

## A community's pain

By Robert Pore

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In a show of community support, more than 200 people and families came together on a chilly Sunday night to pray and seek God's guidance in helping those individuals and families impacted by last Tuesday's immigration raids in Grand Island.

The candlelight prayer vigil was held in the parking lot between St. Mary's Cathedral and the Cathedral Square parish hall.

The vigil was planned in response to last Tuesday's Immigration and Customs Enforcement raid at the Swift & Co. packing plant, in which more than 260 people were arrested and sent to an out-of-state military detention camp for further interrogation by federal officials.

The prayer vigil was sponsored by the Grand Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and by various churches throughout the community.

Overseeing the prayer vigil was Alvaro Paiz of Grand Island, president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Paiz said the immigration raids at the Swift plant have created difficult times for the entire community.

He said there are strong feelings, especially in the Hispanic community, concerning the immigration raids that range from anger, sadness, fear, uncertainty and confusion.

Paiz said he has personally been impacted, as friends he has known for a long time have been arrested and are now being deported back to their home countries.

"I know this is the law, but it is very hard when they take the fathers and leave the kids alone at home," he said. "I think they can find better ways to make this process happen."

There were strong feelings about how the government conducted the raid at the Swift plant with a show of force and conducting a mass arrest by people at the prayer vigil.

And the way the government conducted the raids scared many of the people in the immigrant community, whether they have entered the country illegally or not, because in some cases, they have come to America to escape political oppression within their homeland, where mass arrests by the government were commonplace occurrences.

"For many of us here, we came to this country to help provide a better life for our kids," Paiz said. "It sad to see these kids crying because their fathers are in jail when all they wanted to do was come here to work."

Antonio Hernandez came to Grand Island on Sunday night from Lexington in a show of support for the Hispanic community.

An immigrant from Columbia, Hernandez has been in the U.S. for 40 years and is a veteran of the U.S. military.

"What happened here in Grand Island was completely and totally unjustified," Hernandez said.

Hernandez believes the government should focus its efforts to apprehend the individuals who operate the identity theft rings that sold the fake IDs to desperate and frighten immigrants that came across the border illegally looking for work to support their families.

"Even if they did come into this country illegally, it doesn't excuse the way it happened," Hernandez said.

Elias Serrato of Grand Island said he came to the prayer vigil to show people who are in need that there is support for them.

Serrato, who has been in Grand Island for 12 years, also said the way the government conducted the raid and frightened people in the Hispanic community is inexcusable.

"They need to respect our rights as human beings," he said. "A lot of people don't think they have any rights, but they do."

Serrato said he has heard some people say "send all them back to where they came from," but he said people need to understand why those who illegally obtained identities did so.

"They need to work and support their families," he said. "God loves all of us and when you love God with all of your heart and soul it can straighten everything out. If we love God, we must respect others no matter what the situation."

Eulogio Olivo-Rivera of Grand Island, who is the director of the Diocese of Grand Island Office of Hispanic Ministry, said the prayer vigil was designed to bring the Hispanic together as one.

"We need to strengthen our ties as a people and the best way to do this is through God," he said. "Because we are a spiritual people, we picked this type of activity to come together."

Olivo-Rivera said he has received the support of ministries from throughout Grand Island for the prayer vigil.

"The people who are responsible for these raids have inflicted fear among the people, and I don't think that is the way to proceed," he said. "My contention is that we should not fear the law, but respect the law. These law enforcement agencies should help me respect the law and not fear it."

One of the ministers supporting the prayer vigil was the Rev. Jay Vetter of Trinity United Methodist Church.

Vetter said holding the prayer vigil was "extremely important."

"There is kind of a resurgence of mistrust in the community as a result of the raid that has created more polarization," Vetter said. "Everyone affected are our family, our friends and our neighbors. It is really important for us to be together and to pray for one another and raise up our unity as opposed to our differences."

What disturbs Vetter is how the immigration raids have impacted families.

"Families are probably the most important thing in our faith and our lives, and it is what grounds this whole community," he said. "It is really important to show support for families and children and all who are affected by this."

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