

What is Sanctuary?

Put simply, sanctuary is the movement and the work of defending immigrants and standing up for their rights. It nearly always works simultaneously on two levels:¹

1. The local level is where the primary work of protecting immigrants occurs. It is impossible to be involved in sanctuary as a solo congregation; **the first step** to becoming a Sanctuary Community is to develop relationships with the local sanctuary network. Such a network may include:
 - Sanctuary coalitions
 - Immigrant-led churches
 - Workers' centers
 - Immigration policy institutes or advocacy groups
 - Local chapters of Church World Service, Cosecha, Faith In Action, or other congregational organizing networks

Collaborating with these local groups serves at least three purposes:

- It puts the **communities most directly affected** by deportations at the center of the movement. Ally congregations should be taking their cues from immigrants and immigrant-rights leaders.
 - Our activism is most effective when we know **what the particular local networks want** us to do. Sanctuary is a decentralized, national movement that has evolved differently in every community where it is practiced. This means that sanctuary—both its definition and what synagogues and churches are asked to do—can vary widely from city to city, based on the needs of the local community; the local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), police, and municipal leadership; and what efforts are already in place. Coordinating also reduces redundancy.
 - Developing relationships with immigrant communities **strengthens the fabric of our interfaith, interracial, interclass society**. Having thick relationships makes it harder for confounding issues to drive a wedge between communities that should be allied in the current historical moment. The collaboration and the work itself also demonstrates our understanding of immigrant communities as neighbors and friends—not as an “other.”
2. On top of local work to protect immigrants, the Sanctuary Movement may also focus on changing the public's hearts and minds, with an eye towards federal policy. This is true for any public action taken by sanctuary communities (a list of suggested possibilities is on page 9). In the case of offering “public sanctuary,” government and media are expressly told that an immigrant is taking sanctuary in a given faith institution—though in the atmosphere of fear created by the Trump administration, immigrants may opt for sanctuary that is not publicized. In the long term, only a wholesale reorientation of our society, away from racism and xenophobia and towards inclusion and love, will offer true, lasting protection.

We should keep both goals at the forefront of our minds.

What makes sanctuary space work?

Communities participating in sanctuary should be clear in their understanding that the law does not protect an immigrant who takes sanctuary inside a house of worship. ICE agents or police officers with a warrant can enter a congregation and make arrests as the warrant indicates. This is the reason some sanctuary is offered privately, in order not to disclose a vulnerable person's whereabouts.

It is, rather, a policy²—call it a *minhag* (custom)—that ICE does not enter houses of worship, based on public perceptions and American (largely Christian) values about churches. The theory is that government will prefer to avoid the spectacle of uniformed officers forcibly removing someone from a church or synagogue. (Mosques and other religions' sacred spaces are, unfortunately, likely viewed less favorably by ICE.)

Sanctuary can be successful even if an arrest and deportation does occur, through the impact on the family of the arrested person and on the wider public. Action by faith communities sends a powerful message that protecting the vulnerable lies at the moral core of our traditions, and that we are ready to deploy the power of our communities to stop deportations.

1 According to Reverend Alexia Salvatierra, a national leader in the sanctuary movement.

2 <https://www.ice.gov/ero/enforcement/sensitive-loc> (accessed February 5, 2019).

TALMUD BAVA BATRA 11A

The Sages taught: King Munbaz liberally gave away his treasures and the treasures of his ancestors in the years of drought [distributing the money to the poor]. His brothers and his father's household joined together against him, and they said to him: Your ancestors stored up and added to [the treasure] of their ancestors, and you are liberally distributing it. [King Munbaz] said to them: My ancestors stored up below, whereas I am storing above, as it is stated: “Truth will spring out of the earth and righteousness will look down from heaven” (Psalms 85:12).

What does it mean to be a sanctuary congregation?

“Sanctuary” as defined by the contemporary New Sanctuary Movement has a variety of different meanings, all of which relate to protecting immigrants and preventing deportation. Many people, upon hearing the word “sanctuary,” imagine an immigrant living in a church or synagogue. This is just one means of providing sanctuary. Other activities that fall into sanctuary include:¹

- Change federal public decisions by changing hearts and minds
- Create a local safety net
- Advocate for local policy
- Advocate for specific individuals and families
- Provide pastoral and practical support, including being part of a shelter-cluster
- Engage in rapid response
- Offer physical shelter

The New Sanctuary Coalition of New York has identified the following forms of congregational participation. We offer these as a sample; **contact your local sanctuary coalition to learn what efforts your community most needs.**

SERVING AS A SANCTUARY SPACE

This can mean providing:

1. Short term sanctuary – “Safe Space”: If an immigrant has not been named as an ICE target for immediate deportation but feels at risk, taking sanctuary in a house of worship may be useful for a short time (a few hours, one day, or a short overnight stay). This brief respite will help the person feel safe and calm, overcome panic, and get information on next steps, while making contingency plans. Short-term sanctuary may be precipitated by immigration raids (or rumors of raids) or acts of hate occurring in the area. Fewer amenities may be required in order to provide short-term sanctuary, as the stay is intentionally brief.

