News



Activist and farm worker Xochitl Nunez, right, holds up a picture of late farm worker Jaime Alanis, believed to be the first fatality during an ICE immigration raid, as she joins farmworkers, immigrant leaders, labor allies, and organizers to announce a national "Farmworker Strike for Dignity" during a news conference at La Placita Olvera in Los Angeles, July 14, 2025. (AP photo/Damian Dovarganes)



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Roberto Carlos Montoya Valdez grew up in Jutiapa, a small Guatemalan town close to the Salvadoran border. He repaired cellphones, raised goats for milk and cheese and trained young people to box.

Despite juggling several jobs, he could barely make ends meet and felt he couldn't provide the life his children and grandchildren deserved. Like thousands of others from Latin America — regions rich in natural resources but scarce in opportunity, he made the journey north.

Montoya Valdez had migrated to the U.S. three times before. Three years ago, he arrived again, in California, and quickly joined the day laborer community.

Every morning, Montoya Valdez waited outside the Home Depot in Monrovia, California, with the hope of being hired by someone to do home repairs, landscaping or roofing. He was 52 years old and had a bone disease that made it hard for him to do certain jobs, but he didn't have the luxury to reject them. His daughter, Ana Victoria Montoya, sent him medicine from Guatemala, where it was cheaper, and allowed him to continue working.

Even while standing in the store's parking lot, Montoya stayed connected to his family through WhatsApp, sending voice notes, photos and daily video calls. On Aug. 13, he proudly sent a clip to his 8-year-old grandson, showing him Hot Wheels cars he had just bought and encouraging him to study hard.

Montoya would never get to deliver those toy cars. Within less than 24 hours, he was dead.



Family members and neighbors attend Carlos Roberto Montoya Valdez's funeral, in his hometown in Jutiapa, Guatemala, Sept. 7, 2025. (Courtesy of the Montoya family)

Raid turns deadly

When agents conducted a raid Aug. 14 at the Monrovia Home Depot, Montoya Valdez fled. An agent pursued him, and he ran onto the 210 Freeway, where he was struck by a car. He was pronounced dead at a hospital a few hours later.

The Monrovia city manager said in a statement U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement conducted the action, and multiple media outlets reported the same. U.S. Customs and Border Protection issued a statement Aug. 25 concerning the "Fatality of an Unknown Pedestrian," claiming eight "illegal aliens" had been arrested. The statement said U.S. Border Patrol conducted the action at Home Depot and a Border Patrol agent "pursued a man on foot" but stopped when the man ran up an I-210 exit ramp.

Community advocates immediately pushed back criticizing these ICE raids.



Roberto Carlos Montoya Valdez's family held a funeral for him with a small religious service at their home in Jutiapa, Guatemala, Sept. 7, 2025. (Courtesy of the Montoya family)

The organization National Day Laborer Organizing Network,or NDLON, which advocates for day laborers, migrants and low-wage workers rights, said in a statement that "Carlos Montoya was not an 'unknown pedestrian.' He was a beloved father and grandfather, and a member of our community."

NDLON said to NCR that according to people on the ground at the Home Depot, ICE agents participated in the raid, but CBP denies this and says they were Border Patrol agents.

The labor group has been organizing protests, vigils and "know-your-rights" teach-ins at places where day laborers congregate."Workers have the right to stand in public and seek jobs," Palmira Figueroa, the group's communications director, told the National Catholic Reporter.

"Detaining people without warrants — based on language, race or appearance — is what breaks the law," she said.

Cross border mourning

Faith leaders, activists and local politicians held a vigil at the Monrovia Home Depot the day after Montoya Valdez's death to pay tribute to him and protest President Trump's immigration policies. They also called on California Gov. Gavin Newsom to conduct an independent investigation. Newsom has not commented publicly about the case and his press office did not respond to NCR's inquiry.

Back in Guatemala, Montoya Valdez's wife, daughter and entire extended family anxiously awaited for his body to be repatriated to Guatemala. On Sept. 7, they were finally able to hold a proper funeral for Montoya Valdez, an evangelical Christian, with a small religious service at their home. Dozens of neighbors attended, many with a shared story of migration.

