



Sanctuary in Trump's America

Definitions and Resources for Synagogues

Overview

In his first few actions as President, Donald Trump has slammed the door shut on refugees, decided to build a wall to keep people out, and made it easier for the government to arrest, detain, and deport immigrants at the border and across the United States.

As Jews, we bring our own values and history as refugees to bear in this moment. We are outraged by these executive orders, devastated by the suffering that will be inflicted upon refugee and immigrant populations, and determined to fight back and do what we can to support our neighbors.

This document is designed to answer some basic questions about the concept of sanctuary. *A fuller guide, co-created by HIAS and T'ruah: A Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, will be available in April 2017.*

As a Jewish organization that works with refugees and asylum-seekers, HIAS developed this resource because of the critical importance of sanctuary at this time.

What is "sanctuary"?

The term "sanctuary" generally refers to the act of providing support and protection to immigrants and asylum seekers who fear deportation and need a safe, temporary place to live. Places of worship—along with schools and hospitals—are considered "sensitive locations," so law enforcement officials are not supposed to search, interview, or arrest people there under most circumstances.

In the 1980s, many synagogues and churches were involved in a national sanctuary movement to protect Central Americans who sought safety in the U.S. and risked deportation back to war-torn countries. A "new sanctuary movement" began in 2007 when workplace and neighborhood raids escalated. Today, in 2017, the term "sanctuary" refers to several distinct—yet related—concepts:

1. Congregations providing housing/lodging to immigrants or asylum seekers and protecting them from deportation;
2. Congregations supporting immigrants and asylum seekers by working in partnership with local agencies that provide services such as legal services, English and citizenship classes, psychosocial support, etc.;
3. Congregations making a public statement that they will welcome refugees and asylum seekers, regardless of their immigration status; and
4. Jurisdictions refusing to help the federal government carry out immigration enforcement, instead focusing their resources on local law enforcement responsibilities.



Who is helped by sanctuary?

The term sanctuary is most-often applied to those who fear deportation by the government because they have not been granted legal status in the country. This usually immigrants who do not have documentation, or asylum-seekers who have fled violence or persecution in their home countries. Refugees who arrived through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program do have legal status and are not at risk for deportation.

Outside of this definition, other populations may also need assistance or 'sanctuary' if they fear violence.

Can my congregation offer sanctuary in our building?

Yes! You can join a national movement of places of worship that are providing sanctuary for immigrants and asylum seekers. You will want to consider various logistics including living arrangements (i.e. easy access to showers, bathroom, and kitchen).

Most of the time this process starts with a local lawyer or legal service provider identifying an immigrant or asylum seeker who needs assistance. Ideally the process begins several months in advance, but sometimes there is an urgent and immediate need.

Are there any legal ramifications?

While no congregation or faith leader has ever been prosecuted for allowing individuals to find shelter and safety in their place of worship, we recommend that you speak with a legal expert who are familiar with your particular state/locality.

What are "sanctuary cities"?

Over 350 jurisdictions across the country have enacted policies prohibiting local law enforcement officials from sharing information with ICE, holding undocumented immigrants in custody for nonviolent crimes, or asking about an individual's immigration status. This kind of "sanctuary" policy benefits public safety by allowing jurisdictions to focus on local priorities rather than helping the federal government detain and deport immigrants. By delineating themselves from federal immigration enforcement officers, local law enforcement can better protect their communities.

Some jurisdictions refer to these policies as "trust policies" or "separation ordinances" to emphasize the distinct roles of local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement. This type of separation is critical to ensuring trust between local police and the communities they serve and



protect. It would be unreasonable to expect an immigrant to engage with local police—i.e. to report a crime or testify as a witness—if they risk being questioned, detained, or deported.

These policies do not offer safe harbor to criminals. If any criminal is found to be in violation of federal immigration law, they are immediately handed over to the Department of Homeland Security. But simply being in the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant is a civil—not criminal—offense.

Is this Legal?

Yes. Immigration enforcement is the responsibility of the federal government, and jurisdictions have no legal obligation to assist. Local decisions to offer resources towards federal immigration enforcement authorities is completely voluntary.

Is there another option?

Yes. Some jurisdictions have decided to enact “welcoming resolutions” instead of declaring themselves a “sanctuary city,” and some have done both. By passing a proclamation or resolution, elected officials can formally affirm their support for refugees.

How will President Trump’s recent executive orders affect this issue?

Many elected officials—including the mayors of [New York](#), [Philadelphia](#), [Boston](#), [Washington, DC](#), [Chicago](#), [Minneapolis/St. Paul](#), [Los Angeles](#), [San Francisco](#), and [Seattle](#)—have already responded to President Trump’s announcement that sanctuary cities will not be eligible for federal grants - declaring that they will keep their promise and continue to do everything to protect immigrants in their city. That said, it is too early to know what effect the executive order will have, or what the implementation will look like.

President Trump has also signed policies to start the process of building a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border, which will make it easier for enforcement agencies to arrest, detain, and deport unauthorized immigrants at the border and in the U.S. This could affect many asylum-seekers who come to the U.S. fleeing persecution in their home country. The vast majority of asylum-seekers crossing the U.S.-Mexico border are women and children who are at risk of violence, sexual assault, and even death if they are returned to their home countries.

How can congregations help?

Through offering sanctuary, faith communities around the country—clergy, lay leaders, congregations, families, etc.—can help address the immediate and acute needs of refugees and immigrants who seek safety in the U.S. Here are a few things to consider:



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

- Sign your congregation on to [HIAS' Welcome Campaign](#) as an affirmative statement in support of welcoming refugees to the United States. Let us know if you are particularly interested in sanctuary and we will connect you with national or local coalitions who can help you to move forward. Jewish organizations such as the RAC, T'ruah, and the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association are also offering trainings.
- Reach out to local organizations that support immigrants and asylum-seekers and develop a relationship. Being a sanctuary congregation most significantly means that you are working locally to make your city or town safer.
- Thank your elected officials (mayor, governor, city council members, state legislators) for their stance on sanctuary or – as the case may be – urge them to take a different stance. Contact your local elected officials to ask them to introduce a “welcoming resolution” to affirm their jurisdiction as a place that welcomes all refugees and immigrants, regardless of who they are, where they come from, how they pray, or whether they have proper documentation. [Click here](#) for a sample resolution.
- Meet with your Members of Congress to make sure they know that your community welcomes refugees and immigrants. Urge them to do all they can for refugees in 2017— including calling on the Trump administration to undo his recent executive orders

Learn More

- [Definitions of Refugee, Asylum Seeker, IDP, Migrant](#)
- [The HIAS Welcome Campaign](#)
- [Over 1,700 Rabbis Support Welcoming Refugees](#)
- [Sanctuary Cities, Trust Acts, and Community Policing Explained](#)

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