

Statement of Being a Sanctuary Congregation

We, the community of First Congregational United Church of Christ, are a diverse group. We are people of different ages, races, sexual orientations, and gender identities who have come from a variety of social, economic, political, religious, geographic and ethnic backgrounds. Our congregation has long been committed to seeking justice, both within our community and in the world at large. We are rooted in bold response to important crossroads moments. First Church was founded by abolitionists at the end of the Civil War, and we were the first racially integrated congregation in the District of Columbia. We declared ourselves a Just Peace Church in 1985, an Open and Affirming Congregation in 1986, and a Multiracial and Multicultural Church in 2003. We have taken these actions as we strive to embody Christ's beloved community here on earth.

We again find ourselves at a crossroads as more than 11 million undocumented immigrants face the real threat of persecution and deportation, and other marginalized people suffer under increased surveillance as well as physical, rhetorical and political attacks. How are we, as a people of faith, called to respond? Leviticus 19:33-34 tells us, "When an 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. I am the Lord your God." Jesus Christ and his family also were immigrants who were forced to flee from their homeland to Egypt because of the cruel dictates of an imperious ruler. In his teachings, Jesus stressed the importance of compassion and providing aid to anyone in need. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matthew 25:35)

As people of faith and people of conscience, we declare that we will resist policy proposals that seek to deport or otherwise target millions of undocumented immigrants and that enable, affirm or codify discrimination against immigrants and other vulnerable and marginalized communities. We make this declaration both because we are called to stand in solidarity with immigrants and other vulnerable and marginalized people everywhere and because many members and friends of First Church fall within one or more of these groups. We will accordingly marshal the efforts and energies of our congregation and fellowship in a spirit of hope, faith, inclusion, and love to help those targeted by fear, suspicion, bigotry, and hate. We will work alongside our friends, families and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.

We declare ourselves to be a Sanctuary Congregation and affirm our responsibility to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We will work together with partner organizations to resist any harmful or unjust policy proposals that undermine due process, lead to discrimination based on identity, or otherwise violate Constitutionally-protected rights.

We are dedicated to educating ourselves and our community concerning destructive policies and practices related to immigration, deportation, criminalization, incarceration, enforcement,

and family separation. With this education as a foundation, we will work to activate our community to respond to these destructive policies and practices.

We pledge to stand in solidarity with all those who are facing persecution based upon their identity, with a focus on national origin, immigration status, faith, race, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

We note that historically the Sanctuary Movement in this country has concentrated its efforts on providing shelter to immigrants at risk of deportation. Following careful consideration, First Congregational UCC does not presently commit to physically housing individuals or families on church property. We will, however, stand in solidarity with and provide support to those organizations and individuals who do provide physical refuge.

The Sanctuary Task Force recommends the church become involved in the New Sanctuary Movement in the following ways:

1. Publicly declaring our commitment to being a Sanctuary Congregation by placing a banner in our window, adding a statement to our website, and communicating this as part of our identity in other formats as appropriate.
2. Creating a committee that would be responsible for the following:
 - a. Coordinating the efforts of both individual congregants and the congregation as a whole in resisting unjust policies and actions that target marginalized people,
 - b. Continuing to discern what First Church and its members and friends are called to do in support of the Sanctuary Movement, and
 - c. Maintaining our connection with other organizations involved in the Sanctuary Movement.
3. Provide a gathering place for marches, trainings, and lobbying efforts.
4. Work with other entities to provide resources and support to undocumented immigrants, other marginalized individuals, and their families.
5. Directly lobby local, state, and federal government to enact equitable immigration policies and laws that are fairly enforced with humanity and compassion, to de-militarize interactions between police and individuals and to develop a pathway to citizenship for all immigrants.