

Postville, Iowa  
Lessons for Immigration Reform

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## **The Setting**

Postville, like many small towns in the northeastern corner of Iowa, is an agricultural community, formally established in 1873. Surrounded by rolling hills and rich valleys, there is plenty of arable land for corn and soybeans, plus grazing for cattle and confinement buildings for the production of chickens, turkeys, and, increasingly, hogs, a shift from the hogs raised on the traditional diversified farms in the area (Flora and Bendini, 2007).

Settled by German and Norwegian immigrants, most community members were, until the 1990s, either Lutheran (the majority, with a large church on the hill next to the local cemetery) or Catholic. The Presbyterian Church served the other Protestants. Inter-marriage between Catholics and Protestants was considered quite inappropriate, but occasionally occurred. The two religions worked to accommodate each other. The town newspaper was printed entirely in German until the anti-German sentiment that accompanied World War I led to its overnight conversion from German to English, as with many town newspapers across Iowa at that period.

As with most cross-roads farming towns, Postville's post-WWII economy was based on supplying inputs for crop and animal production. Town businesses sold farm machinery, feed and seed, and agricultural chemicals. Services providers included veterinarians and custom pesticide applicators as well as doctors, lawyers, and accountants. Because of the surrounding agricultural abundance, it was logical to add value to local products through a feed mill and two slaughter plants – one for cattle and one for turkeys. The turkey plant, Iowa Turkey Production, was part of Turkey Valley Farms, LLC. It was established by turkey growers in Iowa and Minnesota in 1972. The Hygrade meatpacking plant, part of London-based Hygrade Foods Ltd., operated until 1980, when the corporation closed its Postville plant. The turkey plant employed some Latino labor, primarily from Mexico, and small businesses that served that new ethnic group emerged.

## **Diversity Increase**

In 1989, Aaron Rubashkin of Crown Heights, NY saw an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* for the long-unused Hygrade plant in Iowa. Rubashkin's purchase of the plant was a logical extension of their kosher meat distributing business. The family is prominent in the Hasidic Lubovicher<sup>1</sup> millenarian evangelical Jewish sect headquartered in Brooklyn, N.Y. The movement started in Russia in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Revitalized

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<sup>1</sup> Sometimes spelled Lubavicher

by the Lubovicher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), the seventh leader in the Chabad-Lubovitch dynasty, the movement seeks to bring the truth – and thus conversion to strict observance of their seven key laws and membership in their highly bonded communities – to Jews around the world, whom they view as straying from the proper path and thus impeding the coming of the Messiah.

Three of Aaron's children moved to Postville to run the plant, followed by many more Lubovicher families, whose male members worked in the plant (Agriprocessors, 2009). Sholom Rubashkin was the CEO. Under his direction, the plant was refurbished according to Hasidic Law, and it opened as a kosher plant in 1990.

Aaron Rubashkin's practice in his delicatessen and kosher meat distribution company was to employ new immigrants and refugees (Bloom, 2000). He is also known for his good works and charity to needy Lubavichers in Brooklyn. Renamed Agriprocessors, the privately held plant demanded absolute freedom from outside authorities, and absolute control within. Internal control is sought by all firms, and labor and environmental laws and their enforcement by governments impinges on that control. The Lubovichers, however, feel their interpretation of the Torah takes precedence over secular laws. The general society standards are viewed as irrelevant in the face of the Lubovich standards for the treatment of animals, treatment of workers, and treatment of the environment. Indeed, Rubashkin utilized the family's considerable influence with the Republican Party to rewrite the USDA slaughter standards to meet Agriprocessors internal standards. According to FailedMessiah.com, a website highly critical of the Rubashkins in particular.

Orthodox rabbis, kosher supervision agencies and kosher industry mouthpiece (and paid Agriprocessors' consultant) Menachem Lubinsky – led by Agudath Israel of America – met with senior USDA officials in Washington, DC on October 23, 2003, one year before the PETA videos were made public. In this meeting, the rabbis claimed USDA directives outlawing "sawing" by the religious slaughters would be wrongly used to stop all kosher slaughter.

