

Sanctuary Rising: Lifting up hope in times of fear and hate

by Noel Andersen
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Every day we face a new story of a family being separated and children torn from their parent. This is the result of an outdated immigration system and a President who rode a wave of xenophobia all the way to the White House. As people of faith who are committed to loving our neighbor we must inspire hope and take action to push back against the harsh and inhumane policies being pushed by the Administration.

How is the faith community reacting? It's reacting in ways both big and small. For 86 days Jeanette Vizguerra sought protection from deportation, taking up residence in the First Unitarian Society of Denver. She was named one of Time Magazine's 100 most influential people for lifting up her prophetic voice and taking leadership in the Sanctuary Movement. Thanks to her courage and enormous public pressure, she was offered a stay of removal for two years; a huge victory for her family and for the community that supported her.

Shadow Rock United Church of Christ was recently featured on 60 minutes to highlight the case of Sixto Paz, who has been living in sanctuary for nearly a year. At the same time the congregation is mourning the loss of Marco Tulio Coss, a father of three, whom the congregation had helped get a stay of removal in the past. He was deported after ICE misled his lawyer and the community, urging him to report to ICE offices under false pretenses where he was abruptly detained and deported.

People of faith across the country are helping thousands of asylum seekers and undocumented people find safe refuge and legal service support. Pilgrim UCC in Buffalo is even helping asylum seekers find their way to Canada where the government is actively welcoming them at the border because they have a credible claim of fear of persecution.

Every day I hear from congregations who want to know how they can accompany the immigrant in our midst. Any congregation can become part of the Sanctuary Movement. Already, more than 800 congregations have joined, more than half since the 2016 election. Many of these communities are prepared to house someone fighting a deportation order if needed. However, congregations who might not have the space, or are concerned about legal risk, can still be part of this movement through a spectrum of solidarity activities including assisting with legal services, fundraising for families in need, and engaging in advocacy to stop deportations.

With our partner denominations we hope to assemble more than 1,000 Sanctuary congregations to demonstrate to the administration and the broader public the power of the faith community and the depth of our concern about these harsh policies, which are hurting families in our community.

Together, we must also continue to confront our decision-makers in Congress to push back against the massive cuts to social safety nets. Want to do something right now? Stand up for a just budget. We cannot steal from the poor in order to pay for the wall, increase border militarization and immigration enforcement. Congress controls the power of the purse, not the administration. Contact your congressperson today: <http://p2a.co/7dVvFo0>.

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