

Following are some questions we have received, or know are on the minds of members and friends. First and foremost, it is important to state that there are *no* guarantees about this process. Recent developments in deportation guidelines and procedures have demonstrated that our country is undergoing a significant shift; so, what has been true in the past may not always be in true in the present or future. We can only go on what we have witnessed before. A form of providing sanctuary in religious community has existed for over 1000 years (<https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/24/3/440/1573358/Understanding-Sanctuary-Faith-and-Traditions-of?redirectedFrom=fulltext>); the American Sanctuary movement was significant in the 1980s when individuals and organizations were concerned about immigrants being sent back to war-torn countries, and has been rejuvenated over the past decade.

Q: Simply, what does it mean to be a "Sanctuary Congregation"?

It means we are prepared, under the right circumstances, to host an individual facing deportation in our space. The idea is that an individual (or perhaps very small family unit) would stay within the congregation's building for a time period while their immigration status was settled. By tradition, and previous policy, immigration enforcement officers do not enter churches – and there are occasions where an individual is close to deportation even though they may have a case that would normally enable them to stay. Offering sanctuary allows them to follow through the due process.

Q: What services would our congregation provide/be required?

Each situation is individualized. We cannot emphasize this enough – these cases are determined between the site that hosts someone and the person themselves (often when third parties helping them). At the most fundamental level, we provide space – a room where they can stay. Figuring out certain amenities (like bathrooms, cooking, etc) are up to individual congregations and the person seeking sanctuary. Generally, though, people take care of their own needs (though with assistance – for instance, with grocery shopping, as they cannot leave the premises). Some of the logistical things (laundry, grocery shopping, etc) are handled by people they know, family members, congregants, and members of the larger community who volunteer to help – it does not fall solely to church members or staff.

Q: What are some reasons people might need sanctuary? Isn't the fact that they're seeking sanctuary a sign that they are already in trouble?

We have seen a strategic and intentional decision to increase deportation – not only of people convicted of committing felonies or violent crime (which had been the most recent priority for ICE), but anyone (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2017/02/21/donald-trump-homeland-security-issues-deportation-memos/98190192/>). On one hand, this idea – that it is good policy to send back "felons, not families" – proceeded because we often assume a criminal deserves punishment (<http://fusion.net/story/377516/how-the-language-of-division-could-spell-disaster-for-immigrants-in-the-era-of-trump/>). However, this is often a second punishment – as our country is looking at deporting people who have already served time for their crime (which is normally viewed as paying one's debt to society). Further, the truth is that occasionally people are labeled as criminals and yet aren't (one story in the above article talks about a grandmother accused of being a gang member without proof).

Another recent story tells of a small business owner in rural Illinois who had been a pillar of the community (https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/us/immigration-trump-illinois-juan-pacheco.html?_r=0). Many citizens felt he was a model for the community and gave back in so many ways, without committing any crime other than being here without going through the proper channels. And, we are facing a situation where people who are not typically threatened with deportation are being threatened. Several outlets have reported that an entire plane was unduly searched (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/papers-please/517887/>); and, that people can be sent back to a country that is not their home country (<https://www.propublica.org/article/trump-plan-deport-anyone-crossing-mexican-border-regardless-of-nationality>).

Some of the home nations (to which people would be sent back) are in the midst of violence, some of which has been induced by American policy (whether related to drugs, gangs, fiscal policy, or the environment). Many people seeking sanctuary are concerned about being disconnected (perhaps permanently) from their children. Sometimes people who are potentially being deported have "followed the rules" but paperwork has been disrupted. Some people are legally allowed to be here, due to having a "green card" but can be deported for committing a crime (such as seeking work or being a part of a protest without a permit). Here are more stories about deportation in inappropriate circumstances (https://www.buzzfeed.com/norbertobriceno/13-controversial-us-deportation-stories?utm_term=.xhBbvKEep#.bnq91NWR6).

Allowing people a safe place to continue working on their immigration process without being sent to another nation does not equal abandoning immigration laws or concerns about immigration. We recognize there are many points to consider when it comes to policy – but seek to offer a humane way for people to be treated.

