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Breastfeeding baby's mom among those detained

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Marshalltown, Ia. — A priest's and nun's mission to find the mother of a nursing baby was thwarted today after they said officials from Camp Dodge would not let them inside to tell their story.

Sister Christine Feagan, from the St. Mary's Hispanic Ministry, and The Rev. Jim Miller, who is a priest from the St. Mary's Parish, both said they drove to Camp Dodge this afternoon to find out the status of a nursing mother who was deported and nursing a baby. They were also seeking a father with an ashmatic child.

They didn't come with papers showing legal status. Instead, they wanted "to show them the need to be free," said Miller.

Miller said he knows detainees were located there, because they were permitted a phone call from Camp Dodge and some had called the church seeking help.

He said an ICE officer at the facility "wouldn't tell us anything about anybody."

The duo returned to Marshalltown this afternoon to deal with the scores of families trying arrange care for children whose parents have been detained.

At the church's Hispanic ministry, the baby whose mother was arrested was passed among staff and a community activist who had agreed to help care for her.

They said they don't know when the girl, whose father is absent, will be reunited with her mother.

The child, whose name was not provided by ministry staff, cried little, and stared at the different faces visiting the ministry. Women speaking a mixture of Spanish and English coordinated plans with how they would take care of children left behind.

Carmen Montealegre is one of the women who is taking care of two of her friends' children with family displaced by the arrests. One of the children, a seven-year-old, asks frequently why her mother was detained, she said.

"She asked me three times, 'Did she kill someone?' I said, 'She was working under another name.'"

The baby left behind has her own problems.

She has been difficult to feed since her mother was arrested, Feagan said.

"The mother was breastfeeding the baby," Feagan said. "The baby doesn't want to eat. Another tried to breastfeed, but she knew it wasn't her."

Feagan said she and advocates for local Hispanic families have tried to pinpoint exactly how many children are in family-limbo to try to organize help.

A total of 408 students were absent in the Marshalltown community school district as of Wednesday morning, district officials reported.