

New Sanctuary Movement Tool Kit

What is the New Sanctuary Movement?

In the book of Numbers in the Hebrew Scriptures, God gives the people of Israel instructions to follow if they are persecuted for a crime that they did not commit and cannot get a fair hearing. They were to run to the Biblical Cities of Refuge and grab the horns of the altar. No one could harm them in any way until they could get a fair hearing. These “refugees” would be given “sanctuary.”

Inspired by many examples of Sanctuary throughout the ages, most particularly the sanctuary movement of the early ‘80s for Central American refugees and Elvira Arrelano’s courageous stand in Chicago, the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) is a national effort by religious leaders and congregations of all faith traditions to respond to the crisis of families being broken by an ineffective and unjust immigration system. The NSM engages congregations in accompanying, supporting and hosting immigrant families facing deportation while publicizing their stories. The objectives of the NSM are to:

1. Make Visible the Invisible – giving a voice to those who have no voice – and revealing the unjust suffering of millions of families (bearing the image of God) at the hands of the immigration system.
2. Inspire members of congregations to raise their voices to call for public policy to address the needs of these families.
3. Heal the trauma experienced by families facing the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment.

In order to start a new sanctuary movement effort in your community, you need to find willing **families and congregations**. You also need to prepare for media and obtain legal support. This tool kit will help you to understand how to:

- Recruit and support appropriate families
- Recruit and support sanctuary congregations
- Provide legal and advocacy support for families
- Work with the media

It will also help you to connect with opportunities for education, civic participation and worker justice as well as linking you to potential allies.

Sanctuary is an ancient spiritual act. It has power to transform individuals, congregations, communities and nations.

Recruiting and Supporting Families

Families that receive sanctuary become the faces of immigrant families across the country. Not all families facing deportation are willing or suited to play this role. Although some sanctuary congregations and families find each other naturally, it can help to think clearly about the criteria for a sanctuary family and the process for preparing a family for sanctuary.

Criteria for a Sanctuary Family

A) Help Non-immigrants Feel Connected and Compassionate

A central goal of the New Sanctuary Movement is to awaken the moral imagination of the country by making immigrant families visible as children of God, members of our human family (rather than “criminals and aliens who invade us and drain our resources”).

In order to achieve that goal, it is critically important for the average American to hear the stories of immigrants that break negative stereotypes. As a result, we seek families with citizen children that have a good work record and a history of contributing to their community. It is also helpful when families can speak from the heart about their love for their children, their neighborhood, their community and this country, as well as their religious faith. We also value ethnic and religious diversity and want to challenge the misperception that all immigrants are Mexican Catholics.

B) Reveal the Brokenness of Current and Proposed Immigration Law

We want to show the ways in which current and proposed immigration law impact families in terrible and unjust ways. In order to meet this goal, we seek families who are in a deportation process that would either separate them from their children or cause them to take citizen children into a situation where they would not enjoy the rights and benefits due to U.S. citizens. We particularly seek families whose deportation orders are a violation of due process – of the fair legal processes that Americans expect from their government. For example, they may have been harmed by incompetent legal representation. We also want to show the ways in which immigration law does not respect the traditional American values of repentance and rehabilitation, mandating exaggerated (cruel and unusual) and permanent punishment. For this reason, even though it is usually advantageous for a family to have a clean legal record, we have chosen families in which one member committed a crime many years ago and has since become a contributing member of a family and community.

While we typically seek families, we are also interested in young individuals who came to this country as small children and are doing well academically but are still facing deportation.

We are very interested in multi-generational, extended families that are helping each other to succeed. We are also very interested in families who participate in worker organizing towards a more just workplace – which might not be possible under potential guest worker programs.

Lastly, we are interested in families that would not have many points under a “merit system” (because they don’t have higher education or English proficiency) but they are highly valued by their communities.

C) Reasonable Risk

We do not want families to be harmed by receiving sanctuary. We do not want to exploit families. As a result, we seek families who have:

- A viable case, if they have access to adequate legal support and advocacy,
- Such a sympathetic case that we can advocate for a humanitarian visa/ stay of deportation even if they do not have a viable legal case, or
- Such a desperate case that they are at risk of immediate deportation without sanctuary.

Viable cases typically require that an immigrant had first filed an application before March of 2001. If the person filed after that point, he/she is facing the “bar” (the requirement that they return to their home country for 10 years before any possibility of legalization). If the person filed before that point, he/she may be eligible for adjustment of status (being able to stay in this country while the person completes the immigration process). It also helps if there are features of the person’s case that would help demonstrate “extreme and exceptional” hardship for his/her family members who are U.S. citizens if the person were to be deported. It can be useful in convincing ICE to re-open a case if we can document ineffective counsel (negligent lawyers). We have learned that the District Director of ICE for a specific area has the authority either to re-open a case where there has been an order of deportation or to grant a stay of deportation. There are a variety of ways to advocate for families.

