

New Sanctuary Movement

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS



ADVOCACY AND WITNESS PROGRAMS

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Introduction: Sanctuary

In the early 1980's, thousands of Central American refugees poured into the United States, fleeing life-threatening repression and extensive human rights violations by their governments. At the time, federal immigration policy would have denied the majority political asylum simply because their governments were allies of the U.S. Many of these refugees had actively participated in the liberation theology movement and naturally sought protection from congregations.

Many Catholic, Protestant and Jewish congregations and temples responded positively -- offering these refugees social services and advocacy support as well as engaging actively in efforts to change federal immigration policy. These congregations, united under the banner of the Sanctuary Movement, also pledged that they would not reveal the identities of these refugees, even if they were arrested or jailed for doing so.

The Sanctuary Movement was ultimately successful both in changing national policy and in protecting tens of thousands of individuals and families, enabling them to start a new life in the U.S. (Courtesy of www.newsanctuarymovement.org)

Unitarian Universalists and Sanctuary

Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to recognize that no one is "the stranger"; and to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. At our first General Assembly in 1961 we passed a resolution on the rights of migrant workers and in 1963 a resolution for immigration reform.

In the 1980s, many Unitarian Universalist congregations were actively involved in the Sanctuary movement. The UUA strongly supported this movement: three General Assemblies of the UUA endorsed sanctuary for refugees (1980, 1984, and 1985), and a 1986 Board Resolution established a Unitarian Universalist Sanctuary Fund to support individuals seeking sanctuary and to aid churches providing sanctuary.

- The 1980 General Assembly resolved to "...urge local societies and individuals to support their government's efforts in assisting refugees; and...[to]...urge local societies to investigate ways to aid refugees through programs of sponsorship, language lessons, vocational training, and other forms of community support as well as programs of education and consciousness raising on the refugee problem for their members and local communities". (*Refugee Assistance*, 1980 General Resolution)
- The 1984 General Assembly "...urge[d] Unitarian Universalists to support actively those Unitarian Universalist societies and other religious communities which offer sanctuary to El Salvadoran and other Central American refugees". (*Concerning Central American Refugees*, 1984 Action General Resolution)
- The 1985 General Assembly, recognizing that some Unitarian Universalist congregations "...as an active participatory form of protest and witness..." urged UU World to publish a list of UU congregations participating in the Sanctuary movement, and urged individual congregations, clusters and districts to

“...give careful and compassionate consideration to the issue of sanctuary...”. It also strongly urged the Social Responsibility Section of the UUA to:

Gather and disseminate information about sanctuary, including the tradition and current activities of Unitarian Universalist societies and other denominations...To study the initiation and conduct of sanctuary in UU societies and develop relevant materials specifically for the guidance of other UU societies and groups; and...to foster discussion of sanctuary through meetings, seminars, and workshops. (*Sanctuary*, 1985 Business Resolution)

- In 1986, the Board expressed their support for the Sanctuary movement by creating a Unitarian Universalist Sanctuary Fund “for the purpose of supporting sanctuary defendants, sanctuary churches and for the direct support of those in need of sanctuary”. (*Sanctuary Fund*, June 1986 Board Resolution)

A resolution of immediate witness was passed in 1995 for humane treatment of immigrants and in 2006 the General Assembly voted for an Action of Immediate Witness to support immigrant justice. Many among us are immigrants and integral members of and contributors to our communities and our congregations; many of us witness to the impact of the current unjust immigration system on families and communities around us. For these reasons, we Unitarian Universalists join people of many faith traditions in supporting the rights of our brothers and sisters who are recent immigrants to the United States of America.

Most recently, at the 2007 General Assembly, delegates passed an Action of Immediate Witness to Support Immigrant Families—Stop the ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) Raids that calls for an immediate moratorium of all inhumane raids and resulting deportations.

Now, over 25 years later, religious leaders across a broad spectrum of denominations from 10 states have come together to begin a New Sanctuary Movement to accompany and protect immigrant families who are facing the violation of their human rights in the form of hatred, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation. The New Sanctuary Movement welcomes religious leaders, congregations and faith-based organizations of all denominations to join in this effort.

New Sanctuary Movement Pledge

The New Sanctuary Movement is a coalition of interfaith religious leaders and participating congregations, called by our faith to respond actively and publicly to the suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters residing in the United States.

We acknowledge that the large-scale immigration of workers and their families to the United States is a complex historical, global and economic phenomenon that has many causes and does not lend itself to simplistic or purely reactive public policy solutions.

We stand together in our faith that everyone, regardless of national origin, has basic common rights, including but not limited to: 1) livelihood; 2) family unity; and 3) physical and emotional safety. We witness the violation of these rights under current immigration policy, particularly in the separation of children from their parents due to unjust deportations, and in the exploitation of immigrant workers. We are deeply grieved by the violence done to families through immigration raids. We cannot in good conscience ignore such suffering and injustice.

Therefore, We Covenant To:

- Take a public, moral stand for immigrants’ rights
- Reveal, through education and advocacy, the actual suffering of immigrant workers and families under current and proposed legislation
- Protect immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination, and unjust deportation.

