Six weeks in review – Mississippi ICE Raids of August 7, 2019

Weeks 1-2

- August 7, 2019: Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Homeland Security Officers raided seven (7) food processing plants in and around the communities of Canton, Carthage, Forest, Laurel and Morton – arresting 680 immigrant workers. More than half of those arrested were taken to detention facilities – the rest were released with monitor devices.
- Families and communities were thrown into a totally unexpected crisis – causing indescribable suffering due to family separation and fear of an unknown and insecure future.
- Volunteers from the affected communities responded as best they could to support families in need of emotional and spiritual support – and rallied to organize centers for gatherings, know-your-rights sessions and collecting supplies for affected families. At the beginning, local sites were open 5-7 days/week.
- Calls and donations streamed in from all over the country in support of families.
- Bishops Kopacz, Kihneman, Seage, Swanson and Gordy from the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and Lutheran Church leadership in Mississippi wrote a joint statement calling us to respond in Christian unity – in solidarity and support of our immigrant neighbors.
- Catholic Charities immediately began receiving monetary donations on behalf of affected families – and made plans to pass on direct assistance funds to local churches in the affected communities. The CC website and Facebook pages were updated on a regular basis with information about how to donate and resource links pertinent to the situation.
- The Catholic Extension Society immediately sent a donation and made plans of soliciting their network for additional funds. Many religious orders and organizations also sent significant donations on behalf of affected families.
- Catholic Charities, USA (CCUSA), the Catholic Legal Immigration Legal Network, Inc., (CLINIC) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reached out in support to identify needs. Support was provided in the way of financial support, immigration legal support and plans for reaching out to networks for persons interested in being deployed for volunteer work.
- Clinicians from Catholic Charities formed an Emotional Care team made up of both CC staff and community volunteers wishing to provide support. An in-service was provided and a resources were developed that are available to families needing emotional support.
- Weekly visits by Catholic Charities were made to each site to meet with volunteers or volunteer teams to monitor needs, provide support where needed and begin to form a plan for distribution of donated funds.
- Pro bono Immigration attorneys, human rights groups and union leaders began meeting with individual families. The MS Immigration Coalition was formed to raise funds to provide legal support and humanitarian aid.
- A bi-lingual hotline number was distributed at sites for families to call when in need of legal aid for immigration matters or for housing issues. The hotline number is 978-993-3300

Weeks 3-4

- Catholic Charities opened its doors to accept donations of non-perishable food items and other household supplies. Donors are encouraged to use the donation line (601-803-1225) or email Ben Garrott at ben.garrott@ccjackson.org to arrange for dropping off items.
The MS Immigration Coalition asked Catholic Charities to accept and disperse the humanitarian aid they raised. A formal agreement was developed.

With no income after the raids, affected households began seeking assistance with more regularity to pay bills for rent, utilities and for other expenses for which only money can help. Some families were being threatened with eviction – housing attorneys are providing support. Families are encouraged to use the hotline number.

Volunteers at the local sites are organized to meet with families for an assessment of needs and use monetary donations from the church sources or from Catholic Charities to pay vendors on behalf of the families.

Monetary and in-kind support that flowed heavily during the first 2 weeks began to taper off. Sites began running out of the most requested items: Maseca (masa) flour, oil, sugar, salt, black beans, rice, laundry detergent, dish soap and gift cards to purchase perishable food items. Several sites replenished supplies through donations Catholic Charities collected.

Local sites began to move slowly from chaos to management with increasing organization of volunteers and the development of a more consistent schedule for screening families for assistance and distribution of food/supplies.

Legal clinics continued at each site with an organized and regular schedule for each site.

The Catholic Charities Emotional care team organized to visit local sites at the time of legal clinics or distribution times to provide a presence and an opportunity for emotional care triage.

Families are requesting help preparing documents for upcoming legal hearings and for communication with their loved ones in detention (phone cards, etc.). Immigration attorneys are using their connections to attempt visits to detainees for legal support.

**Weeks 5-6**

Catholic Charities developed standardized screening/processing forms for each of the five affected community sites and distributed them for immediate use. The new forms and process will help volunteers communicate a consistent and clearly understood process to families.

Early projections indicate that monetary donations will cover rent/utility expenses for about 3-4 months. Presently there is no end in sight for when assistance will no longer be needed or when families will be able to earn income through employment.

In-kind donations have slowed down considerably and are needed to help off-set expenses – particularly the most requested items listed above. Cash for gift cards that can be used to purchase food/supplies will also be helpful.

Working Together Mississippi is beginning to meet with and organize immigrant communities – developing leadership within the community for long-term support to immigrants. Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) will provide technical support and Catholic Charities will maintain communication with WTM for collaboration and/or coordination of services.

Catholic Charities, USA is deploying case manager volunteers from its national network to provide support to volunteers at local sites.

Local sites are beginning to look at long-term case management needs for individual families.

The CC Emotional Care team will remain available to meet with families requesting emotional care assistance and provide mental health assessments for family’s legal hearings.

Pro bono attorneys continue to assist families on a case-by-case basis.