Families under an order of deportation can sometimes spend years in relative safety because of the sheer number of people in their situations. However, a life spent waiting for the knock on the door can be more spiritually and emotionally costly than stepping out into the light of publicity and seeking sanctuary.

D) Demonstrate Courage and Commitment

We know that sanctuary is a serious risk. We also know that being under the media spotlight is often stressful and can be painful. We know that the whole experience is alien and can be very hard on children. We can only invite families into sanctuary whom we trust to have the spiritual maturity, courage and commitment the stress and public scrutiny.

Finding Sanctuary Families

While hundreds of thousands of families are facing deportation, relatively few fit all of the above criteria. Of those families, even fewer are interested in receiving sanctuary when it includes the requirement that they speak publicly about their situation. We have found sanctuary families by

working with organizations that have regular contact with large numbers of organized immigrants. These include:

- Immigrant Congregations
- Immigrant Rights Organizations
- Unions or other Laborers' Associations
- Social Service Agencies that serve immigrants

In order for these organizations to be willing to invest the time and energy to find families, they need to participate actively in the sanctuary coalition. They also need regular support and encouragement from a lead sanctuary organizer (staff or volunteer).

We also have received multiple calls from families after our sanctuary launch; however, the majority did not meet the criteria nor were they actually seeking sanctuary. Their primary need was for trustworthy legal representation.

The Discernment Process

Once a family surfaces who meets the criteria and is interested, the process is not over. It is such a serious step to go into sanctuary that it requires time for discernment and dialogue. Even when the need is so urgent that the family has to move quickly, it is still important after the fact to go through the process. The process has to include the following elements:

A) Building Trust

The family has to come to trust the sanctuary coalition lead organizer, the designated representatives of the sanctuary coalition that will be working closely with them, and the overall coalition members.

B) Clarity of expectations and promises

Part of what builds trust is when the coalition representatives tell the family the truth about all of the risks and benefits of sanctuary so that there are no false promises and the accurate promises are consistent and clear. We have several samples of clear covenants in our between congregations in our website tool kit section.

C) Building relationships

Coalition representatives need to spend time with the family in order to build the kind of relationship that will sustain them through the pressure. This has meant for us time that is social, emotional and spiritual as well as practical. We have eaten together, shared our stories and prayed together regularly.

D) The Dark Night of the Soul

The coalition needs to minister to the family in its moments of greatest anguish, anxiety and doubt, encouraging family members to share their feelings as well as listening for what kind of support they need and ensuring that they get it.

Recruiting and Supporting Congregations

There are many clergy and congregation members who feel an urgent need to respond to the crisis of families being broken by a broken immigration system. There are different ways that congregations can participate in the sanctuary movement. However, often congregations need to overcome significant barriers in order to follow their sacred impulses. We have learned strategies which help to overcome barriers.

Congregational Roles

A) The Sanctuary Pledge

The minimum commitment is to create an opportunity for members of the congregation to sign on to the following Sanctuary 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, I/we covenant to:

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

B) Prophetic Hospitality

The maximum commitment is to provide temporary housing on faith community property. Congregations will host a family seeking sanctuary for a period of three months and will serve as a tangible support system for the family during that period.

C) Advocacy

Sanctuary congregations can advocate for the sanctuary families in their midst. This includes the collection of documents which support their case as well as direct advocacy with the local office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. They also help the sanctuary families to connect with pro-bono or affordable legal resources as needed.

D) Material Support

Sanctuary congregations can provide financial support for the needs of the families. They also connect the family with other resources as needed, from material goods to medical services.

E) Pastoral Support

Sanctuary congregations can support the families through regular visitation and active listening as well as a variety of other ways to communicate emotional and spiritual support. They can also provide counseling, tutoring and other services to the family as needed.

Overcoming Barriers

A) Anxiety about Legal Ramifications

Sanctuary is a risk. It requires an act of moral courage. We should not pretend otherwise. There are also a variety of legal opinions about it. Nonetheless, we do have strong legal arguments which claim that we are not violating any law because the families are telling their stories publicly. (Legal precedent defines “harboring an illegal alien” as including the concealing of the alien; we are not concealing the sanctuary families.) We have a legal brief on these arguments which was prepared by a nationally known legal firm that has a thirty-year history in the immigration field. This firm has also agreed to represent all of the congregations in the country in case of legal action by ICE or other entities. They have sent a letter to ICE and to the Department of Justice stating that they are representing us and asking to be notified prior to any action and have written instructions for us about how to contact them and what to do legally in an emergency. The legal brief, letter of representation and instructions in a legal emergency are posted in the tool kit section of our website. After reviewing these materials, some congregations’ anxiety has been reduced or alleviated.

