

# Sanctuary & Sanctuary Support FAQs

## What is sanctuary?

Traditionally, sanctuary is a safe space located within a faith community, school or hospital that is generally recognized as “off limits” by law enforcement agents. In a 2011 memo, the Department of Homeland Security clarified its longstanding policy that immigration enforcement activities including interviews, arrests, searches, and surveillance should not occur in these “sensitive locations.”

Since taking office, the Trump administration has made detention and deportation top priorities of its immigration policy, increasingly targeting immigrant families in communities across the United States through an aggressive program of arbitrary enforcement. Responding to growing fears of deportation, many synagogues, churches and other houses of worship across the country have declared themselves sanctuary congregations, offering support and shelter to those who need it most. As UUs, our faith traditions are clear: Welcoming the stranger and treating immigrants fairly are at the center of our sense of justice and morality.

## What is the process for taking someone into sanctuary?

Before being referred for sanctuary, an immigrant must be in immediate danger of detention and deportation and must be working with a lawyer who is trying to gain legal status for him/her. Aside from that, each sanctuary church establishes its own set of criteria for accepting a person into sanctuary, based on the particular abilities and limits of the congregation.

In order to be protected in sanctuary, the immigrant guest must stay inside the sanctuary church at all times. He may receive visitors and engage in congregational life as much as desired. The hosting church will make every effort to make the situation as comfortable as possible for him.

**Note:** Some cases for a person in sanctuary may be resolved in a few days, weeks, or months. Others may take longer. The average time is 9 months.

## Why is giving sanctuary important now?

Since January 2017, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has harshly modified its protocol, resulting in the deportation of individuals who had previously been told they deserved to stay in the United States. Millions of families living in the U.S. now live in constant fear. Members of our own community have been detained and deported despite decades of living, working, and contributing to our community.

## What is sanctuary support and what will be needed in Manchester?

The type of sanctuary support that will be needed at UU Manchester cannot be known precisely in the absence of a specific person in sanctuary. However we have learned from visiting an active sanctuary church, that “premise volunteers” are generally the most pressing

need. Because the church must have an American citizen in continual attendance, many volunteers are needed to fill out the weekly schedule. Background checks and training are both required of presence volunteers. In addition, food, language, childcare, and relationship assistance are frequent volunteer needs.

**Note:** UU Nashua's commitment to UU Manchester will be expressed in a covenant between our two congregations and NOT implemented until first approved by our Board of Trustees.

### **Who is part of the sanctuary church movement?**

Thirty-nine faith organizations have pledged to support the NH Immigrant Solidarity Network. Three New Hampshire UU churches (Dover, Meriden, and Manchester) have committed to offer sanctuary. Seventy-nine UU Churches nation-wide are supporting the sanctuary movement.

As part of a discussion of this movement, we cannot underestimate the role of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The UUA has a long history of support for immigrant justice through all possible means--funding, actions of immediate witness, a Congregational Study Action Issue "Immigration as a Moral Issue," and a large number of comprehensive resources for UU churches considering/ preparing to be sanctuary churches. Understanding our faith's support for the sanctuary movement provided us an important spiritual framework for the work we were undertaking.

### **What actions led up to this resolution to become a support sanctuary church?**

The attention to government hostilities directed at immigrants began in early 2017 when members of our church started looking into the possibility of sanctuary for our church. Over the next several months, through numerous trainings, meetings, and events, a core group of UUs became educated and engaged in the immigrant solidarity movement building among faith organizations in New Hampshire.

When GSOP launched the NH Immigrant Solidarity Network, UU Nashua quickly moved to become a member. An Immigrant Solidarity Team formed and began looking into our church's role. Throughout the Fall of 2017 and Spring of 2018, we were busy--many meetings, a sermon on immigrant solidarity in January, 2018, open discussions with the congregation, visits to First Parish Bedford and UU Manchester. We finally decided on this resolution to become a Support Sanctuary Church.

Please click [here](#) for a detailed timeline.

### **Are there any financial risks for our church if we become a sanctuary support church?**

UU Manchester has complete liability coverage in the case that any volunteer experience an injury. We don't envision any other potential financial impact to our church.

## Would we be putting ourselves in legal jeopardy by becoming a sanctuary support church?

So far, there have been no signs that the Trump administration is targeting sanctuary congregations, and they are clearly a much more difficult target for ICE than the many immigrant families just going about their daily lives. It is impossible to guarantee that the Trump administration will never take action against sanctuary congregations, but our position as a sanctuary support church would be far less risky than the many houses of worship that have chosen to become physical sanctuaries.

## Where can I learn more about sanctuary?

<https://www.uua.org/immigration> - UUA social justice link for immigration

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/sanctuary-policy-faq635991795.aspx> - National Conference of State Legislatures (Includes Trump's Executive Order for immigration enforcement)

<https://www.nwirp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/ACLU-Sanctuary-FAQ-March-2017.pdf> - ACLU FAQ sheet

<http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-new-haven-nury-chavarria-case-lawyers-announced-wednesday-evening-that-an-immig-20170726-story.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/us/sanctuary-church-immigration-philadelphia.html> - Two representative cases of people who won their cases after seeking sanctuary, one in just a week and the other after 11 months:

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-new-hampshire> - Immigrants in New Hampshire (fact sheet by the American Immigration Council)

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*As a religious people who affirm human compassion, advocate for human rights, and seek justice, we must never make the mistake of confusing a legal right with a moral right. The forced removal of Native Americans from their land and onto reservations was legal. The importation and sale of African slaves was legal. South African apartheid was legal. The confiscation of the property of Jews at the beginning of the Nazi regime was legal. The Spanish Inquisition was legal. Crucifying Jesus was legal. Burning Michael Servetus at the stake for his Unitarian theology was legal. The fact that something is legal does not cut much ethical ice. The powerful have always used the legal system to oppress the powerless.*

**Excerpt from "We Are One" by Peter Morales, in *A People So Bold***