

How did the St. Bridget's and Catholic Charities Staff Respond?

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

In one sense, the St. Bridget and our Archdiocesan staff of Catholic Charities responded no differently to the demands of the raid, than they did to any other previous pastoral issue. They responded with compassion, charity, courage, justice, humility, sincerity, openness, honesty and flexibility.

At the same time there was a major difference! The raid demanded a type of wholehearted presence and commitment that few had ever before experienced. This same wholehearted presence and commitment continues to this day. This style of response comes with a cost, a cost that people are willing to accept because of the significance of the ministry.

St. Bridget's had always been known for its hospitality. Our Latino brothers and sisters knew that they could approach our Hispanic Minister, Paul Rael, or Father Paul Ouderkirk before him, with any question or concern. They knew they would be respected and responded to in some manner. Although their Pastoral Administrator and Sacramental Priest, Sister Mary McCauley, BVM and Father Richard Gaul respectively, are not bilingual, they knew that they, too, were sincerely concerned about them. This confidence was validated by one of the mothers, who in the midst of the raid grabbed her cell phone, called Paul Rael and simply said, "*Take care of my children!*"

Because the needs were so great and so varied the St. Bridget staff immediately recognized their need for expanded services. They acted with honesty and humility, welcoming assistance from a variety of persons and groups. Without a doubt collaboration and recognition of the unique giftedness of each person characterized our response.

One person came in to prepare meals, another to serve, another to engage the children, another to translate or offer clerical assistance, while another counseled, offered legal advice, provided medical care, served as a driver, kept a record of jail placements for the detainees, approved the payment of bills, updated computer programs, coordinated the volunteers, cleaned the parish hall, received donated food, responded to the questions of a journalist, initiated contacts with a legislator, or offered a comforting word to a frightened child. The list could go on and on. Each person's gift was needed. Each person's gift was valued.

Without the help from Catholic Charities, Lutheran Services, the Archdiocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry, the United Food Growers of America, our Jewish brothers and sisters, social advocacy groups, our pro bono lawyer and other volunteer lawyers, the services of the Department of Human Services personnel, volunteers from Luther College and various religious communities, as well as, an increase in paid staff we would never have been able to respond in the way that we did.

To be at St. Bridget's from the day of the raid until the present moment is to see the words in the Book of Leviticus become a living reality:

You should treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you, too, were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I the Lord am your God" (Lev. 19:14).