

SPIRITUAL LIFE

Local faith leaders support undocumented workers

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Leaders of 11 Silicon Valley faith-based and nonprofit groups are scheduled to convene on Zoom 6 p.m. today (May 5) to call on Gov. Gavin Newsom to do more for undocumented essential workers during the pandemic.

More than 1,000 people are expected to participate, including members of the **California Industrial Areas Foundation** and several state legislators.

Congregation Beth Am of Los Altos Hills is among the leaders of the Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee coordinating the event. Other participants include Christ Episcopal Church of Los Altos and Trinity United Methodist Church of Mountain View.

Organizers said one out of 10 workers is an undocumented immigrant. The labor such immigrants contribute is overwhelmingly in jobs deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic – agriculture, food production, food distribution, food service, child care and elder care, among other industries. The federal government has excluded undocumented immigrants from relief, and Newsom’s initiatives to date provide only small cash payments to fewer than 7% of the state’s 2.2 million immigrant workers.

“This is morally wrong. Immigrant workers pay \$3.2 billion in state and local taxes. They should not have to rely on charity to keep their families fed and safe,” said the Rev. Shelley Booth Denney, rector of The Episcopal Church in Almaden. “It is also careless from a public health and economic perspective. This isn’t just the right thing to do, it’s good for Silicon Valley’s entire economy.”

Even without jobs, many in the undocumented community continue to give back. Santa Maria Urban Ministry in San Jose reported an uptick in volunteers. Immigrant workers who are worried about paying rent and utilities but who have come out to help others in their situation include Luis and Gerardo, who worked in construction; Edgar and Eliseo, who lost their jobs in a local food court; and Manuel and Lucia, bakery workers who find themselves unemployed due amid the pandemic.

“Immigrant workers literally feed and take care of Silicon Valley’s families,” said Congregation Beth Am Associate Rabbi Jonathan Prosnit. “Our congregation is especially concerned about the child care workforce, which was on thin ice even before the pandemic. Home-based providers – with their low margins and reliance on immigrant caregivers – are at particular risk. If they go under, Silicon Valley’s parents will not be able to return to work once the shelter-in-place order is lifted, especially those with infants and toddlers who are primarily served by in-home programs and family friend and neighbor providers.”

The faith-based organizations plan to ask Newsom to expand the California Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to all workers who pay taxes, including a large number of undocumented immigrants. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cites an analysis of the economic impact of a federal EITC in California, which found that payments contributed to more than \$5 billion in business sales in the state and helped add nearly 30,000 jobs.

Meeting participants represent eight organizations from across the state, all of which are affiliates of the Industrial Areas Foundation, a leadership development and organizing network.

The Silicon Valley Sponsoring Committee is a nonpartisan network of civic associations, faith-based organizations and nonprofit groups that develop the leadership capacity of their members to effect change on a larger scale than they could alone. Funders include the Catholic Campaign for Human Development and the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real