

Sanctuary?

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is deporting immigrants who are in this country illegally even though some of these people have a case pending in immigration court. Because ICE has a policy memorandum stating enforcement actions are not to occur at “sensitive locations,” such as churches, organizations such as Hartford Deportation Defense periodically contact the Reverends asking if the Unitarian Society of Hartford (USH) can offer Sanctuary to one or more immigrants in danger of being deported.

If USH decides to offer Sanctuary, we would not be doing it alone; we would reach out to partners in the community.

Offering Sanctuary is a provocative act, but it is not illegal. USH will alert local media that it is hosting a Sanctuary Guest. Therefore, Sanctuary is “hiding in plain sight.” We will not be harboring a fugitive; providing Sanctuary is not Civil Disobedience.

WHY WOULD THE USH CHOOSE TO BECOME A SANCTUARY?

- The first principle of Unitarian Universalism mentions the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.”
- USH espouses social justice as an element of spiritual growth.
- As a church, USH is a “sensitive location;” we can offer help where others cannot.

WHO MIGHT BE OUR PROSPECTIVE GUEST?

- A Sanctuary Guest needs to have an active claim in immigration court that has high merit and a high likelihood of prevailing.
- A Sanctuary Guest must be at imminent risk of deportation.
- A Sanctuary Guest needs to be represented by an attorney or advised by an attorney who will keep USH informed about progress.

- A prospective Guest will have a face to face interview with a USH representative to present themselves in advance of final acceptance.
- A prospective Guest with any record of serious criminality or any suspicion of gang association or a personality disorder will **not** be accepted.
- A prospective Guest must agree to a preliminary medical exam and screening before final acceptance.

WHAT WOULD BE THE OBLIGATIONS OF A GUEST?

- A Guest must agree to all conditions laid out in an agreement with the Congregation.
- If the Guest exhausts all levels of appeal he/she agrees to leave Sanctuary.
- The Guest gives up freedom.

WHAT CHALLENGES WOULD USH FACE?

- Providing Sanctuary requires a large commitment of time and energy by many congregants working together for an extended period.
- Having a Sanctuary Guest may affect services; or use space needed for rentals, outside meetings, and childcare.
- Having a Sanctuary Guest may cause USH to lose congregants.
- The Congregation would have to be prepared for an unhappy outcome.

WHAT HUMAN RESOURCES WOULD WE NEED?

- Friendly hosts: two 10-member teams—one male and one female, depending on gender of Guest. Team members take turns staying overnight with the Guest until there is a level of comfort (both ways). The alternate team would be responsible for food, laundry, arranging visitation, communicating with community and family, and all other miscellaneous tasks.
- Medical professional (doctor or nurse).
- Mental health consultation to evaluate Guest's emotional status and needs; e.g., loneliness, PTSD, depression.
- Translators, if needed.

WHAT PHYSICAL RESOURCES WOULD WE NEED?

(note: Building and Grounds feels it is possible to create a space with the requirements below.)

- Appropriate living space with window.
- Bathroom with shower.
- Closet or wardrobe.
- kitchen access or mini refrigerator and microwave and/or hotplate.
- internet access.

WHAT OUTSIDE RESOURCES WOULD WE NEED?

- Financial partners for living and other expenses.
- Volunteers and professionals to fill some of the human resources needs.
- Other organizations are interested in helping immigrants but cannot do it themselves because they are not “sensitive locations.”

PROCESS FOR DECIDING WHETHER USH SHOULD BECOME A SANCTUARY

- Facilitated Under the Stairs discussions on two Sundays in October. These would be opportunities to ask questions and express opinions.
- Two additional facilitated discussions during the week; one during the day and one in the evening.
- A dedicated email address to submit opinions.
- All the input will be synthesized and shared with the Congregation.
- If the “sense” of the Congregation is to move forward, more work will be done on logistics and costs to determine if it is feasible.
- If offering Sanctuary is feasible, there would be a Congregational vote in January.
- After an overwhelmingly positive vote, efforts would begin to prepare the space, draft the agreement, and secure the financing.

Offering Sanctuary presents an opportunity for USH to live our Unitarian Universalist principles by providing necessary shelter and emotional support to an individual in crisis.

USH.sanctuary@gmail.com

Under The Stairs: Sundays Sept. 22, Oct. 13

Weekdays: Oct. 1, 7-8:30; Oct. 16, 10-11:30