

**Response to Receiving Cristine Wilson Medal
for Equality and Justice
From Iowa Commission on the Status of Women
August 29, 2009**

I stand before you this morning humbled and grateful for the honor of being awarded the **Cristine Wilson Medal for Equality and Justice**. Obviously I would not be here if it were not for the tragic immigration raid that took place May 12, 2008 at Agriprocessors in Postville, Iowa.

There is a scripture verse in the Gospel of Luke that has haunted and humbled me ever since hearing that I would receive this medal. It reads: *So with you: when you have done all you have been told to dosay, "We are unworthy servants, we have done no more than our duty."* Lk. 17:10

On the day of the raid Paul Rael, our Hispanic Minister, and I were doing no more than our duty. We were offering **pastoral presence and support to people in need**, when our government purely because of a flawed and outdated immigration system, was treating them as criminals.

My presence with you this morning tells you that I humbly accept this special recognition yet in my mind and heart I do so **in the name of many other valiant people**.

I receive and accept this medal in honor of the **389 women and men in Postville who were arrested**, as well as in the **name of all the children who feared that they would never again see their mother or father**.

I accept it in honor of the **mother who upon seeing the ICE agents**, grabbed her cell phone called our St. Bridget Hispanic Minister and simply said... **"Take care of my children!"**

I accept it honor of my friend **Pedro**, a 12 year old boy, who on the Thursday following the raid, in response to my question...**Pedro, how are you...said, "I am sad, very sad, because they have taken away my mother."**

I accept it in honor of the **42 women and 3 men who walked the streets of Postville with GPS devices on their ankles....**At first they were so embarrassed that they did not want anyone to see these devices, yet when it came time to walk in our marches and rallies they were unafraid. They stood tall....rolled their slacks to their knees and carried signs that read, **"We are not criminals. We came to work. We came to feed our families. We are mothers."** I call them the Rosa Parks' of our broken immigration system.

I accept it **in honor of all the children...both Hispanic and Anglo...who wake up with nightmares and still shudder when they hear a helicopter, fearing that their mothers and fathers will be taken away.**

I accept it in honor of the **Guatemalan women** who were described by Rigoberta Menchu, the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner as “**double time victims**” for the conditions they experienced that forced them to leave their home country and then for the treatment that they received at Agriprocessors in Postville.

I accept it honor of “**Isaias**” who sat in front of a lawyer and an interpreter at the Cattle Congress in Waterloo sobbing. When he regained his composure he looked directly at the two men and said: “*God knows you are just doing your job so you can feed your familiesand your job is to keep me from feeding mine.*”

I accept this award in honor of Gloria and the many other “women who worked at Agriprocessors.” “**Gloria**” is a woman from Mexico. She is tall and dignified. She not only walked the streets of Postville with an ankle bracelet, but she also walked with intense pain and anger in her heart. Her anger stemmed from the alleged labor law abuses, the injustices and sexual harassment that she and others experienced during their time of working at Agriprocessors

I accept this award **in honor of the entire St. Bridget Response Team** who have worked tirelessly...day in and day out... for our people. In particular I acknowledge **Paul Rael**, our Hispanic Minister, **Father Paul Ouderkirk**, our retired pastor, **Violeta Aleman**, our administrative assistant and **Pastor Steve Brackett** of St. Paul Lutheran Church.

I accept it in honor of **all the people throughout the United States who have supported our work through their financial donations. With each donation came words of support...**I recall one in particular that read...

- Saw yesterday’s N.Y. Times article. Your work is inspiring. God bless you and we’ll pray **that our country will once again become the humane shelter for the poor and weak and helpless....**
- Another read.... “**NO...NO...NO, this must not happen in the United States of America...treating people like this....**”

I also accept this honor **in the name of all the people who were deported to their home country....often they would leave on a bus from St.Bridget’s.** As they would board the bus I would hug them....and with the aid of a translator...tell them that they were loved and that I was so sorry that they had to leave...That I was so sorry for what had happened to them. They would look at me...shrug their shoulders and say, “**We understand...It’s ok.**”

But I say, “**It’s not ok! We have to sound a call for justice. We have to act. We have to call for comprehensive immigration reform.**”

I accept this medal **in the name of all the members of my religious community**, the Sisters of Charity, BVM, who through their presence, prayer and common commitment to justice and equality, **especially for women**, gave me the courage needed to respond with integrity and compassion to people in need.

The medal that I received this morning is not for display...it is not simply for the history books. It is not for a note on the internet. It is not for some jewelry box. Instead it is an award that must come alive or it should never have been given, so in fidelity to this honor I ask you to join me in **speaking a word of justice...a word of consolation....and a word of hope**. Please join me in seeking equality and justice for all people, especially the poor, the traumatized and **those held captive by the circumstances of their lives**. Please join me in taking to heart the words from the Gospel of Luke, "*We are unworthy servants, we have done no more than our duty.*" *Lk. 17:10*

In the name of **Cristine Wilson**, the woman who set the tone for this prestigious award, I remind you that it is our duty and our privilege to do whatever we can "*to have our country once again become the humane shelter for the poor, the weak and helpless.*" It is our duty to call for **comprehensive immigration reform**. It is our duty to work for **equality and justice**.

Our immigrant ancestors risked their lives, sacrificed and worked hard so that we could call America home, may we do the same for our 21st century immigrants. This to me is the meaning of the **Cristine Wilson Medal**. I am honored and grateful to receive it.

Thank you,

Mary McCauley, BVM
August 29, 2009