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In Salt Lake City, Catholics focus on immigration

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NCR Today

SALT LAKE CITY -- The U.S. Catholic bishops' immigration conference in Salt Lake City this morning focused on details about current laws and legislation, as well as the status of enforcement and concerns from people who work in immigration-related areas.

The focus of the conference is to closely look at state and local immigration initiatives. The conference dives into detail, rather than just brushing over general immigration facts.

The hosts of the conference are the Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), the U.S. bishops' conference, and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC).

Panelists for the first session today included Karen Lucas, an advocacy attorney from CLINIC; Tyler Moran, policy director at the National Immigration Law Center; Wendy Cervantes, vice president of immigration and child rights policy at First Focus.

E-Verify was discussed in length (E-Verify has appeared in many immigration laws) in the first session today. Moran from the National Immigration Law Center listed five strategies her organization used at a federal and state level to work against E-Verify. From the list, she highlighted what implementing the program would cost to small businesses.

How laws affect children and families was also discussed in this and the next session (ex: what physical and mental changes happen in children when one (or both) parent is deported).

Later that day, the Secure Communities program raised a lot of questions in the Q&A session.

Panelists included Laura Olson from the Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties at the Department of

Homeland Security and Don Kerwin, executive director at the Center for Migration Studies (originally scheduled to be a respondent to John Sandweg, the special counselor to DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano; Sandweg is expected tomorrow).

"The Obama administration is on pace to deport 1.5 million persons over four years. Just by way of comparison, the last 20 years of Republican presidents, we deported in total 2.3 million," Kerwin said. More on that to come.

The Civil Rights and Civil Liberties office works to cover all activities that the Department of Homeland Security is involved in, which is more than just immigration, Olson said. She works in the immigration section. Her office is working closely with ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) on awareness briefings that go to state and local officials regarding Secure Communities, she said.

Relationships between immigrants and local police forces was also discussed.

[This is just a snippet of what is going on at the immigration conference in Salt Lake City today. Visit NCRonline.org throughout the next few days for more.]

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