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# Response to recognition at Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition, April 26, 2009

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**Response to Recognition at  
Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition  
April 26, 2009**

I stand before you this afternoon humbled and grateful for the honor of being a part of this Inaugural Celebration of the **Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition**. Obviously I would not be here if it were not for the tragic immigration raid that took place a year ago at this time at Agriprocessors in Postville, Iowa.

To many I have said that I consider May 12, 2008 and the many days to follow as the most challenging, exhausting yet privileged days of my many years of ministry.

The honor that I received this afternoon may be in my name but in one sense that is a misnomer.... for it should be given in the names of the 389 people who were detained following the ICE Raid at Agriprocessors in Postville, Iowa. In addition it should hold the names of the hundreds of people who assisted us in responding to the needs of our Hispanic brothers and sisters.

So this afternoon I tell you that I accept this honor not so much in my name but in the name of many other very special people.

First of all I do accept it in honor of the **389 men and women in Postville who were arrested**. It was 10:00 on Monday morning, May 12, 2008 when ICE agents, helicopters, police officers, and sheriff cars stormed into Postville, a town of about 2400, in order to arrest any undocumented person who worked at Agriprocessors.

I accept this honor in the **name of all the children who feared that they would never again see their mother or father**.

I accept it in honor of the **mother who upon seeing the ICE agents**, grabbed her cell phone and called our St. Bridget Hispanic minister, Paul Rael and simply said...**"Take care of my children!"**

I accept it honor of my friend **Pedro**, a 12 year old boy, who on the Thursday following the raid, in response to my question...**Pedro, how are you...said, "I am sad, very sad, because they have taken away my mother."**

I accept it in honor of the **42 women and 3 men who during the summer walked the streets of Postville with GPS devices on their ankles....**These are the same people who walked in our marches and rallies with their slacks rolled to their knees so that everyone could see the ankle bracelets. They carried signs that read, **"We are not criminals. We came to work. We are mothers."**

I accept it honor of **little Ana** who kept starring at her mother's leg with the cumbersome ankle bracelet.....**she looked....she starred and finally asked: "Mommy, what did you do?"** The only response that her mother could give was to say, "**Ana, your mother and father loved you so much that we risked our lives and came to the United States because we wanted you to have food and an education. Yes we came without proper documentation..... but we believed that we had no other choice. We came to work and now I am considered a criminal.**"

I accept it **in honor of all the children...both Hispanic and Anglo...who wake up with nightmares and still shudder when they hear a helicopter, fearing that their mothers and fathers will be taken away.**

I accept it in honor of the **Guatemalan women** who were described by Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner as "**double time victims**" for the conditions they experienced that forced them to leave their home country and then for the treatment that they received at Agriprocessors in Postville.

I accept it in honor of **Jose, a man from Guatemala**, who was in a Florida jail. He had come to Postville so that he could send money back to his wife so their children might have food. After a month or two in jail he was able to talk to his wife in Guatemala....she told him that they did not have any money and that his children were hungry. His advice to his wife was this: "**Sell whatever we have in order to feed the children.**"

I accept this award in honor of Gloria and the many other "women who worked at Agriprocessors." "**Gloria**" is a woman from Mexico. She is tall and dignified. She, too, walks the streets of Postville with an ankle bracelet. She also walks the streets of Postville with intense pain and anger in her heart. Her anger stems from the alleged labor law abuses, the injustices and sexual harassment that she and others experienced during her time of working at Agriprocessors

I also accept this award **in honor of the entire St. Bridget Response Team** who have worked tirelessly...day in and day out... for our people. In particular I acknowledge Paul Rael, our Hispanic Minister, Father Paul Ouderkirk, our retired pastor and Violeta Aleman, our administrative assistant.

I also accept it in honor of **all the people throughout the United States who have supported our work through their financial donations. With each donation came words of support...I recall one in particular that read...**

- **“All I want to say really is...I keep you in my prayers and I want to stand up and be counted with all the others who are saying, “ NO...NO...NO, this must not happen in the United States of America...treating people like this...”**
- **Another letter read:** My wife, a rabbi, visited Postville. They came away enormously disturbed by the actions of our government and, of course, by the behavior of Agriprocessors itself. But they came away inspired by the extraordinary work you are doing to support those who now find themselves without jobs, in danger of losing their housing and unsure of how they will feed their children
- Then there was also another very memorable one that read, **“Give ‘em hell...Sr. Mary”**

**I accept this award in honor of the 28 women** who remain in Postville with GPS devices on their ankles and whose court dates are not scheduled until next November which means that they will have been unable to work and totally dependent upon charity for 18 months.

**I accept this award in honor of the 41 adult witnesses and 12 minors who remain in Postville...have not yet been deported and have agreed to testify for the government.....**They have said they would serve as a witness for the Government but have no assurance whatsoever that they will be able to remain in this country following this service.

I also accept this honor **in the name of all the people who were deported to their home country....often they would leave on a bus from St.Bridget’s.** As they would board the bus I would hug them....and with the aid of a translator...tell them that they were loved and that I was so sorry that they had to leave...That I was so sorry for what had happened to them. They would look at me...shrug their shoulders and say, **“We understand...It’s ok.....”** But I say, **“It’s not ok! We have to sound a call for justice. We have to act...We have to call for comprehensive immigration reform.”** We cannot remain silent.

**I therefore ask all of you present here this afternoon to stand in solidarity with us on Tuesday, May 12, 2009...**the first anniversary of our Postville Raid. If possible please join us in Postville for a prayer and rally that will begin at 3:30. If you cannot do that and we understand if you cannot, please be with us in spirit. Within your own communities please join in prayer and action. **Join us in calling for humane immigration reform, just labor practices, family unity and an end to raids.**

**As I accept this award I also take this opportunity to** thank you for your courage and initiative in forming the **Chicago New Sanctuary Coalition**. Thank you for your commitment to immigration reform and to assisting our 21<sup>st</sup> century immigrant.

Finally I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the **Jewish Council on Urban Affairs** for all of the wisdom, commitment and concern that you have shared with us. The day that Jane Ramsey and Tom Walsh called and asked how they might help us was a blessed day.

**Finally I accept this award in the name of all of you who are present in this room this afternoon. Your presence is a sign of your commitment to justice....in particular to comprehensive immigration reform and for this I am most grateful.**

Thank you,

Mary McCauley, BVM  
April 26, 2009