

## **INTRO: Sanctuary Movement and the Immigrants' Rights Movement**

*Adapted from Sanctuary resources for churches*

People of faith from all traditions called on Congress to pass immigration reform, yet Congress failed to move forward on meaningful legislation. Meanwhile, the deportation machinery grew stronger becoming more advanced under the Obama Administration, with an alarming rate of more than 1,100 people being deported every day, totaling nearly 2.5 million deportations over under this administration. The organizing efforts of undocumented youth in 2012 pushed the administration to create the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which has allowed close to a million undocumented students to travel and work legally.

In [2014 a resurgence of the Sanctuary Movement](#) began out of need in the community to stop deportations at a case-by-case level. In May of 2014 [Daniel Neyoy Ruiz](#) took Sanctuary in Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson Arizona, the same church that helped nearly fifteen thousand political refugees escape the tragic civil wars in Central America during the 1980s. Daniel won a stay of removal after 27 days of living in Sanctuary. As this spread through the media at a time when President Obama was delaying Executive Actions on immigration, many more immigrants facing a deportation order looked to congregations in their region to take refuge and fight to keep their families together. Over the next years more than a dozen people came forward to take refuge in Sanctuary, the majority were able to win a stay of removal or an order of supervision within several months, but the Immigration Customs Enforcement delayed justice on many occasions such as with Rosa Robles-Loreto who only found victory after 461 days of Sanctuary. Some left the church with a written promise from ICE they would not be deported, but they continue to fight their case to gain some sort of relief from deportation.

This resurgence of the Sanctuary Movement has created a platform to raise up the prophetic and moral witness while at the same time lifting up the stories of those leaders who are brave enough to speak out against the injustice of deportation. This surly brought significantly increased public pressure on the Obama Administration to announce the President's Executive Action on Immigration on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

Now, the Sanctuary Movement is playing a critical role again in responding to the post-election reality wherein fear, discrimination and xenophobia have taken a new precedence in our countries' politics. Since the Trump administration has promised to deport millions, people of faith have a moral responsibility to act. Sanctuary is a tool that helps escalate these efforts by offering our neighbors who face a deportation order safe refuge and sanctuary in our congregations.

### ***An Ancient Tradition of Faith Communities***

Sanctuary is one of the most ancient traditions that we have as a people of faith. The ancient Hebrew people had allowed temples and even whole cities to declare themselves places of refuge for persons accused of a crime they may not have committed, a practice that allowed those wrongfully accused to escape swift and harsh retribution until the matter could be resolved. In the late Roman Empire fugitives could find refuge in the precincts of Christian churches. Later, during the medieval period churches in England were recognized sanctuaries, offering safe haven for a temporary period to accused wrong doers. In the United States the first practical provision of anything like sanctuary occurred in the years

before the Civil War. The Underground Railroad came into being to help slaves flee the South and find safety in many congregations throughout the country. Sanctuary is about providing safe space to those who are victims of unjust laws.

### ***A few Sacred Texts***

- God calls people of faith to remember that they once were strangers in a strange land and they must, must welcome the stranger as an expression of covenant faithfulness (Leviticus 19:33-34)
- We must “learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17)
- We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves (Luke 10:27)

### ***The Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s***

When refugees from the Civil Wars in Central America began to flee to the United States in the 1980’s, the U.S. government did not recognize them as political refugees. Many were deported and received by death squads upon their return. From this dire injustice, the Sanctuary Movement was born. It peaked with over 500 congregations establishing an underground railroad whereby refugees move through the United States to safe houses and safe congregations. Many clergy in the Tucson area were indicted and eventually acquitted for their involvement in assisting Central American refugees. The Sanctuary Movement sought to remind the United States government of its own asylum and refugee laws, which they were not following when it came to the refugees of Central America.

LINKS on Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s

- [The Public Sanctuary Movement: A Historical Basis of Hope](#) by Eileen Purcell
- [The Origins of a Political Trial: The Sanctuary Movement and Political Justice](#) by Sophie H. Pirie
- <http://sanctuarynotdeportation.org/>

### ***Current Day Sanctuary Movement***

Drawing on this tradition, communities of faith have once again seen the need to declare Sanctuary for immigrants as the rise of deportations continues to separate families. In the 1980’s we were compelled by the call to welcome the stranger, as we opened our doors to newly arriving refugees. Now we are moved by the call to love our neighbors as ourselves, as those who are entering into Sanctuary are most often long term members of our communities - our neighbors.

In 2007, an initiative known as the New Sanctuary Movement took shape with coalitions of congregations in major cities throughout the country. As work place and neighborhood raids escalated, these congregations opened their doors to provide refuge to those facing deportation.

The New Sanctuary Movement helped win [the Morton Memo and Prosecutorial Discretion](#) in 2011 and [President Obama’s Executive Actions on Immigration in 2014](#), which has helped stop thousands of deportations through case-by-case advocacy. Those entering sanctuary are generally eligible for Prosecutorial Discretion, but local ICE field offices have been very reluctant to offer this relief from deportations in which the community has had to engage in public advocacy to win stays of removal or an order of supervision and in most cases.

