

Declaring Sanctuary

By Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, Congregation Shaarei Shamayim

In May, 2017 the board of Congregation Shaarei Shamayim voted to declare ourselves a sanctuary congregation. Under the leadership of the Wisconsin immigrant rights organization, Voces de la Frontera, and Centro Hispano, which serves Madison's Latino community, we will assist vulnerable immigrant communities and provide physical sanctuary as needed.

This is one expression of our [Madison Jewish Pledge of Solidarity and Sanctuary](#), which expresses our commitment to stand with our Muslim and Latino neighbors. Another expression has been our commitment to raise over \$60,000 so that Voces de la Frontera can hire a staff person for its Madison chapter.

In declaring sanctuary, we are partnering with the First Unitarian Society (FUS), along with several other congregations that are part of the Dane County Sanctuary coalition. FUS has done considerable research on the legal risk of welcoming in an individual at risk of deportation in the building; its leadership team is confident that it is minimal. They are currently working through the numerous practical implications of housing an individual so that the process is a smooth one.

As a Jewish community we are called to welcome the stranger and protect the oppressed. Out of a deep sense of social justice, we are responding to the urgent needs of Dane County's immigrant communities, and we will stand with them in this act of solidarity.

While the threat to undocumented immigrants is nothing new, racist rhetoric and threats to immigrants have escalated under the new administration, resulting in severely increased anxiety and fear in these communities. Deportations are rising, and as families are ripped apart parents are scrambling to create guardianship plans or apply for passports for their children.

To be considered for sanctuary, an individual would be referred to us by Centro Hispano or Voces de la Frontera. This person would be working with an immigration attorney, and he or she would be chosen if they have a strong case to defer or stop deportation, no significant criminal record, a compelling story, and the ability to withstand the rigors and restrictions of sanctuary.

The individual would live in the Atrium Building in one of the classrooms, 24 hours a day, while the legal team challenges the deportation. Sanctuary can provide a deterrent to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), thus giving the individual an opportunity to plead his or her case in court rather than being summarily deported.

Providing sanctuary is a humanitarian act for an individual, as well as an opportunity to raise public awareness of deportations in our community. We are not hiding an individual; rather we are publicizing our action in the media and to ICE. This makes a powerful public statement that we will not stand idly by.

In the coming weeks we will share opportunities to get involved, should an individual be placed at FUS. I hope that you will join with us in this important work.