
The Postville Raid—A Background

“The day that scarred my heart forever” - Pedro Lopez, Age 12

On May 12th, 2008, Immigrants Custom Enforcement (ICE) agents arrested 389 people at Agriprocessors, the local kosher meat packing plant in Postville, Iowa. At the time, this was the largest raid in the history of the United States, changing the lives of many, in the town and around the nation. Now, a year later, communities around the nation have a chance to join with the Postville community in calling for comprehensive immigration reform.

The Raid in Numbers:

- 389 were arrested despite ICE agents being prepared with over 600 arrest warrants. The discrepancy is due to second and third shift workers not being in the plant.
- Of the over 950 employees at Agriprocessors, 75% were undocumented persons.
- Only 5 of those arrested had any sort of criminal record.
- The majority of those arrested were men.
- While many were from Guatemala, around 90 were from Mexico, 4 from the Ukraine and 3 from Israel.
- 56 were released with ankle bracelets, for humanitarian or health reasons, 12 were minors, the rest were mostly women with children.
- St. Bridget’s Hispanic Ministry Fund is supporting 24 women and one man waiting for their court date, and 35 named witnesses. Only ten of these 60 have been able to acquire work.
- By the morning of May 13th, one-third of Postville had fled and 120 of the 363 students were absent from school. The principal convinced some students to return, but 50 never did.



Faith Community Support:

“Our goal during the immediate days following the raid was to respond to the myriad needs of fearful, anxious and traumatized men, women and children.” - Mary McCauley, BVM

- By the evening of May 12th, over 400 had gathered at St. Bridget’s to be with one another; to pray and cry together; to receive strength from one another; and to escape the fear that ICE might show up at their home.
- In the week following the raid people of many faiths provided meals while members of the community such as lawyers, medical personnel, drivers and translators provided their expertise and presence. After a week they were asked to return home, but the support to these families continues to this day.
- Individuals, churches and organizations from across the nation called to offer services, financial and emotional support.

The work continues, including:

- Serving meals and stocking the Postville Food Pantry
- Driving people to Des Moines for finger printing
- Paying bills for those who cannot work
- Securing necessary documents so the process of citizenship can begin
- Arranging transportation for those returning to their home countries
- Contacting Immigration Lawyers
- Securing counseling for those traumatized by the raid
- Helping those who took the immigrant's jobs and are now also unemployed
- **Urging congressional representatives to advocate for worker justice, family unity, an end to raids and comprehensive immigration reform.**

Learning more:

- For a more detailed background visit: <http://www.arch.pvt.k12.ia.us/PostvilleRelief/pdf/DayofRaid.pdf>
- The local paper covered the events extensively, one story can be found at: <http://data.desmoinesregister.com/guatemala/guatemala.php>



Expanding the Call

It became apparent to the Postville community that the raid was the result of a much bigger and more complex problem—the immigration system. As a result, on July 27th, 2008, the interfaith community of Postville worked to organize a social advocacy event. The event turned into a major prayer and rally which called for a comprehensive solution to the broken immigration system. Over 1,000 people came together to make this message known. On the anniversary of one of the largest raids in United States history, it is important to realize the many factors of our broken immigration system that led to this raid a year ago. Your community can use the raid's anniversary to make the call for comprehensive immigration reform known!

Help us make May 12, 2009, a day for nationwide awareness of the need for comprehensive immigration reform, just labor practices, family unity and an end to raids.

Go to www.postvillestbridget.org to find out how you can get involved!
