News



After an "ICE out of Minnesota" rally and march hosted by the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee Jan. 10, thousands of participants marched to the site of the ICE shooting that killed Renee Good in Minneapolis Jan. 7. (Tim Montgomery)

by Tim Montgomery

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In the days following the Jan. 7 killing of Renee Good by a federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent in Minneapolis, there has been an upwelling of community prayer and support for people targeted by the government's immigration crackdown surge.

Hours after the shooting, a crowd of thousands gathered around the site to remember Good and protest the ICE action that took her life. Thousands more have gathered at other events since then, including an "ICE out of Minnesota" march hosted by the Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee on Jan. 10.

Anne Attea, a longtime parishioner at Church of the Ascension in North Minneapolis, attended a "Vigil of Hope" at the state capitol Jan. 9. She said many in the Spanish-speaking immigrant community at her parish experienced what she described as an "Advent of darkness" as the ICE crackdown in the city began. Both documented and undocumented immigrants have been living in fear, she said, because ICE agents have been engaged in aggressive racial and ethnic profiling.

"We as a Catholic body should become more forceful in denouncing hate, evil, racism and lack of respect for human dignity," said Attea, who is program minister in the Center for Spirituality & Social Justice at St. Catherine University in St. Paul.

> 'We're human beings, people with children trying to provide for our families. We have to stick together, help each other, pray for each other and not lose faith.'
> —Digna Yaurincela
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About 400 people prayed Jan. 13 outside the Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis where people are being detained by ICE. Participants held signs denouncing ICE and remembering Good.

"I think solidarity in times like this is so important," said Aaron Sinner, a parishioner at St. Thomas More Catholic Church in St. Paul. "ICE has a pretty clear mandate, and

it's a pretty narrow mandate by law. It's scary to see the wanton disregard for what their scope of duty is and the reckless abandon with which they are exceeding their mandate and putting lives at risk."

Marty Roers, of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet Justice Office in St. Paul, belongs to an interfaith group that has been showing up to pray at the federal immigration detention facility every month for 12 years. On Jan. 13 he said he was there "standing up for a better way to work with the issues and struggles of immigration."



People rally outside the Whipple Federal building and immigration court in Minneapolis Jan. 13. A group demonstrates and prays monthly for immigrants going through the detention and deportation system. This month's rally also drew attention to the Jan. 7 shooting by an ICE agent of Renee Good. (Tim Montgomery)

The ICE agents in the Minneapolis area in recent weeks wearing black head coverings have reminded Houa Her, a parishioner at Presentation of Mary Parish in the St. Paul suburb of Maplewood, of the Communist military forces that came to his village in Laos. They questioned people about their activities and loyalties and took

some away, never to return, he said.

People were living in fear, he told The National Catholic Reporter. Her was 12 years old at the time. He eventually came to the U.S. with his brother from a refugee camp in Thailand and has been a U.S. citizen since 1995.

Currently in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area, ICE agents have not limited their actions to city streets. They have also entered people's homes and, in doing so, have created a sense of fear that is disrupting family life, according to a Latino parish ministry worker in the archdiocese who did not want her name to be used out of safety concerns. She described a feeling of great desolation in the community.



Participants in a "ICE out of Minnesota" rally Jan 10 stand at a memorial marking the site where an ICE agent shot and killed Renee Good had been shot and killed Jan. 7. Pastors in the area say church attendance is down as ICE activity takes place. (Tim Montgomery)

"These (people) are not threats to our community," said Fr. Dale Korogi, pastor of Ascension Church, in remarks about immigrants at an interfaith press conference in Minneapolis Jan. 8. "These are really good people!" The priest said that families were afraid to leave their homes. They're not being inconvenienced by ICE, he said, they're being harassed, terrorized and traumatized by ICE. In the memory of Renee Good and in the name of God, Karogi called for an end to this cruelty.

Korogi said Mass attendance among Spanish-speakers at Ascension is down about 80%. Fear of leaving home has also contributed to an over 60% drop in attendance numbers at the Sunday afternoon Spanish-language Mass at Assumption Catholic Church in the Minneapolis suburb of Richfield, another parish with a large Spanish-speaking immigrant congregation. The same story is playing out at other parishes in the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis since ICE's "Operation Metro Surge" began in December.

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"Currently in Minneapolis we see so much inhumanity," said one South Minneapolis pastor in his weekend homily. "Whatever our nationality or race, our true citizenship is in the Kingdom of God. Let's live that way," said the priest who didn't want to be identified out of concern for his parishioners' safety.

"When it comes to ICE operations, I understand they are doing their job," said Digna Yaurincela, a parishioner at St. Richards Catholic Church in Richfield, "but they're focusing on the wrong people."

Yaurincela, who is a U.S. citizen, related several accounts of people being picked up by ICE agents. They included a 17-year old who was picked up at the Richfield Target store, then released 3 miles away at the Bloomington Walmart after producing a passport to establish his U.S. citizenship. She worries her own children might be picked up based simply on how they look.

"We're human beings, people with children trying to provide for our families," Yaurincela said. "We have to stick together, help each other, pray for each other and not lose faith."

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Immigration Protests in Minneapolis** and **Immigration and the Church** feature series.

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