

The UCC Helping Lead the Sanctuary Movement in the Trump Era

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The United Church of Christ has a new prophetic calling in our new political reality. After a vitriolic campaign season during one of the most controversial elections in U.S. history, many are worried about what's to come, especially those who found themselves targets in a strategy to mobilize voters through scapegoating immigrants, refugees and Muslims. This harsh rhetoric, paired with concerning Cabinet appointments, shows a growing agenda of white supremacy, patriarchy, misogyny, racism and environmental degradation that will impact vulnerable populations in potentially devastating ways.

As the United Church of Christ, we must find our calling in a new era where the politics of fear have taken over. For immigrants, the Obama years were not kind. Two and a half million people were deported and thousands of families were separated, while the administration employed rhetoric designed to criminalize immigrants. The resurgence of the sanctuary movement in response to President Obama's mass deportations has become a foundation on which we must build a new strategy as we prepare for the incoming Trump administration.

Since the 1980s the sanctuary movement, motivated by the scriptural call to welcome the stranger, has provided safe haven to immigrants and refugees in need. Sanctuary is a tool that helps us to realize our vision of community, and mobilize people around solidarity with immigrant families, by offering our neighbors who face deportation safe refuge in our congregations. The modern-day resurgence of the sanctuary movement has created a platform to elevate the prophetic and moral witness of faith communities, while at the same time lifting up the stories of immigrant leaders who are brave enough to speak out against the injustice of deportation.

Since 2014, 16 churches in nine cities have provided Sanctuary to 20 individuals seeking to remain in their communities, helping them win relief from

deportation with the support of hundreds of congregations nationwide. Through a recent petition seeking to stop deportations and discrimination, an additional 300 congregations have announced their intention to join the sanctuary movement.

Now leaders of this movement are calling on all congregations across faiths to open their doors and provide refuge for immigrants facing detention and deportation, and a safe space for all individuals targeted by negative policy changes and hateful actions and rhetoric. Currently there are five public sanctuary cases and two of those cases are connected to UCC congregations -- Shadow Rock UCC in Phoenix is hosting Sixto Paz, a father of three U.S. citizens, and University Church (UCC/DOC) in Chicago is hosting Jose Juan Frederico Moreno, a father of five U.S. citizens (sign the petition here*). Hundreds of new UCC congregations have expressed a desire to learn more about how to join the sanctuary movement and get more involved. (You can learn more via sanctuarynotdeportation.org).

As President-elect Trump continues to rally supporters behind oppressive policy proposals, he has inadvertently brought the social justice community together. Too often, we have gotten distracted working only on one issue area at a time in a way that can sometimes divide us, but we are stronger united. Sanctuary is a practice that now, more than ever, should be expanded to include all those who are currently being attacked, such as immigrants, refugees, Muslims, women, Black Lives Matter activists, Native Americans and the LGBTQ community. Although the coming years will bring tremendous challenges, they will also provide new opportunities for movement building. The United Church of Christ must escalate our bold and prophetic voice as we work alongside partner organizations and interfaith efforts to help protect human rights and advance unity, love, respect and dignity for all.

* <https://action.groundswell-mvmt.org/petitions/tell-chicago-ice-don-t-deport-jose-juan-father-of-5>

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The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.