

Sanctuary Movement – Four Points of Entry

During the Sanctuary Churches Training, Kristin Kumpf outlined 4 broad categories for where and how congregations can become a part of the Sanctuary Movement. We currently have churches that are interested in entering at one of these levels, and we have partnered one member of the RMC Immigration Task Force with each.

Education and Relationship Building

At its most fundamental level, the Sanctuary Movement is about relationships between congregations and their immigrant neighbors. Many of our churches have little or no relationship with the immigrant populations in their local communities (and sometimes even within their own church building). Trust must be earned, and in order to get to a point where a congregation is able to offer deeper support they must first educate themselves and do the work of meeting people.

Ex: Clergy and ality from Smoky Hill noted that they have a Hispanic congregation that worships in the same building, and yet the two worshipping congregations do not know each other. They have committed to doing intentional work with Pastor Lucia in order to learn about each other's experiences so that they can figure out how best to offer support.

Trainings and Direct Action/Rapid Response Networks

Once a congregation has started building relationships with their immigrant neighbors, they can start entering into more of an advocacy role. One way that many groups do this is through "Know Your Rights" and "Active Bystander" trainings. The goal of these is to equip community members – immigrants and allies - to speak up and interact with law enforcement and ICE in ways that are most beneficial.

Another way for congregations is to set-up or join Rapid Response and Direct Action teams. These are groups of people who commit to joining a text/email chain meant to quickly disseminate info when raids and/or police actions are occurring.

Ex: Arch Street UMC has set up networks of advocates in different parts of Philly who get a text message anytime something happens in their area. When a raid does take place, these individuals go to the site of the police action, document what is happening, and try to offer whatever support they can. Some of these groups have also agreed to non-violent direct action (such as surrounding ICE vehicles or forming human walls to protect undocumented folks, but this is entirely dependent on the level of risk that the congregation is willing to absorb.

Support Churches

For some churches, they are absolutely willing to become a part of the Sanctuary Movement, but space constraints and other logistical challenges make it impossible to offer physical sanctuary. For these churches, their main focus is going to be on supporting those churches that can provide physical

sanctuary. These support churches can provide meals, financial support, child care, pro-bono legal services, etc.

Ex: Jeanette Vizguerra is currently receiving Sanctuary at the First Unitarian Society of Denver and is not able to leave the physical property at the church. However, there is a whole network of congregations that have agreed to help provide meals and other support while she is stuck on site. These folks make it possible for Jeanette to live in sanctuary at the church, and First Unitarian would not be able to offer physical sanctuary without them.

Churches offering Physical Sanctuary

This is for churches that have the physical capacity to host an undocumented neighbor and the “appetite for risk” that is involved. Offering physical sanctuary does increase certain liabilities, but Kristin Kumpf made it very clear that there have only ever been 2 churches – ever – raided by ICE for offering Sanctuary. Kristin also explained that there are two primary models for offering physical sanctuary:

Public Sanctuary – This is for churches that are going to openly welcome an undocumented person into sanctuary. These churches usually contact the media, are well known in the community, and have the ability to leverage their privilege. Ex: Arch Street UMC speaking with CNN, MSNBC, VICE News, BBC, etc and publically stating that if ICE want’s to deport, they will have to come through the members of the church.

Private/Quiet Sanctuary – This is for churches that are able to offer temporary shelter for undocumented neighbors, but they don’t have enough protections in place to be very vocal about it. This is usually used for people making their way from a more hostile location (say El-Paso, Texas) to a more receptive country (like Canada) *or* it can be used to provide temporary shelter during a raid or ICE action.

MAIN TAKEAWAY – SANCTUARY IS MORE THAN JUST OFFERING PHYSICAL SHELTER TO UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS!