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Program trains leaders to put faith into action

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More than 200 parishioners representing 21 parishes within the Diocese of Dallas participated March 29-31 in a leadership training program aimed at "Welcoming the Stranger." The leadership formation program, held at Catholic Charities Dallas, was sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and organized by Dallas Area Interfaith.

The program, which is being offered in both English and Spanish in the 15 dioceses in Texas, as well as New Mexico, Arizona, and other areas, focuses on "leadership in the Latino community, so that the church can respond to the immigrant community."

"We can't respond to the community, if we don't have capable leaders," Josephine Lopez Paul, lead organizer for Dallas Area Interfaith, said.

Auxiliary Bishop Gregory Kelly of Dallas praised the new leaders in attendance for opening their hearts to God's call.

"I'm very grateful for your willingness to learn and to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ," Bishop Kelly said. "It is important to understand ourselves as leaders and citizens who take steps to help the people in their community and church."

Jessica Barron, 30, a parishioner of San Juan Diego Catholic Church, saw the training as a way to put her faith

into action, especially when it came to addressing ongoing issues concerning immigration.

"The Bible tells us, 'without deed or action, there is no faith,'" Barron said. "There is a lot of fear and misleading information. We need to attend programs like this where we can learn and then teach others."

Margarito Garcia, 31, praised the collaborative effort the program encouraged.

"I learned that working together is more likely to be successful," said Garcia, also a parishioner at San Juan Diego Catholic Church.

Garcia, who participated in the training program two years ago and is part of a leadership group in the Diocese of Dallas, helped organize a November 2017 meeting where an idea for parish identification cards was accepted.

Joe Rubio, organizer of the Industrial Areas Foundation, a network of faith and community-based organizations that receives some funding through a grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, said understanding what the Catholic faith teaches plays a role in how the faithful can aid with the nation's immigrant community.

"Catholic teachings become important in public life, particularly on immigration because we have so much tension around that...we need to form relationships of solidarity and advocate for a more welcoming and receptive environment," Rubio said.



JENNA TETER/The Texas Catholic

Auxiliary Bishop Greg Kelly visits with Adargisa Mena, right, of St. Luke Catholic Church in Irving during a Dallas Area Interfaith training workshop at Catholic Charities Dallas March 28.