

Frequently Asked Questions on Offering Sanctuary

1. **What does it mean for a faith group to provide “sanctuary” to immigrants?** Traditionally, “sanctuary” is a term that has been used to describe the protection of individuals in a place of worship. With respect to immigrants, different faith groups use this term in different ways, but sanctuary is generally considered to involve providing comfort and assistance to immigrants and their family members at risk of apprehension by federal immigration authorities or mistreatment by others. Exactly what type of assistance a faith group or its members may choose to provide to immigrants is for each congregation to decide.
2. **Why are we considering this? “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren you did it to me...” Matthew 25: 31-46**

In the past few years deportations have increased as hopes for comprehensive immigration reform have decreased. The current administration has broadened the categories of those being targeted for deportation. Rather than focusing on those convicted of serious crimes, virtually anyone without proper documentation can now be detained and quickly deported, including those who have lived here for decades, children brought here at a very young age, single parents, the elderly, and those who were granted asylum status. This has resulted in widespread fear among immigrants across the nation and in our community.

Local and national news has recently reported several cases of people who have lived here for many years. People raising families with no criminal record who work and pay taxes, suddenly deported with no due process.

3. **What are the legal aspects?** The law is clear that if we harbor someone; that is if we hide them from law enforcement (private sanctuary), or if we transport them, we would be in violation. However, in offering a place of safety we would not be hiding or transporting anyone but instead would inform ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) they are with us (public sanctuary), being given humanitarian aid, which is not against the law.

While there is uncertainty as to how the Trump administration plans to respond to the over 1000 churches (and growing) that have declared themselves to be sanctuary churches. Moreover, faith communities are considered to be “sensitive locations” along with schools and hospitals, meaning that ICE has maintained a hands-off approach and respected those

spaces. No ICE officials have stepped across those bounds in the past 40 years.

While conservative voices often argue the tax-exempt status of congregations offering sanctuary should be withdrawn, there is no precedent for this.

- 4. What criteria would we use in accepting a person or a family?** We would not offer aid to anyone with a serious criminal record (nothing beyond a traffic ticket). We would offer to help someone who is already working with a lawyer who assures us the person has a legitimate chance at receiving a stay of deportation and who basically needs time to pursue all avenues available. (Quite often the person has not received due process, or may have had poor or even no legal advice to this point.)
- 5. What would be required in terms of volunteers?** Short answer: HUGE AMOUNTS. We would have a coordinating team overseeing the project, with one or two people coordinating the volunteers. We would need people to take shifts staying in the building. We would need shoppers, people to help set up the space, people to run errands, people to coordinate food and laundry, and perhaps transportation of children to school. We would also need people to spend time getting to know the individual or family in sanctuary, perhaps playing cards or cooking or some other activity to help pass the time. We will have a training session for all volunteers.
- 6. What would be the financial costs to the church?** We would keep costs to the church as minimal as possible. At the beginning, we would set up necessary sleeping arrangements (beds, linens, pillows, blankets), a sitting area, and possibly some other basic needs. This space will evolve over time dependent on the specific person or family that is living there. We will seek donations from within and from outside of the church.
- 7. Will there be others in the community who will support us in this endeavor?** Yes, the Oberlin Community "Sanctuary Committee" led by Mary and Steve Hammond, and Sarah Johnson will be of enormous help. The Oberlin Area Cooperating Ministers will also be an ally. The El Centro

organization in the city of Lorain and the Lorain Ohio Immigrant Rights Association will also help in this endeavor. The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, the Multicultural Resource Center, many professors, students, and administrative staff at Oberlin College will support this project. We will also notify the City Manager, Police Chief, and City Council of the City of Oberlin of our intention to serve as a sanctuary church.

- 8. How will we respond to the media?** We will have one or two designated and trained spokespersons to respond to the media.
- 9. Will all of this actually help the immigrant?** We will not do this if there is a strong chance the immigrant's life will be made more difficult or experience an increased level of danger. We will work with people who are trained in dealing with immigration law to ensure that what we are doing will help and not harm them.
- 10. How long will the person stay?** This is somewhat unpredictable. Other churches have welcomed people for a few weeks or months while others have had folks stay over a year. We would make a written covenant with the immigrant to spell out how long we intend to offer sanctuary and review the situation at the end of that period of time.
- 11. What about Medical Issues or Emergencies?** We would have a plan in place and a list of trained medical persons on which we can call if needed.

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