

# Response to ICE raids ongoing

WASHINGTON - The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has conducted raids in recent weeks at workplaces across the U.S. to round up workers who are in the country illegally.

In two communities where raids took place March 6 - South Bend, Ind., and New Bedford, Mass. - members of the Catholic community and the wider community continue to help families torn apart by the federal action, especially children left in limbo. A majority of the detainees in both places were women, many of them single parents with babies or toddlers.

In South Bend, 36 candles at a prayer vigil and information session March 6 at St. Adalbert Church commemorated 36 members of the parish's Hispanic community who were detained in the raid on Janco Composites, a Mishawaka plant that makes fiberglass products for a variety of industries.

A parishioner who works at Janco - himself a documented immigrant - recounted how the raid unfolded, how they had been working when the officers came in with bulletproof vests and weapons drawn, how the workers were then separated by race, which is permissible under current immigration law.

The 36 workers were taken to the Broadview Detention Center in Chicago. One was immediately released upon reaching Chicago when it was realized that he was documented. By March 18, the rest had bonded out of jail and were back home awaiting court dates.

In an interview with Today's Catholic, the newspaper of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Holy Cross Father Chris Cox, pastor of St. Adalbert, said he recognized the government's responsibility to uphold the law, but said, "I think our immigration laws are broken and really need some significant fixing."

He took issue with ICE's tactic of sending 70 officers with weapons drawn into an environment where they would not expect hostile fire to be returned.

"They went in with unnecessary and over-the-top force that caused fear in citizen and noncitizen alike," Father Cox said, adding that he fears such tactics only

increase the chances of “a really tragic event unfolding.”

Bishop John M. D’Arcy of Fort Wayne-South Bend reached out to the community with a letter in which he stated: “I want you to know that you have my prayers and support in this difficult moment. My own dear parents were immigrants, and I understand the struggles you are experiencing. Let us place ourselves in the hands of our dear Lady of Guadalupe, who will surely protect us.”

He noted that he and the other Catholic bishops of Indiana support comprehensive immigration reform, which Father Cox said is the key to solving the situation.

The priest sympathizes with Catholics who oppose the church’s stance on immigration and express anger over the jobs that are being lost to undocumented immigrants.

“The frustration they feel with our broken immigration system is the same thing that hits my parishioners,” Father Cox said. “We need leadership in Washington to get real reform in the immigration system.”

The most devastating effect of the raid for the St. Adalbert Parish community has been its effect on families, he said. Thirty-two children were immediately affected by the raid, the priest said. “One breast-feeding child (was) separated from her mother,” he added, and in “one instance a wife and husband were taken and the kids were left with the baby sitter.”

In Massachusetts, Bishop George W. Coleman of Fall River asked parishes in the diocese to take up a collection to assist Catholic Social Services in serving the immigrant community in New Bedford.

Deportation is likely for many of the 361 illegal immigrants jailed following the March 6 raid at a manufacturing plant there, but freeing the jailed mothers with young children as well as providing for the immediate basic needs for affected families has become an around-the-clock battle for Catholic and other agencies.

“But we’re making a turnaround for the affected immigrants families, slowly perhaps, but energetically,” reported Denise Porche, of the Office for Child Protection of the diocesan Catholic Social Services agency. “Our focus, our accent is

on care for all involved.”

At the same time, other illegal immigrants worried about their status are refraining from going to their jobs and causing an added and immense strain on relief efforts, Porche told The Anchor, the diocesan newspaper, and Catholic Social Services is looking to funding by the Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition.

On March 13, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts, in partnership with the advocacy coalition, launched a relief fund, with \$65,000 in committed gifts.

“The needs are so great that we hope to raise at least \$250,000 through this fund to help meet them,” said Craig J. Dutra, foundation president, adding that “100 percent of all donations will be used to directly assist the children and their families with basic needs.”

“Many of the families have expressed concern that without a steady income, they’ll have housing and other financial problems over the next month,” he said.

Contributing to this story were Don Clemmer in South Bend and Deacon James N. Dunbar in New Bedford.