Opinion
Guest Voices



The Metropolitan Detention Center is shown Tuesday, Sept. 2, 2025, in Los Angeles. (AP/Damian Dovarganes)



by Jeff Dietrich

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He sobbed copiously as he told his story. Manuel was looking for his wife, who had been taken while performing her legal obligations at the San Bernardino federal building and transported to the federal building in Los Angeles.

We had just begun our weekly Friday vigil against ICE in front of the L.A. federal building when Manuel approached us, clutching a sheaf of legal documents. He wanted to visit his wife in prison in the "basement dungeon" of the Metropolitan Detention Center, a makeshift holding pen where people sleep on concrete floors with aluminum blankets and, we've been told, are only served one meal a day with limited access to drinking water. Detainees are only supposed to be there for 72 hours before being sent to detention centers in the desert or Northern California, but we have known some to have stayed there for 12 days.



Jeff Dietrich, of the Los Angeles Catholic Worker, under arrest for "blocking the driveway" at the Alameda St. entrance to the Metropolitan Detention Center in L.A. on Sept. 24, 2025. (Courtesy of Bob Eiden)

Though the 2,000 National Guards that President Trump deployed have left Los Angeles, the battle with ICE is not over here. Masked agents have instigated a climate of fear across Southern California with sweeps of parks, car washes and day labor pickups. Fear of arrests prevents immigrants from attending church services, grocery shopping and attending school.

The L.A. Times found that the majority of those arrested in Southern California had no criminal history. But immigrants here do not have due process. They do not come before a judge, the judge does not get to hear what crime they have committed — or if they have committed a crime at all — and they do not get to post bail. They do not have visitation rights either, so Manuel could not visit his wife.

In his last Easter address, the late Pope Francis lamented "how much contempt is stirred up at times toward the vulnerable, the marginalized, and migrants… I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves or, who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas! For we are all children of God!"

At a Mass for missionaries and migrants earlier this month, Pope Leo XIV said, "No one should be forced to flee, nor exploited or mistreated because of their situation as foreigners or people in need. Human dignity must always come first."

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On the day of our vigil, Fr. Chris Ponnet, pastor of St. Camillus and an agitator in multitudes of anti-immigrant demonstrations, led us in prayer. As we prayed for Manuel's "kidnapped" wife and all the immigrants in our country denied due process, we also prayed for those immigrants fleeing war, poverty, famine and climate change from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan to Gaza.

As for me, I will stand with Pope Francis, Pope Leo and Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. I will stand with the immigrant poor just as I have stood for the poor of Skid Row for over 50 years as a Catholic Worker. I will stand in front of the bus blocking the exit to the "basement dungeon" of the Metropolitan Detention Center. I will stand in solidarity with Manuel and his wife. I will risk arrest and imprisonment; I will stand in solidarity with all immigrants, all the poor impoverished people. For we are all children of God!