



What, Why, Where, How, When of Sanctuary at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church

On April 2, 2017, the Board of Trustees unanimously voted for Cedar Lane to become a Physical Sanctuary Congregation and the Congregation concurred, voting overwhelmingly to do so at its May 21, 2017, Annual Meeting.

Between those dates, Cedar Lane's Immigrant Justice Ministry Team led a period of "discernment" – church-wide learning and discussion on what being a physical sanctuary means, whether we should become one, how it would happen, what form it would take, and how it would impact Cedar Lane and the community. The IJM Team created information displays and chatted with attendees after every Sunday worship service, held mini-presentations and Q&A sessions at church committee meetings, and invited members to attend 5 Q&A meetings about becoming a Sanctuary Church. The Team also established its own email address – immigrantjusticeteam@gmail.com - as a portal for comments and participation by members.

Background

Cedar Lane has signed the UUA Declaration of Conscience regarding immigration rights as a moral issue. Our pledge is to live our shared UU values, visibly working for justice in our community.

At this uncertain, worrisome period for immigrants in the United States, with rapidly changing and sometimes contradictory executive orders by the administration, court challenges, and inconsistent practice and stepped-up actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents (ICE) to detain and deport, we are called by our Seven Principles to act in faith and solidarity with our immigrant neighbors.

As part of its commitment, in Fall 2016, Cedar Lane established the Immigrant Justice Ministry Team (IJMT) which is leading the congregation's engagement on 4 fronts to support our immigrant friends and neighbors: 1) education and training, 2) witnessing/accompaniment and advocacy, 3) partnering with other area congregations, immigrant communities, and immigrant service organizations, and 4) supporting physical sanctuary congregations which provide housing for immigrants who have initiated legal challenge to ICE detainments and orders of deportation. Our Board of Trustees now has declared its support for Cedar Lane to itself become a Physical Sanctuary, joining an estimated 800 other US congregations.



What is Physical Sanctuary?

A Physical Sanctuary is a “sensitive location” identified by US Dept of Homeland Security policy to be houses of worship, schools, and hospitals. ICE agents are not allowed to forcibly detain an immigrant within these locations. As an act of public witness, a physical sanctuary congregation (host) provides hospitality (temporary residence) to an immigrant (guest) who usually is undocumented, and usually while the guest’s legal appeal of an order of deportation receives due process in court. The hospitality becomes morally important because ICE is known to detain and deport before legal appeals are completed, or in spite of some limited policy and due process protections the immigrant may have.

What are the Responsibilities of Cedar Lane as a Physical Sanctuary Church?

Cedar Lane takes responsibility to companion the immigrant guest while his/her legal appeal is pending. In coming to a sensitive location, the immigrant guest recognizes leaving church property heightens apprehension risk. Cedar Lane offers housing with basic personal privacy and security, which may possibly include food and other personal services, and public advocacy - similar to our temporary housing of other guests associated with our religious mission. Housing for an immigrant guest may be as short as 1–4 months, or closer to 18 months or longer. We can set limits on length.

Do We Do This Alone?

No. The guest, any guest’s family and guest’s own legal counsel develops and directs the appropriate program of support for the duration of the guest’s stay, in coordination with our IJM Team. We also will have strong support from other congregations who already have identified themselves as “Supporting Sanctuary Congregations”, whose memberships have pledged to provide volunteers, funds, supplies and other supports to the Physical Sanctuary Congregation in their area, as needed. In January, Cedar Lane joined the newly forming DMV Sanctuary Congregation Network of over 60 area congregations representing at least 17 faiths committed to this coalition for immigrant rights. The Network is organized in geographic clusters of congregations pledging support to each other; Cedar Lane already is active in the Montgomery County Cluster with 16 member congregations.

Does Being a Physical Sanctuary Break the Law?