On top of his casket was a Superman action figure that he had given to his grandson who had called him his Superman.

A neighbor, Elías Arrecis, spoke to NCR about his own similar experiences as a migrant in the United States, saying he suffered from exploitation and discrimination to be able to send money home, but he believes the situation has gotten much worse.



Roberto Carlos Montoya Valdez's grandson looks at his grandfather's casket, with the Superman doll that he had given him resting on top. Montoya Valdez's funeral took place Sept. 7 in his hometown of Jutiapa, Guatemala. (Courtesy of the Montoya family)

"They now hunt people down, treating the immigrants like criminals, sticking the Army, police, ICE agents and even mercenaries on them," he said. Arrecis had fond memories of Montoya Valdez as "a good person, a good friend, a good compañero who was always checking in on neighbors, and helping out, very happy."

Weeks prior to Montoya Valdez's death, a town in Zinapécuaro, Michoacán, Mexico, was experiencing the same grief at the funeral of a 57-year-old Mexican farmworker Jaime Alanis. Alanis died after an immigration raid on July 10, on the Glass House Farms legal cannabis farm in Ventura County, just north of Los Angeles.

Alanis fell from a greenhouse roof and later died in the hospital July 12, according to the Associated Press.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum expressed her solidarity with the family at a press conference July 15 and said her government is considering filing a complaint in U.S. courts, according to Newsweek. "It's very unfortunate that this happened. We offer our complete solidarity and support to the family. There cannot be another case like these, and that is why a complaint must be filed in the courts there," Sheinbaum said.

"Words can't describe our loss," said his cousin Juan Duran, who had attended a memorial service for Alanis, who was Catholic, in Oxnard and his funeral in Michoacán.

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In an interview with Univision, Duran added: "They must be held responsible, it was the police and there must be justice, his death must not be in vain."

Reporters had been warned against attending the funeral in Michoacán, due to organized crime in the town causing Mexican Independence Day festivities to be cancelled following car burnings and road blockades.

Montoya Valdez's daughter Ana Victoria told NCR she could understand her father's logic in running away.

"If people knew they were going to be treated like human beings, like citizens, then maybe they wouldn't flee, maybe they would show up for the authorities, but that's not what we see in the news, the people talk about the humiliating conditions, how they hold them and how they treat them," she said.



Washington Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala speaks during a roundtable titled "Deportations and Assaults on Human Dignity: on Catholic Principles, Human Costs, and Pastoral Challenges" at Georgetown University in Washington Sept. 11, 2025. Also pictured is Sr. Norma Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, who is executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley in the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas. (OSV News/Courtesy of Georgetown University/Rafael Suanes)

Organizing and resistance

A few U.S. Catholic bishops have spoken out recently about current treatment of immigrants. During a roundtable discussion Sept. 11 at Georgetown University, Bishop Evelio Menjivar-Ayala, an auxiliary bishop of Washington, and formerly undocumented immigrant from El Salvador, likened recent raids to the fear and death that reigned during his country's civil war.

"I went to a parish that had been heavily affected by raids," he said. "And as I listen to the stories of people … one of the phrases that kept coming … is '*se lo llevaron*'

— 'they took him,' or 'they took her.' "

Menjivar said it was the same phrase people used during the civil war in El Salvador when death squads disappeared others. "So this is what people are experiencing these days," he said. "This is the level of terror that people are feeling these days."

Washington Cardinal Robert McElroy similarly spoke against the assault on immigrants during a Mass for World Day for Migrants and Refugees Sept. 28 at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. "This campaign relies on fear and terror at its core, for the government knows that it cannot succeed in its efforts except by bringing new dimensions of fear and terror to our nation's history and life," he said.

The National Day Laborer Organizing Network, based in Los Angeles, says it will keep mobilizing with their network of 70 organizations across the country. "As immigrants, our resilience resides in our community, we will keep fighting, we will keep working with each other for our own safety and showing up for everyone, because the attack on immigrants is an attack on everyone else," Figueroa told NCR.

"We are hoping that the whole country will stand up for us, because when they stand up for us, they stand up for themselves," she said.

Josue Decavele contributed to this report from Guatemala. Decavele is a Guatemalan photojournalist and video journalist.

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