It has also been helpful for congregations to know that we have a “Worst Case Scenario” plan. Key contact information from all over the country has been entered into a program called “One Call Now,” which will inform everyone immediately if a congregation has been raided. The movement now has a plan of action to follow if the call comes posted on the tool kit section of the website.

Multiple legal experts also affirm that congregations that are participating in support activities are much less likely to be sued or attacked than congregations that are hosting families. Some congregations have chosen to take a support role rather than host for this reason. We have found that we need at least three support congregations for each host congregation.

B) Denominational Concerns

There are different concerns about sanctuary in different denominations. For example, the official position of the Roman Catholic Church, for example, is that they do not endorse sanctuary as a denomination (focusing all of their denominational energy on comprehensive immigration reform) but they support individual clergy and congregations who choose to offer it. However, they do not allow minors to stay on church grounds. Other denominations have a structure for congregational decision-making that makes it very difficult to make quick decisions or to offer sanctuary if there are individuals in the congregation who oppose it. Other denominations are concerned about the appearance of illegality, particularly as reflected in the media.

Sanctuary in this historical moment requires flexibility as well as courage. Flexibility allows for congregations to find a way to deal creatively with their denominational issues. We are experimenting with a variety of models, depending on the degree of risk for the family and the desires of the family such as:

- Housing the immigrant facing deportation while supporting the other family members who continue to reside in their own home.
- The immigrant staying in sanctuary temporarily (and then shifting to another congregation or going back home).
- The immigrant coming and going as needed.
- The immigrant not going into physical sanctuary but being accompanied and defended by the sanctuary network (with the option of physical sanctuary if the situation changes).
- The immigrant staying in a religious institution that is not a congregation.
- The immigrant staying in the home of a religious leader while being sponsored by a religious institution.

These options may make it easier for congregations to participate. We are also committed to continuing to work with and engage our denominational leaders in whatever ways are most appropriate. The following statement has been signed by a number of individual denominational leaders supporting the pledge:

Interfaith Denominational Leaders Statement of Support for the New Sanctuary

Movement: *The New Sanctuary Movement is a coalition of interfaith religious leaders and participating congregations, called by faith and conscience to respond actively and publicly to the suffering of our immigrant brothers and sisters residing in the United States. These leaders and congregations have chosen to stand with and support immigrant workers and their families facing deportation, revealing the actual human costs of current immigration policies. As religious authorities, we believe that the New Sanctuary Movement reveals the face of the immigration crisis. We share their grief at the separation of children from their parents due to unjust deportations, including families affected by the ongoing raids. We join their call for the moral awakening of the nation and share their commitment to protect immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation. We endorse the New Sanctuary Movement Pledge and activities as an apt vehicle for the living out of our faith in the current historic moment.*

As leaders continue to sign, the support base will grow within each denomination. In addition, Rev. Jessica Vasquez (jvazqueztorres@iwj.org) of Interfaith Worker Justice is working with representatives from a number of denominations to explore ways that they can support the sanctuary movement.

C) Anxiety about the Costs/Burden

Congregations who are considering providing sanctuary are often worried that they will not be able to provide adequate financial or volunteer support to the family. It is critically important that there be allied congregations who take on the responsibility of providing all of the other forms of support that the family needs, including financial support, medical resources, pastoral support, emotional support/child care/transportation for their families and advocacy. Each sanctuary coalition has evolved a different structure for sharing these responsibilities. We encourage you to utilize the structure that best fits your context:

- In Los Angeles, each family has its own cluster of congregations, some of which have the capacity to host, some of which will be able to host in the future but need more discernment time and some that provide support services. The family and cluster representatives meet regularly for coordination, fellowship and mutual support. The whole sanctuary network (representatives of 18 fully committed congregations, 5-10 other religious leaders and representatives of 3-5 organizations that represent immigrant families who are there in solidarity with the interfaith community) also meets monthly to tackle larger needs and questions.
- In San Diego, CA the sanctuary movement is facilitated by staff through the Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (ICWJ), which has convened a community wide Sanctuary Network. The congregations affiliated with the ICWJ are both familiar with the suffering and exploitation of immigrant workers and knowledgeable around strategies of advocacy. The entire group endorsed the New Sanctuary Movement as did several of the clergy organizations. Yet it is still challenging to engage congregations at the deepest level of providing sanctuary. At the current time, Spring 2007, one congregation is actively

providing sanctuary to one family, and three others are almost to that point. Strategically, we have provided opportunities for congregations and their leaders to take steps toward becoming sanctuary congregations by planning sanctuary programs including a Misa Santuario, a Sanctuary Mass. Additionally, we have created a local reference guide to assist immigrants who call for sanctuary support, may not be a strong fit for the Sanctuary Program, yet need some kind of immediate assistance.

