

Cathedral of St. Raphael hosts Immigration Resource Fair

Aid organizations, advocates attend

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Witness Correspondent

DUBUQUE — “I was a stranger and you welcomed me,” says Jesus in Matthew 25:35. For the past several years, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Dubuque has made welcoming the stranger an essential part of its mission by providing free legal services to immigrants in the archdiocese.

On Friday, April 5, representatives from Catholic Charities teamed up with the Presentation Lantern Center, a non-profit organization that provides ESL instruction and help with preparing for the US Naturalization Test, the Tri-State Hispanic Council and the Human Rights Department of the City of Dubuque to organize an Immigration Resource Fair at the Cathedral of St. Raphael.

“There are many organizations in the Dubuque area that provide services to immigrants, but unfortunately some of these have been siloed in their work. We wanted to provide a chance for people in these organizations to get to know one another and determine ways to collaborate,” stated Megan Ruiz, who is Executive Director of the Presentation Lantern Center.

Some of the organizations represented at the fair included Dubuque for Refugee Children, which connects young newcomers to Dubuque with educational, medical, and legal services; Iowa Legal Aid, which provides free legal assistance to low-income Iowans and has a farm-worker project focused on labor disputes, chemical exposure, and housing justice issues; Waypoint, which offers counseling and support groups for victims of domestic violence; Fountain of Youth, which works with young people to break the cycle of Generational Poverty; and the Riverview Center, which provides crisis intervention for victims of sexual assault. Various entities of the city and state government as well as Northeast Iowa Community College were also on hand.

One central feature of the fair was a “Know Your Rights” training session put on by Catholic Charities immigration at-



A participant in the fair at St. Raphael Cathedral April 5 speaks to a representative of the Presentation Lantern Center of Dubuque. The organization was founded by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to aid immigrants from other nations who come to Iowa. (Photo by Jeannine Pitas)

torney Ry Meyer, whose work centers on family-based immigration law with the principal aim of keeping mixed-status families together.

“We all have inalienable human rights, regardless of our citizenship status,” he said. “Citizens may know their rights, but immigrants may not be aware of the legal protections they have and the legal courses they can take.”

Some of these basic rights include the right to remain silent when arrested and the legal assumption that everyone is innocent until proven guilty.

Meyer went on to describe strategies on how to deal with local law enforcement or federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials if encountering them at home, in a car, or in a workplace. “Never fight or run; you have to identify yourself, but otherwise, say nothing,” he said.

He reminded listeners that law enforcement can only enter a home with the resident’s permission (granted by opening the door) or a valid search warrant. Such a warrant must be signed by a judge, list the address, and describe the specific area of the home to be searched.

“Many people feel nervous, afraid or angry when confronted by the police,” Meyer said. “Stay calm, write down later

what happened, and make sure that your hands are visible at all times.”

Meyer advised that avoiding sudden movements is especially important if one is stopped in a car, as more police get shot in traffic violation encounters than any others.

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*Ry Meyer,
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“You will have to show your license, registration and proof of insurance,” he said. “You may have to give your name, but you can always ask if it is required. You are never required to answer questions about where you are going or where you are from. You can ask ‘Am I detained?’ and state that you want to speak with an attorney before answering such questions. If it’s not the local police, but

ICE that targets a vehicle, it is even more necessary to remain silent.”

In terms of raids on workplaces, Meyer says it is important to have a plan in case of a potential ICE raid.

“Everyone should have a plan; they should know their rights, remember where their important documents are and have decided who will care for their children in case of an arrest,” he said. “Never sign anything before speaking to an attorney, and know what you are being accused of.”

Meyer noted that most of the attendees at this training – immigrants’ rights advocates – were more likely to be on the receiving end of phone calls from arrested people rather than making them.

“If someone who has been detained calls you, ask them where they are, what papers they have been given, if they have a court date scheduled and if they have spoken with an attorney,” said Meyer. “Knowing that calls from jails are recorded, never ask why they were arrested or what they were doing.”

While very comprehensive, it was noted that this immigration resource fair was attended almost exclusively by service providers and community advocates, not immigrants themselves.

“Many people are nervous to come due to safety concerns. We are not entirely surprised by this outcome,” stated Taj Suleyman, who is the Equity Outreach Coordinator for the City of Dubuque and was one of the co-organizers of the event.

Ruiz echoed the sentiments of her colleague.

“While we tried to advertise this fair to immigrants, people are nervous to come. But our hope is that this information will still reach communities as service providers were able to share information with each other and spread the word about what our community offers,” Ruiz stated. “If only one or two organizations are known as helpers of immigrants, they can become overburdened by the need that exists. We hope to aid providers in sharing that burden and spreading the responsibility.”

Catholic Charities and the other organizations that attended the fair are hoping to raise awareness.

“It’s up to all of us to get out into the community and let people know about the many kinds of help we offer,” Ry Meyer said.