News



Protesters, including many clergy, gather to denounce U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations, June 10, 2025, in downtown Los Angeles. (AP/Damian Dovarganes)

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Los Angeles — June 12, 2025
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On Friday (June 6), the Rev. Brendan Busse, a Jesuit Catholic priest, had just finished a graduation ceremony for eighth graders at Dolores Mission School when he got news about an immigration raid happening in downtown Los Angeles. He abruptly stopped folding chairs, rushed past parents and grandparents leaving the celebration and drove to the city's Fashion District.

What he found shocked even a veteran priest who has worked with vulnerable populations all over the globe.

"It was almost like every science fiction movie, where there's an alien occupation from another planet that comes in with guns and flash grenades and pepper spray, in order to seek out and to hunt certain people who were there just trying to do their daily job," he told Religion News Service in an interview this week.

The experience, he said, felt "like what it might feel like on the receiving side of an occupation."

It was the beginning of what has become a volatile period in Los Angeles' history, with immigration agents facing raucous protesters who have been, in turn, confronted by deployments of National Guard troops and active-duty U.S. Marines. The result has been an escalating standoff between President Donald Trump's administration, which has taken a hard-line approach to immigration, and the people and elected officials of Southern California, where immigrants and their close relatives make up a substantial part of the population.

Amid all the dramatic clashes, Busse said, his focus — as well as those of other religious leaders in the city — has been on those impacted the most: people whose family members have been detained and, in some cases, already deported.

In addition to his priestly duties, Busse is a member of a local rapid response network, which tries to keep tabs on immigration raids and support those affected.

"Since the inauguration of the president, we've been training and preparing to respond to actions like this," Busse said. He explained that members of the network — which includes community members and representatives from different organizations, nonprofits and religious congregations — aren't trained to interfere with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity, but rather to document the situation and try to provide legal and moral support.

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"The Christian faith has always been the faith of witness, a faith of trust in God's revelation in the times in which we live," he said, arguing his faith compels him to bear witness "especially in moments of persecution or suffering or oppression."

His words were echoed Monday by the Rev. Jaime Edwards-Acton, pastor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Hollywood. Edwards-Acton spoke at a press conference convened to support 14 families whose loved ones were among those apprehended by ICE — including at the raid Busse witnessed.

"Just like Peter stood and preached boldly in the face of empire, we too are called to boldly speak truth in our own time," Edwards-Acton said, as Busse stood nearby. "So we proclaim today, in the spirit of Jesus, that immigrant lives are sacred. We insist that family unity is holy. We declare that due process and human dignity and respect are nonnegotiables, and we will not allow this administration to normalize cruelty or silence our resistance."

Edwards-Acton was followed by an array of immigrants who spoke on behalf of family members. Many accused ICE of "kidnapping" their loved ones, whom they said they had not heard from and don't know where they are.

"(He) was kidnapped by ICE agents, and we haven't heard anything from him yet," one family member said, referring to his uncle.

Edwards-Acton told RNS that 13 Episcopalians in his diocese have been impacted by the raids. The priest passionately rejected arguments put forward by the Trump administration that those being apprehended by ICE were hardened criminals.

"According to them, they're all criminals, they're the worst of the worst," Edwards-Acton said. "But I can tell you personally of 13 families where that is just not the

case."

Edwards-Acton said many local faith leaders have joined the protests against ICE. At a demonstration Monday, clergy were among the protesters calling for the release of David Huerta, a union leader and member who was arrested by ICE agents while trying to document an immigration raid, according to Edwards-Acton. (Huerta, who was charged with one count of conspiracy to impede an officer, has since been released.)

"We were really there to call out ICE, demanding to know where our families are, where our loved ones are, and where our community members and church members are," Edwards-Acton said. The group also communicated with Los Angeles Police Department officers, hoping to remind them "that we are a sanctuary city in a sanctuary state."

But the faith leaders, he said, hoped to serve another purpose: reduce tensions between protesters and armed authorities, which have sometimes escalated to moments of violence. After the rally, Edwards-Acton said, he and a group of other clergy walked a few blocks to where a large contingent of police officers and National Guard members were assembled. The faith leaders spread out in front of the line of officers and held hands, sometimes bursting into song.

"The clergy tried to de-escalate by reminding folks that we're here in a nonviolent capacity," he said. "We're here to challenge what's going on, but not to do it violently."

He added: "When we are there in that capacity, everyone responds differently. Not just the protesters, but the police, the LAPD, ICE or whatever."

Edwards-Acton said he and other faith leaders plan to continue to be a presence at the protests, while hosting their own demonstrations. The local Episcopal diocese helped sponsor an interfaith vigil on Tuesday evening, and the Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles celebrated a Mass for peace, focused on the current situation, on Wednesday.

Jewish leaders have spoken out as well. On Tuesday evening, Rabbi Sharon Brous, a prominent local rabbi, appeared with LA Mayor Karen Bass at an interfaith vigil before a curfew went into effect, calling Trump a "pharaoh" and calling for nonviolent resistance.

"We will not obey in advance. We will not turn our gaze. We will not fan the flames of extremism. We will not answer violence with violence," said Brous, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Edwards-Acton and Busse said they remain focused on members of their communities apprehended by ICE, especially amid reports that some have already been deported.

"If you want to look to the power of the Spirit, just watch those family members appeal for their own fathers and brothers and sisters and mothers who have been detained," Busse said.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.