

Postville Disaster Response Steering Committee Report
May 28, 2008

The humanitarian needs following the largest immigration raid in U.S. history—which detained one-fifth of the population of this small rural community—are staggering and continue to grow. As relief efforts are coordinated by the very limited staff at St. Bridget's Catholic and a core group of volunteers, we need to adjust our expectations and expand our vision for the kind of response that is needed. Below are the five highest priorities we have identified at this point as we try to respond. This list is by no means exhaustive, and it only covers some immediate needs without attending to the long term impact of this event in what has until now been a growing, flourishing, and model community.

- 1) We are trying to provide for the basic needs of families of those who were originally detained, and then released to care for minor children (42 women and 2 men—many of their children are US citizens). These families must remain in the community and accessible to immigration authorities as part of their parole requirements. They are unable to generate any income; therefore the community is trying to find ways to provide for some of their basic needs.

- 2) We are tending to the welfare of minors: our relief efforts have focused on the well being of minors from the very first day of the raid. We began by collaborating with the school system, where about half of the student body comes from either Guatemalan or Mexican families, to make sure all children were accounted for and were placed in the care of relatives or family friends until at least one of their parents was released. In addition, we have worked with families to identify all minors who were working at the factory and were detained. Most of those minors who were detained during the raid (except for five) have been released on parole and have returned to the community—a total of about 20.

- 3) We are assisting individuals in fulfilling their Parole Requirements: in addition to making sure that the two groups mentioned above are able to cover their basic needs while they wait for court dates (initial court dates are estimated to take place between 3-5 weeks from now, with possible follow up dates that could take much longer) we are also working with these two groups (heads of households and minors) to both to make sure they understand the expectations of their parole and that they fulfill all requirements. As court dates approach, the financial implications of this will mean travel to court (most of them expected to be out of state) and child care while being in court. A very minimal estimate would be about \$150 per person per court date, in addition to the need for volunteers to provide the needed transportation.

- 4) We are tracking the detainees and connecting them with their families: many of the women, men, and minors in the groups above, as well as many more families

in town have one or more family members detained. The majority of those detained have received a five-month sentence on federal charges—about 280 detainees—and will then be transferred to immigration custody for deportation. An additional 20-30 people will not be serving time and have already been transferred to immigration custody or their cases are pending prosecution. We are trying to assist about 300 families (close to one-third of the town's population) to make contact with their loved ones who are detained, understand their legal situation, and keep track of them as they are transferred from place to place in a fairly complicated detention system. The volunteer needs in this area are staggering as information on the cases has not been forthcoming—even when much of it, pertaining to their criminal charges, is public record. In addition, we will be facing costs related to communication with those detained (families are carrying the brunt of that cost as they must pay about \$5 for the first minute and \$2 for every additional minute when they accept collect calls from their loved ones who are detained).

- 5) We are trying to raise funds to cover the costs of returning to countries of origin: it is difficult to estimate the travel cost involved in facilitating the return to their countries of origin for these various groups—those detained and released, those currently detained, and those not detained in the raid but who have decided to leave the country. Many families are hoping to have the option of a voluntary deportation when their legal matters have been attended to. This process expedites the return to the country of origin, but involves the individual financing their own return. Based on initial numbers from those who have begun their process of return or have inquired about it, we are looking at about \$2,500 per family to Guatemala and about \$2,000 to Mexico. The former involves flights and the latter the need for someone who is documented to accompany the family as they have no documentation even to drive themselves or use public transportation. In addition, each family will need to obtain a variety of documents (from U.S. Passports for children born in the U.S. to Consular I.D.'s) to be able to travel.

To support these efforts please make designated “Postville, IA” to [ELCA Domestic Disaster Response](https://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Give-A-Gift.aspx) 8765 West Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631 or on line at <https://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Give-A-Gift.aspx>