The annual Langley Park Day takes place this year on Sunday, May 7th from Noon until 4:30 p.m. The site is the Langley Park Community Center, both its building and (if weather permits) its grounds. The day features:

- A health fair with doctors, nurses, and others screening for good health and advising on how to address certain health problems!
- A folklórico of music, dance, and song – from step dancing to Columbia folk dances and much more!
- Children’s activities – including a moon bounce, face painting, arts and crafts, and much more!
- College advisors – to focus on the advantages of completing high school and continuing on to college!
- Legal consultants – in case there are difficulties with an employer, la migra, and more!
- Food and craft vendors – lots of good food as well as crafts!
- And more!

**SO MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW!**

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**AT THE RALLY FOR IMMIGRANT RIGHTS**

March 7th was the date of an impressive rally in DC seeking congressional legislation that would not be punitive to immigrants or those who help them. Fully 40,000 people came to the capitol to call for a positive change of direction, that is, immigration reform that recognizes the critical importance of immigrants to the US economy, society, and culture.

The rally was organized by the National Capital Immigration Coalition, and it drew participants from across the three-state area and beyond. Friend Juan Carlos Ruiz was a key organizer of the local rally, and clearly his work must be judged a success.

From the Washington Post (6 March 2006): “Thousands of people massed outside the U.S. Capitol yesterday to protest proposed federal legislation that they contend would allow law enforcement authorities to prosecute social service workers, doctors and other professionals who help illegal immigrants. “Chanting ‘Si se puede!’ (‘Yes you can!’) and holding signs that proclaimed ‘We are not Criminals,’ the crowd roared as speakers derided the legislation and proclaimed immigrants the long-standing backbone of the nation’s workforce.”

One immigrant participant said to BLP, “All that immigrants want is an opportunity to work and to live with their families.”

Of course, there is no guarantee that the rally influenced congressmen; therefore, there is no guarantee that legislation will encourage immigrants to remain in the USA and others to join them. What would happen if immigrants disappeared from the US? There would be many changes; three of them include a narrowing of our cultural richness, a severe lack of workers, and a demographic structure that would have too few young people to sustain our nation’s vitality.

Anyone who has strong views about the legislation being drafted by the Senate should call Senator Specter, the Judiciary Committee Chair, **right away** (tel. 202 224-5225) to let him know if you favor positive immigration reform that provides options for permanence among long-term law-abiding US residents, and if you believe that the vast majority of immigrants in the US, with or without documents, are contributing positively to a better life in this country.
THE FOOD VENDORS ARE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL!

Some mobile van food vendors and sidewalk fruit vendors have conducted their businesses in Langley Park for almost a decade, but if some county officials get their way, most of them will be forced out of business. That’s because these officials propose that only about one-third of the mobile vendors will be allowed to sell their food, and the locations of their vans will be sharply restricted. Furthermore, the women’s businesses selling fruits and drinks on a handful of busy corners within Langley Park will be forced to close or possibly herded into a yet-to-be selected small market area.

There is a political reality to the officials’ positions: Comparatively few vendors and their customers vote in local elections. Politicians know how to count votes.

The BLP staff members asked a number of area residents to explain what was happening, and the most common theme was expressed by Miguel: “Some people are not proud of their culture.” We hope that is not so.

But why is there a need for so many vendors on the streets and sidewalks of Langley Park? Because in the areas where they sell (census tracts 8056.01 and 8056.02), there are twice as many men in the 15-49 age group than there are women. [See “Demographics,” p. 3.] That is, thousands of men are on their own, and the reality is that most men are not good food shoppers and preparers. Indeed, they may not have access to kitchens. So the vendors fill the gap with hot meals, cold fruit, and perhaps a feeling that they are not alone.

Most of the people who complain about the food vendors live in houses (mostly in census tract 8057), and in this area there is close to an equal number of males and females.