Q: What are some of the legal issues that arise? Will this threaten our church's 501(c)(3) status? Will members, or staff, be arrested in conjunction with this?

"Sanctuary Congregation" is not a legal status that exempts individuals from deportation. In 2011, ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) shared a memorandum that there were three standing institutions (hospitals, schools, and churches) that were deemed "sensitive locations" where enforcement officials should not enter unless given specific prior approval by a supervisor (funerals, weddings, and political demonstrations are also "sensitive locations") - <https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/Sensitive-Locations-Memo-2-18-16.pdf>.

Usually, what happens is that someone who has been working with immigration officials will seek a sanctuary until their individual case is negotiated by their legal representation and immigration officials. Determining who will stay in a sanctuary site is a matter that is negotiated between the site itself and its community partners (representatives of the immigrant communities and other organizations willing to help with the work of maintaining a sanctuary site).

In 1985 and 1986, there were criminal cases brought against ministers and lay people who were specifically active in transporting and harboring undocumented immigrants throughout the United States. Only the people active in the program were subject to prosecution (not all

members of the church, or its staff or officers). The public nature of the case(s) led many charges to be dropped and reduced. Similarly, in the thirty years since then, there have been dozens of cases where people use a congregation for "sanctuary" where the clergy and volunteers have not been charged with a crime (though that is not to say there is free rein to do this). Congregations who do this should understand that this is a form of civil disobedience.

At the same time, there has been no previous example of a congregation losing its non-profit status because of this type of action. For more information about legal issues, please visit some of the following links:

- http://download.lww.com/wolterskluwer_vitalstream_com/PermaLink/NCF-JCN/A/NCF-JCN_26_4_2009_09_03_WILLIAMS_200907_SDC1.pdf
- <http://www.npr.org/2017/02/16/515510996/colorado-church-offers-immigrant-sanctuary-from-deportation>
- <http://www.groundswell-mvmt.org/sanctuary-101-how-churches-and-synagogues-are-stopping-deportations/>

Q: Who gets to stay on-site? How will the decision be made?

The New Sanctuary Movement offers this criteria for decisions about possible candidates for "Sanctuary":

- Be in the legal process and under an order of deportation
- American citizen children
- Good work record
- Viable case under current law

Some of those terms are clearly subjective; but, the idea is that we become a sanctuary for people who are caught in a particularly inhumane system – not for every person who runs the risk of deportation. The Obama Administration prioritized deportation of people who had been convicted of felonies and violent crimes; the Trump Administration has primarily said that there will be no further prioritization of certain populations over others. Decisions about who would use our space (the UU Church of Bloomington) would be made by the Senior Minister, in consultation with appropriate legal counsel, the board of directors, and community partners. In all likelihood, we would only have space for an individual, or a small family.

Q: Does this make a difference in the scheme of things?

Understandably, we want to know that our actions make a difference in the world. Becoming a "Sanctuary Congregation" will not fix what is wrong with our national immigration system. However, there are two "victories" – one is that immigrants (whether undocumented, or people are here with appropriate documentation but still feel targeted by the government) understand there is a community that supports them. And on a very personal, individual basis, providing "Sanctuary" often greatly benefits the individual (and their whole family) who utilize the congregation. An article from the Chicago Tribune offers this (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-immigrants-sanctuary-strategy-20160508-story.html>):

"Rev. Noel Andersen [is] a Washington-based activist who tracks sanctuary cases that are made public. Churches or activists choose to publicize sanctuary cases when they believe public support could influence Immigration and Customs Enforcement decisions, while others seek sanctuary privately, hoping to negotiate with the agency.

Andersen, who works with the nonprofit Church World Service, has counted 16 sanctuary cases, 13 of which he calls "wins," in which an immigrant was granted a stay of deportation, or closure of the deportation case altogether, since 2014. Two cases, including Moreno's, are still in sanctuary."

Our Unitarian Universalist faith calls us to care for each person's worth and dignity, and to understand how our lives are connected in an interdependent web of existence. Standing in solidarity and offering safety to very vulnerable people makes a tremendous difference, even in ways unforeseen.

Q: Is there someone in Bloomington actively seeking Sanctuary? Why now? Can we hold off until we are more prepared? Will this upend our work with refugees?

