

The New Sanctuary Movement

Background:

In the early 1980's, thousands of Central American refugees poured into the United States, fleeing life-threatening repression and extensive human rights violations by their governments. At the time, federal immigration policy would have denied the majority political asylum simply because their governments were allies of the U.S. Many of these refugees had participated actively in the liberation theology movement and naturally sought protection from congregations. Many Catholic, Protestant and Jewish congregations responded positively -- offering these refugees social services and advocacy support as well as engaging actively in efforts to change federal immigration policy. These congregations, united under the banner of the Sanctuary Movement, also pledged that they would not reveal the identities of these refugees, even if they were arrested or jailed for doing so.

The Sanctuary Movement was ultimately successful both in changing national policy and in protecting tens of thousands of individuals and families, enabling them to start a new life in the U.S.

Now, over 25 years later, religious leaders across a broad spectrum of denominations from 14 States have come together to begin a New Sanctuary Movement to accompany and protect immigrant families facing the violation of their human rights in the form of hatred, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation. We welcome religious leaders, congregations and faith-based organizations of all denominations to join us in this effort.

Goals:

- 1) To take a united, public, moral stand for immigrant rights
- 2) To protect immigrants against hate, workplace discrimination and unjust deportation
- 3) To reveal the actual suffering of immigrant workers and families under current and proposed legislation to the religious community and the general public

Strategy: Prophetic Hospitality: As an act of public witness, we will publicly provide hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families whose cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system while working to support legislation that would change their situation. These families will be in the deportation process, include citizen children, have adults with a good work record and have a potential case under current law. Both the host congregations and a network of allied congregations will sign a pledge to accompany and support these families for as long as they need help and assistance. We plan to launch our movement in March 2007.

The Center for Constitutional Rights is working with a broad network of lawyers across the country to provide expert legal counsel and support to each family. We need lawyers who are willing to represent families and congregations pro bono or low-cost.