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Rev. Alison Harrington leads fight against new immigration legislation

SAN ANSELMO, Calif., May 3 – Rev. Alison Harrington earned her undergraduate degree at the University of California in Berkeley and her Master of Divinity at San Francisco Theological Seminary. To say that she studied to have a prophetic voice is an understatement.

Harrington, the pastor at Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Ariz., is calling on that training and her longtime commitment to social justice to fight recent state legislation aimed at curbing illegal immigration. Her voice was heard nationally on April 29 when CNN aired her comments delivered during a rally at her church.

“It is immoral, unethical and unjust,” Harrington said. “As faith leaders we are called to struggle against sin, to call our leaders into repentance and to call our communities into action.”

Harrington earned a bachelor's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies with an emphasis in U. S. Race Relations at UC Berkeley before becoming a community organizer. A fully-committed advocate for human rights and peacemaking, she was a youth volunteer in Northern Ireland. She has a background in prison ministry and served as a facility chaplain in the Santa Clara County Jail system, as well as working within San Quentin State Prison as a volunteer.

The daughter of two Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) ministers, Harrington followed in their footsteps by answering a call to attend SFTS, graduating with a M.Div. degree in 2006. Her father, Rev. Dr. Steve Harrington, earned his Doctor of Ministry from SFTS in 1998 and is senior pastor at Sunnyvale Presbyterian Church. Her mother, Rev. Nancy Harrington, earned her M.Div. from SFTS in 1992 and is pastor at Evergreen Presbyterian Church in San Jose.

Prior to her call to Southside Presbyterian Church, Alison was associate pastor of Covenant Presbyterian in Palo Alto, and filled in admirably when head of staff Isaiah Jones (D.Min. '89) was diagnosed with leukemia.

Due to its location and history, Southside Presbyterian Church has reached out to Native and immigrant populations since it was founded in 1906 as a mission church for

the Tohono O'odham people (known at that time as Papagos), and was initially named Papago Presbyterian Church. The church also served Mexican and Chinese people who lived in the area. The congregation has included a diverse mix of Native Americans, Latinos, Caucasians, African Americans and others. The present-day neighborhood is mostly comprised of low-income Latino and Native American families living in modest single-family homes.

Southside offers many diverse programs, including operating a Day Labor Center that provides a safe place for workers and employers to negotiate employment while maintaining a healthy relationship with the surrounding neighborhood. The center is open Monday through Saturday from 7-11 a.m. Begun in 2006, the center also provides the workers with English classes and the opportunity to play a leadership role in the running of the center itself.

In the 1950s, Southside under Rev. Caspar Glenn led Tucson in the struggle to make racial integration a reality. When civil wars in Central America brought refugees to Arizona borders in the 1980s, Southside under Rev. John Fife, former moderator of the PC(USA), ignited the Sanctuary Movement.

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San Francisco Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) graduate school, has prepared whole leaders for the whole church since 1871. One of the founding members of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, it offers theological degrees at two campuses, in San Anselmo and Pasadena. Its innovative Program in Christian Spirituality is open to clergy and non-ordained individuals. For more information please call SFTS at 1-800-447-8820 in San Anselmo or 1-800-473-8772 in Pasadena. Also find information on our Web site: www.sfts.edu.