The rabbis asked for the directives to be reworded. The USDA agreed. Ann Veneman, a former food industry lobbyist who was appointed Secretary of Agriculture by George W. Bush, is thought to have participated in that meeting and to have approved the rewording.

The new directive was written with close participation of Agudath Israel of America and its supporter, Nathan Lewin, a noted constitutional lawyer. Lewin was also Agriprocessors' (the Rubashkin family's) attorney.

The rabbis wanted to change USDA directives governing ritual slaughter, apparently to benefit Rubashkin and allow throat-ripping. (FailedMessiah, 2004)

At first the Rubashkins recruited Ukrainians and Russians recently arrived to New York City and paid their travel by bus or air to Postville. Often they came with families, and

their children enrolled in local schools, greatly increasing the language and ethnic diversity beyond that created by the few Latinos already there. Over 50 different nationalities have worked in the plant since its inception as a kosher facility, and as many as 35 different languages were present in the Postville schools.

In 2002, a plastic factory, Norplex, which produces industrial laminates, located in Postville. It is an affiliate of Industrial Dielectrics, Inc., based in Nashville, Indiana. This factory has employed up to 500 workers, primarily local Iowans. Currently it employs 180 workers as the economy has declined (Norplex, 2009)

The Iowa Turkey production plant burned to the ground in the winter of 2003. In response to the plight of the displaced workers, many of whom were Hispanic, Postville established a Food Pantry as a 501(c)3, and encouraged the Latino workers to transfer to Agriprocessors in order to have a ready labor force available when the plant was rebuilt. Although Postville put in a proposal to support rebuilding, the Board of Directors of Valley Turkey Farms decided that instead of rebuilding in Postville, they would acquire and refurbish a closed turkey plant in Marshall, Minnesota, as that would require a smaller capital investment. By 2004, the only member/owners of Turkey Valley Farms were in Minnesota.

When the turkey plant burned, Agriprocessors hired many of that plant's Latinos workers. Further, word got out that, while many of the employers in the region demanded documentation before hiring, Agriprocessors would take care of the paper work for the new workers after they had been hired. Workers' dependence on their employer for remaining in the United States increased their vulnerability and that of their families, so that they did not report unpaid wages, uncompensated overtime, sexual harassment, or unsafe working conditions. When a few workers tried to unionize, Rubashkin thwarted the effort by claiming that they weren't really employees since they were not documented.

In the bucolic rural setting the Lubovichers were able create a kind of *shtetl*, a small, pious community following Lubovicher strict 19<sup>th</sup> century standards of generosity to all within their community,. The Lubavichers purchased a large farm house and grounds opposite the Lutheran church for worship, ritual bathing, and education. Few of their many children enrolled in local schools. Managers and administrators were all Lubavichers, and many specialized rabbis were needed for the ritual slaughter of the animals. Further, New York connections were leveraged to expand Agriprocessor kosher products, such as Aaron's Best, into Jewish markets. Bloom, 2000). The peak Jewish population was 500, nearly half under age 15. Postville, Iowa is one of the four Chabad-Lubavitch Centers in Iowa.

In expanding their control of kosher meat industry, Agriprocessors used both financial and political capital, including taking the fight against annexation to the district and Iowa Court of Appeals, both of which ruled for annexation.

They hire high-powered lawyers—a former Iowa U.S. attorney was handpicked as the Postville plant's chief compliance officer after the raid. Representing Aaron Rubashkin on and off since the 2004 animal-cruelty scandal is the celebrated constitutional lawyer Nathan Lewin, who defended former president Richard Nixon in one of the 27 cases he has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. Earlier this year, Lewin petitioned the Supreme Court to hear the Rubashkins' contention that immigrants at the Agriprocessors distribution center in Sunset Park, [New York] don't have a right to unionize, because they are undocumented. Lewin sought to overturn a national labor-relations board position and a prior Supreme Court decision affirming that right. The Supreme Court declined to hear the Agriprocessor case.

The Rubashkins go to great lengths to defend themselves: When the undocumented workers in Sunset Park attempted to unionize with the UFCW, the Rubashkins used a tactic that had worked for them in years past. They signed the workers up with a "sweetheart" union run by fellow ultra-Orthodox Jews. The tiny Brooklyn-based union, Local 1718, was started by the Williamsburg sect of Satmar Chasids—which has some friction with the Lubavitchers—to combat the attempts by national unions to organize workers in local factories (Dwoskin, 2008).

