

## **In search of compassion**

**Sr. Carol Hoverman, OSF -- Witness Editor**

**Excepted with permission from 12/20/06 Witness**

We have heard the account of the birth of Jesus so many times. Now, a movie, THE NATIVITY STORY, gives viewers a better understanding of the human dimension of the plight of Mary and Joseph. St. Luke just gives one verse to the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. But that journey was over 100 miles, with plenty of hardships along the way! The lack of compassion the couple experienced in Mary's time of need, as they searched for a place of comfort, seems cruel. Could people be so heartless, we ask?

Compassion, in general, still seems in short supply. Instead, there is a tendency to instantaneously cast blame or judgment without knowing the facts.

Webster says compassion is "sympathetic consciousness of others' distress, together with a desire to alleviate it."... That implies walking a mile in another's shoes, so one can experience what the other person is experiencing....

We feel for military families who are experiencing separation at this holiday season. Having a spouse in constant danger in Iraq or Afghanistan causes great anxiety. Children miss their dads and dads miss months and years of their children's growing experiences. Special parties and other events are held for the family members remaining at home. In general, society feels great compassion for them.

On Dec. 12, many Hispanic families felt the pain of separation in another traumatic situation. These are the immigrants who were forcibly taken from the Swift Meat Packing Plants in Marshalltown and in five other states. Many of these had the proper documentation, resulting in the violation of their civil rights. Others may have been the victims of unscrupulous persons who "helped them," but actually gave them someone else's Social Security number. Many were taken to other states without the benefit of legal counsel. Is that how our country should treat guest workers who spend long hours at difficult jobs?

Where is the compassion for these individuals and families? Persons involved in Hispanic ministry in Marshalltown have been totally immersed in meeting the human and spiritual needs of the affected population in this time of chaos.

What would it be like to be in the shoes of these families? Mom is at home with the children and Dad is at work. Suddenly, Dad is taken away and the rest of the family doesn't know what has happened to him and where he has been taken. Many single mothers remained in custody long after they were told they would be able to make alternative arrangements for child care....

Some of these people have risked their lives out of desperation because of their dire poverty. They would like their children to have a better future. The same is true of most of our ancestors.

Regardless of their "legal" status, our Hispanic workers are deserving of our support and compassion and deserve better treatment than that experienced on Dec. 12.... A means of legal citizenship must be found for immigrants already in this country, especially for those who have worked and lived here for many years.

Mary and Joseph in the guise of Maria and José are still looking for a secure, peaceful place for their child. Who would turn them away?

---

Donations to assist with rent, food and regular expenses for those families affected may be sent to:

**St. Mary's Hispanic Ministry, 12 West Linn Street, Marshalltown, IA 50158**