

Frequently Asked Questions About Sanctuary

Sanctuary: A place where someone or something is protected or given shelter.

What does sanctuary mean for us?

As an act of public witness, the New Sanctuary Movement supports congregations to publicly provide hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families or individuals 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.

Providing physical sanctuary is one part of a wider movement for immigration system reform. It is providing space and time for individuals to contest or appeal their deportation order; to shine light on the human stories of families with one or more undocumented members.

How does this initiative connect with our Congregation's mission and vision?

In 2016, in our vote to affirm Black Lives Matter, we made a common commitment to pursue racial justice through a campaign of intentional learning, public witness and partnership building. Recent policy changes on immigration enforcement disproportionately impact communities of color; the sanctuary movement provides an opportunity to turn our values into action.

What is the difference between a Sanctuary Congregation and a Supporting Congregation?

There are two ways a congregation can participate in the new Sanctuary Movement. One way is to be a *supporting congregation*. This would be committing resources and time to helping another organization or congregation be a sanctuary.

The other option is to become a *sanctuary congregation*, which means being open to someone residing on our campus, within our building.

What does a sanctuary congregation do?

Sanctuary Congregations host an immigrant and provide support for the family for an initial commitment. One or more members at immediate risk may need to physically stay on church property, while pursuing legal action to prevent their deportation, and advocating for the rights of immigrant families. Generally, Sanctuary Congregations make their actions publicly known, including communicating directly to US Government agencies. Offering sanctuary is an act of faith, and public witness.

What support do Sanctuary Congregations typically have, and what risks do they take on? Sanctuary congregations rely on a larger network of individuals and congregations who provide material and spiritual support for families. The UUA has affirmed it will provide support, including assistance in securing expert legal counsel.

What will the US government do? The operating procedures of U.S. government agencies responsible for enforcing immigration law are subject to change. At present, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) treat places of worship as sensitive locations in which they will generally avoid enforcement actions. This is internal ICE guidance, not law, and could change at any time.

Frequently Asked Questions About Sanctuary

Today, it's unclear just how aggressive future enforcement by the Trump administration will be.

ACLU guidance on legal issues associated with sanctuary is a helpful overview of actions that are legal and illegal, and offers guidance on the boundaries between legal and illegal activities connected with sanctuary. (aclu.org)

IF First Unitarian were to join the Sanctuary Movement as a Sanctuary Congregation...

...Who in the community would help us? We would certainly have the support of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches and Dorcas International Institute, as well as from the UUA and its experienced staff.

Rhode Island State Council of Churches is making progress on creating a sanctuary movement in our state. From the meeting at 1st UU in February, 33 houses of worship expressed an interest in being involved.

Dena Quilici and Reverend Charlie are representing 1st UU on the steering committee formed to work on the sanctuary infrastructure in RI. This is important, because we are expecting the council of churches to help guide us and support us in whatever decision we make regarding sanctuary.

Currently, RISCC is working on assembling a team of lawyers who will help train lawyers not familiar with immigration law on how to help.

Is our congregation supportive? 126 members responded to an on-line survey. 98% want the congregation to be involved in immigration issues. 77% want us to become a sanctuary church and/or to support another church offering sanctuary. Many people offered time, money, and/or services to support the sanctuary work.

Some Details

Who would we host and how would we evaluate them? Following UUA Guidelines, sanctuary-seekers share the following criteria — they must:

- Be in the legal process and under an order of deportation
- Have American citizen children
- Have a good work record
- Have a viable case under current law

In addition, sanctuary-seekers should be willing to advocate publicly for immigration justice.

Would our activity be publicized? Yes

Would we have a rapid response team? Who would be on it? Yes, and TBD

Who would we be coordinating with in the community? Rhode Island State Council of Churches, Dorcas International Institute and other groups in the community.

Where would they bathe? Shelter is the most important factor here. Some type of temporary shower can be installed. When seeking sanctuary, this is not the biggest concern.

Frequently Asked Questions About Sanctuary

Would there be a church member on site at all times? This will be up to the Prudential Committee to determine. It would be necessary at first, but can be revisited after the sanctuary seeker and the congregation feel comfortable with one another.

How long would someone stay here? Under guidelines set out by the UUA, if we do decide to host a sanctuary-seeker in our church, we would host them for an initial period of up to three months. After evaluating the sanctuary relationship, we would decide to either 1) extend the hosting relationship for a minimum of another three months, or 2) end the sanctuary hosting and assist a transition to another religious organization.

Might there be a language barrier? How would we deal with this? There would be translation services available to us. There may be people in our congregation who can help with this. Members of our congregation may be inspired to learn a new language.