There is not a specific individual who has spoken with us about using our building as a "Sanctuary Congregation", as of yet. What follows is more information about why we are doing this now. The ministers and staff have been actively exploring the different issues related to becoming a "Sanctuary Congregation" since the fall of 2016. Given our dedication and commitment to helping resettle refugees moving to the area, it did not seem like we would become overly-involved in the "Sanctuary movement". As 2017 began, we learned of expedited deportations, changed rules about who was swept up in raids and individual actions, and we had conversations Bloomington community members about what sort of resources Bloomington had and needed. After that, we devoted more time and attention to whether we had the capacity to become a "Sanctuary Congregation". Members of the Bloomington community who are vulnerable to deportation have asked for help from the rest of the city/community in identifying a "Sanctuary Congregation" (if not more than one), as well as other resources that would assist them in this time of great stress and need.

Many, if not most, religious communities are ill-equipped to handle someone living in their space. While it creates some inconveniences for our congregation, we began to see that it was indeed a possibility for UUCB – if the situation called for it. We are asking the members of the UU community to vote in support of becoming a "Sanctuary Congregation" – in part, recognizing that we are in a position of relative power and privilege and can more easily bear the burden of risk-taking that comes with this situation. That way, if an individual needs sanctuary, they know they will not be taking that risk alone.

Still, we will work to coordinate plans both within the church and with the larger Bloomington community. A vote in favor of becoming a "Sanctuary Congregation" will not stop our work in this vein; it will strengthen the resolve of staff and volunteers, knowing that the congregation supports them in this social justice effort. We will continue to offer information to educate ourselves and the broader community about the needs of immigrants, as well as refugees. In

fact, one sign that our congregation would be a good partner in this work was the dedication and support that people were willing to offer refugees, were they to resettle in Bloomington. We clearly have a commitment to helping people strengthen our community!

Q: Are there other Sanctuary sites/"Sanctuary Congregations" nearby?

Currently, there are no nearby faith communities that are "Sanctuary Congregations." A number of faith communities have volunteers and staff that are willing to help, but are unable to host an individual or family (due to size, space, accessibility needs, etc). The nearest "Sanctuary Congregation" (of any denomination/faith) appear to be in Chicago. We would be the only UU "Sanctuary Congregation" within a 300 mile radius. While we are more than willing to support other congregations as a sanctuary, there is a particular element we should consider – that Unitarian Universalism offers a theologically liberal environment that would be free of pressure to adhere to particular religious beliefs.

Q: Would we increase our security? What is the risk we are undertaking?

We would be taking a risk – just as we are at risk when we protest on the Square, have a booth at the Monroe County Fair, allow (or invite) groups to meet in our space., or otherwise publicly demonstrate our values. Risk comes with taking a stand – and we continue to stretch ourselves to take that risk to stand in solidarity with youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and/or transgender (PRISM), recovery/12-step groups, groups who have spiritual practices that differ from the mainstream (such as meditation). This would be another form of our community outreach; and, yes, it would be another signal to our community that our congregation has a particular view about our world. At the same time, we are in explicit conversations with people in the community about how they could assist us in this process – and the fact that we are considering this question has encouraged individuals and groups to say that they would help us, particularly in a time of trouble.

We will not be staffing the building 24/7 – in consultation with other churches who (a) have been a sanctuary congregation, (b) churches who have designated themselves as a sanctuary congregation, and (c) the UUA and UU Service Committee who are advising congregations about this, 24/7 coverage is not a typical arrangement. If the individual staying here has particular concerns, we will work with them – but recognize our own limitations. Our own staff have had, and would continue to have, conversations about the implications of being a sanctuary – we recognize the need to offer some degree of safety and protection for the groups that meet at the church and our members, as well as the person seeking sanctuary.

Q: Does this take place immediately? Would someone be able to come to us on Thursday, March 9 or Friday, March 10?

We would take advice from UURISE as to how to proceed and when to announce and the timing. One example is that the First Universalist Church of Minneapolis held their vote on a Sunday, empowering the congregation to go forward if/when it was needed (but did not host someone that day). In every case we know about, it is not that someone shows up asking for sanctuary – but arrangements are negotiated.