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40 Workers at Irving poultry Plant Test Positive for COVID-19

"As a church, we work for them and with them," says an Irving priest

By Dianne Solis and Imelda Garcia - May 8, 2020

At least 40 workers have tested positive for COVID-19 at the Brakebush Bros. Inc. poultry plant in Irving, as infections widen in the nation's meat and poultry industries.

The Wisconsin-based [food-processor](#) closed its Irving plant for four days in April for a deep cleaning and has strengthened its employee safety precautions since the mid-March outbreak. The plant employs more than 750 people.



Brakebush Bros. in Irving. (Google Street View)

No citations from local, state or federal authorities have been given to Brakebush over the outbreak, Brakebush spokesman Phill Trewyn said. Two dozen of the infected employees have returned to work since the outbreak started in mid-March, he added.

"Brakebush Brothers continues to encourage employees to alert supervisors if they are not feeling well and to seek proper health care," Trewyn said in a statement. "The company, in addition to normal paid-time-off policy, is providing paid sick leave to employees who have medically verified cases of COVID-19."

Brakebush follows protocols set by the Centers for Disease Control, including home isolation and receiving appropriate medical care, he said. The company has also worked with local public health officials to address employee safety, he said.

At St. Luke's Catholic Church in Irving, Rev. Ernesto Esqueda said the church will support the workers with food and other needs during the pandemic.

"We are all walking on the same path, and our close ties mean we help and will continue to help so that these persons don't feel forgotten or abandoned," Rev. Esqueda said. "As a church, we work for them and with them."

The priest said the church is also working with the nonprofit **Dallas Area Interfaith's Lead Organizer, Josephine Lopez Paul**, and government authorities to find help for workers and parishioners.

One church leader in the interfaith group, Cecilia Avalos, said many of the Brakebush workers are vulnerable Spanish-speaking immigrants, and she knew of a worker who quit when the plant wouldn't allow the worker to self-quarantine after exposure to an infected worker.

“There is such an outcry among people,” Avalos said.

Trewyn said if employees choose not to come to work because they believe they may have the virus, or have been exposed to it, they can take unpaid time off without jeopardizing their job. He detailed new steps to protect workers, such as taking temperatures of people entering work areas, using surgical masks and placing plastic dividers in workspaces.