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Poll: Faith communities on board with immigration reform

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Recently, I interviewed Robert P. Jones, founder and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute, on a new poll his firm conducted about the attitudes of people of faith on immigration reform.

The results were surprising. That poll found that every major faith community in the United States -- even those traditionally conservative on other issues -- is on board, and not only with immigration reform. They favor even the most controversial aspect of proposed reforms: granting a path to citizenship to undocumented immigrants.

This lineup favoring a path to citizenship includes Mormons (63 percent in favor) and evangelical Protestants (56 percent in favor). For the record, 74 percent of Hispanic Catholics favor a path to citizenship, as do 62 percent of white Catholics.

This poll is another reason to hope that immigration reform is politically possible in 2013. The real driver of reform is, of course, the Republican desire to regain some of the Hispanic vote they lost resoundingly in the 2012 election. But groups like Mormons and evangelicals are an important part of the Republican base. Their majority support for the path to citizenship is vital in providing Republican members of Congress with a sense of electoral safety moving forward.

Interestingly, Jones says the values behind this stance are less about Scriptural passages ("You shall welcome the stranger and the alien") than about protecting the dignity of every person (affirmed by 82 percent in the poll) and keeping families together (affirmed by 84 percent). Nearly 7 in 10 (69 percent) say "providing immigrants with the same opportunity I would want for my family" is also an underlying value.

During the interview, Jones noted Catholic and Jewish support remains very strong because both groups have "immigrant memories." They cite their grandparents, their ethnic heritage and family history.

The good news: We are still a nation of immigrants, and by and large, we are proud of it.

Read the findings from this survey here.

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