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Group prays for 'compassionate and comprehensive' immigration reform

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RACINE - A group of about 20 prayed for a just immigration policy two days before Arizona's new immigration law is poised to go into effect.

The Racine Interfaith Coalition held a 30-minute bilingual prayer service Tuesday in light of the new immigration law set to go into effect Thursday amid nationwide controversy.

The Arizona law requires immigrants to carry identification and police to determine the legal status of those suspected of being illegal immigrants while enforcing other laws.

Nineteen people gathered to pray for a "compassionate and comprehensive immigration reform" at Cristo Rey Church, 800 Wisconsin Ave., Tuesday night.

"It's an opportunity for us to gather and pray for constructive and helpful change in immigration policy that meets the needs of undocumented immigrants and the citizens of the country," said the Rev. Michael Mueller, organizer of the coalition sponsoring the service. "I see that there is a lot of fear and concern around the issue and divided opinions."

The group prayed for God's blessings upon their "undocumented brothers and sisters," asking for legislators and representatives to be sensitive to their needs and for an end to "violent police abuse and social discrimination." They also prayed for citizens to be moved by the injustice against illegal immigrants, for businesses to not abuse migrant workers and for the families torn apart by deportation.

"It's a complicated situation," said Mueller, pastor of St. Andrew Lutheran Church at 1015 4 Mile Road. "The kind of racial profiling that the law seems to make it easy to do is a concern."

Ricardo Fierro, 32, of Racine, a salesman, said he was concerned the "unfair" Arizona law, which he said treats all Mexicans like criminals, would spread to other states.

He noted it was a small crowd Tuesday but said they represent the Hispanic community.

"We want equality," he said.

Cristo Rey Deacon Roberto Fuentes said he has heard people's stories of suffering and fears of being deported especially when their families are with them.

"To see that and experience that, it makes me sad, it makes me want to do something," he said. "I can't just sit there and do nothing. So that's why today we prayed for God's help."