



Becoming Sanctuary

March 2008

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"Hundreds of Americans offer sanctuary to birds in the winter...in fact, people love to take care of birds. How odd it is that anyone would consider opposing sanctuary to a human being."

- Rev. James A. Forbes

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The NYC New Sanctuary Coalition is an interfaith network of immigrant families, religious congregations, and organizations standing together to publicly resist unjust deportations, to inspire a humane public discourse about immigration, and ultimately to bring about reform of the US' flawed immigration policy. We are part of the national New Sanctuary Movement.

This newsletter is meant to serve as a space to explore and share ideas and experiences as we seek to embody our faith and our thirst for justice.

Dear American Citizens...a letter from an 11-year-old

My name is Fanta and I'm an 11-year-old girl. Something terrible happened to me and my family this summer on July 20, 2007, at 6:00 in the morning. The immigration police came to our door and took my Daddy away from us. We never dreamed that this would ever happen to us. He was at jail for 4 months and we thought that he would be released and come home, but instead on November 16, 2007, at 4:00 pm, we received a phone call home from my father. He said that he was at the airport and that they were going to send him back to Africa.

Since that day on, at nights we couldn't have enough sleep because we were all scared about what would happen to us in the future without him here. We received a letter from the immigration and they said that they will take my mother from us and we don't deserve that. We just want to stay as regular kids like every other kid. We all deserve love from our mother and father.

We need your help to get our Dad back here because there are no men in the family who could help us. I'm asking everyone who has

kids to think about how you'd feel if they separated you from your child(ren) and how your child(ren) would feel. Also think about how your child(ren) would end up like if that was to happen. We're all scared about what will happen in our future.

I want to stay at these schools because I love learning here and I want to stay with my friends and teachers. I've never had a problem at the schools and so hasn't my siblings, and most of the time I'm at the top. I want to stay like that. We all really need help from you and other important people who could also help. We don't want our life to be miserable and end up bad. There's nobody that loves your children more than you do and that's how my mother and father feel like. They don't want to be separated from us.

Sincerely,
Fanta

Fanta and her family are members of Families for Freedom and are now in partnership with the NYC New Sanctuary Coalition.

First Presbyterian Church of NYC Joins the NSM!

by **Grania Marcus, congregant at First Presbyterian Church of NYC**

It was with joy and hope that I discovered the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) in July 2007. I had spent almost 20 years working with migrant farmworkers in upstate New York and another 3 years working on the US/Mexico border for the Presbyterian Border Ministry, and I had seen first-hand the pain of the suffering and deaths of migrants crossing the desert, and the many families broken by US immigration policy.

At my congregation First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York (FPCNYC), we moved very quickly from hope to action, and everything started coming together with the help of God, our pastors, many of our congregants, and especially Michael Ellick of

the NYC New Sanctuary Coalition. In July, our senior pastor Jon Walton preached on "The Stranger in our Midst," in which he quoted from Hebrews 13:2: "*Extend hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.*" And he told me that he had recently met with some of the New Sanctuary Movement folks at Judson Memorial and was interested in the NSM. Our Associate Pastor Sarah McCaslin encouraged me to attend the September 6th training where I met Sanctuary families and members of the Coalition. I also met with representatives of three other Presbyterian churches in Manhattan as well as Annie Rawlings of the New York Presbytery, all of whom were discerning whether to join. →

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St. Ignatius Loyola congregants lead prayer at our 12/10 vigil outside the ICE Varick Street Detention Center.

“At my congregation, First Presbyterian Church NYC, we moved very quickly from hope to action, and everything started coming together...”

-Grania Marcus



Jean and Janay, sanctuary parents from Brooklyn, speak at the 9/6 NYC New Sanctuary Movement training.

Social Justice Group Takes Lead at St. Ignatius

by Marie Viola, congregant at St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic Church

On January 24 about 45 parishioners gathered at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan to learn about the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) and to examine the movement’s place in relation to the long tradition of Catholic social teachings. Ignatian Social Justice (ISJ), the parish’s social justice group, sponsored the meeting.

Long before the January information night, members of ISJ had spent much time in prayer and discussion of the various papal encyclicals and statements by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in order to discern our responsibilities to immigrants, both documented and undocumented.

ISJ found that the goals of the New Sanctuary Movement are completely consistent with the social teachings of the Catholic Church and that ISJ’s participation

in the movement was the logical next step after years of activities by the group in support of immigrants. These activities included working with Catholic Charities in ESL programs, visiting detained immigrants and asylum seekers at centers in Queens and New Jersey and supporting the parish chapter of Pax Christi in presenting a series of films on the immigrant experience.

In participating in the New Sanctuary Movement, we have pledged to take a public, moral stand for immigrants’ rights and to work to prevent, through education and advocacy, unjust deportation. We are now considering whether we have the capacity to offer moral and spiritual support to an individual immigrant family while they challenge, as part of the New Sanctuary Movement, unjust deportation.

