

Ongoing vestry discernment about supporting Sanctuary congregations

(Adapted from Sanctuary resources for churches)

At St Jude's, fifty parishioners participated in a Living Room Conversation about immigration on February 19, as the vestry discerns whether St Jude's should support Sanctuary congregations in practical ways (food, transportation, laundry services, money for legal defense, pastoral support and friendship). It is an opportunity for us to work on our Mission Covenant goal to engage in mutually respectful, courageous conversations in a safe space, exploring different viewpoints and learning new perspectives.

The vestry is in ongoing discernment about how we are called to respond to the clear call in Scripture to support immigrants and refugees, and how best to offer spiritual and moral leadership on this issue. Sanctuary is about taking a stand and providing safe space to those who are victims of unjust laws. Congregations who declare sanctuary, offer shelter to an immigrant individual or family in danger of deportation. This has complex moral, spiritual, theological and economic dimensions, as well as legal and political issues. There is precedent for sanctuary in ancient Hebrew tradition, in the late Roman Empire in Christian churches, and during the medieval period in England. In the USA, the Underground Railroad helped slaves flee the South and find safety in many congregations throughout the country. In WWII, Christian people hid Jewish people in their homes. In the 1980s in the US there was a Sanctuary Movement to shelter refugees from Central America. Now there are renewed calls for sanctuary.

There are over eight hundred churches and religious faith congregations in the Sanctuary movement who have decided to publicly shelter undocumented immigrants, because they believe we are one another's keeper, we are kin. Our lives and wellbeing are socially bound together. Sanctuary congregations believe that it is spiritually and morally imperative to 'love our (immigrant) neighbors as ourselves' (Luke 10:27) and to care for 'the least of these' (Matthew 25) – preventing family breakup and separation through deportation, years long waits for immigration hearings while waiting under inhumane conditions in detention centers, and more. Our faith calls us to social justice and the restoring of broken relationships, and our sacred texts carry a strong message of support for immigrants and refugees throughout Scripture. 'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' (Lev 19:33-34). See 'Sanctuary and the Scriptures'

Our challenging task is to interpret what that means in practical, concrete ways. At this time we are not discerning whether to offer sanctuary, we are discerning whether to offer practical support to other sanctuary congregations, as listed above. Please pray for the vestry as they continue to explore this option and discern the next steps.