



Austin Sanctuary Network

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and First United Universalist Church of Austin
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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement - San Antonio Field Office
3523 Crosspoint Dr., San Antonio, TX 78217
Attn: Field Office Director, Daniel Bible

SILENT NO MORE

We are faith leaders who cannot remain silent about our nation's mistreatment of undocumented immigrants. As much as we value non-partisanship, we do not believe being non-partisan means ignoring injustices done against vulnerable members of our human family. We cannot be silent knowing tens of millions of people all over the world have been forced to leave their homes due to violence, poverty and persecution.

Many of our scriptures tell us specifically that we must not oppress immigrants. They tell us we should offer immigrants the same human rights as citizens. The prophetic voices of our traditions tell us the greatness of a nation does not reside in its economy or military, but in how it treats the most vulnerable among us.

Some of us have not spoken out before because we couldn't imagine an America where children would be put in cages and families separated by our own government. We did not foresee the existence of private prisons where the freedom of undocumented people was determined by the same people who profit from their captivity. We never foresaw an America where refugees fleeing violence in other parts of the world would be vilified as rapists and criminals by our nation's leaders. We could not have foreseen that our nation would keep a database of wrongs done by undocumented persons to scapegoat and vilify them.

SANCTUARY

The sanctuary movement in the United States has deep historical and scriptural roots. The Judeo-Christian scriptures tell of the people of Israel forced to seek refuge in Egypt. In the United States during the 19th century, churches provided safe havens for escaped enslaved people. Sanctuary draws from our faith traditions and is centered on compassion for those fleeing violence. It is driven by the personal stories of those facing deportation and the consequences to those individuals of forced removal. Our concern for these individuals calls us to assist and protect them.

Today we join our voices with Pope Francis and the U.S Catholic Bishops who call people of faith to "open new humanitarian corridors for the refugees of war and

hunger.” We join our voices with Rabbi Jill Jacobs, who said, “Within the Jewish community, many of our own families are alive today because of the relatively open immigration policies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. And too many Jews died after being trapped in Europe when the borders closed in 1924.” Today we join our voices with the more than 15,700 clergy members of the The Clergy Letter Project who condemn family separations.

LET MY PEOPLE GO

As clergy, we are mortified as our faith traditions to protect and honor immigrants are violated more each day. And, as Americans, we are confounded as our leaders make a mockery of our core principles while the world watches. We value non-partisanship, but we are compelled by all that is sacred to declare the timeless message given to Moses at the burning bush, “Go to Pharaoh and tell him, “Let my people go!”

We stand with the nearly 50 people who are living in sanctuary in churches across the United States, and ask that relief is granted in each of their cases. In particular, we stand with Austin Sanctuary Network leaders, Alirio Gamez, Hilda Ramirez and Ivan Ramirez, who are currently living in sanctuary from deportation in two of our Austin congregations, First Unitarian Universalist Church and St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church respectively.

“When the alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” -Leviticus 19:33-34

In faith,