

Three bishops say Iowa migrants deserve better after raid, floods: "Inhumane" conditions

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Iowa bishops from three denominations have demanded an overhaul of U.S. immigration policy in the wake of a government raid on a large kosher slaughterhouse and allegations of worker mistreatment during relief efforts after June's floods.

"We are concerned that we would substitute any level of fearmongering . . . for the hard work of getting a humane and just immigration policy," United Methodist bishop Gregory Palmer said July 10.

In a telephone press conference organized by the group Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform, the bishops condemned the government's handling of a May 2 raid at a kosher slaughterhouse in Postville, Iowa, which resulted in the arrest of nearly 400 undocumented workers.

The Episcopal, Methodist and Lutheran bishops also voiced concerns that many undocumented workers faced "inhumane" conditions while cleaning up flood-affected areas in eastern Iowa. According to the group, workers were paid less than the minimum wage and forced to work 12- to 14-hour shifts in "toxic" environments.

"They were from Miami, Houston, Honduras—all over," said Iowa Episcopal bishop Alan Scarfe. "We discovered that one man thought he was actually in Chicago. That's how taken-off-the-streets these people are."

Illegal immigration has been a hot-button issue in the state in recent months. Federal agents arrested 389 workers during the Postville raid at the Agriprocessors meatpacking plant. Advocates for immigration reform argue that the raid had a wide-reaching negative impact on the community and on young children, whose parents were either imprisoned or forced to stay home with no source of income.

Government policies “have increased the level of fear, and have literally terrorized the lives of people and torn apart families,” Palmer said.

The Postville plant has recently come under fire from Jewish leaders as well, who called the conditions for workers “contrary to Jewish values.” The plant is the nation’s largest supplier of kosher meats. *–Religion News Service*