By 2008, the Postville plant was one of the leading producers of kosher meats and non-kosher beef, veal, lamb, turkey, and chicken products sold in many countries. At its peak, Agriprocessors produced 60% of kosher meat and 40% of kosher poultry consumed in the U.S. (Grey, et al. 2009). They also market non-kosher meats to smaller grocery stores and meat markets around the U.S. According to their webpage (2009), 2/3 of their meat and poultry production is non-kosher.

### **Accommodation, rather than assimilation**

As the plant prospered, the Lubovich employees did as well, and purchased large home and much local commercial and rental property. The population of Postville grew from 1,400 in 1990 to 2,200 in 2000 to 2,800 in 2008. The new residents were ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse.

The traditional co-existence between the Protestants and Catholics, where the clergy met and worked together on community issues, served as the mental model for the community's approach to new populations. Differences were not necessarily liked or trusted, but there was an acceptance and willingness to "live and let live", as long as the customs of one group were not seen as impinging on other groups and as long as there was general acceptance of local norms of neatness, outward friendliness (that did not actually require friendship) and participation in community events. This approach was made more difficult when the new workers did not speak English (their languages were usually Eastern Europe or Spanish or Mayan dialects) and when the administrators and managers felt that mixing with non-Jews was a form of genocide. Yet the community

organized A Taste of Postville as an annual event where the many different ethnic groups could share their special foods.

The norms of accommodation meant that one group did not question the practices of other groups, particularly the labor practices of the dominant employer in the community, which had already threatened to move when the area that included the plant was annexed by the city in 1997 (Bloom, 2000).

In 2004, Agriprocessors weathered an animal-cruelty scandal—videos secretly taped at the plant showed cattle stumbling around with their throats cut and their windpipes pulled out, trying in vain to bellow. The videos proved highly offensive to Jews: "Kosher" is supposed to ensure a more humane process of slaughter. The scandal led to a workers' rights investigation and a boycott of Rubashkin meat by conservative Jews. In December of the same year, the Environmental Protection Agency sued Agriprocessors, claiming it repeatedly exceeded pollutant limits at its plant in Postville. The larger Postville community was relatively silent regarding the treatment of animals, as meat packing is assumed in Iowa to be a bloody activity. In addition, EPA in Iowa was generally regarded by local citizens as unreasonable, so that also elicited little local comment. Part of accommodation is to defend the local, even when different.

Working conditions in the plant were known to be poor. The Department of Labor was in the midst of an investigation when the raid occurred. But these conditions were not discussed in Postville, although documented immigrant workers who sought work there frequently left employment quite quickly, often setting up auxiliary enterprises in Postville to serve the undocumented workers in areas of housing, food and transportation.

According to the New York Times

The workers had been paid some of the lowest wages in the nation, and were allegedly forced to work up to 17-hour days with 10-minute lunch breaks in a freezing-cold, dirty hallway. Workers as young as 16 were said to have been operating meat grinders and power shears, often without any safety training (Dwoskin, 2008).

Yet the town was determined to make diversity work, supporting the Guatemalan and Mexican workers, who remained separate from the rest of the community except for the Catholic Church, but whose children attended the public schools. In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the town had a functioning diversity committee and annual diversity town fairs. Its efforts at diversity were documented in the film, *Postville: A Clash of Cultures in Heartland America*, which is widely used in college classes. The sentiment conveyed by the film was of deep differences that the native Iowans sought to accommodate and accept. The local newspaper hired a Lubovicher woman to write a column explaining the religion. Aaron Goldsmith, an Orthodox Jew but not a Lubovicher, was elected to the City Council, and Sholom Rubashkin participated in a weekly radio program explaining the religion. The local radio station broadcast in English, Spanish, and Russian. Jeff Abbas (2009) of that radio station referred to the situation as "tolerated co-existence."

