

B'nai Israel's Process to becoming a Sanctuary Congregation:

Over a year ago, in response to the controversy about the US taking in Syrian Refugees, B'nai Israel formed a "Refugee Assistance Committee" dedicated to assisting refugees settling in Sacramento. We work with "Opening Doors," a local refugee resettlement organization to assist local refugees. In addition, our congregation has helped support a couple from the Ukraine and Turkey who are here as Political Refugees. Last year we also signed on with HIAS as a congregation that supports refugees. In addition, immigration reform is something we have been involved in with for several years because of our work with Reform California and our local PICO chapter. This all set the stage and preceded our discussion about becoming a Sanctuary congregation.

In the days following the election, I started talking about immigration with our Temple president, then the Executive Committee, and then the full Board of Trustees about possible anticipated actions against undocumented immigrants and Muslim immigrants, and what actions were available to our congregation as a response. We were sure there would be legal action, but did not know in what form they would take, or when. So we discussed possible scenarios, and plans for us to respond so that we would be prepared. This enabled us to act quickly following the Executive Orders issued on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

1. On January 27 the President and Rabbi sent out an email to the Congregation and invited them to a Town Hall meeting and to the Board of Trustees meeting to discuss our becoming a Sanctuary Congregation. We invited those who could not come to the meetings to email us about their thoughts on the matter.
2. We had more than 130 people show up at the town hall, another 50+ email us, and about a dozen members show up to the BOT meeting (in addition to the Board). Support was overwhelming. The negative comments tended to cluster around security issues and what was the potential legal and security risks for the congregation, as well as what the vetting process would be.
3. Immediately following the town hall meeting, a group of lawyers and retired judges formed a committee to look at liability issues for the temple, as well as providing a group to give pro-bono services to those who we might shelter as well as the temple.
4. It was a unanimous vote of the BOT.
5. The BOT authorized the President to form a small group that would screen who we would shelter (the group is: the President, immediate past president – both are attorneys – the Rabbi, the temple's legal counsel and a professor at George School of law who runs a law clinic.)
6. We have also established a fund for donations to help in this work and will be further increasing and enhancing our security.

Excerpt from:
Minutes – Board of Trustees
Congregation B'nai Israel
February 2, 2017

Sanctuary Congregation (Alan, Elizabeth Landsberg, Tere Flores, Organizer with Sac ACT)

- Alan shared the feedback we've received from congregants regarding the proposal to declare CBI a Sanctuary Congregation. Close to 130 congregants attended the town hall meeting on Sunday. There was overwhelming support, but concerns were raised about safety, legal issues, logistics, etc. He also received 52 member and 3 non-member emails. All were in support, some had constructive concerns. Of the 3 non-members, two were in favor; the third non-member was strongly opposed.

Other question raised:

- Is there really an immediate concern that requires an immediate response? A: Yes, activity has been stepped up. The government is expediting deportations, ICE agents are going door to door asking people what their status is, and hanging out at courthouses in Oregon to pick up people who have committed minor offenses. Sac County sheriff allows ICE to come into their jails.
- PICO has 400 congregations across the country that has committed to being Sanctuary Congregations.
- Congregations would house families in immediate threat of deportation.
- As a result of the President's executive order, there is an increase in the number of raids and an increase in the number of ICE officers detaining people.
- 14-15 attorneys have already formed a committee to help determine the liability of the board and the sanctuary.
- Tere – some congregations are unable to host, but want to be in solidarity, so may help raise funds. There is a growing movement around this, we want to be public about it, but will only release information with congregational approval. Would likely hold a press conference once many congregations have signed up.

Discussion

- Q: What would be asked of us? A: We could house a family or small group of individuals identified through Sac ACT. We'd house them in our multi-purpose room and provide them basic necessities and financial support. We'd set up a designated fund for Refugee and Immigrant Assistance – to be used for Sanctuary and assisting with refugee resettlement.
- Would we help undocumented immigrants with a pathway to legalization? Tere - Many immigrants don't have a legal pathway. There are many folks who are legal residents or green card holders who are being detained.
- Has the staff provided input? Sara- staff is very supportive.
- Have we considered the logistical impacts on RS on Sunday? A: We'd sacrifice our MPR.

- How much lead time would we have? A: It could be immediate if ICE shows up at their home or they may get an order of deportation, which could be a week in advance before they have to show up somewhere.
- Whatever the congregation can't raise, Rabbi designated her discretionary fund, to fill gaps that the congregation can't raise so it doesn't come from general fund.
- Tere: Most of the families we work with are affiliated with an ACT congregation
- Would like to see a rapid response team if ICE or law enforcement came to the temple and training on non-violent resistant.
- Is there any danger of losing our tax-exempt status? Tere: Many congregations, schools, and hospitals have done this since the 1980s and are considered sensitive areas. While there have not been issues in the past, we're in new territory. The optics of law enforcement taking people away forcibly from a synagogue is bad.
- Tere clarified that ACT doesn't vet people to determine the nature of their criminal background.
- While there are risks, by standing up, we're empowering others to stand up. It sends the right message and we will not be alone.

The Board voted to declare CBI a sanctuary congregation. The Board delegates authority to a committee of the Rabbi, the President, the immediate Past President, General Counsel and two designated congregants appointed at the discretion of the President, to determine whether to house a specific individual or family.

The Board voted to start a new Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Fund.

Action Item – Alan will draft the new policy using the new format.