Providing Sanctuary

As an act of public witness, the New Sanctuary Movement enables congregations to publicly provide hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families whose legal cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system while working to support legislation that would change their situation.

These families will be in the deportation process, include citizen children, have adults with good work records and have a potential case under current law. The Center for Constitutional Rights is working with a broad network of lawyers across the country to provide expert legal counsel and support to each family. Participating congregations will offer a family hospitality for a limited period; the family will rotate from one congregation to another as needed until their case is resolved. The Center maintains that because the family's identity will be public, the congregations will not be violating federal law. However, this argument has not been accepted by a court. A congregation or individual making the decision to harbor or transport an undocumented immigrant should consider it as an act of civil disobedience and consult legal counsel for a full explanation of the risks involved in such a decision.

Host congregations will sign onto a Sanctuary Pledge. Other allied religious leaders and congregations will also sign onto the Pledge. They will also accompany the host congregations, providing spiritual and material support as needed.

Host Congregations Agree to:

- Host an immigrant family that meets the following criteria:
 - Be in the legal process and under an order of deportation
 - American citizen children
 - Good work record
 - Viable case under current law
- Host the family for an initial commitment. The family will use the congregation as their mailing address and will be able to spend time as needed at the site. They may need actual hospitality (a place to live) in the congregation, in real estate owned by the congregation or in the home of a family that belongs to the congregation.
- Help with material and spiritual support for the family. There will be a larger network of individuals and congregations who will not be hosting families but will be providing material and spiritual support for families. Expert immigration lawyers will be handling their case.
- Participate in a public press conference with congregations all over the country who are hosting families. All of the host and allied congregations are joining in an interfaith statement of accompaniment/solidarity lifting up the human rights of immigrant families as children of God.
- Be available for press interviews.

Legal Justification and Support

A legal justification from the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law in Los Angeles for the legal status of congregations participating in the New Sanctuary Movement is available online www.newsanctuarymovement.org/legal.htm. However, UUA counsel advises that this justification has not been tested in the courts and that providing physical sanctuary could be considered harboring. Congregations considering this level of support should view such participation as an act of civil disobedience and are advised to consult with a lawyer.

Allied Faith Communities Statement of Support and Involvement:

Moved by our faith to participate in the New Sanctuary Movement, this faith community commits to the following:

Education

- We will educate ourselves about issues facing immigrants in our society, and about the current status of immigration-related legislation.
- We will avail ourselves of resources from the New Sanctuary Movement, and will welcome the first-hand stories of immigrants themselves who have experienced injustice.
- We will renew our study of the sacred stories of migration and hospitality, injustice and hope, which already exist in our own faith tradition.
- Seeking also to educate our greater community, we will offer public forums on immigration.

Advocacy: We understand that education alone brings no change if it does not lead to action. Therefore,

- We will actively and publicly work for comprehensive immigration reform in the United States.
- We call for an immediate moratorium on all raids and unjust deportations that cause the separation of families, until such time as the broken system of immigration laws is fixed.
- We agree to include our names, our voices and our selves (or representative members) in public events, various forms of media, and other appropriate venues.
- We will be a compassionate and persistent voice for justice for our immigrant brothers and sisters.

In addition, we commit to one or more of the following:

- **Legal Triage.** The need for competent and free or low-cost legal advice to the immigrant community far outstrips the capacity of the movements "prophetic hospitality." Therefore, faith communities are called upon to host legal clinics, provide legal referrals and to identify families in need of such assistance.
- **Prophetic Hospitality.** Faith communities will "host" a family seeking sanctuary for a period of three months, and serve as a tangible support system for them during that period. Based on the needs of the family in question, such support might include (a) meals for the family, (b) transportation to and from work, school or other events, (c) housing at the faith community itself, should such emergency housing be required, and (d) financial support and/or job referral (particularly in the case of job loss due to publicity of the case). Although this form of very public hospitality is entirely legal, faith communities involved in this aspect will have access to first-rate pro-bono legal services.
- **Material Support.** Faith communities will provide financial support towards either (a) the New Sanctuary Movement itself, or (b) a pool of money to be used to assist specific families in the local community seeking sanctuary and in need of the support. Depending upon storage and distribution capacity, other forms of donations could also be given, including food, bedding, clothing, and other material goods. Cultural, musical and other educational events are encouraged to raise both money for and awareness of the movement.
- **Worker Justice.** Despite society's ongoing desire for the services of day laborers and immigrant domestics, the climate of racism and harassment has reached a fever pitch. Faith communities are called to offer support through: 1) being publicly present at existing day labor pick-up sites as a peaceful presence in the face of racist and hateful demonstrators; 2) serving as an alternative labor/employer match site; and/or 3) being advocates for worker issues.