The momentum towards making diversity work was stopped in its tracks at 10 am on May 12, 2008 by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, a branch of Homeland Security) raid. ICE arrived, and with great verbal abuse arrested 389 individuals, which was about half of the Agriprocessor workforce and about 20% of Postville's population. A number of other workers fled, including some in management ranks.

### **Iowa Raid Preparedness**

Previous ICE raids, such as that in Marshalltown, Iowa, December 12, 2006, had mobilized pro-immigrant forces in the state to become more proactive with respect to future raids. In 2007, prompted primarily by the 2006 Marshalltown raid, ISNET, the Immigrant Security Network, a coalition of progressive organizations based in Des Moines, including the American Friends Service Committee, Catholic Charities of Des Moines, the legal clinic of the Iowa Coalition against Domestic Violence, United for the Dignity and Safety of Immigrants (UDSI), Iowa Allies for Immigration Reform, and several other faith-based organizations, was organized and developed an emergency response plan for central Iowa. Volunteers were organized into four teams: Churches, Community Based Organizations and Unions; Legal; Government Liaison; Media; plus an Action team that acts as information central and coordinates interaction among teams. Sixteen people were arrested on March 26 in Council Bluffs, in far western Iowa, in an ICE raid on the American Clothing Company there.

ISNET was aware that Homeland Security was planning a massive raid in eastern Iowa when the Des Moines Register reported that ICE rented the National Cattle Congress (a fair grounds) in Waterloo on May 6, 2008. Assuming the raid would be at the Tyson plant in Waterloo, the Immigrant Rights Network of Iowa and the Waterloo Centro Latinamericano organized an Immigrant Rights Workshop in Spanish at the Parroquia Reina de la Paz in Waterloo on May 11. The raid occurred in Postville the next morning, with ICE arriving with helicopters and 600 arrest warrants.

Although Postville is outside central Iowa, ISNET activated its teams the morning of May 12, 2008. However, it was clear that in order for the process to work smoothly, there would have to be a coalition on the local level that mirrored ISNET's structure prepared to take action in case of a raid. Thus, ISNET's assistance to Postville was invaluable, but a number of features of the raid, besides the absence of a raids preparedness team in Postville prior to the raid, limited its effectiveness:

- The overwhelming size of the raid;
- The fact that workers were charged with identity theft, rather than immigration violations, meant that immigration lawyers were not permitted to see potential clients.

After the Marshtown raid, ISNET set out to encourage and orient local preparedness teams within the limits of its very small budget and its volunteer "staff." The first group to accept their offer of help was an ad hoc group of civic leaders in Marshalltown. The

development of the preparedness plan was coordinated by the director of Mid-Iowa Community Action and included many of the principals who had responded to the December 12, 2006 raid in that community. That group met over a 9-month period and on May 14, 2009 held a meeting to approve a final version of the preparedness plan. The Marshalltown Preparedness group developed the same teams as did ISNET, so that each team could interface with its ISNET counterpart team. The only modification is that Marshalltown included an Education team, since the school system was perhaps the institution (apart from the packing plant that was raided) that was most affected in the immediate aftermath of the raid. A major issue was determining, in the absence of parents, to whom children at school should be released. In both Marshalltown and Postville, school administrators played a pivotal role in responding to the respective ICE raids. Other communities in Iowa with large immigrant populations are also developing raid response plans. However, these response plans may need to be revised before the ink is dry on them. Janet Napolitano, President Obama's new Homeland Security Secretary, has declared that workplace raids will no longer be conducted, although as was demonstrated in Marshalltown the weekend of March 20-21, 2009, ICE continues to visit homes of persons suspected of using false documents, and if people are not briefed on their rights, may arrest other members of the household as well. Exactly how to adjust to these under-the-radar sweeps has not yet been determined by ISNET and local preparedness groups.

