

A little boy's tears

by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

From her yearlong sanctuary in a Chicago church, Elvira Arellano, deported Aug. 19, was said to have put one face on the need for immigration reform.

On Aug. 20, a more poignant face for the need was shedding tears, hiding behind the woman who will now be caring for him after his mother's enforced departure. Eight-year-old Saul Arellano, a U.S. citizen born here, will now live with the family of the refuge church's pastor.

His mother's deportation was virtually assured after she was convicted of working under a false Social Security number in 2002 while cleaning planes at O'Hare International Airport. She was to have surrendered last August but took refuge in Adalberto United Methodist Church instead.

Her deportation was definitely assured, however, after she left the refuge to publicly rally for immigration reform. Authorities arrested and deported her Sunday after she traveled to Los Angeles and spoke at a gathering there. She pledged to carry on the fight for reform from Mexico.

While Arellano's plight mirrors many among illegal immigrants, in a very real sense she was not the perfect representative. Few so publicly flaunt their undocumented status. And even fewer have special legislation introduced so that they might stay. Rep. Luis Gutierrez, D-Ill., offered such a bill in March. It is still pending but, with Arellano's deportation, is pretty much a moot point.

No, in this instance, Saul is the better face for the need for immigration reform.

His mother was among the 12 million illegal immigrants estimated to be in this country. She came to Washington state in 1997, was deported shortly after, returned and moved to Illinois in 2000. Her son, however, is among another group of people not much considered these days. This would be the children of undocumented immigrants in this country, numbering 3.1 million, according to the Pew Hispanic Center.

Illegal immigration foes say Arellano demonstrated the need for the federal government to simply do its job. And they would have had authorities break down church doors to do it.

But the federal government cannot do this with all 12 million. There's the matter of resources but also the matter of doing irreparable harm to the U.S. economy.

And harm to children as families are broken up. Forgotten in all this talk of sanctuary and deportation are the 3.1 million Sauls, who, though U.S. citizens, would essentially be deported with their parents or forced to live without them. Among the litany of valid reasons for reform, this is as good as any.

Reprinted from the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel - CNS

A little boy's tears by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel