

# The Sanctuary Movement and Loving One Another

Dear Friends,

Several of you have written to ask about ways to support refugees and undocumented persons in light of our President's recent executive order, and other potential policy actions regarding such persons living in the United States. The importance of caring for the poor and the refugee is expressed in scripture and has always been a critical part of the lived expression of our Judeo-Christian faith. This does not mean that these matters have been easily negotiated. They require our prayerful attention.

I remind you of Episcopal Migration Ministries, serving refugees since the late 1800s and a vocal advocate especially since WWII, which served as precursor to Episcopal Relief and Development. More information on how our church engages with refugees may be found at [www.episcopalmigrationministries.org](http://www.episcopalmigrationministries.org).

Some leaders have asked about the Sanctuary Movement. There is much information online and I encourage you to research it carefully. There are many ways to engage a movement, and here are a couple of points to consider from the perspective of the church canons and best legal practices.

A parish (not an aided or mission congregation) is free to discern its use of space independently of the diocese, providing there is no sale or encumbrance of the property. Therefore, if a parish or a family were to choose to house a family under threat of deportation they are free to do so. While there are less cumbersome ways to participate in the Sanctuary Movement, it is important to be mindful of the commitment required of housing a family for any period of time. Thought must be given to protection of those in the vicinity of any sanctuary. A procedure will need to be developed to screen the individuals seeking sanctuary. It is important to be sure those being sought for deportation are not seeking to avoid police because they are being accused of breaking the law. Discerning carefully the full implications of housing a family requires detailed consideration. An Immigration attorney that was consulted advised that one of the best ways to help is to find and help fund good legal advice.

As well, I would strongly encourage you to engage a Living Room Conversation ([www.livingroomconversations.org](http://www.livingroomconversations.org)) on the matter of immigration, human rights or other matters of concern to you in your community. What topics are emerging as important in your local congregation? To listen and speak responsibly is to take action. It is critical and productive to explore together with civility how our faith informs our values, opinions and actions. Discovering where we can respectfully agree could offer us powerful platforms for values-based engagement in our community. The groups within our diocese who have utilized this tool have found greater love and respect for one another which has deepened their experience of community; despite differences. Some will say, ‘the talking is nice but we need to take action.’ Others come to church for peace and quiet. What if we could mobilize our diversity? The Rev. Canon Linda Taylor serves as a resource for LRCs and may be reached at [canonlinda@gmail.com](mailto:canonlinda@gmail.com).

I ask you to consider: where else in our culture does a group of people who live by the words “love one another” gathered regularly? I think it is increasingly extraordinary and counter-cultural. What an opportunity we have to think and reflect together across a broad spectrum of opinion about our challenges as a human community. How the Episcopal Church views matters of political and social concern will always include as many opinions as we are members. We are not a church that requires its members to “fall in line” with the leaders of a congregation, diocese or beyond. What a tremendous – and underutilized – resource. Being part of our national conversation is an essential part of American citizenship and of being Christian. My read of the scriptures is that Jesus was a politically active member of earthly society – and of the Kingdom of Heaven. I believe we should find ways to follow his lead. Let us pray that we may capitalize on our identity as a church that invites its members to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider their values of faith and to live them accordingly.

Blessings,  
+*Mary*