

## Catholic Sisters launch “Welcoming Communities” for immigration reform

Written by Sister Sallyann McCarthy  
Monday, 19 December 2011 13:12

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Ten communities of Catholic Sisters based in the Upper Mississippi River Valley are calling on President Obama and Congress to work together to enact comprehensive immigration reform.

To make their point, they have issued a statement on “Welcoming Communities,” they are placing billboards in the Quad Cities, Des Moines, Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City and Clinton, Iowa, this month in advance of the Iowa caucuses to make sure delegates, potential candidates and voters remember this critical issue, and they are holding prayer services at the billboard sites and at their headquarters on December 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the day the billboards will be posted.

The billboards with the message: “I was a stranger an immigrant and you welcomed me” (see attached) will remain through early January. The message, based on the words of Jesus, is taken from the Gospel of Matthew.

“We declare ourselves ‘Welcoming Communities’ in affirmation of our Catholic tradition that holds sacred the dignity of each person,” the Sisters said in the official statement, “and we invite other communities and people of faith to join us in becoming ‘Immigrant Welcoming Communities’ through prayer, reflection, education and action.”

“Our ‘Welcoming Communities’ stance is a direct response to the government’s ‘Secure Communities’ program which has transformed local police officers into a primary gateway for

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deportation,” explained the Sisters. “The results have been hundreds of thousands of detentions and deportations, serious civil and human rights concerns, due process violations and damaged trust between immigrant communities and local police.”

They further noted that “the ‘Secure Communities’ process was marketed to local law enforcement agencies as a way to deal with serious and dangerous criminals. In fact, low-priority, non-violent offenders or even lawful permanent residents are being funneled into this program which is breaking up families, promoting racial profiling, and fueling a fear-filled and hateful anti-immigrant atmosphere.”

National immigration reform organizations assert that the “Secure Communities” program has actually made communities less safe because many individuals are afraid to report crimes that they experience or witness for fear of being deported or having neighbors, family members or friends deported. As a result, they state, crimes are going unreported and communities, rather than becoming “secure” are living in fear.

“Failure on the part of the federal government to reform the present unworkable immigration system has resulted in states passing legislation that is punitive and harmful to human rights,” noted the Sisters.

“We understand that enforcement of law is part of any immigration policy,” the Sisters emphasized. “However, the present policy of involving state and local law enforcement agencies in the enforcement of federal immigration law, such as in the ‘Secure Communities’ program, is not achieving that goal. True security lies in building relationships and respecting human rights and only true, comprehensive, compassionate immigration reform can deal with the crisis in our nation. Therefore, we are declaring ourselves Immigrant Welcoming Communities.”

“Welcoming Communities” is a project of the Dominican Sisters, Sinsinawa, Wis., [tbuxton@sinsinawa.org](mailto:tbuxton@sinsinawa.org) ;  
Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dubuque, Ia.,  
[aconnolly@bvmcongregation.org](mailto:aconnolly@bvmcongregation.org)  
; Sisters of the Humility of Mary, Davenport, Ia., (  
[lmartin@chmiowa.org](mailto:lmartin@chmiowa.org)  
); Sisters of the Presentation, Dubuque, Ia.,  
[jane@dubuquepresentations.org](mailto:jane@dubuquepresentations.org)

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- ; Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Ia.,  
[sisters@clintonfranciscns.com](mailto:sisters@clintonfranciscns.com)
- ; Sisters of St. Francis, Dubuque, Ia.,  
[brookensp@osfdbq.org](mailto:brookensp@osfdbq.org)
- ; Sisters of St. Benedict, Rock Island, Ill.,  
[sflansburgpr@smmsisters.org](mailto:sflansburgpr@smmsisters.org)
- ; Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, La Crosse, Wis.,  
[jcomeau@fspa.org](mailto:jcomeau@fspa.org)
- ; Sisters of the Visitation, Dubuque, Ia.,  
[tclark02636@yahoo.com](mailto:tclark02636@yahoo.com)
- ; Sisters of Mercy, West Midwest Community, Omaha, Neb.,  
[sgoetzing@mercywmw.org](mailto:sgoetzing@mercywmw.org)

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