Unitarian Universalists and the New Sanctuary Movement

In May 2007, the UUA became the first national religious denomination to endorse the New Sanctuary Movement. UUA President William G. Sinkford sent a statement of support that was read at events in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Chicago announcing the launch of a New Sanctuary Movement. UUA support of the New Sanctuary Movement draws upon our history of involvement with the original sanctuary movement, our purposes and principles, and recent statements by the UUA General Assembly regarding immigration. These statements strongly condemn the current immigration system, support immigration reform, and encourage support for immigrants, regardless of immigration status. The 2006 and 1995 General Assemblies supported comprehensive reform, resolving to “Support just and comprehensive immigration reform...[including]...the creation of an accessible and timely process to obtain residency and citizenship” (*Support Immigrant Justice*, 2006 Action of Immediate Witness) and to “...demand...from both state and federal lawmakers humane solutions to the very complex social issues relating to undocumented persons in this country” (*A Call to Conscious, Humane Treatment of Immigrants*, 1995 Resolution of Immediate Witness).

UUA General Assemblies have also encouraged direct aid to immigrants: the 1995 GA urged Unitarian Universalists “to serve those directly harmed” by legislation infringing on immigrants’ rights and/or limiting access to health, education, and welfare services. (*A Call to Conscious, Humane Treatment of Immigrants*, 1995 Resolution of Immediate Witness). Last year, the 2006 GA called on “Unitarian Universalist congregations and individuals to “...continue providing services and fellowship to undocumented individuals even if legislation is passed that criminalizes these humanitarian acts” (*Support Immigrant Justice*, 2006 Action of Immediate Witness). And the 2007 GA AIW calls for a moratorium on ICE raids and deportations.

Unitarian Universalist Association Supports the New Sanctuary Movement:

Statement from UUA President Rev. William G. Sinkford

Grounded in the Unitarian Universalist affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations endorses the New Sanctuary Movement, a movement of prophetic hospitality and public witness to bring about real change in the immigration policy of the United States. The UUA joins other people of faith and conscience in calling for the passage of just and comprehensive immigration reform and an immediate stop to federal raids that separate parents from their children and create a climate of fear and repression.

In the original Sanctuary movement in the 1980s, Unitarian Universalists joined Catholic, Protestant and Jewish congregations in providing sanctuary to Central American refugees. The Sanctuary movement protected tens of thousands of individuals and families who were largely being denied asylum by the United States Government. This movement, initiated by people of faith, ultimately changed policy on the national level.

It is time for a new sanctuary movement that stands with immigrants who are fighting deportation through legal channels. Driven by the prospect of economic opportunity and by American businesses’ voracious need for cheap labor, undocumented immigration is on the rise. America has created an under-class of residents who are refused the dignity and civil protections that come with citizenship. Our current system keeps families apart, both through a huge backlog in family-based immigration, and through the unjust detention and deportation of immigrant mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters. We are also called to acknowledge that racism has blinded many Americans to what takes place in our own kitchens, workshops, and fields. For our nation to be whole, we must acknowledge that our lives of privilege are supported in thousands of ways by people whose labor is invisible and whose suffering is hidden. Led by people of faith from many backgrounds who stand in solidarity with immigrant families, the New Sanctuary Movement seeks to take a united, public, moral stand for immigrant rights; to protect immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation; and to witness to the suffering of immigrant workers and families. Unitarian Universalists join in this call for solidarity because we know that as people of faith, our concern for family values needs to embrace these families as well. Unitarian Universalists stand on the side of love.

For more about Unitarian Universalist involvement in the New Sanctuary Movement:

UUA Joins Faith Communities Protecting Immigrants from Deportation

<http://www.uua.org/news/newssubmissions/24058.shtml>. Includes press coverage of the New Sanctuary Movement launch, a congregational resolution for joining the New Sanctuary Movement, and more.

New immigrant sanctuary movement calls for 'prophetic hospitality'

Unitarian Universalist Association joins movement supporting undocumented immigrants facing deportation. By [Donald E. Skinner](#) at <http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/26739.shtml>

Resources:

- ***New Sanctuary Movement*** <http://www.newsanctuarymovement.org/>. This website includes a Congregational Handbook and Study Guide, a pledge form, contact information for local affiliates and more.
- ***For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. Through the Lens of Faith*** a comprehensive toolkit for congregations seeking to educate themselves on immigration-related issues developed by Interfaith Worker Justice. The guide helps people of faith reflect on what their religious traditions say about immigrations and engage in meaningful action for creating a just and humane immigration program: <http://www.iwj.org>
- **Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform:** This legislative campaign for comprehensive immigration reform has extensive analysis of and up-to-date information on immigration reform legislation: www.cirnnow.org
- **Rights Working Group:** This national coalition of more than 250 community-based groups and policy organizations is “dedicated to ensuring that American commitment to liberty and justice is fulfilled;” RWG’s website includes in-depth information on immigration legislation: www.rightsworkinggroup.org
- **Breakthrough TV:** Immigration reform is one priority of this international human rights and media organization. Their guide: *Restoring the Right to Due Process: A Toolkit for Immigrant Rights Advocates* is available at: www.breakthrough.tv

For more information on UU participation in the New Sanctuary Movement, please contact Susan Leslie, Director, UUA Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness: sleslie@uua.org or (617) 948-4607