

San Mateo County Times

San Mateo County clergy helping undocumented families stay together

By Christine Morente
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SAN MATEO — Yvette Jimenez and her five siblings lost their father in December after Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested him outside their home and deported him to Mexico.

The kids, living in a family shelter with their undocumented mother, are scared she will be taken away, too.

To help her family, 17-year-old Yvette Jimenez has taken a part-time job.

"We have to find a way to live and support ourselves," she said. She will be a senior at Aragon High School this fall.

The family's story came out when the San Francisco Organizing Project held a town-hall meeting in March.

The organization, a federation of 40 congregations and schools throughout 14 San Francisco neighborhoods, met with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-California, and Congressman Luis Gutierrez, D-Illinois, to urge them to make immigration reform a national priority.

On that day, 15 SFOP clergy leaders prayed to transform ICE practices, while Jimenez and two other American teens told stories of their raided homes and deported parents.

Pelosi denounced the raids and proclaimed that separating families was "un-American," said Ramon Gomez, a Peninsula Interfaith Action community organizer.

PIA is a San Carlos-based network of 31 congregations in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties and an affiliate of PICO National Network.

All of the groups are amassing stories to send to Pelosi and President Barack Obama.

Also, people are scheduling local congressional visits to let Congress know that families want immigration reform.

U.S. Reps. Jackie Speier, D-Hillsborough, and Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, have voiced their support to Jimenez.

Jimenez said she wants the 12 million to 13 million undocumented immigrants in the country to know they are not alone.

"We're going to make change," she said. "We're going to be persistent."

In June, Obama met with members of Congress to work out a comprehensive immigration reform package.

It calls for provisions such as providing "a path" to legalizing the millions of undocumented people and increasing border patrol, according to reports.

Mike Mullery, a former immigration attorney, said any reform would only act as a Band-Aid.

He said the only solution is to help build Mexico's economy so there are jobs for its people.

Sixty percent to 70 percent of all undocumented immigrants in the U.S. come from Mexico, he said.

"They don't want to be here," said Mullery, who is a member of the Congregational Church of San Mateo. "But they want to eat, be clothed and provide an education for their kids."

Jimenez's father provided for his family before he was arrested by ICE agents. He boarded a plane that evening for Mexico.

His wife — who is undocumented and wishes to remain anonymous in this story — was allowed to stay with her children.

However, Jimenez's mother is expected to have a hearing in November to determine if she will stay in the country or not. She's lived in the country since she was 15 years old.

"We don't want our mom to be deported," Jimenez said.

With the father gone, the family was forced out of their home.

For two weeks, they lived in hotels with Samaritan House's help. Now, they're at Haven Family House in Menlo Park but have to move out at the end of the month.

Mullery is confident people's voices will be heard.

"You trust in God to allow your efforts to bring about the best for God's children," he said. "We have to advocate for more than justice for the 12 million (undocumented immigrants) here. We have to advocate for a solution to the problem."

From 3 to 4:30 p.m., July 18, PIA will hold a public meeting with state Assemblyman Ira Ruskin, D-Los Altos, and other guests at First United Methodist Church, 2916 Broadway in Redwood City. For details or to RSVP, call 650-592-9181, ext. 10.

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