

First Unitarian Church of Providence

SANCTUARY RESOLUTION

Because First Unitarian Church of Providence affirms the Unitarian Universalist Association principles of:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- The respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Because the Unitarian Universalist Association and many UU congregations have been active in the sanctuary movement since the early 1980s, when we joined other faith-based communities in offering spiritual and sometimes physical shelter to hundreds of Central Americans fleeing life-threatening persecution at home;

Because as members of the larger community we seek to support the sanctity of the family and the shared value in maintaining its integrity;

Because of the growing threat from federal authorities of separating families of immigrants at risk of deportation is not only injurious to parents and children alike, but also to the moral integrity of the larger community;

And because as members of the First Unitarian Church of Providence we covenant to transform shared values into action in the world;

It is resolved that:

We, the Congregation of the First Unitarian Church of Providence, hereby commit to becoming a Sanctuary Congregation in order to provide on-site shelter and support for those at risk for deportation. We commit to working with a coalition of interfaith partners, the UUA, social justice agencies and other community organizations to oppose unjust immigration laws. We hereby affirm the authority granted under the congregation's Bylaws of our Prudential Committee to decide when and if it is appropriate to stand on the side of love and offer on-site Sanctuary to vulnerable people and for making public, through the media, our actions and the religious values that they represent.

Some Background to the Motion

This motion was proposed by the Standing on the Side of Love Committee and has been reviewed and approved by the Prudential Committee, the governing board of the church. It reflects broad consultation, and anticipates close collaboration, with the Unitarian Universalist Association, the RI Council of Churches, and a number of local organizations.

The motion reflects an effort to balance responsibility and risk; to further put into action the commitment to racial justice the congregation affirmed in last year's Vote; and to live up to our principles and our aspirations as the largest UU congregation in RI.

The voting process, and the Prudential Committee's executive power

Our bylaws call for a written ballot of all members in situations where the congregation is called upon "to take a stand on an issue of public interest." Specifically, "If at least one-third of the total eligible voting members shall vote and if two-thirds or more of the ballots returned shall be in favor of the proposition stated in such issue or shall be against the proposition, then the consensus of the congregation shall be deemed to be in favor thereof or against it, as the case may be, and shall be published as the stand of the Church on such issue."

Our bylaws describe the scope of the Prudential Committee's decision-making power as follows:

"The Prudential Committee may also exercise any other power of the Church upon the delegation of the Church. The Prudential Committee may exercise any power of the Church as may be required in any emergency circumstances, as it may determine."

The motion, if passed, would explicitly delegate to the Prudential Committee the decision to offer physical sanctuary to an individual under threat of deportation. This action would be a part of the congregation's wider commitment to stand with a wider coalition to oppose unjust immigration laws.

What actions will follow if the motion passes?

Should the motion pass, church leadership will inform the UUA that First Unitarian is now a sanctuary church, and First Unitarian would be added to the list of forty-three UU congregations who have publicly joined the new Sanctuary movement (listed at <http://www.uua.org/immigration/witness/partners/new-sanctuary-congs>)

We would also share this resolution with our local partner organizations, and would continue to collaborate to support those individuals and communities at risk of deportation, and to oppose unjust immigration laws.

The situation may then arise that through this collaborative network, an at-risk individual may ask us to provide physical sanctuary. Such an individual would probably have an existing relationship with a local organization. The Prudential Committee would at that time assess the specific case, the broader context, and our own capacity and readiness, before determining as a body whether to offer physical sanctuary. Should sanctuary be offered, all relevant authorities would be immediately notified.