The sword has not fallen yet, and for that we must thank the officials. Perhaps there are ways to save these micro-businesses. A group of vendors (see photo) recently met with Penelope Guzman, ALP members, and others to discuss strategies of survival. Some useful possibilities emerged from the meeting, and they will be sharpened in the coming weeks. We may yet maintain some of the benefits (affordable food, safety, community) the vendors bring to Langley Park.

If fifteen van vendors are permitted in the neighborhood then one possibility is to have one fruit vendor allowed to work adjacent to each food van. Of course, there would have to be protections so that the women would not be exploited (“give me money or else”).

Most of the vendors of Langley Park are in what is called the “informal sector” - long the focus of scholars and policy-making. John Cross, a leading scholar in this field, has written (International J. of Sociology and Social Policy, 20, #1-2): “The informal sector has grown in recent decades because it has successfully avoided control by a ‘modern’ state apparatus focused on the needs and concerns of large business enterprises.” This focus appears to characterize the Langley Park area.

Cross continues: “There is a danger that attempts to ‘formalize’ the informal sector will threaten the very factors that made it successful. ... Rather than lowering the formal system to the level of the informal sector, as some have advocated..., or raising the informal sector to the level of the formal sector, as many development projects focusing on the micro-business sector seem to attempt, our suggestion is that policy makers create ways in which formal and informal sectors can exist side-to-side. Continue to maintain and support the ‘modern’ formal system, but also allow spaces, or massive micro-business incubators, in which those overlooked by the formal sector can develop their own solutions to the poverty within which they live.” This idea appears to be applicable to Langley Park.

In an important New York Times article (12 March 2006), the ideas of Guatemalan architect Teddy Cruz are presented. The article ends this way: “What Mr. Cruz is arguing for is freedom — and an openness to the traditions of other cultures. His projects remind us that meaning can be found in places rooted in a personal experience distinct from our own. How far this spirit will move us depends on how much freedom we are willing to tolerate.”

Street vendors operate in countries throughout the world, including some parts of the United States. One example in this country is Palo Alto, California. The regulation there states: “Permits and licenses are issued by the Police Department to street vendors who sell flowers and food for immediate consumption.” What a nice approach. Perhaps officials of the city of Palo Alto are not afraid of the lively (and to some eyes, beautiful) streets that the vendors create. Perhaps they celebrate and enhance diversity.

IMMIGRATION: SENATORS SPEAK!

Patrick Leahy: “I am here to join in what I hope will be a bipartisan effort to make real progress on the fundamental issues that need to be considered if we are to have comprehensive immigration legislation this year.... Farmers in Vermont and across the country need help. Immigrants are hopeful that we will reaffirm the promise that America has long represented with our Statue of Liberty and its inspiring words of hope and comfort to the oppressed and downtrodden.”

Harry Reid: “Democrats support bipartisan, realistic, and workable immigration policies that will reunite families, provide for continued economic growth, protect the rights of American workers, and honor our values as a nation of immigrants.”

Hillary Clinton: “There must be a path to earned citizenship for those who are here, working hard, paying taxes, respecting the law, and willing to meet a high bar for becoming a citizen.”

Bill Frist, the Senate’s Republican leader: “Our country needs security at our borders in order to slow the flow of illegal immigration and make America safer from foreign criminals and terrorists.” Immigrants=criminals? Immigrants=terrorists?
TRUANCY*

In early March at Northwestern High School, parents, teachers, and others gathered to consider the threats to the next generation coming from truancy and dropping out. The keynote speaker and event organizer was Bill Ritter, former Northwestern principal and now in a senior oversight position in PGCPS. Ritter described the very troubling situation: He noted that among Latino immigrant youth the dropout rate was close to 50% (a University of Maryland estimate; the official figure is much less due to a flawed method of calculation), truancy flourishes, and county-wide, students are performing on practice tests such that only 9% of them would meet the standards for graduation that will be in place within a few years. In other words, there is an emergency.

Ritter: “This is a far more serious problem than most people want to discuss. To admit to the problem would require every adult in this county to change their behaviors in ways that they might not prefer to do.”