First Presbyterian Church of NYC Joins NSM! (cont’d)

→ We continued to meet in the Fall to discuss our discernment processes.

In October, I presented several documents about the NSM to the C & S Committee, and then we had a formal meeting with Michael Ellick of Judson Memorial. The committee had many questions for him: How is the New Sanctuary Movement different than the 1980’s Sanctuary Movement? How much might it cost the church? What is the church’s civil or criminal liability? Would joining the NSM put us on a Homeland Security watch list? What do the different levels of joining mean? Could FPC lose its tax-exempt status? Would we alienate some church members by joining the NSM? How do we avoid overwhelming the church members who do become involved? On November 5th, three members of the C&S Committee attended a workshop on proposed actions regarding immigration policy that New York Presbytery might consider taking, where we consulted with Tom Shea of the New York Immigration Coalition.

At the November C & S Committee meeting, we voted unanimously to recommend to the Session to join the NSM and, to accompany

our recommendation, prepared a summary document on the NSM, the Biblical basis for welcoming the stranger, and how our church plans to carry out our commitment. We also included in our recommendation our decision to reevaluate our commitment in May 2008, with the idea that we might increase our level of commitment at that point to the next level. The Session voted to join the NYC New Sanctuary Coalition in December at the Minimum level and signed the Sanctuary Pledge. The Rev. Donna Schaper, Michael Ellick, and Grace Goodman, all of Judson Memorial, came to the January Session meeting to answer any further questions.

The C&S Committee, with the assistance of our ministers, has also planned two educational forums for FPC’s congregation: “What is the New Sanctuary Movement?” on February 24th and “Justice for Immigrants” on March 9th, focusing on immigration policy and its impacts on immigrants.

We look forward to our church’s continued growth in knowledge of, and commitment to, the NSM and to helping ameliorate the plight of immigrants and their families.



“To Welcome The Stranger” by Dorothy Fyfe, congregant at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

For weeks, there had been announcements in the Church bulletin that something exciting was happening on January 28th at Good Shepherd in Bay Ridge. Dr. Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, a social anthropologist from Princeton, was crossing the bridge to discuss immigration. In the write-up in the bulletin, her article was cited, “To Welcome the Stranger.” Well, that sounds like a Christian perspective. That interests me. And then, of course, fabulous Middle Eastern food will be served!

Our event area filled up with people from other parts of Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, and even one Pastor from Long Island. One woman at my table told of her work on the Mexican border. The Shaykh spoke of his organization’s community and social services under the sponsorship of Muslims. And then, Dr. Fernandez-Kelly spoke, encouraging questions and laying out the format. I could see that she would be good, maybe even inspiring.

Dr. Fernandez-Kelly gave an overview of immigration to the US during the last 50 years. She spoke of legislation that had been

enacted for guest workers and their families. And then 9-11 happened. Immigration turned from a labor issue to a security issue, and we became afraid of foreigners entering the US. ICE, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, became an agency of Homeland Security and was charged with stopping illegal immigration and returning people to their native lands, even if those lands were a distant memory.

She asserted that our immigrant “problem” is really Mexican migration, citing that over half of illegal immigrants are from south of the border. I had not thought of it in those terms and I am not sure why. I hear of the barriers and fences and obstacles and great walls that we need to keep those workers out in the news frequently. But I thought ICE would treat everyone equally as badly, that it was not ethnically driven. I know so little that it surprised me that not all groups are targeted. Naïve, I know.

The children of these undocumented people have far greater problems living here. They form an under-society of sorts. No papers,

inadequate education, prejudice, and fear of being deported underlie their lives. As a result, these children are kept out of the mainstream, putting them at risk for gangs, crime, and unemployment. Their parents work here for low wages and live in fear of being deported, yet their children seldom have the opportunity to realize the American dream. Work hard, get an education, and make something out of yourself; this is an illusion for them. These are not the huddled masses of the Statue of Liberty. How did that change? Maybe it never was.

But we need to make that our vision, to advocate on behalf of “strangers,” to welcome them, to build our country with them as part of our communities, as citizens. We, as people of faith, must join in their struggle and change the injustice occurring here. I am beginning to understand that and believe that it is up to us to spread the message to others, to let our friends and colleagues know what is going on in “the land of the free and home of the brave” today. It will take the courage to stand up for what we believe, to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and welcome the stranger.

Theological Corner: Ma’un or Neighborly Needs by Shaykh TA Bashir, House of Peace Islam

Holy Qur’an. Surah CVII
In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. Seest thou one Who denies the Judgment (to come).
2. Then such is the (person) who repulses the orphan (with harshness),
3. And encourages not the feeding of the indigent.
4. So woe to the worshippers
5. Who are neglectful of their Prayers,
6. Those who (want but) to be seen (of people),
7. But refuse (to supply) (even) neighborly needs.

