

Community girds for possible ICE raids

Haverhill Street church set up as 'sanctuary center'

By Bill Kirk bkirk@eagletribune.com Jul 13, 2019

LAWRENCE — A church on Haverhill Street is being offered as a sanctuary center for undocumented immigrants as the city, state and nation prepare for deportation raids by the federal Immigration Customs Enforcement, or ICE agency, on Sunday.

President Donald Trump has vowed a crackdown on illegal immigration, including nationwide seizures of people, starting early Sunday morning.

Pastor Cassandra Chavez of the Lutheran Church at 163 Haverhill St. said the church next door — Fuente de Salvacion at 155 Haverhill St. — will be available for people who fear they may be swept up in the raids and possibly deported.

“It will be offered as a sanctuary center,” she said.

“People are ready for anything,” noted Chavez, adding that her parishioners as well as other people across the city and the region are “concerned about it and prepared for it.”

She noted that many people are keeping a low profile this weekend, keeping travel to a minimum.

“People are less likely to go out due to the fear of ICE agents,” she said. At the same time, she and other immigration advocates have been talking to people about their rights.

“ICE agents aren’t allowed to storm a house,” she said. “At least they’re not supposed to.”

That doesn’t mean ICE agents won’t come to the city, however.

“Lawrence is definitely an immigrant community and Trump has not said nice things about Lawrence and recent immigrants,” she said. “That branch of government (ICE) can go where they please. ... But there’s no guarantee everyone will be treated with compassion.”

She and other immigrant advocates have been advising people that “when ICE comes to the door, they (residents) should ask for a judicial warrant.”

In addition, residents “don’t have to say anything. Don’t respond.”

Chavez said people should be aware that there is a large network of organizations, with lawyers and other advocates, who can help people who feel threatened or fear they may be picked up and/or deported.

Cosecha is a nationwide organization with a branch in Lawrence and the Merrimack Valley that is run by advocates for immigrants.

Another is the Merrimack Valley Project, a group of local residents and members of the faith community, focused on different justice issues. She said they were scheduled to hold a vigil in Shawsheen Square Friday night.

“We believe, in the faith community, that people should feel safe and not fearful,” she said. Rhetoric by Trump, she said, “may give people license to be less compassionate.”

Police Chief Roy Vasque said he hadn’t heard anything, either about Lawrence or other nearby cities, about ICE raids.

“No one’s contacted me about anything,” Vasque said Friday evening. “Hopefully it all takes place out west, in California, Texas, down by the border.”

Nonetheless, he said, “we are standing by to stand by.”

He said that ICE occasionally contacts local law enforcement if they think there’s a security issue, but in this series of raids, he understands that most of those being picked up will be for administrative reasons, not criminal issues.

Vasque noted that even though the city is considered a “sanctuary city,” local police will still arrest undocumented immigrants who may be wanted for criminal offenses.

“if you’re a criminal and you’re wanted, we have no problem arresting you,” Vasque said. “We just don’t get involved in administrative detainments.”

He said he had spoken with other chiefs in the area and in other cities in the state to “see if anyone’s heard anything” but nobody has.

Local immigration advocacy organizations have set up a hotline for people who may be having problems with ICE: 978-327-0906.