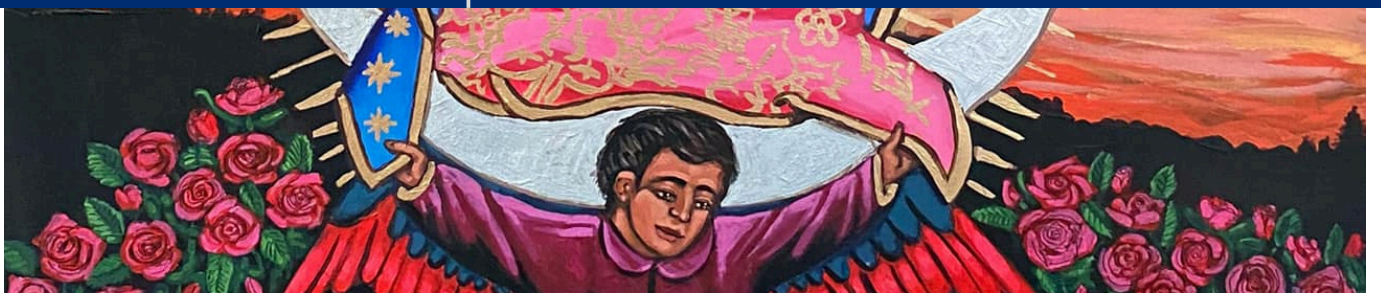




BECOMING A PLACE OF SANCTUARY



THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MISSOURI

*“For my house shall be
called a house of prayer
for all peoples.”*

-Isaiah 56:7b



FROM THE BISHOP



"Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." - Matthew 25:34b-36

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Our baptismal vows require us to "seek and serve Christ in all persons, to strive for justice and peace among all people, and to respect the dignity of every human being." These are not mere poetic words or lofty aspirations, but parts of a tangible covenant to live more fully into our call to follow in the way of Jesus. As people of faith, united as one in Baptism, committed to dismantling oppressive systems, and building structures and communities that reflect God's compassion and justice, we must do nothing less than to act and advocate for the most vulnerable and marginalized in our society.

In a world marked by uncertainty, fear, and division, we are called to be places of sanctuary—safe havens where God's peace dwells and all people find welcome, dignity, and hope. Our doors, our hearts, and our hands must remain open to those who seek safety: the vulnerable, the hurting, the refugee, and the marginalized.

Over the last few years, we have seen a dramatic increase in vitriol and violence against immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who have, in many cases, sacrificed everything in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their loved ones. This time calls on us as people of faith to live into our mandate to be places of safety and sanctuary.

To be a sanctuary means more than providing physical safety; it is about creating a community of grace, where all God's people can be seen, heard, and loved unconditionally. It is more than a public witness. It is a relationship. Cultivating partnerships in the community, exploring our theological convictions, understanding our own privilege, and committing as communities of faith to the care and nurture of those being marginalized are key to building a healthy relationship. Sanctuary, then, is a place where the broken find healing, where the rejected find belonging, and where all are met with compassion and care.

As an immigrant, I know only too well the importance of communities of faith speaking out and standing up for those who often feel voiceless, hopeless, and powerless. I encourage each community of faith within the Diocese of Missouri to advocate and act on behalf of those seeking refuge and pursuing dignity by becoming places of sanctuary. Now more than ever, the Church needs to be a visible compassionate voice for immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

Together, let us build communities where no one is turned away, where hope is restored, and where God's love is made manifest in our midst, centered on Christ's compassion. Pray for immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Pray for those who have been marginalized and sidelined. Pray for those who live with fear, uncertainty, and terror as their constant companions. Pray that we might be equipped and sustained to be a sanctuary for those Christ has called us to serve.

Yours in Christ,



The Rt. Rev. Deon K. Johnson
XI Bishop of Missouri



*Living God,
deliver us from a world
without justice and a future
without mercy; in your
mercy, establish justice, and
in your justice, remember the
mercy revealed to us in
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.

INTRODUCTION

The 79th General Convention of the Episcopal Church (see appendix below), gathered in Austin, TX in 2018, passed a resolution encouraging each congregation to, ***“become places of welcome, refuge, healing, and other forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted for deportation due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference, and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.”*** This resolution puts our faith into action by calling each Episcopalian to stand with the growing number of cities, colleges, and communities of faith declaring themselves places of welcome, refuge, and healing, for those targeted for deportation due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference or barred from entry to this country, as we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. What exactly does The Episcopal Church resolution call for?

A. The resolution explicitly calls for resistance to policy proposals to target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants and to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. It further calls for connecting with other local and national sanctuary communities and institutions, immigrant rights groups and coalitions. In addition, the resolution calls for engaging in educating, organizing, advocacy, and direct action, and other methods as deemed appropriate in each context, to ensure the safety and security of those targeted due to immigration status.

Q. What specifically does The Episcopal Church resolution ask churches to do?

A. It urges congregations and institutions to discern how they are called to serve as places of welcome, refuge, healing, and offer forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted by hate for any perceived status of difference and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people – by sacred resistance when necessary.

Q. How are those being offered sanctuary defined?

A. One of the core promises of our baptismal covenant is to “persevere in resisting evil.” We understand that as a call to stand in resistance to the systemic evils that oppress and marginalize any member of our human family – including but not limited to racism, sexism, nativism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. Grounded in our baptismal promises, our resistance to public policies that perpetuate those evils is how we put our faith into action in the world.

FAQ CONTINUED

Q. What are the legal implications of being a Sanctuary community?

A. Being in the U.S. without proper documents is a civil offense, not a criminal one. It is simply not a crime to be undocumented and describing any immigrant as “illegal” is legally inaccurate. In becoming a Sanctuary community, we join with the growing number of cities, colleges, and communities of faith declaring themselves sanctuaries and stand ready to challenge the unjust targeting of immigrant members of our communities.

