

# Religious leaders reflect and comment

## Pro-active reaction to immigration raid

By Joseph O'Brien

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POSTVILLE — After the May 12, first anniversary observance of the immigration raid in Postville, Archbishop Jerome Hanus, OSB, told *The Witness* that he hoped the event would show the world that faith in Christ ended in action.

“We’re hoping to show that we take the words of our Scriptures very seriously,” he said, “to treat the alien in your midst like your brother or sister, and that when you receive the alien, the foreigner, you are welcoming Christ.”

It was important, the archbishop said, for the event to be both local to Postville and universal in participation.

“We decided the event had to take place here because this is where the event took

place and this is where so much of the suffering has happened,” he said. “The experience itself, though, was not just a Catholic experience. Many of the persons involved were not Catholic...As the experience was diverse, so the response and commemoration of it had to be diverse as well.”

Rev. Stephen Brackett, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Postville, said the event was as much a way to reach out to those still living in Postville as to those who had been taken away after the raids.

“In the worship service we wanted to tell the story of why immigrants come here, what they experience trying to get here and what happens to them while they’re here,” he said. “We also wanted to answer what we do as people of God to respond to their plight.”

According to Brackett, a number of complications have prolonged the suffering of the immigrants in the Postville community. He said that the community was expecting the workers to be deported

quickly after being processed by the courts. In fact, many are still stuck in the court system, Brackett said, while the women who were allowed to return to their children with monitoring bracelets are still awaiting trial. In addition, he said, some of the workers who were arrested returned to Postville as material witnesses in the case pending against Agriprocessors’ alleged labor infractions.

“So in looking back about a year ago, we really did not expect this to go on any longer than five or six months perhaps,” Brackett said. “And really we thought by nine months we would only have one or two people we would be dealing with. So it really wound up being much more involved than any of us anticipated.”

Attending the event as a guest, Erik Camayd-Freixas worked as a government interpreter during the legal process after the raid, working on behalf of the workers. After seeing how the workers were being treated, though, he resigned from his po-

sition and began documenting the irregularities in the judicial process affecting the Postville workers arrested. Since then, he’s been working as an advocate for Postville workers as they work their way through the U.S. legal system.

Camayd-Freixas said that the day of remembrance will call attention to the need for immigration reform around the country. “Postville is really ground zero for comprehensive immigration reform,” he said. “The egregious injustice we’ve seen here and the devastation, economic and otherwise, really have no justification. There’s absolutely nobody who benefited from this. The importance of Postville, being such a small town, there’s no way to hide the damage. So what we’re seeing here is the same devastation going on in communities across the country even though in larger cities the impact is more diluted and easier to deny. In Postville you can’t hide it. So Postville shows us exactly what’s going on around the country.”