

Statement by Archbishop Jerome Hanus, archbishop of Dubuque, IA.

May 12, 2008

The actions taken by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Postville on May 12 highlight once again the need for comprehensive immigration reform. Families have been disrupted; parents and children are filled with fear. Many are uncertain whether their loved ones will be arrested, imprisoned indefinitely or deported.

This state of terror for families is evidence that our political system has not adequately addressed the demand for labor, the inadequacies of our present immigration policies and practices, and the broader economic challenges. Some of the weakest members among us are bearing the brunt of the suffering, while legislators and other leaders, as well as many of us in the general public, have failed to give this issue the priority that it deserves.

Leaders in the Roman Catholic community as well as many other religious leaders have called for comprehensive immigration reform which strives:

- to create legal avenues for workers and their families who wish to enter our country and work in a safe, legal, and orderly manner with their rights fully protected;
- to develop border protection policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect;
- to allow authorities to carry out the critical task of identifying and preventing entry of terrorists and dangerous criminals, as well as pursuing the legitimate task of implementing American immigration policy;

➤ to reduce significantly waiting times for separated families to be reunited.

I urge all persons of good will to work at changing a system

➤ that ignores the plight of individuals and families;

➤ that resorts primarily on punitive measures rather than a long-term fix which would welcome hard-working people from impoverished nations to assist us in our labor needs as well as offer the richness of their faith and culture to our society;

➤ that terrorizes families, separates parents and children, and places people in detention centers without good legal assistance and makes very difficult the possibility of communicating with their loved ones.

Our religious and social response is based on the Judeo-Christian scriptures which call believers to welcome the stranger among us, to treat the alien with respect and charity, and to provide pastoral and humanitarian assistance. While we do not condone illegal activity, we do give spiritual and moral support to suffering families.

All of us should urgently reiterate the call to our legislators to work for comprehensive reform.

I express my gratitude to all who are helping in these painful circumstances and assure our prayers and support to those who are suffering.