Q. Will churches serve as physical sanctuaries to immigrants under threat of deportation?

A. Each community of faith within the Diocese of Missouri can and should make their own determination as to how they will serve as a sanctuary. Some communities will lean heavily into advocacy, while others may have the physical and financial resources to house those facing deportation or other forms of oppression. All communities of faith are encouraged to provide a broad range of support, including legal assistance, material support, prayer resources, and pastoral care.

Q. So what are the next steps?

A. Once a community of faith has done the work of discernment through listening, formation, community conversation, and prayer, the elected leadership would then craft and pass a resolution declaring the level of sanctuary they are able and willing to offer. A copy of that resolution should be shared with the Bishop, to be kept on file in the Diocesan offices, which allows for the creation of a network of sanctuary communities across the Diocese.



**FREQUENTLY
ASKED
QUESTIONS.**



WHAT CAN WE DO AS WE DISCERN BEING A PLACE OF SANCTUARY?

PRAY. Offer prayers of solidarity and healing for immigrants by the inclusion of intercessions for their safety and welfare in weekly worship services. When possible, organize prayer vigils and special services with ecumenical and interfaith partners to demonstrate love and empathy through prayer.

EDUCATE. Be intentional by offering opportunities for formation about the plight of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers and the actions that can be taken to support them. Seek training in order to equip members of the community of faith and the public with sufficient knowledge, skills, and courage to accompany immigrants to their check-ins with immigration authorities and to visit those confined in detention centers.

ADVOCATE. In partnership with the Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, seek resources and plan actions that advocate for compassion and caring, working towards a just immigration system consistent with our scriptural mandate to “not wrong or oppress a resident alien” (Exodus 22:21).

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:

- Legal consultation: Consult with legal experts to understand the potential legal implications of declaring a sanctuary church in your community.
- Congregational discussion and consensus: Ensure open dialogue and opportunities for open conversation among church members before adopting a sanctuary resolution.
- Detailed action plan: Develop a concrete plan outlining roles, responsibilities, and specific actions to implement the sanctuary designation.



WHAT NEXT?

Q. What do we need to do in order to be a sanctuary congregation?

A. Communities of faith within the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Missouri may discern and declare themselves places of sanctuary in order to advocate and offer safe spaces for those who are being threatened or persecuted because of their legal status. At a regular meeting of the Vestry or Bishop's Committee a resolution should be passed declaring the community of faith a place of sanctuary. This should state that the church body formally commits to providing a safe space and support for individuals facing deportation or other forms of persecution, often focusing on immigrants, by offering legal assistance, advocacy, and in some cases, temporary physical shelter. In addition to publicly declaring their stance against unjust policies targeting vulnerable populations the community of faith should acknowledge potential legal considerations and committing to responsible action in accordance with their faith principles.

Key elements of a sanctuary church resolution:

- Affirmation of values: Clearly state the congregation's commitment to biblical teachings of compassion, hospitality, and justice for all people, especially those facing hardship or displacement.
- Designation as a sanctuary: Explicitly declare the church as a "sanctuary church" where individuals seeking protection will be welcomed and supported.
- Scope of support: Outline the specific ways the church will provide sanctuary, including legal assistance, advocacy, community outreach, and potential temporary housing if appropriate.
- Collaboration with community groups: Express intention to work with local immigrant advocacy organizations, legal services, and other faith communities to effectively support those in need.
- Public statement: Commit to publicly communicating the church's sanctuary status to raise awareness and encourage community engagement.

Sample resolution format:

"Resolved, that [Church Name] hereby declares itself a sanctuary church, committed to providing refuge and support to individuals facing deportation or other forms of persecution, upholding our faith-based values of compassion and justice by offering legal assistance, advocacy, and pastoral care, while working in collaboration with local organizations to advocate for humane immigration policies and to publicly stand in solidarity with those seeking safety within our community."





APPENDIX

General Convention of The Episcopal Church Resolution 2018-C009

Urge Church to Become a Sanctuary in Support of Immigrants

Resolved, That the 79th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, in obedience to the many biblical injunctions imploring us not to wrong or oppress the alien in our midst and Jesus' own mandate to extend care for the stranger, and in accordance with our Baptismal Covenant, reaffirms resolution 2015-D057 supporting the New Sanctuary Movement; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church urge its members, as people of faith and people of conscience, pledge to challenge and question any unjust immigration law, policy, or practice that is inconsistent with our biblical mandate to "not wrong or oppress a resident alien" (Exodus 22:21); and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church recommend that its institutions and congregations become places of welcome, refuge, healing, and other forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted for deportation due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference, and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church encourage its members to connect with local and national sanctuary communities and institutions, faith-based coalitions, and immigrant rights groups and coalitions, and engage in educating, organizing, advocacy, and direct action, and other methods as deemed appropriate in each context, to ensure the safety, security, and due process for immigrants, with a focus on keeping families together of the undocumented community, and to assist in equipping congregations, clergy and lay leaders to engage in such work, appropriate to local contexts, capacity, and discernment; and be it further

Resolved, That The Episcopal Church affirm our church's support for U.S. executive policies that deemphasize immigrant enforcement action against those who have not committed felony crimes, and reaffirm our church's support for congressional action for comprehensive and just reform of the broken U.S. immigration system as called for in General Convention resolution 2009-B006: "to allow undocumented immigrants who have established roots in the United States and are often parents and spouses of U.S. Citizens to have a pathway to legalization and to full social and economic integration in to the United States."



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