## Sanctuary Goals and Strategy

- As the faith community, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation. By offering sanctuary we can fight individual cases, advocate to stop deportations, and make it possible to win deferred action at a case-by-case level to keep families together.
- Amplify the moral imperative to stop deportations by lifting up the stories of sanctuary cases and ensuring the prophetic witness of the immigrant taking sanctuary is heard at the national level.
- Defend administrative policies such as [Prosecutorial Discretion](#) so that we can still win stays of deportation case by case and keep sacred spaces and schools protected under the [Sensitive Locations](#) guidelines
- Work alongside undocumented students to defend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival program (DACA)
- Support local work to defend Sanctuary cities or local detainer policies and push back against unjust enforcement policies such as the [Priority Enforcement Program](#) or [287 g in the jails](#)
- Participate and help create protection networks to provide know your rights education, sanctuary space, legal assistance, housing assistance, family planning and bail support funds
- Stop the building of the border wall and any attempt to increase criminalization or mandatory sentencing for immigrants
- Defend asylum seekers by pushing back against expedited removal and helping provide critical resources such as legal assistance so they can defend and win their case.

### *Legal Questions*

Everyone always wants to know - are we breaking the law? Law is a lot like scripture - its up to your interpretation. There is a law against bringing in and harboring persons not authorized to be in the U.S. (insert footnote. INA Sec.274) While we are clearly not bringing people in, whether we are harboring someone is up for interpretation. Some courts have interpreted harboring to require concealment of a person, when we declare Sanctuary for an individual we are bringing them into the light of the community, not concealing them in the dark of secrecy (U.S. V Costello, 66 F.3d 1040, 7th Cir. 2012). Other courts have interpreted harboring to be simple sheltering (U.S. V Acosta de Evans, 531 F.2d 428 (9th Cir. 1976).

Those who are entering sanctuary will most likely have an opportunity to win relief from deportation, this means that they are not a high priority for deportation and that ICE can and should grant them prosecutorial discretion. In essence, the Sanctuary Movement is holding the administration accountable to their own standards and guidelines as put forth by the President's Executive Actions.

There is risk in offering Sanctuary, however, the field practice over the last forty years shows that no congregation has been prosecuted for allowing undocumented people to find shelter and safety in their house of worship.

### ***Community Support***

Families living in Sanctuary are often in need of support in a multitude of different ways, including food, transport, friendship, and financial support. Most importantly is the support of friendship – events like game nights, or simply hanging out, making them feel at home and a part of the congregational family. It is also important that they are able to retain some normalcy as a family - enabling them to cook for them can help with this. Congregation members can show their love and support by bringing food, which may be helpful a few nights a week, but it is important that the family is able to care for themselves and control as much as possible in a situation that is very much out of their control. Instead of bringing meals, people can bring food that they can cook with.

There may also be the need for financial support, particularly if the individual in Sanctuary normally works. People can give to the family, either directly or through the house of worship (these donations to benefit an individual are not tax deductible). Care should be taken to respect the pride of the family in these situations. It is difficult for all of us to be in a situation where we have to depend on others. We have often reminded individuals that by being in Sanctuary, they are engaged in hard work; both for their families but also for the movement and that work should be compensated.

### ***Opportunity for St Jude's to support***

There are many ways to support individuals and families living in sanctuary congregations. There are at least eight congregations in the San Jose area who are considering declaring themselves a sanctuary congregation. For many reasons, St Jude's vestry decided this is not under consideration for us. There is however, an opportunity for St Jude's to publicly support other congregations that have declared sanctuary. St Jude's is one of about twenty churches and synagogues in the San Jose area who are considering this option.

This option offers practical support: donating food; providing rides to family members of the deportee; socializing with the guest deportee and/or their families and offering friendship and pastoral support; assistance with finances for legal defense if that becomes necessary.

### ***Decision***

St Jude's vestry was ready at the January vestry meeting to take this decision, but decided to wait in order for the new vestry to decide, and to have the conversation with the larger congregation. This is an opportunity for us to practice ways of talking about difficult topics with people of different opinions, an opportunity for courageous conversations.

### **Round One: Getting Started / Why Are We Here?**

What interested you or drew you to this topic?

### **Round Two: Your core values**

Answer one or more of the following:

- what sense of purpose or duty guides you in life? What is your mission statement?
- what would your best friend say about who you are and what makes you tick?
- what are your hopes and concerns for your community and/or the country, now and long-term?

### **Round Three: Your thoughts and concerns.**

Remember that the goal of this Living Room Conversation is for each participant to listen to and learn about the different opinions within the group to see where you might share interests, intentions and goals. Answer one or more of the following questions:

- What is your personal, family or friend's experience that informs your beliefs about immigration?
- How have you personally been impacted by immigration in CA?
- What do you think is contributing to undocumented immigration right now?
- Do you have undocumented immigrants in your community? What role do they play?
- What do you expect from your city, county, state, or federal government with regard to undocumented immigration?
- What do you expect from churches with regard to providing or supporting sanctuary for undocumented immigration?
- What are your hopes with regard to undocumented immigration?

### **Round Four: Reflection**

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- in one sentence, share what was most meaningful or valuable to you in the experience of this Living Room Conversation;
- what new understanding or common ground did you find within this topic?
- has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?

### **Round Five: Accomplishment and moving forward**

Answer both of the following questions:

- name one important thing that was accomplished here;
- is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

### **Closing**

**Thank you!** Please complete the feedback form to help us continue to improve Living Room Conversations.