and are paying taxes when they shop or eat at restaurants, but they never get the benefits.

“Charlotte was a welcoming community, we are supposed to be an international community...but all those roads have been shut down,” Mayfield said.

N.C. Sen. Nick Mackey and Antoine M. Ensley, who is running for Mecklenburg County sheriff, were also present.

“I think we need reform,” Ensley said. “But it shouldn’t be at the detriment to families.”

To find out more about the Campaign to Reform Immigration FOR America, visit: www.reformimmigrationforamerica.org.