

Bishop Asks to Halt Migrant Worker Raids

Says Catholics Could Consider Conscientious Objection

PROVIDENCE, Rhode Island, AUG. 21, 2008 (Zenit.org)- The bishop of Providence is urging immigration agents to evaluate the morality of immigration raids and be ready to conscientiously object to participating in them.

Bishop Thomas Tobin and 15 pastors of the Diocese of Providence who minister to immigrant communities sent a letter to the interim director of Immigration and Custom Enforcement urging a moratorium on raids seeks undocumented workers. They contended that raids should be halted until Congress has managed to pass just and comprehensive immigration reform measures.

"As religious leaders we understand and support the need to apprehend and arrest individuals who are responsible for felonies and other serious crimes," the bishop wrote. "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."

The letter comes after a series of raids in Rhode Island over the summer, as well as the death of an immigrant who was denied medical care in a Rhode Island prison two weeks ago.

"What we have witnessed is that the police action of [Immigration and Custom Enforcement] 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 bishop and clergy added. "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."

Morality

Bishop Tobin also suggested that participating in immigration raids could go against the consciences of some of the government officials.

He encouraged the Immigration and Custom Enforcement agents 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," the statement continued. "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."