Opinion

NCR Voices



Smoke rises from a burning car on Atlantic Boulevard during a standoff by protesters and law enforcement, following multiple detentions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Compton, California, on June 7, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Barbara Davidson)



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The tensions between protesters and law enforcement in Los Angeles are ominous. Opposing the indiscriminate raids on migrants is necessary and just, but people rightly fear President Donald Trump is only looking for an excuse to claim emergency powers.

The protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids have been largely nonviolent. Many of the protesters are themselves immigrants, demonstrating solidarity with those swept up in the raids. Union leaders rallied to protest the detention of David Huerta, the president of California's Service Employees International Union, who was arrested on Friday and hospitalized after police threw him to the curb. He was released on bail Monday, June 9.

Keeping the protests nonviolent is critical. If anything is obvious about the developments in Los Angeles over the weekend, it is that President Trump welcomes a confrontation. Who is talking about the collapse of his public bromance with Elon Musk now? Who is talking about tariffs? Trump lives to master the news cycle and he does it better than any politician in my lifetime. Only if the protests are nonviolent can they both register their message and avoid stoking flames Trump is only too happy to see engulf the country.

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Nonviolence rarely dominates news coverage. Images of people walking peacefully down a street do not garner as much attention as photos of burning Waymos, self-driving, electric taxis that have become popular in Los Angeles. And violent protests

can quickly turn the American people against the cause of the protesters.

Highlighting a young girl whose father was detained in one of Friday's immigration raids was an intelligent way to remind people that the provocation in Los Angeles started with the ICE raids and that the issue has a human face. As Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez said in a June 6 statement:

> We all agree that we don't want undocumented immigrants who are known terrorists or violent criminals in our communities. But there is no need for the government to carry out enforcement actions in a way that provokes fear and anxiety among ordinary, hard-working immigrants and their families.

It would be a good idea for the archbishop to invite his clergy to help lead the nonviolent protests. Get people walking behind images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, chanting prayers and singing religious songs, processing around the cathedral's parish boundaries, which encompass much of the downtown area affected by the riots, or walking from church to church. Any troublemakers who want to resort to violence probably would not join a church-led march, and isolating them is also a good thing. It is time our church leaders seek some creative ways to show solidarity with unjustly targeted migrants.

Democrats and others who are opposed to Trump's authoritarian tactics need to be very prudent. At his "Triad" column at The Bulwark, Jonathan Last raised many of the most important concerns about the protests. He notes that some protests succeed, while others fail, and it is well nigh to impossible to know in advance which will be the case for a given protest. "The received wisdom is roughly: Protests should be nonviolent, massive, with clearly articulated and achievable goals," he wrote. That sounds right to me.

"It is probably true that Trump chose to escalate deportation arrests in Los Angeles in the most confrontational way possible in the hopes that the city's residents would object," Last argues. "It is absolutely true that he needlessly mobilized the National Guard in the hopes of provoking a confrontation between protesters and the military that he could use as a pretext for his next escalation. But do you think he *needs* a pretext?" This is the man who, after all, encouraged the most violent protest in recent U.S. history, the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol, and he largely got away with it.

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Such political calculations are not the church's concern. Our concern is to affirm the human dignity of migrants, whether they have entered the country with proper documentation or not. Our concern is to offer what protection we can to them and to their families.

My late friend Richard Trumka, the president of the AFL-CIO, would often recall how his father and some other miners were meeting to form a union, when the company's guards — sometimes, Trumka called them "goons" — broke up the meeting and chased the miners away. They fled to the local Catholic church where the pastor stood on the steps holding a cross, welcoming the miners to the safety of the church, and telling the company's guards to back off. Fr. Clete Kiley recalled Trumka telling this story in his remembrance of the great union leader published here at NCR.

We need the kind of solidarity those miners showed, and the kind of courage that pastor showed. The migrants being targeted by ICE are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do not need to burn a Waymo to demonstrate our solidarity. We do need more than statements from the church's pastors. This is a moment when the church must witness to what we believe as if the judgment of our souls depended upon it. Because it does.

Related: The terror of an ICE check-in: One Catholic family's fear of being torn apart
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