How many people would be living here at any given time? This would be up to the Prudential Committee, but the most likely scenario would be one adult. Family members and friends should be welcome to visit with the sanctuary seeker.

How would we provide resources (food, etc.) and emergency medical care? This would be an effort of the greater community, bringing in meals, providing medical support if needed.

Would the individual(s) have meaningful work to do? Part of being in a UU sanctuary requires public outreach, to inform the community. This should be agreed upon during the mutual discernment and interview process. Other projects or tasks can be taken up by an individual, if this is agreed upon mutually. If individuals do work of value, they should be compensated at a fair wage.

Where would individuals live in our church? This is something we would need to decide with an eye towards what works best for the parties involved.

Would hosting a sanctuary seeker interfere with our other church events? Becoming a sanctuary church will cause little or no disruption to our church events and activities. We will be welcoming a new family into those activities and growing our church community.

Would we be doing this alone? No, we would have community support from RI State Council of Churches.

Will this affect membership or donations? The church we have been in contact with (in Denver) said for the most part, there was a positive impact on their membership. They were not certain, and said they could have lost a member or two, but they feel it brought people in rather than drove them away.

How would people be vetted? There are organizations in our community who would be helping with this process. They would recommend someone to our congregation who meets our guidelines, and we would then meet with them and be sure that we can work together. We would have final say on who is in our building. The church would not offer sanctuary to a person with any known violent felonies or charges.

Costs

What would the extra cost to providing sanctuary to someone be? There may be an increase in our insurance, but the exact cost is still not known. The estimated cost of utilities is around \$125.00 per month. It is our intention that this money will come from donations directly to sanctuary at our church that come in through fundraising and from our coalition partners. At this time, the SSL committee is still

Frequently Asked Questions About Sanctuary

researching where we might have some kind of bathing area, and the cost for this. This will also be an added expense, which would not be undertaken until we know that we would definitely have someone in sanctuary, and we could raise the funds separate from the church budget.

How would we raise these funds? We will set up a donation site directly for our sanctuary efforts at the church. This would not happen until we know we will have someone in sanctuary. We also expect that other congregations (from our coalition partners) who cannot provide sanctuary to someone will be helping out with expenses.

Risks

What is the situation with insurance? We have reviewed our insurance policy, and contacted our insurance company. There is a potential increased financial risk resulting from use of church property as an act of civil disobedience. Should our building be damaged as a result of forced government entry, we would have to find funds for the repairs.

What if our guest injures themselves due to congregational negligence, such as a slip or fall? Providing sanctuary is not specifically excluded under our current coverage. However, Church Mutual (our current insurance provider) takes the position that providing long term sanctuary is the same as using the church facilities as a residence, and requires that we provide documentation that our building is in an area zoned for this.

What if there is damage to church property or injury to a church attendee caused by an action of the person in sanctuary? If we provide governmental documentation that residency is permitted, we can then purchase insurance on the increased risk such residency presents. This would be an unknown increase to our insurance costs. If we cannot provide such documentation, Church Mutual could decide to cancel our insurance with them.

Civil disobedience using church property is an act of courage for our congregation. Such activity places the congregation at risk of damage to church property which, if not covered by insurance would have to be paid out of existing church resources.

SSL, and the Prudential Committee continue to gather information on the legal aspects of all of these questions, and are also seeking the input from legal counsel. Reverend Charlie will be connecting with a lawyer on the Rhode Island State Council of Churches (RISCC) steering committee.

The ACLU has a brief on the legal issues for Sanctuary Congregations. The brief is on the web at: <https://aclum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017.03.10-Sanctuary-FAQ.pdf>

If you have questions, you are encouraged to contact a member of the SSL committee, or a member of the Prudential Committee. We will do our best to find an answer.

Resources: This document was compiled with information from the UUA, including excerpts from their New Sanctuary Movement document which is available here: http://www.uua.org/documents/washingtonoffice/sanctuary_issuebrief.pdf

Additional information was supplied by the congregation of the First Unitarian Society of Denver. You can find excellent information about their process on their website: <http://www.fusden.org/>

Other information is available from the UUA:

<http://www.uua.org/immigration/witness/partners/newsanctuary>

<https://www.standingonthesideoflove.org/ourstories/expanding-sanctuary-tod> <http://uurise.org/programs/legal-counseling-and-representation/>

Frequently Asked Questions About Sanctuary

Some of the coverage of potential partners and allies in RI:

ACLU: <http://www.riaclu.org/news/year/2017>

Dorcas: <http://www.diiri.org/Services/ImmigrationServices/tabid/264/Default.aspx>

RIFuture: <http://www.rifuture.org/ri-national-lawyers-guild/>