**Frequently Asked Questions on Offering Sanctuary**

**How will this work?**

A committee at church will receive the name of a person who is seeking sanctuary from that person's lawyer or from an agency. It could be a family seeking our help; the most recent cases have involved one person seeking help - their family is not under threat of deportation. We would meet and interview the person, listen to her or his story, and determine suitability of working with together. The person would be someone who has no history of criminal charges beyond minor infractions (many people have minor traffic violations). We would discuss with the lawyer how the person would benefit from staying with us – we are seeking a person/family who needs more time to present or appeal their case. The goal is for the person to be granted a stay of deportation until they can receive due process.

If things check out, and the person feels entering sanctuary with us is their best option, and we feel good working with the person, we would welcome the person to our church. We will establish a "private area", two or three rooms where the public is not invited, and that is where the person will stay, probably rooms on the lower level west side. We will dedicate one room where the person will reside, and another room for volunteers. We will provide a bed, dresser, table and chairs, tv, computer, a refrigerator, toaster oven or microwave. The person will be able to use a restroom where we will install a shower. At times when the Arts and Basics (the group who leases space on the lower level east side) – is in session, the person will be able to access the main level restrooms. When the church is open, we will ask the person to remain in the private area. When the church is closed, the person will have access to our main kitchen and Fellowship Hall. We will provide one or two volunteers who staff the private area and building 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The volunteers will be the intermediary between the person(s) in sanctuary and the public. Volunteers will be able to sleep at night, read, watch tv, and so forth.

Once the person or persons enter into sanctuary with us, we will notify ICE, the city police, and the county sheriff's department that the person is in sanctuary with us. Then we will notify the public, including the media, stating what we are doing and why. Historically, ICE agents have treated churches as a “hands-off” area and have not entered the building. They can only enter the area with a warrant signed by a federal judge, meaning two branches of the federal government have to agree to enter a church's private area and arrest someone. Then, we wait, and share meals and share life with our guest. The person could remain with us a week or a month or several months. The end comes when the person's case is resolved, or when the person leaves sanctuary. Otherwise, the person is confined to our building. The person can have visitors - family and friends - to the extent we are comfortable. We will assist in providing food, help with laundry, help with entertainment. After the first day, sanctuary is likely to be pretty boring, until the last day of sanctuary.

We will need volunteers to serve as hosts. The volunteers will have a second room that will serve as their office (and will include beds). We will need volunteers to shop for food and perhaps provide meals unless their family members are able to do this, and perhaps to eat with the person in sanctuary. We will need volunteers to help set up the two rooms, perhaps help with laundry, and help with entertainment (again, after the first day it will likely get boring for the person). We will need funds and donated items to set up the rooms and the shower. We will have several coordinators - to help with on site volunteer hosts, to help with meals, to help with building concerns, to help with media and messaging. The number of volunteers we need depends on how much each person is willing to do - perhaps one eight hour shift a week or two shifts a month. There will be volunteer orientation and the coordinators will help with supervision.

**Why are we considering this?**  
Congregational UCC has placed a high value on hospitality throughout its history; it is a central part of who we are. In the past few years deportations have increased as hopes for comprehensive immigration reform have decreased. The current administration has broadened the categories of those being targeted for deportation. Rather than focusing on those convicted of serious crimes, virtually anyone without proper documentation can now be detained and quickly deported, including those who have lived here for decades, children brought here at a very young age, single parents, the elderly, those who were granted asylum status. This has resulted in widespread fear among immigrants across the nation and in our community.  
  
Local news has recently reported several cases, people who have lived here and raised families here for many years. People without a criminal record who work and pay taxes, and who have not received due process. There are many more such stories. As a church with a longstanding reputation for welcoming all, and with being on the forefront of justice issues, we are being asked to help.  
  
Ultimately, this is a matter of faith: we follow Jesus, whose family had to flee violence, who teaches us to love one another without condition, who tells us that whenever we offer help, when we feed the hungry and house those in need and protect those in danger, we are helping him.  
  
**What are the legal aspects?**We have consulted with local attorneys as well as attorneys in other areas. The law is clear that if we harbor someone; that is if we hide them from law enforcement, or if we transport them, we would be in violation. However we would not be hiding or transporting anyone but would inform ICE they are with us, being given humanitarian aid, which is not against the law.  
  
While there is uncertainty as to how the Trump administration plans to respond to the over 500 churches that have declared themselves to be sanctuary churches, historically faith communities have been considered "sensitive locations" along with schools, meaning that ICE has maintained a hands-off approach and respected those spaces.  
  
**What criteria would we use?**  
We would not offer aid to anyone with a serious criminal record (something beyond a traffic ticket).  
We would offer help to someone who is working with a lawyer and who basically needs time to pursue all avenues available for a stay of detention. Quite often, the person has not received due process, or may have had poor or even no legal advice to this point.  
  
**What would be the financial cost?**  
We would keep costs to the church as minimal as possible. At the beginning, we would need to create a temporary shower, have the space well-cleaned, supply some basic needs. We will seek donations from within and from outside of our church.  
 **What about insurance?**This is addressed in other materials.  **Will there be others in the community who will support us?**Yes. Four local pastors have indicated that their churches would want to offer support, such as, volunteers, funds, and possibly furniture. We know of several other churches that will also want to help once they are aware of the situation. A couple of other churches are also considering offering sanctuary but have not had much discussion about it yet.  
 **Will there be negative reactions in the community?**  
We can expect some negative reactions, but our church has been targeted before. We also expect an outpouring of support from other segments in the community.  
  
**How will we handle the media?**  
There is likely to be media attention. We will have one or two designated and trained spokespersons to speak to media.  
  
**What about other groups that use our space?**  
We will have conversations with each group prior to any action, and have begun the process of checking in with them.  
 **What about our neighbors on Radiance Drive?**  
As with those who use space in our building, we will share information with them just prior to anything happening publicly.

**Will this actually help the immigrant?**  
We will not do this if there is a strong chance the immigrant's life will be made more difficult or experience an increased level of danger. We will work with an attorney to make sure this will help and not harm them.  
 **How long will the person stay?**  
That is unpredictable. Other churches have welcomed people for a few weeks or months while others have had folks stay over a year. We would make a written covenant with the person to spell out how long we intend to offer sanctuary, reviewing the situation at the end of that period.  
  
**What about emergencies or medical issues?**  
That would be part of the agreement. We would have a plan in place and would train volunteers accordingly.   
 **What does the Bible have to say about all this?**  
The Bible makes it very clear that God loves the refuge and stranger, and calls us to do the same. There are dozens of passages conveying God's desire that we are to welcome the stranger and the refugee, that we are to do unto others as we would want to be treated, that love of neighbor is of extremely high value and that “neighbor” is to be defined in the most inclusive way possible. Two passages put all this succinctly: Exodus 23:9, “You shall not oppress the resident alien; you know the heart of an alien for you were once aliens . . .” and Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

**What can I do to help?**

First of all, keep the church, church leaders, and staff in your daily prayers, that we may continue to discern wisely and listen for the Spirit’s guidance. Second, consider your level of support. Would you be willing/able to volunteer for a shift to accompany the immigrant at church? Help set things up? Donate needed items? If we move forward with this, we will need a united, church-wide effort. Third, let the ministers, Church Council, or members of the committee studying this know your opinions, concerns, questions, hopes. Thank you!