2. Long term sanctuary – “Physical Sanctuary”: If an immigrant with a final deportation order has been named for immediate deportation, going into Physical Sanctuary may be a way to avoid deportation for an indefinite period, which could last for weeks or months or even years. The immigrant moves into the house of worship and lives there full-time until some agreement can be made with ICE to let the person live outside the house of worship without fear of being immediately deported. A congregation offering long-term sanctuary should provide a private, separate space, whose amenities may include a full bathroom and kitchen. Some long-term sanctuary is public (meaning the press is alerted and the intent is to change the narrative around deportations), but in some cases, long-term sanctuary is private (meaning there is no publicity).

Public, long-term sanctuary always results from a process of consultation that includes the immigrant in question and their family, lawyers, congregational members and leaders, and other stakeholders. It is never a surprise, spur-of-the-moment decision.

Note that a congregation that provides public social services—such as a soup kitchen, homeless shelter, or drop-in center—may very well have undocumented immigrants among its clients, and therefore may find itself encountering ICE even without intending to be a sanctuary congregation. We encourage such congregations to seek legal advice, develop a plan for how to respond if ICE agents show up, and make sure all relevant volunteers and staff are trained to react appropriately. *T’ruah* has collected several sample policies; please contact us at sanctuary@truah.org if you would like to see them.

“Hosting a family for sanctuary is the hardest, holiest mitzvah our shul has ever engaged in. The sanctuary leadership team and volunteers, along with staff, are working round the clock to support our guests. We are blessed by their presence even as we are furious at a corrupt, immoral, and busted immigration system that threatens them with harm. Just as our ancestors were welcomed into a tent open on all sides, we pray we are doing what is just, loving, and compassionate. It is a painful responsibility to be a sanctuary synagogue—a sacred trust. As the children of Abraham and Sarah, we pray our hospitality is nothing less than Divine.”

— ANONYMOUS RABBI WHOSE SYNAGOGUE IS HOSTING AN IMMIGRANT FAMILY IN PRIVATE SANCTUARY

¹ Thanks to Reverend Alexia Salvatierra for offering this framework.

TALMUD BAVA BATRA 7B

Is the Mishnah teaching it is beneficial to build a gatehouse [that might keep poor people out of a courtyard]? But wasn't there once that pious man, whom Elijah the Prophet used to visit regularly? One day, the man built a gatehouse and Elijah did not visit him again! This is not a contradiction—it is beneficial if the gatehouse is inside the courtyard; it is not if it is outside [completely blocking access]. What if in both cases the gatehouse were outside? There is still no contradiction—it is harmful if the gatehouse has a door [so the poor cannot even be heard]; it is not if the gatehouse has no door...

The Talmud continues with several more sub-cases, all pointing to the same conclusion: one may adopt measures for the safety of a community, so long as there remain points of access for the vulnerable.

SUPPORTING THE “SANCTUARY NETWORK”

A congregation can declare itself part of the Sanctuary Network and provide support to the network in a number of ways. Some of the following may require consultation with your local immigrant-led organization for guidance and training:

1. Provide **accompaniment training** and send volunteers to accompany those at risk of deportation to their ICE check-ins.
2. Have congregational leaders attend **meetings with elected officials**, participate in public events, attend immigration hearings, etc.
3. **Advocate** for immigrant defense, including: participating in local and national campaigns, signing petitions, and engaging your congregation in support of immigration policies.
4. **Organize professionals** in your community who might be able to provide valued services pro bono, such as lawyers, social workers, or healthcare professionals.
5. **Share resources** with local immigrant-led groups, such as offering space for community meetings or trainings (for instance, “Know your rights” trainings) free of charge, or volunteering to provide childcare during these programs so immigrant parents can participate without distraction.
6. **Display signage** in your congregation that provides information about what an immigrant can do if ICE shows up at their door.
7. Display a **“Sanctuary Movement” symbol** in your congregation, including the “Sanctuary Mezuzah” (on page 17 of this booklet).
8. Provide **material support** to individuals and their families who have taken sanctuary in another house of worship.
9. Participate in **Rapid Response** actions.



REUNITED AT LAST

IKAR and Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles have together been assisting an immigrant family since August, 2018. Delmi, her 5-year-old son Ernesto, and her partner Miguel (not their real names) arrived in the U.S. in June, 2018. They fled domestic violence in El Salvador—they have a credible fear of being murdered if they return home—and also had to seek better medical care for Ernesto, who has diabetes. Delmi and Ernesto eventually were able to find a home with distant relatives, but Miguel was incarcerated for six months at Adelanto Immigration Detention Center, about 100 miles northeast of Los Angeles. He was finally released in early December, 2018, and he and Delmi are getting married, with the two congregations helping fund the wedding festivities. Their journey is not over, but being together makes each step easier.

<http://tinyurl.com/ImWithDelmi>

<https://www.facebook.com/imwithdelmi/>

DELMÍ AND ERNESTO REUNITED WITH MIGUEL;
PHOTO COURTESY OF IKAR