### **Postville, May 12, 2008**

The sound of a circling helicopter was the first that those in Postville were alerted to the raid, according to Nina Van Gorp, K-8 music teacher in the Postville schools (2009). Teachers and principal first thought that there had been an accident with a bad injury that needed to be air-evacuated. But when they went outside to look, they saw a Federal helicopter, and knew it must be a raid. The school went into immediate lockdown, and no one could leave or enter the school. Children on their cell phones with parents in the plant, reported the raid in progress to their teachers and peers. The parents working in the plant were very concerned their children would be taken. The helicopter was there for eight hours. The 389 arrested workers, except for the mothers who said they had young children at home, were taken from the plant to the cattle congress in Waterloo. However, a number of mothers were afraid to say that they had children, because they were afraid they would be taken away. Those mothers were eventually deported, although their citizen children remained. The other mothers had GPS shackles placed on their ankles. Later, men released who were needed as witnesses underwent the same indignity, which they felt stigmatized them in the community as criminals.

The high school guidance counselor and the bi-lingual interpreter went from door to door in Postville to let people know what was happening and directing them to go to St. Bridget's Catholic Church. High school students took younger children from the school the three blocks to St. Bridget's. Despite the swift local, state, and national response from immigrant rights groups and the Catholic, Methodist and Lutheran faith communities, there was little that could be done, particularly since the cadre of lawyers assembled were immigration lawyers, and the charge brought against the workers was identity theft, a

criminal charge. (Use of this charge in these circumstances was disapproved by the May 4, 2009 Supreme Court ruling that unintentional use of another's social security number does not constitute identity theft).

### **Immediate Postville Impact**

The lack of personnel idled the plant for several weeks. The lack of a local labor force and the difficulties of the previous recruitment strategy for recruiting by word of mouth from refugees and undocumented workers resulted in a world-wide search for workers with appropriate documentation and enthusiasm for long hours at low pay in the packing plant. The "experiments" included bringing in busloads of potential workers from homeless shelters in other parts of the country, and flying in men to work in the plant from the former American Pacific territory of Palau. These new domestic workers, generally single men and women without any local commitment or source of social control, were unsatisfactory inside the plant and out, and the Palauans were recruited by other Iowa meat packers right outside the plant.

On November 4, 2008, Agriprocessors declared bankruptcy. On November 11, the plant shut down, and no one was paid. On November 21, the Postville mayor, after much prodding, called a community meeting that included Ralph Rosenburg, Director of the Iowa Civil Rights Commission and others who might offer some input as to next steps. Those attending agreed they had a problem – and they declared an economic and humanitarian disaster. The City Council affirmed that proclamation at their meeting November 24. Once that was announced, the shame in the Latino, Anglo and Jewish communities associated with not paying bills was relieved (Olson, 2009).

Because they waited so long after the raid to declare an emergency, FEMA and the state were not able to be involved. Thus it fell on Postville to generate the response themselves. The Food Pantry Board, a 501(c)3, wrote a contract with Maryn Olsen to coordinate the Postville Response Coalition. Outside funding was raised from the United Methodist Committee on Relief, the ECLA (Lutheran) and the Falck and Schmidt Foundations but primarily fund raising is local, including from time to time the City Council. At first the Coalition met in the basement of the community hall (with little visibility), and had to move out as the building was renovated. On February 20, 2009, they moved into their new offices on the main street of town.

Agriprocessors never returned to capacity. Agriprocessor's number of workers shrank from nearly 900 permanent workers on three shifts to 300 part time workers. Only the chicken line is open, and it will be extremely costly to open the beef and lamb lines (Olsen, 2009) Federal and state investigations resulted in three indictments for Sholom Rubashkin, including bank fraud and child labor violations.

Abbas reported that

Prior to the raid, the two main Postville rental property companies had purchased properties at double their normal price and therefore increasing the rent. The employment people put 14 people in a house at the higher rents, and with so many individuals per unit, both made money. (2009).



The raid and the upcoming criminal trials that involve accused workers as witnesses has placed continuing burdens on local churches and charities.. St. Bridget continues to care for 30 families. Rev. Paul Ouder Kirk, a leader in the Catholic Church's ministry to Postville's Latino community reported in the Gazette that the ministry has hired a psychiatric counselor to help those families, now wards of the church, cope with stress caused by the raid and its aftermath (Love, 2009). As Latino attendance at the church has dropped sharply after the deportations to Mexico and Guatemala, the ministry is more support than outreach, although the ministry has a strong component of education on humane immigration reform.

