

NORTH TEXAS CATHOLIC



Continuing the conversation builds trust within community

By Susan Moses

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Martin Martinez, right, speaks with a police officer following a community meeting hosted by Arlington Mansfield Organizing Strategy (AMOS) at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington, Sept. 12. (NTC photo/Ben Torres)

ARLINGTON — In today's climate, the social barometer reads somewhere between indifferent and hostile toward people different than ourselves. Leaders from Arlington to the Vatican are attempting to shift the prevailing attitudes towards unity by promoting encounters between immigrants and the community.

Arlington Mansfield Organizing Strategy (AMOS) has sponsored two forums at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington to introduce two groups whose relationship is often plagued by misinformation and fear: the

police and the immigrant community. At the first meeting, several police officers representing four cities answered questions about Senate Bill 4, known as the “anti-sanctuary cities law.”

Olga Rivera, a parishioner at St. Joseph, explained many people were afraid of the new law (most of which is currently blocked while being challenged in federal court). At the first meeting, the officers explained the law would not impact how the police do their job, which calmed the fears and anxiety of the immigrants.

Arlington Police Lieutenant Donald Fulbright said police appreciated the opportunity to communicate directly with residents of the community they serve. “We want to build growth with the community, not do anything to divide it,” he assured the predominantly Hispanic crowd.

The second forum, on Sept. 12, was called to “continue the relationship,” according to meeting organizer Socorro Perales. “Police serve us and keep the community safe. There is a unique, genuine need for this relationship to continue so we can build trust,” she pointed out.

The police suggested several possibilities to strengthen bonds, including National Night Out, Coffee with a Cop, and police athletic leagues. Several officers also stressed sharing with friends and families that police serve the community and want to stand united with it, not in opposition.



A woman and her family bow their heads during a prayer at a community meeting hosted by Arlington Mansfield Organizing Strategy (AMOS) at St. Joseph Parish in Arlington. (NTC photo/Ben Torres)

Perales cited Pope Francis’ teaching on the Road to Emmaus as a powerful inspiration to organize the meetings. In his May 27 general audience, the pope likened Jesus, who walked and talked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples, to the Church who “encounters persons, with their hopes and their disappointments, sometimes heavy. The Church listens to everyone’s story, as they emerge from the chest of the personal conscience, to then offer the Word of Life, the witness of the love of God, faithful love to the end. And then a person’s heart burns again with hope.”

Pope Francis frequently promotes a culture of encounter in his addresses and writings, and he has given shelter to several refugee families in Vatican apartments over the last several months. On Sept. 27, the pope will launch “Share the Journey,” a two-year campaign to increase opportunities for migrants and communities to meet and understand each other.

Bishop Michael Olson is responding to the Holy Father’s call to welcome the stranger with an initial “Share the Journey” session at Catholic Charities Fort Worth on Sept. 27. The bishop will listen and learn as immigrants from several countries share their stories.

As for AMOS, their next step is training sessions where leaders will determine issues that would benefit from police and the community working together. Then, the police and immigrant population will meet again to increase their connection and support the greater community.

Ongoing encounters between immigrants and the police are vital, according to Perales, who said, “We cannot act if we are not in conversation, if we are not in relationship, if we do not know one another.”