



Office of the Bishop
Diocese of Providence
One Cathedral Square
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 278-4546

August 19, 2008

Mr. Stephen J. Farquharson
Interim Director
Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement
Room 1700, JFK Federal Building
Boston, MA 02203

Dear Mr. Farquharson:

We the undersigned, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Providence and pastors who serve the immigrant community, urge you to declare a moratorium on immigration raids in the State of Rhode Island, until our nation can implement a comprehensive and just reform of our immigration laws. It is our hope that such reform will make immigration raids obsolete. Until then, we believe that raids on the immigrant community are unjust, unnecessary, and counter-productive.

As religious leaders we understand and support the need to apprehend and arrest individuals who are responsible for felonies and other serious crimes. The enforcement of just laws is necessary for public safety and the common good. But the arrest of serious criminals is not what we have observed in the arrest and detention of immigrants that has taken place recently in our State, particularly in Newport and in Providence.

What we have witnessed is that the police action of ICE against immigrants has divided the community, instilled fear in our streets, disrupted the everyday life of good people and separated family members, innocent of any crime, from one another. The confusing and secretive detention of those arrested has further complicated the situation. As religious leaders concerned for our people we would be negligent of our pastoral duties if we didn't speak out against these unjust government policies and practices.

We agree with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' that *policies on...immigration...should help families stay together*. The bishops also correctly state that *The Gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger" requires Catholics to care for and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, including immigrant children*.

Additionally, we encourage the agents and staff of ICE to evaluate the morality of their participation in immigration raids in the context of their faith and sanctity of their conscience. If their discernment leads them to the conclusion that they cannot participate in such raids in good conscience, we urge them not to do so. If ICE agents refuse to participate in immigration raids in conformity with their faith and conscience, we urge the Federal Government to fully respect the well-founded principles of conscientious objection.

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