

What Did We Learn From this Experience?

By Sr. Mary McCauley, BVM, former Pastoral
Administrator of St. Bridget, Postville

How often members of the St. Bridget Response Team described their experience as one of the most challenging, yet privileged and transformative of their lives! Yes, the raid of May 12, 2008 had a direct impact on the 389 men and women arrested during the raid and their families. It also had a significant impact on the St. Bridget Response Team and on everyone else who chose to offer presence or support.

Some of the lessons learned are obvious; others have yet to be identified. Only through a period of personal and communal reflection, along with a bit of distance from the present situation will we ever be able to fully respond to this question. With this in mind the Response Team notes the following as lessons learned to date:

- That as important as it might be to be ready for a potential raid by having read and prepared a variety of materials, it is even more important to trust your heart, responding with compassion and wisdom to the need of the moment.
- That “disasters” touch the hearts of many and bring forth generosity and concern.
- That possessing a super abundance of compassion, humor, flexibility, integrity, inner peace and love is essential for a member of a response team.
- That there is much more power in collaboration than in any one personal endeavor.
- That the poor and vulnerable possess deep faith.
- That interfaith prayer, dialogue and advocacy are effective, powerful and essential.
- That innumerable people within the United States are very concerned about our 21st century immigrants and desire to reach out and offer assistance.
- That it is very important to be open and responsive to the media.
- That people can be touched by the humanitarian needs of people affected by a raid, and at the same time hold very conflicted feelings when it comes to questions of breaking a law, even to the point of exhibiting great fear and anger.
- That it is very important to put a “human face” on the issue of immigration.
- That social advocacy is essential. Raids call us to work for comprehensive immigration reform.
- That our government is more prone to respond to a natural disaster than to a humanitarian disaster.

- That the psychological trauma experienced by our Hispanic brothers and sisters calls for healing.
- That the monetary cost of responding to the needs of the people affected by a raid are substantial, requiring a special fund raising ability on the part of the faith community.
- That our Hispanic brothers and sisters have experienced one injustice after another.
- That we see a need to give to those affected by the raid opportunities to strengthen their faith, assuring them of God's care and concern.

What Did our Hispanic Brothers and Sisters Teach Us?

- That they believe in a God who sustains and strengthens them along their journey.
- That they hold firmly to their conviction that that their God is always with them.
- That they possess an indomitable spirit, having the ability to endure one suffering after another.
- That they can celebrate in the midst of suffering.
- That the situation in their home country is so devastating that they will risk everything in order to care for their families.
- That they are people of hope.
- That the words "*Gracias*" and "*De Nada*" flow freely from their lips.