Jeff Abbas (station manager at KPVL Radio Postville), on his own initiative, used the radio station as a way to bring together volunteers and services for displaced workers. He said that it was a humanitarian crisis and needed action. Over thirty people showed up at the Board of Directors meeting to show their support for his action. The Board revealed that Abbas had not been paid in several months, due to a shortage of funds (Postville Herald-Leader, December 3, 2008.).

The subsequent closing and partial reopening of the plant had repercussions on other Postville businesses. Five businesses have closed, and more are in the process of closing. For Sale signs adorn most of the buildings on the two main commercial streets.

For flat-broke landlord Gabay Menahem, the dog and cat feces littering one of his many vacant rental units symbolizes post-immigration-raid life in Postville.

The word he uses to describe the litter sounds incongruous coming from a learned member of the town's Orthodox Jewish community, but Menahem can hardly be blamed for letting slip the occasional epithet. He's lost a fortune in the year since federal agents raided kosher meatpacker Agriprocessors Inc.

His 3-1/2-year-old business, GAL Investments Ltd., generated monthly revenue of \$192,000 before the May 12, 2008, raid that plunged Postville into an economic recession months ahead of the rest of the nation. Now, with just 19 of his 129 rental units occupied, Menahem took in \$16,000 last month -- a fraction of his expenses.

Like many other Postville residents, Menahem suffers the ill effects of what local clergy describe as a government-inflicted disaster comparable to the floods and tornadoes that ravaged other parts of Iowa last year ....

“A year ago it was impossible to buy a house in Postville. Now there are 228 houses for sale out of 700 total,” said Menhem, who describes the town as “a sinking ship” ....

Departing laid-off workers, some embittered by their Postville experience, left many of the town's rental units in shambles.

Menahem's property was trashed, he said, by transients recruited after the raid, not by the longer term Agriprocessors employees who had put down roots in the community. The loss of those productive, stable and family-oriented workers may prove to be one of the greatest downsides of the raid. ....

As for GAL Investments, "The company is long gone, man. There's nothing to save," Menahem said. (Love 2009).

With Agriprocessors offline, the price of kosher meat increased. On November 4, 2008, Agriprocessors declared bankruptcy, but the plant continues operating a poultry line under receivership and a trustee. The state of Iowa's Department of Economic Development is working with the trustee to find a buyer who will bring it back to full production, but there is much uncertainty in the community.

The City of Postville is facing many problems. The previous mayor, who worked diligently through the crisis, finally felt so much pressure that he resigned in early April 2008, and City Council member Leigh Rekow was elected mayor by the City Council. Active in the diversity council, daycare, food pantry and the YMCA, Rekow determined to set office hours and promised to make the future of Agriprocessors and the condition of Postville homes a priority (Postville Herald-Leader, April 15, 2009). The decline in housing stock has reduced tax receipts for the city, just as it faces enormous demands to invest in the face of the economic and humanitarian crisis. Unpaid property taxes also impact the county and school district budgets. Among the leading delinquents, according to Allamakee County Treasurer Lori Hesse, are Agriprocessors, owing \$259,000, and Nevel Properties Corporation, a Rubashkin-owned company in Chapter 11 bankruptcy, owing \$95,000.

On June 1, the city likely will be unable to make its twice-annual \$167,000 payment to the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Rural Development for the mechanical wastewater treatment plant built specifically to process wastes from the kosher plant. City Clerk/Administrator Darcy Radloff told the Gazette that the USDA has denied the city's request to defer payments for at least a year while the future of the bankrupt plant is resolved (Love 2009). Both the cutbacks at the plant and the decline in home occupancy have greatly cut back revenue for the city-owned utility. According to the City Clerk/Administrator Darcy Radloff, the city has assessed unpaid utility bills totaling \$60,000 to Menahem's GAL Investments and another \$24,000 to Nevel Properties Corp. (Love, 2009).

Sales tax revenue is also down. In the quarter ending Dec. 31 -- the last period for which data is available -- the state collected \$3,806,482 in sales tax from Postville businesses, down 27.3 percent from the comparable year-earlier figure of \$5,238,204.

