

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Immigration: an economic and religious issue

Note: In 2012, MLive.com was a partner in the "Year of Interfaith Understanding" initiative. The success of that project led to an ongoing effort to build interfaith understanding in West Michigan. This column is one such effort. It is coordinated by Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University, and is written by Kindschi and others in the interfaith community.

By Douglas Kindschi

Last week, Gov. Rick Snyder named West Michigan businessman Bing Goei director of a new Michigan Office for New Americans. This office, announced in the governor's State of the State address on Jan. 16, is being created to welcome immigrants into the economy of Michigan. Snyder hopes to receive federal permission



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Nationally, and in Michigan, the economic argument for immigration reform is being made by Republicans as well as Democrats.

"I'm probably the most pro-immigration governor in the country, and I'm proud of that," Snyder, a Republican, recently said.

Earlier, Mayor George Heartwell, in a guest column for MLive.com, made his argument for the economic benefits that would come from a more enlightened immigration policy. He also honored Goei as a "Champion of Diversity" in his State of the City speech last month.

for 50,000 additional immigrants to live and work in Detroit, especially those with advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The economic and political case for reform has been made from the perspective of opportunities for farm workers as well as the case for immigrants as entrepreneurs. While these arguments can be powerful, there also is an argument to be made from an interfaith perspective.

It frequently is noted that all of our major faith traditions call for hospitality to the stranger. For example:

■ "When a stranger lives with you in your land, do not ill-treat him. The stranger who lives with you shall be treated like the native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33).

■ "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger

and you invited me in" (Matthew 25:34-35).

■ "Be kind to parents, and the near kinsman, and to orphans, and to the needy, and to the neighbor who is of kin, and to the neighbor who is a stranger" (Quran 4:36).

As our world becomes more and more interconnected, and as our country continues growing in diversity, the question of getting along with those who are different from us will become increasingly critical. Our faith traditions cannot sit on the sidelines but must inform our attitudes as well as our political understanding.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it, "Can we recognize God's image in one who is not in my image?" Tolerance is a beginning. But if we are to be true to our faith traditions, we should go beyond that to hospitality, understanding and respect.

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