- In New York City (NYC), each family has a cluster of congregations who are advocating and organizing together with them and their legal representation. At times, the legal support is evaluated and decisions are made accordingly. The NYC coalition is relatively new and continues to refine its structure. From the beginning, the families have been part of the decision-making and shaping of the coalition. Some communities of faith have developed their own discernment tools and manuals in the process of becoming sanctuary congregations. The support of community-based groups who are already working with immigrants in their struggle for justice, such as Families for Freedom (a network of families in deportation proceedings who organize and advocate at both the legislative and community level) has been critical for the coalition.

Legal and Advocacy Support

The Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law is representing all of the congregations and is available for technical assistance for lawyers working to represent or support sanctuary families. Call 213-388-8693 for non-emergency needs and 323-251-3223 for emergency legal assistance.

In addition, each coalition needs to identify pro-bono or discount legal support services for families. The Center is willing to identify potential lawyers from its national immigration network that could be available for this purpose. CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Network), the PICO network, local law schools, and local immigrant rights networks often can identify potential lawyers.

In the current legal situation, advocacy is as important as professional legal support. This involves preparing a “case campaign,” for sustained advocacy with a specific family. Clergy and congregations participate in a case campaign by:

- Working with the family to collect documents which support their case (e.g. letters from teachers, doctors and employers).
- Compiling support letters from religious and community leaders, and obtaining their commitment to make advocacy phone calls when needed.
- Meeting with politicians with all of the documents and support letters to obtain their support.
- Meeting with ICE to advocate for the family.
- Carrying out actions that will increase the pressure on ICE and engaging allies in increasing the pressure on ICE.

Congregations can carry out effective advocacy campaigns with information and technical

assistance. There are organizations around the country that specialize in advocating for detained immigrants and often have expertise in carrying out these kind of advocacy campaigns, typically called “case campaigns.” To find one of these organizations in your area, contact detentionwatchnetwork.org. NSM leaders have received training sessions and materials from one of the strongest organizations in the network – Families for Freedom in NY (212-898-4121, familiesforfreedom.org). The materials from the training are posted on the tool kit section of our website.

Media Support

From the beginning, attracting media coverage has been a core goal of the New Sanctuary Movement. We have been successful thus far with over 1,000 media hits and over 400 stories. However, we have to continue and expand media coverage. Each sanctuary coalition has the challenge and opportunity of attracting local media. The movement recommends that you open with a formal “launch,” an opening service and press event to which you invite all forms of local media. Sample launch ceremonies and materials are posted on the tool kit section of the website. We also recommend that you develop relationships with key immigration journalists and write Op-Eds for local papers.

Expert media consultants have helped us frame a message and design talking points. Various media materials are posted in the tool kit section of the website. We are in the process of finishing a media tool kit and designing a structure for ongoing media support and training. The New Sanctuary Movement website (newsanctuarymovement.org) has blog capacity. We would invite you to write a blog about your community’s experience with sanctuary.

Other Important Areas

Education

We have an education section on our website for updated information about legislative developments. Interfaith Worker Justice has designed a primer that congregations can use to lay the foundation for our work (iwj.org.)

Civic Participation

Although we do not take policy stands as a coalition, we do encourage members of the new sanctuary movement to get involved in civic participation, raising your voices with your legislators. Each denomination has mechanisms for civic participation (e.g. suggested letters, lobby days) as well as several of the major interfaith networks (Interfaith Worker Justice, Gamaliel, PICO) and the Sojourner’s Christians for Comprehensive Immigration Reform. On a secular level, FIRM (which is a national association of immigrant rights’ networks led by the Center for Community Change) offers multiple opportunities for civic participation on this issue as do many local immigrant rights’ organizations.

Worker Justice

While national legislative reform that truly meets the needs of immigrant families may take many years to achieve, it is possible now to support immigrant workers locally in their campaigns for workplace justice. Interfaith Worker Justice and its affiliated groups across the country are building religious involvement in low-wage worker and immigrant center lead campaigns. In California, CLUE-CA is an alliance of interfaith worker justice groups throughout the state committed to building a statewide faith-rooted movement for economic justice. The National Day Laborers' Organizing Network (NDLON) and progressive labor unions such as UNITE HERE, SEIU and LIUNA are fighting for the rights of immigrant workers in many areas across the country.

Allies

While the New Sanctuary Movement is distinctively a faith voice (which gives it maximum impact), it is very important that we be accountable to the organized voices of immigrant families. For that reason, we encourage sanctuary coalitions to include the active participation of organizations which we believe to effectively represent the organized voices of immigrant families in the planning and implementation of our activities. We encourage each coalition to welcome organizations with a broad range of political positions if they effectively represent the organized voices of immigrant families.

For more information or to join the New Sanctuary Movement, contact:

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www.newsanctuarymovement.org