

Application for AAR Regional Development Grant

Project Title: Immigration Reform: Linking the Academy to Activism

Location: Whittier College, Whittier, California

Date: Sunday March 27, 2011

Target audience: Scholars, teachers, community activists, and lay persons engaged in the study and teaching of issues relating to religion and immigration.

Professional Resources: Selected activists and scholars working in the field of religion and immigration.

Background: Immigration reform is currently at the top of the political agenda in the U.S. Stories about anti-immigrant legislation appear daily, and are particularly important in the border area of the Western Region AAR. This is an issue of compelling urgency for those teaching courses in Religion in America, Moral Theology, Social Ethics, and Religion and Society who are trying to address immigrant issues in a rapidly changing landscape. What are the issues that must be covered and how should educators teach them in the classroom?

Project Description: This project seeks to link scholars in religion and activists in the field of immigration reform. Three activities are planned for the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Western Region, to be held at Whittier College March 26-28, 2011. First, the keynote address for the regional meeting will be given by Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, a professor at USC and author of *God's Heart Has No Borders: How Religious Activists are Working for Immigrant Rights*. This lecture is funded by the AAR/WR, and is the major talk scheduled for the meeting. The second element is a panel comprised of activists from Arizona and California who will discuss their work in immigrant rights and immigration reform, and who will suggest resources for scholars to use in the classroom. Contacts have been made with Dolores Mission, La Placita, and American Friends Service Committee in Los Angeles, and with immigrant activists in Arizona. Finally, a panel of immigrants will provide testimonies of their experiences: why they came; what they have found; what they recommend. These immigrants may be drawn from refugees from Sudan and Myanmar, as well as from Latin America.

Benefit to the Scholarly Community: The primary benefit to the scholarly community is to provide the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge from experts—immigrants and activists alike. This topic is of crucial importance to a wide spectrum of courses in religious studies, and the project can serve as a model for members of AAR in other regions who want to make immigrant rights and reform meaningful by becoming better informed. By providing information about immigration and the role that religious institutions and activists are playing, scholars will gain the tools needed to integrate theory and practice with their students.

Promotion Plan: In order to achieve these goals, we plan to promote the project throughout the AAR/WR via email blasts, contacts through section chairs, and personal recruiting. By using the AAR/WR keynote speaker as part of this project, national funds are

used wisely as both a regional event and a funded project. This allows for more dialogue between scholars and activists. By integrating the panels into the Latin American Religions Section of the AAR/WR it will already have a dedicated audience. We want to expand this, however, to others who are teaching ethics, contemporary religious issues, moral theology and immigrant rights.

How does this project address the underserved? Immigrants are among the most abused and misunderstood population in the nation today. Access to accurate information about their situation is not available through mainstream media. Immigrants have been demonized by anti-immigrant vigilante organizations and by state legislatures.

How does this project fit the criteria of broad service to the region? While immigration reform is being discussed nationally, the Western Region of the AAR is particularly affected by anti-immigrant sentiments. Faculty are teaching students who may have undocumented status, and so are involved indirectly if not directly. These scholars need to hear from activists and immigrants themselves in order to challenge students responsibly and to lead discussions in the classroom.

How can this project be adapted to other regions? This project can easily be replicated in other regions. What is needed is a commitment to locate activists and immigrant populations in order to pull together similar panels. We will provide whatever materials we develop to the Regionally-Elected Director to share with the national organization.

Budget

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| Honorarium - Keynote Speaker | in-kind | |
| Honoraria - 4 Activist Panelists | | |
| Honoraria - 4 Immigrant Panelists | | |
| Travel (airfare from Arizona and overnight lodging; gas from LA and San Diego) | | |
| Scholarship/registration to AAR/WR meeting or invited panelists/activists and graduate students/ effort to reach out to newer members | | |
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| TOTAL | | |

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