Both the Jewish school and the Postville public school did not experience the huge decline in enrollment expected after the raid. Parents still see Postville as a good place to raise children. The Jewish boys' and girls' schools in Postville still have enough students

to justify continued operation. The future is less certain for the yeshiva, which educates about 40 13- to 16-year-old boys, most of whom are boarders, according to the mayor. Enrollment in Postville schools has declined only 3.1 percent after the raid, from 542 to 525.

By the anniversary of the raid, Mayor Rekow estimated that the population had fallen over 1,000, to 1,800. Rabbi Aron Schimmel, who oversees kosher slaughter and directs the Judaic Resource Center in Postville, said of the 80 Jewish families in Postville before the raid, about 55 remain. His work, too, has been cut back.

On April 28, 2009, the City and the Postville response Coalition organized a long term recovery meeting, facilitated by the Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Iowa. Thirty eight Postville residents from the Catholic, Protestant, and Lubovicher communities attended the meeting, where they put together a collective vision for the future of Postville and reviewed their assets to move toward that future. The next meeting will be held on May 19, 2009. A major agreement among all present was “No finger pointing. We are all in this together” (Postville Long-Term Recovery Plan, 2009).

### **One year later**

The Lubovichers held a parade at 11:30 am on Lag BaOmer, May 12, 2009, the same day that the church bells of the Catholic and Lutheran churches chimed 389 times commemorating the first anniversary of the raid. That afternoon’s interdenominational service led by non-Hasidic Jewish, Catholic and Protestant clergy was followed by a march to the plant and a blessing there. Lag BaOmer celebrates the anniversary of the passing of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, author of the *Zohar*. It also commemorates another event. In the weeks between Passover and Shavuot, a plague raged amongst the disciples of the great sage Rabbi Akiva. On Lag BaOmer the dying ceased. It is also the birthday of Lubavicher dynasty Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn and his release from Soviet prison in 1927.

The Lubovicher parade in Postville, with many, many small children and a number of symbolic floats, was filled with signs that said, The Truth, Not Agenda. The agenda is viewed as that of the powers aligned against them as a movement and particularly against Agriprocessors and Lubovichers: Hechsher Tzedek (Kosher Justice Certification), PETA and animal rights groups, and the United Food and Commercial Workers union. It was a joyful event for the nearly 200 Lubovichers that participated, although those watching were mainly visitors from out of town.

After the parade Postville Response Coalition organized a press conference and an art display prior to the 3:30 pm interfaith prayer service. The prayer service included Jewish (not Lubovicher), Catholic, and Protestant clergy from Postville and the state, including the Archbishop of Dubuque. A similar service was held in Des Moines at the same time.

### **Conclusions**

The current residents of Postville, with the support of faith groups around the country, are determined to once again invigorate the town by perfecting the long term recovery plan. Small communities, even those with a history of meat packing, are ill-equipped to deal with government-induced humanitarian and economic disasters. The lack of coordination between different branches of the Federal Government, Homeland Security and the Department of Labor, was particularly disastrous in Postville. If the Department of Labor had been given the time needed to complete its investigation of labor practices in the plant, which resulted in the bulk of the indictments against Agriprocessors, these could have been dealt with separately from the charges against the workers and the economic disaster could have been less. And if ICE had not brought criminal charges against the workers, the humanitarian disaster would have been lessened.

As ICE acted without concern for the community or other state and Federal agencies investigating Agriprocessors, it created a perfect storm. The lack of oversight of privately-held companies had kept out all inspectors but the USDA meat inspectors. And the difficulty of getting appropriate status due to inadequate immigration laws and processors set up an extremely vulnerable population that could not organize to act collectively and feared to act individually against exploitative labor conditions. .

While the community was vaguely aware of labor problems with the plant and the lack of secure status of many of the workers, the community is not the appropriate authority to implement law enforcement. The desire to keep unity – a strategy of accommodation, acceptance and even celebration of difference – allowed the town of Postville to come together to support each other in the economic and humanitarian emergencies that cascaded around them. If a portion of the town has taken a legalistic approach (Flora, et al., 2000), the coming together could not have occurred. The pluralistic approach dominates the external discourse, and the internal discourse has a strong undertone of pragmatism: if these people are good for our community, they deserve to be here.

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