Diocese, Valley Interfaith team up to offer a new kind of ID

By PAUL BINZ | The Valley Catholic

PHARR — Bishop Daniel E. Flores joined Valley Interfaith leaders Sept. 24 in Las Milpas to introduce the “parish identification strategy,” a program to provide all members of Diocese of Brownsville parishes a way to identify themselves to local law enforcement regardless of their legal documentation or status.

Speaking to a packed room of nearly 500 people at the Pharr Research and Development Center in Las Milpas, Bishop Flores said the need for identification has a profound significance in people’s lives—and more so for the marginalized immigrant.

“I would like to emphasize that the ID means something more than simply its implication that you have an identification, an address, a picture or something to show perhaps if you’re stopped at a red light or for some other reason,” Bishop Flores said. “It means something much deeper: ‘I belong to a parish, and so in this community, I am not living in the shadows.’”

Several local officials joined in the effort, including police chiefs and officials from Pharr, Edinburg and McAllen. Emceeing the event, Oblate Father Kevin Collins, pastor of St. Eugene de Mazenod Parish in Brownsville, asked them to respond to three questions:

“While we know there is no substitute for a government-issued ID, could an officer in their discretion accept a photo ID—for example, of a school or a church ID—in order to identify themselves? That’s first.”

“Second, will you train your police officers to recognize multiple forms of ID?”

“In turn, Edinburg Police Chief Cesar Torres, “Third, will you continue to work with us to build trust and to address crime together?”

As Bishop Daniel E. Flores looks on, Sister Norma Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, unveils a check for $10,000 from her agency to help fund a new program to issue ID cards from parishes.
Catholic radio on air in Harlingen in English, throughout Valley in Spanish

By MICHAEL SWARTZ
The Valley Catholic

HARLINGEN — Motorists driving around Harlingen can now tune into Catholic Christian radio, broadcasting on 99.9 FM (KHQR-LP) in English.

In addition, Catholic radio is now on the air in Spanish throughout the Rio Grande Valley, on 88.9 FM in Cameron County and on 88.1 FM in Hidalgo County (through Relevant Radio).

The new radio stations — all of which broadcast Catholic radio in the Valley, especially for Cameron and Hidalgo counties.

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Pharr Police Chief Jose Luengo and McAllen Police Captain Irene Luna all agreed, affirming broad governmental support at the local level.

The parish ID program originated about a year and a half ago in Farmers Branch, a suburb of Dallas.

“They noticed that very few people were going to Mass,” said Jose Hinojosa of Valley Interfaith and a parishioner at Holy Spirit Parish in McAllen, recounting the origins of the program.

“They asked the people why, and they said they were afraid to leave their homes.”

So many of the residents of the city were undocumented, they seldom ventured out other than to go to work or to the grocery store, and avoided contact with police even when they came victims ofcrime.

The police chief there was asked if his department would accept a local parish ID with photo, name and address, and the chief said yes, Hinojosa said.

Today, some 10,000 people in Pharr are carrying the parish ID cards, Father Collins said.

A similar situation exists in the Valley.

“We spoke with immigrant members of our parish, St. Eugene’s in Edinburg,” Rosie Hinojosa, a Valley Interfaith leader from Brownsville, said.

“They are afraid to drop off their children at school or buy groceries.”

“When we asked them what they most need, they told us they need an identification,” she said.

“They now that they know the diocese and their parishes are working with them on this strategy, we see hope in their faces.”

Father Collins explained the card’s limitations to the crowd.

“The ID is not a get-out-of-jail free card; it does not give you permission to drive; it is not a government ID in any way,” he said.

“It is simply an ID that says you are a member of the parish that’s on there; your date of birth is there; your address is there. It expires. You must be a member of the church at least three months ahead of time before an ID will be issued.”

During the meeting, Sister Norma Pimentel, director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, presented a check for $10,000 from that organization as starter money to finance the program.

Those issuing the card will not be limited to Catholic parishes, Father Collins said.

Other denominations and organizations will also be able to participate in the program.

“Too much of the focus is on the national and state conversation regarding immigration,” said Franciscan Father Tom Lazzara, pastor of Holy Family Parish in Edinburg.

“This is a local strategy that gives my own parishioners the dignity of being able to identify themselves to a police officer.

“This will positively affect them. That is what excites me,” Father Lazzara said.

Legal community ready for Red Mass on Oct. 23

The Valley Catholic

EDINBURG — The 26th annual Red Mass, which celebrates the legal profession, is scheduled at 6 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 23 at Holy Family Church, 1315 E. Champion St. in Edinburg.

The procession will begin from Edinburg Memorial Park and proceed to the church. Bishop Daniel E. Flores will celebrate the Mass and offer a blessing to all protectors and administrators of the law, including lawyers, judges, government officials and law enforcement, as well as their families and support staffs.

The Mass is open to people of all faiths.

The Red Mass is a time-honored tradition in the Catholic Church that dates back to 13th century Paris.

The celebrant, concelebrants, deacons and honored guests enter the church in procession wearing red vestments or red clothing, symbolizing the Holy Spirit’s role in guiding those who seek and pursue justice in their daily lives.

The Red Mass, held annually in the fall in the Rio Grande Val- ley, usually alternating between Hidalgo and Cameron counties.

The theme chosen by this year’s committee, led by Judge Rene Rodriguez-Betancourt from the 449th state District Court, focuses on caring for families and the elderly.

For more information on the Red Mass, please contact Melissa Flores at (956) 381-0744 or via email melissa.flores@co.hidalgo.tx.us.

Paul Binz | The Valley Catholic

Bishop Daniel E. Flores, above, spoke about the deeper implications of identity at the Sept. 24 meeting introducing parish ID cards. Father Kevin Collins, below, far left, detailed the card’s restrictions. Law enforcement officials, below center, from three Hidalgo County cities were on hand to endorse the program as a crowd estimated at 450 people packed the Pharr Research and Development Center in Las Milpas.

The Valley Catholic email: editor@cdob.org

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