Both immigration law and historical record of court decisions interpreting it are complicated and unsettled. In the 1980s during what became known as the Sanctuary Movement, lay and clergy advocates were arrested and sentenced for hiding and transporting immigrants for the purpose of



concealment from authorities, and for obstructing authorities, but not explicitly for providing housing in churches. Some more recent policy and court decisions during the New Sanctuary Movement after 2000 indicate housing a guest in sanctuary with full public notice and awareness is not an act of concealment. In the last 40 years, no church has been prosecuted for providing housing to an immigrant guest. Under current policy of “sensitive locations” it is unlikely that ICE would come onto Cedar Lane property, but we cannot know whether the administration will restrict or rescind that policy. If that should happen, we can decide whether or not to end our sanctuary housing for the guest. If ICE does enter our property to detain a guest, it is possible that a volunteer or staff who physically interferes by obstructing ICE could be charged with civil disobedience – a civil charge, not a criminal one. More typically in the New Sanctuary Movement, hosts would not interfere should ICE enter a sensitive location property to detain a guest but be present to bear witness and document it. We believe this approach to physical sanctuary is of relatively lower level of risk to our staff, members, and nonprofit status, but Board of Trustees and IJM Team confer with legal counsel on means to best manage risk levels and recourses we have should federal policy change.

Do We Accept Any Immigrant for Physical Sanctuary, and Who Decides?

Any vulnerable immigrant is welcome to consider Sanctuary at Cedar Lane, consistent with our faith beliefs that all people are worthy, deserving fair treatment under the law and protections from moral injustices. Case law precedent indicates certain categories of immigrants may have advantage in their legal appeals by choosing physical sanctuary. Whether to come into Sanctuary is solely the decision of the immigrant in consultation with their own attorney based on consideration of all protective options available to them. Cedar Lane decides only whether or not to accept requests. The IMJ Team is working with the DMV Sanctuary Congregation Network and established local immigrant service organizations through which referrals for hosting would come.

Where Would Cedar Lane House Our Guest, Who Would Manage Arrangements? Do Arrangements Comply with Church Insurance and Zoning Codes?

The IJM Team, in conference with Board of Trustees and staff, is the primary organizer for management utilizing supporting volunteers. Housing for our guest will be on church property which is a protected “sensitive location” as defined by Department of Homeland Security policy. IJM Team, staff, and Board have reviewed insurance and zoning to be compliant with applicable codes.



What about Impacts on Cedar Lane Life, Nursery School, and Neighbors?

We expect to welcome our guest into the regular life of our church to the extent they wish, with little or no disruption to space use and other programs or activities. We have met with the Cedar Lane Nursery School director and board to answer questions and agree on specific operational guidelines. We will inform neighborhood homeowner associations and institutions if and when we accept a hosting situation.

For more reading about Sanctuary and the Sanctuary Movement Refer to UUA.org:

www.uua.org/immigration

First Unitarian Society of Denver (FUSD) has an excellent informative website for understanding becoming a Physical Sanctuary. FUSD is a Physical Sanctuary Congregation, with experience hosting or supporting several immigrants in sanctuary. <http://www.fusden.org/content/immigration-justice>

This excerpt from the Denver Society website articulates beautifully their call to be a Physical Sanctuary and is applicable to the Cedar Lane congregation and our call as justice-seeking people. See below.

Why sanctuary at FUSD? Why should we, as a church community, consider this opportunity for sanctuary?

We will live our faith by practicing love, compassion, and community.

We will move beyond “us/them” and live into “there is a unity that makes us one.” We will grow and deepen our relationships beyond the walls of our congregation, becoming a true urban sanctuary.

We will be connected to a spiritual legacy of risk and courage in the face of injustice, and inspire others to do the same.

We will engage our resources, our energy, and ourSELVES in the service of being the change we wish to see in the world.

Why sanctuary at FUSD?

We are a welcoming congregation.

We are a strong community, grounded in covenant, and ready to work together to answer the call to justice.

We have a dedicated immigration justice project. We are a trusted partner to community groups and other communities of faith.

We have a historic commitment to social engagement in Denver, Colorado, and beyond.

We have experience hosting overnight guests and families.



*We are centrally located and accessible by public transit.
We are blessed with the space and facilities needed to host.*

Cedar Lane's Immigrant Justice Ministry Team Steering Committee Members Include:

Abhi Janamanchi, Ai-Ling Louie, Bonny Cochran, Harry Olson, Jessica Sawyer, Katie Romano Griffin, Lesley Vossen, Ron Outen, Suzanne Pineau, Dianne Seiffert, Sandy Shaw, Archene Turner, Carol Zachary, and Charlene Belsom Zellmer. We always welcome newcomers.