



HORIZON TEXAS CONFERENCE SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

From the altars in Exodus and the tabernacle in Nob where King David sought refuge, to the underground railroad and churches in the present day, houses of worship have stood as sanctuaries for those seeking refuge for thousands of years. As followers of Christ and in the Wesleyan tradition, we welcome the stranger and care for the vulnerable. Scripture reminds us: "The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:34), and that God chose to be born into a family that chose to evade governing authorities (Matthew 2:22). For more Scriptural references, see www.WhoWouldJesusDeport.com.

The Horizon Texas Conference affirms our Christian duty to love and support *all* people and acknowledge our rich history of providing sanctuary while being aware of the legal implications of our actions. These guidelines are designed to assist churches in considering providing sanctuary.

Legal Considerations

1. "Sanctuary" is not a legal term and provides no legal protection for churches or individuals.
2. Federal law prohibits concealing, harbouring, or shielding undocumented persons from detection.
3. ICE agents are no longer restricted from conducting enforcement actions in sensitive locations, including churches.
4. Churches should be aware that providing shelter to undocumented immigrants may violate federal law.
5. Providing sanctuary in churches to undocumented immigrants carries legal risks for pastors, church leaders, and members.

Guidelines for Churches Considering Providing Sanctuary

- 1. Consult with God through Prayerful Discernment:** Pastors and church leaders should begin with intentional prayer, asking for God's wisdom and direction as you consider how best to serve the vulnerable. Allow Scripture and prayer to shape your response to immigration issues. Trust in God's guidance to act faithfully and with courage.
- 2. Assess Community Needs:** Reach out to local community groups to understand the specific needs of undocumented immigrants in your area. Consider other ways to support undocumented immigrants, such as:
 - Focusing on allowed activities that provide services that are legally permissible, like providing food, clothing, and spiritual support to immigrant communities
 - Providing resources and support for families facing separation, including children and loved ones of deportees
 - Offering financial or volunteer support to organizations providing legal assistance
 - Hosting "know your rights" and other educational activities at your church
 - Joining an Interfaith coalition to share resources and present a unified front

- Advocating for policy changes through legal channels of advocacy and lobbying
- 3. Consult Legal Counsel:** Before taking any action, consult with an attorney familiar with federal immigration law and related state and local laws.
 - 4. Consult with the Full Congregation:** Begin with congregational leadership, seeking approval with all governing entities, and if moving forward with any actions that could affect the entirety of the congregation, consult with the full congregation and with the District Superintendent for the Bishop and others to be aware of potential action.
 - 5. Train Staff and Volunteers:** Ensure that anyone involved in assisting undocumented immigrants is properly trained and aware of potential legal consequences, including arrest and criminal charges. Connect with Church World Service and/or other entities with experience in providing sanctuary before committing to receiving a person or family for sanctuary.
 - 6. Background Checks:** Ensure that those who will potentially receive sanctuary and anyone involved in assisting them have gone through proper background checks and MinistrySafe training.
 - 7. Inform and Educate:** If providing sanctuary, clearly inform undocumented immigrants that staying at the church does NOT provide any special legal protection against detention or deportation and could result in a greater chance for legal action taken against them.
 - 8. Public Announcements:** Rather than seeking to secretly harbor a person in a public building such as a church, the New Sanctuary Movement has been a *highly visible* act of public witness with called press conferences that often included those seeking sanctuary telling their story to build compassion. While law enforcement historically avoided raiding places of worship, be aware that in light of 2025 Executive Orders providing sanctuary can create greater risks for the very immigrants the church is seeking to protect as well as create greater legal and other risks for the church, pastors, and leaders involved.
 - 9. Consult with Others in the New Sanctuary Movement:** Consider these sanctuary tool kits not as an endorsement but as a resource for consideration:
 - [Sanctuary Not Deportation: A Faithful Witness to Building Welcoming Communities](#)
 - [Unitarian Universalist Association Sanctuary Toolkit \(February 2017\)](#)
 - 10. Prepare for Possible Enforcement:** Understand that ICE agents and/or law enforcement on behalf of ICE may now enter church property to conduct enforcement actions. Also understand that ICE agents and/or law enforcement on behalf of ICE carrying out enforcement actions are generally armed with lethal weapons.

Conclusion

As we give a clear witness of Christ in the public square in these challenging times, we remember our calling to love our neighbors: acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. While we must be mindful of legal implications, we are also called to stand with the vulnerable and marginalized. Each church is encouraged to prayerfully consider how to best serve their community while adhering to the law.

"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