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***THE IMPACT OF RELIGION ON IMMIGRATION:
When the Focus Turns From Gateway Cities To Main Street, USA***

September 19, 2007 - Three notable scholars and advocates addressed the interplay of immigration and religion in American society today during an audio news conference. **Kim Bobo**, a leading Chicago organizer of the New Sanctuary Movement, joined forces with immigration and religion scholars and authors **Peggy Levitt** and **Manuel Vasquez** to discuss how local cities and states are responding to immigration in the absence of comprehensive national immigration policy and the role that religious institutions are playing in the outcomes of that debate.

"This is an important crisis for our country, and the religious community is stepping up in many ways," said Kim Bobo, Executive Director of Interfaith Worker Justice. Bobo is also an organizer of Chicago's New Sanctuary Movement, which is rooted in the belief that untold numbers of immigrants need support, refuge and sanctuary – a sacred place for worship and renewal. Bobo described how religious institutions and clergy members are compelled by a set of moral principles grounded in their faith to welcome immigrants and advocate for justice. While explaining the faith-based perspective on immigration, Bobo stated, "We serve a God who doesn't just care about people in one set of borders."

Manuel Vasquez, Associate Professor at the University of Florida, discussed how religious institutions are emerging as a major force in the immigration debate as more immigrants move into America's heartland, stating, "Churches and religious institutions are central to the process of inter-ethnic relations." Vasquez is currently researching Latinos' impact in cities and towns not traditionally accustomed to a large Latino presence, their impact on race relations, and religious institutions' role in helping or hindering communication among different groups. His findings show a clear tension between African Americans and Latino communities in Atlanta, as well as a basis for a new civil rights movement for immigrants.

In addition, Peggy Levitt, Wellesley College Sociology Professor and author of the new book *God Needs No Passport*, discussed how past policy discussions are missing a key component of today's immigrant experience. "The debates we have about the immigrant experience are very much based on out-of-date assumptions," Levitt said, referring to the transnational lifestyle of immigrants in a globalized world. Levitt's research has shown that instead of turning in their passport, more and more immigrants today live transnationally, keeping feet in both their home and adopted countries. As religion has become a globalized practice and plays an important role in immigrants' acclimation process, Levitt urges Americans to comprehend that, "Immigration is a transnational, or cross-border, phenomenon, and religion is an underutilized resource to address the issue."

To learn more about these ideas and listen to a recording of the audio news conference, visit www.religionandpluralism.org. A transcript of the audio news conference will be made available on this site as soon as possible.

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