For the meeting, letters were sent to the parents of 632 students, grades 7-12, who each were absent 25 or more days from school – that is, truants. A majority of the students were failing all or most of their classes. Ritter: “We would expect that unless something drastic happens with these youngsters, they are very likely to become dropouts.”

What is the solution? Clearly, parents and other concerned adults must be supportive of stay-in-school programs. The school system must offer after-school, weekend, and summer enrichment programs, teachers must be of high quality and they must be retained, and much more. Remediation must start soon, and we all hope that the new PGCPS head (see below) will forge a path to student success. Clearly, we must all take immediate and dramatic steps to ensure that our students are in school every day, all day long. Let’s get behind Bill Ritter’s efforts now!

MINUTEMEN: KEEP OUT!

Councilman Will Campos, as reported in the Gazette (23 March), said that the Minutemen constitute a tiny minority in Maryland, in contrast with the widespread support of CASA de Maryland and other organizations meeting the needs (e.g., health) of immigrants regardless of their status. “I definitely take exception to a group outside of Prince George’s County coming to my county and district telling [us] what [we] can and cannot do with an issue in my community.”

AN IMMIGRANT MUSEUM?

On Sunday, March 12th, Professor Judith Freidenberg1 of the University of Maryland’s Department of Anthropology led a session at the Langley Park Community Center on the possibility of a small immigrant museum in Langley Park. The meeting was supported by the Smithsonian Institution’s Program in Latino History and Culture. There were three speakers: Freidenberg, Magdalena Mieri of the Smithsonian, and Bill Hanna of the University of Maryland and Action Langley Park. Approximately 30 people attended the session; some were area residents and others were university students or members of the faculty or staff. A Washington Post reporter covered the event. The next step may be to give consideration to the possibility of a photographic display in the Community Center of images from home countries as well as immigrant life in the USA.

* Thanks to Bill Ritter for contributions to this article.
1 Prof. Freidenberg may be contacted at jfreiden@anth.umd.edu

and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?”

And the king will say to them in reply, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

This one example in Matthew’s Gospel is foundational to our discipleship of Jesus Christ, and all that we do in service to those in need is done in light of our Baptismal commitments.

It is staggering for the federal government to stifle our spiritual and pastoral outreach to the poor, and to impose penalties for doing what our faith demands of us.

Throughout your Presidency you have encouraged Faith Based Organizations to be strong partners in meeting the needs of those in our communities. Yet, this Bill will produce the opposite effect.

You must speak out clearly and forcefully in opposition to these repressive – and impossible – aspects of any immigration reform efforts. Your personal leadership is needed to counter such ill-advised efforts.

Thanking you for giving strong leadership in this matter, and with kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ [Signed]

Know them: On a web site called Insanity Reigns, we read: “…our sovereign nation is facing an overwhelming illegal alien invasion by an Hispanic ‘migrant army’ that has defied our immigration laws and sovereignty. The invasion of America now totals 20-23 million and rising. Of that number, 90% are Hispanics who balkanize our cities and towns, and arrogantly corrupt our unifying national language while actively disrespecting our culture, society and country! All this is being accomplished while our complicit government shamelessly stands by blatantly ignoring the anarchy, by allowing Mexico’s human tsunami of illegal aliens to lawlessly overrun America… The invading illegal alien horde is diminishing our quality-of-life, overloading our hospitals, schools and jails, and bankrupting our taxpayer treasury.” (The United Patriots of America) Phew!

LANGLEY PARK’S DEMOGRAPHICS

The distribution of residents of Langley Park by gender and age is very unusual. Not surprisingly, there are more men than women, especially in the ages of employment. That’s typical of immigrant neighborhoods. But surprisingly, there are unusually few young teenagers. (See below.) How can this be explained? Are the parents afraid of what might happen to their teens? Send in your explanations!

