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Jesuit university to honor immigrant activist

by NCR Staff

Immigration and the Church

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Isabel Castillo (Jon Styer/Eastern Mennonite University)

University of San Francisco press release:

SAN FRANCISCO -- The University of San Francisco (USF) will confer an honorary doctorate on Isabel Castillo, an activist whose high-profile fight for federal immigration legislation could have her deported at any time.

USF president Stephen A. Privett, S.J., will bestow the degree during graduation ceremonies for undergraduate students in art, architecture, performing arts and social sciences on Friday, May 20 at noon on the USF campus in the heart of San Francisco.

Castillo is a passionate advocate of the DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors), which would give legal standing to undocumented college students whose parents brought them to the country illegally when they were children.

She has received national attention after leading rallies, organizing a march on Washington and staging a non-violent sit-in at Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's office, which led to her arrest, but not deportation.

An undocumented immigrant herself, Castillo says, "I'm not ashamed or scared. I'm not a criminal. I'm no longer going to hide in the shadows." A documentary film about her struggle is in progress.

Isabel was just six years old when her family came to the U.S. from Mexico. Despite her exceptional academic record in public schools, she had difficulties gaining admission to college because she had no social security number, and she could not apply for state and federal financial aid.

She eventually earned a bachelor's degree with high academic honors in social work from Eastern Mennonite University. But, without a social security number, it is impossible for her to land a job in that field.

"We honor Isabel Castillo for her selfless courage in advancing the cause of undocumented college students and to underscore the fundamental unfairness of our denying a path to citizenship to some of the most motivated college students in the country," said USF President Stephen A. Privett, S.J. "Isabel challenges our graduates to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired here to fashion a more just world for all."

In honoring Ms. Castillo with the degree of Doctor of Humane letters, the University of San Francisco recognizes her daring work, drawing attention to the need for comprehensive immigration reform in the United States.

Last August, USF joined the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities across the country, along with the nation's Catholic Bishops, to formally petition the federal government for a more humane and just immigration system.

The University of San Francisco was established in 1855, making it San Francisco's oldest university. It is consistently ranked as one of the most ethnically diverse universities in the country. USF is committed to being a premier Jesuit Catholic, urban university with a global perspective that educates leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world.

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With nearly 9,600 students, the university offers undergraduate, graduate, and professional students the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as persons and professionals, and the values and sensitivity necessary to be men and women for others.

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