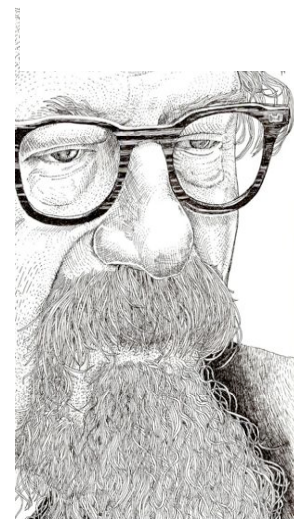
Holy Qur’an translated by Yusef ‘Ali.

True worship does not consist in the mere form of prayer, without the heart and mind being earnestly applied to seek the realization of the presence of God, and to understand and do God’s holy Will.

Hypocrites make a great show of hollow acts of goodness, devotion, and charity. But they fail significantly if you test them by little acts of neighborly help or charity, the thousand little courtesies and kindness of daily life, the supply of needs which cost little but mean much. This verse in the Scripture goes a long way toward establishing a spiritual formula for interacting with our neighbor without pre-conditions.

People are spiritually assassinating others’ character with toxic words and these hurting words are ringing in our children’s ears, from a world of hope to a place of despair. Is there any love left, or are the children all by themselves?

The goal of the New Sanctuary Movement is to increase positive interactions among all communities and provide a safety net for the children of our fellow worker, fellow worshipper and our fellow creation of the One God.



We are commanded to love our neighbor: this must mean that we can.
Abraham Joshua Heschel

Hartshorn '07



NYC
New Sanctuary
Coalition

Upcoming Events!

3/15, 10am-6pm

- **Deportation 101 Training** at the NYU Law School (RSVP!)

3/21, 8:30am

- **Pax Christi Stations of the Cross**, a Christian prayer witnessing to the suffering of Jesus as he is crucified today, with a station presented by the NYC New Sanctuary Coalition, starts at Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza.

3/26, 10am

- **March for Immigrant NY**, from Battery Park to City Hall 11:30am – **Rally**, at City Hall

Remember...

Please keep our sanctuary families in your prayers on **3/5, 3/10, 3/13, and 3/17**, when they have check-in appointments with Immigration at **Federal Plaza**.

For more information, to join our list-serve, or to write an article for the next issue, contact us at:

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Know-Your-Rights in a Snowstorm!

by Leticia Alanis, community organizer with La Union

I was one of 15 or so adults -there were also many children- who attended the "Know your Rights" workshop at Trinity Lutheran Church under the snowstorm on February 19. Despite feeling cold and tired after the day's work, the group listened attentively to the Families for Freedom members who facilitated the training. They were young, knowledgeable, and spoke from their experiences and their conviction that the human and civil rights of people shouldn't be violated as they often are under current laws and procedures, particularly in deportation proceedings.

The workshop was participatory and allowed people to express what they knew and to ask questions. Attendees commented that the workshop provided them with a deeper knowledge of what really happens when people interact with ICE and other agencies. I just would have liked more people in

Sunset Park to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss this important reality that deeply affects people's lives! La Union members handed out fliers in the neighborhood, and Trinity invited the congregation and other pastors to mobilize their communities for this event. Was the storm to blame? I hope it was cold weather and not cold hearts that explains the lack of greater participation!

But that night our group at Trinity experienced the deep connection that unites us all and the importance of uniting in defense of our most fundamental rights. And that's the seed of change we need to keep planting generously around us, as much as we can! In the name of the group, a thanks from the heart to the Families for Freedom facilitators and to Trinity Lutheran for helping us to make it happen.

New Resources for Congregations

We've started a **Media Resource Library!**

Please contact us to borrow one of these DVDs...or to share your own!:

- **Sanctuary: A Question of Conscience** (26 min) - from 1980s Sanctuary Movement.
- **The Lord is Blessing Me** (24 min) - from the 1980s Sanctuary Movement.
- **Strangers No Longer** (22 min) - covers the past and present situation of immigrants in the US with a Catholic/Christian faith perspective.
- **Inaugural Immigration Reform Roundtable** (27 min) - overview of a dialogue among 21 immigration experts, resulting in 6 areas of potential agreement.

Also, check out the **New Sanctuary Movement interfaith congregational handbook**, now online at <http://newsanctuarymovement.org/resources.htm>

We'd love to give a presentation at your congregation or organization!

Some Ways You Can Help Now:

- ...Be a **newsletter volunteer** to make this a regular resource for all of us.
- ...Our 2008 funding proposal fell through so now it's back to the drawing board. We urgently need **contributions** from member congregations and supporters to maintain our part-time staff and respond to families' needs.
- ...**We have more families interested in sanctuary than we have congregations ready to partner with them.** We need willing congregations, and we need help working with these families in the interim.
- ...We need people with experience or interest in **immigration or criminal law, social work, fund-raising, media relations, campaign-building, denominational organizing, etc.!** Please contact us if you can help!