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![Graph showing the age distribution of Langley Park residents](image-url)
TO THE RALLY!
By Xiomara Esteban*

On Sunday, March 5th, members of the Latino Student Union from the University of Maryland, College Park, headed to Langley Park to distribute flyers informing Latinos about the upcoming rally on Capitol Hill. The purpose of the rally was to speak out against the proposed anti-immigration legislation HR 4437. If passed, the bill could either directly or indirectly affect many of the students, turning family and friends into aggravated felons.

Eight students first headed to Langley Park McCormick Elementary School, where they hoped to distribute flyers when Mass let out at noon. Flyers were already being distributed there, but they knew there were many other places for them to go and speak with Langley Park residents who would be interested in their urgent call to unite. They were told another Mass was taking place at St. Camillus Catholic Church at 12:30 p.m., so they headed there and arrived when the congregants were arriving. Students not only handed out flyers but actually spoke individually to people, encouraging them to attend the rally and bring as many friends and family as possible. “See you at the rally!” many students would say as people walked by and received flyers. Many already knew about the rally, but for others, this was the first time they had even heard about the bill.

Once it seemed parishioners had stopped arriving for Mass, the Maryland students decided they still had enough flyers leftover to do some more promoting of the event. They began at Pollo Campero on University Blvd. and split up into groups of two, heading in different directions up and down the main road. They approached anyone on the sidewalk as well as those waiting at bus stops, and conversed with them. Many of the people the students met were unaware of such awful legislation, and were happy to see students who were concerned with this issue. The students wrapped up their efforts when they ran out of flyers a little after 2 p.m. Hoping they had made at least a small impact, they made their way back to Pollo Campero for lunch!

On rally day, about thirty Maryland students met on the College Park campus to take Metro to D.C. Many of the students wore their red Latino Student Union shirts and carried signs such as “Somos todos inmigrantes” (“We are all immigrants.”) At the rally, the students immediately joined in with the chants, including “Aquí estamos, y no nos vamos!” (“We are here, and we are not leaving!”) All in all, it was a great day for students, immigrants, and the USA.

* Xiomara Esteban is a student at the University of Maryland.

ARCHBISHOP MAHONEY
Writes to President Bush

In late December, Carl Roger M. Mahoney, Archbishop of Los Angeles, issued a letter addressed to President Bush concerning legislation passed by the House of Representatives. The letter (which has been praised and criticized by some church officials and others), is worth printing here. Clearly, it applies not only to HR 4437 but also to other actions directed at limiting the opportunities of immigrants (as well as punishing those who work with immigrants in pursuit of justice) — both locally and nationally.

December 30, 2005

Dear President Bush:

The House of Representatives recently passed a border-security Bill (H.R. 4437) that has enormous implications and ramifications for all of us in this country. While I am surely in favor of taking appropriate government action to protect the borders of our country, not every action step is feasible or advisable. Apparently, the recently passed House Bill will require all personnel of Churches and of all non-profit organizations to verify the legal immigration status of every single person served through our various entities.

In effect, priests, ministers, rabbis, and others involved in various Church-related activities will be forced to become “quasi-immigration enforcement officials.” The Catholic Church alone offers a vast spectrum of services for all in need, including education, health care, and social services. Our golden rule has always been to serve people in need-not to verify beforehand their immigration status. But the Bill imposes incredible penalties upon any person assisting others through a Church or a social service organization. Up to five years in prison and the seizure of assets would accompany serving the poor who later turn out to be here without proper legal documentation.

One could interpret this Bill to suggest that any spiritual and pastoral service given to any person requires proof of legal residence. Are we to stop every person coming to Holy Communion and first ask them to produce proof of legal residence before we can offer them the Body and Blood of Christ?

Speaking for the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, such restrictions are impossible to comply with. The underlying basis for our service to others, especially the poor, is the example” words, and actions of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. The 25th Chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel does not simply invite us to serve others in the name of Jesus, but offers such service as a requisite to belonging to the Kingdom of God:

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. A stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty

Letter to Bush continued on page 3