

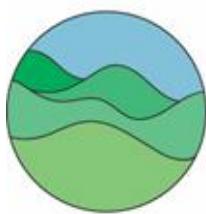
# BERKSHIRE ASSOCIATION

SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

*Spring 2025*



TAKING ACTION.



## Spring 2025 Newsletter

Dear friends of the Berkshire Association,

We are in difficult and challenging times. The daily flood of governmental disruptions, firings, and gleeful cruelty pouring from this administration is stunning. That is their purpose: to render the citizenry confused and passive in the face of a very powerful and willful executive. To people of faith there are many areas of profound concern. One deep concern here in the Berkshires is that we have over 15,000 immigrants. Nearly all of these neighbors—whether undocumented or with various forms of documentation—are at high risk given the constant drumbeat of dehumanizing language, rescinding of protections, and mobilization for mass deportations. How can we faithfully respond in this time?

One place to begin is to remember that the first five books of the Bible tell Israel again and again to welcome the stranger, foreigner, and immigrant, because the people of God had once been foreigners in a strange land. The Prophets again and again challenge Israel to care for the orphan, widow, and stranger because these vulnerable souls are so easily used and abused by the rich and powerful. And Jesus identifies with the outsider and outcast when he says in Matthew's Gospel: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." As people of faith we are to transcend the divisions, hostilities, and scapegoating of our time as we welcome with mercy and compassion those who represent the Spirit of Christ among us.

But what can we actually do? This time is designed to intimidate and silence us. Our culture is telling us that only the powerful can take action. What power do we have? An evangelical pastor from Idaho, Ben Cremer, challenged his part of the church—and all of us—when he said: "When you worship power, compassion and mercy look like sins." Rev. Cremer was trying to understand how so much of the church could jettison the Bible and embrace the threats, cruelty and dehumanization that we are experiencing. Too many are worshipping the power that comes with domination and control—the power from above. But something wondrous can begin to happen when people follow the Love of Christ and bring mercy and compassion to the center. A different kind of power appears—the power from below. The power of mercy and compassion is the power of community—people who care for others and for the common good coming together to listen, learn, and take action in faithful ways.

This is where our Berkshire Association congregations can be vital partners. We can help our communities remember the powerful values of mercy and compassion in a time when those values are being assaulted daily in Washington. As one small sign of such compassion at work: One week as I did my Monday morning deliveries for the South Community Food Pantry I discovered "red cards" had been taped to every box of eggs. "Red cards" describe the legal rights an immigrant has if ICE comes knocking at the door. There are many accounts of immigrants

simply opening the door and being “removed” immediately, leaving small children behind and abandoned. The “red cards” help provide information so that our immigrant neighbors can better protect themselves and make use of a legal system that guarantees them certain rights—such as not opening the door unless the official has a judicial warrant. I was grateful to be distributing such information on a cold day and added my prayers to each card and box. Through worship, prayer, study, sharing, and taking action each of us can faithfully participate in the power of the Gospel—embodying the mercy and compassion of Jesus in such a time as this. In this coming season of Lent let us listen well and respond as we are able to the call of Christ.

With care, Rev. Joel Huntington

**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS, ALWAYS:**

- You have the right to remain silent and can refuse to speak to an ICE agent.
- You have a right to demand a warrant (signed by an actual judge—not an ICE officer) before letting law enforcement into your home.
- You have the right to speak to a lawyer and make a phone call if you're detained.
- You have the right to refuse to sign documents before talking to a lawyer.
- You have the right to refuse to show any identification documents.

Find free downloadable *Know Your Rights* community tools, including our print-at-home red cards in 14 languages, at [llrc.me/protect](http://llrc.me/protect)

llrc

@the\_llrc

## TAKING ACTION

Earlier in February a county-wide zoom meeting for faith leaders—clergy and lay—was held with BASIC: The Berkshire Alliance to Support the Immigrant Community. There were over sixty on the call representing many faith communities, including nine of our Berkshire Association congregations. We learned about the six areas that BASIC is focusing on in working with our immigrant neighbors. On the call we focused on ways we in faith communities could help immigrants know their legal rights in this time, how we might accompany immigrants to ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and court visits—which has been shown to greatly reduce the incidence of sudden deportations, how to prepare faith communities and non-profits for likely ICE visits, and how to mobilize community volunteers in support of immigrants. You can go to [basicberkshires.org](http://basicberkshires.org) to learn more about these

areas of involvement. We also heard from Berkshire Interfaith Organizing and how congregations could support efforts to help immigrants obtain driver's licenses. And we heard about the work of the ACLU in western Massachusetts. The following week we reconvened on Zoom to create working groups around these areas. These groups are now ongoing.

To find out more about what our Association is doing contact any of us who are members of our Berkshire Association Council. My email is [joel.forrest@icloud.com](mailto:joel.forrest@icloud.com).

~ Joel Huntington

## ICE: What Churches Should Know & Do

Note: all of the underlined items can be accessed by going to this page on the SNEUCC website:

[www.sneucc.org/2025-immigration-enforcement-resources](http://www.sneucc.org/2025-immigration-enforcement-resources)

### Make a Plan

Churches should make a plan NOW as to how to respond to ICE at the church. The plan should include training of workers/volunteers who are likely to be at the church, and include an analysis of the church's private and public areas. It should also include some practice at role-playing, because it is difficult to say "no" when faced with authority figures in police gear. [Here is a sample policy for how a church can handle ICE presence.](#) [Here is another sample document for how churches can plan to respond.](#)

- Church workers should know that ICE cannot go into the private areas of a church without a judicial warrant, which is different from an administrative warrant.
- UCC General Counsel Heather Kimmel explains this issue this way: "Public vs. private space is a 'facts and circumstances' inquiry that will be different for each church and it depends on how each church uses its building and invites the public in. If a church has an unlocked door and a lobby that is accessible to the public generally, that's likely a public space. Offices that are marked private are likely private. But, attempts to mark everything private when it is actually public (i.e. putting private signs on a church's front door when it is generally unlocked/open, or marking parking lots private when there's no way to stop anyone from driving in) aren't going to be helpful. If

a space cannot be entered by the public without being accompanied by a church worker, those are probably private spaces. Bear in mind that the designation of a space as public or private is not magic and won't automatically keep ICE out if they have a judicial warrant covering the space or decide to enter without a warrant. In the latter event, the public/private space argument will most likely be made in court, after the fact . . . if the case gets to a courtroom."

Sarah Cruz, border and immigrant rights strategist with the ACLU of Texas, [says](#) that "a valid warrant should have the location, address, and name of the person they are seeking; the word 'warrant;' and the judge's signature."

- Church workers should know that no one is required to talk to ICE.
- Churches should connect with local immigration advocacy groups, solidarity movements and legal resources who can be called upon if needed.

### Resources

[Immigration Enforcement Action: What Churches Need to Know](#), from UCC General Counsel Heather Kimmel (January 30, 2025)

[Sensitive Locations FAQ for Houses of Worship](#) (February 4, 2025)

This document: [National Immigration Law Center: What To Do If Immigration Comes To Your Workplace.](#)

This letter from the Massachusetts Council of Churches, entitled: [Houses of Prayer for All People: Churches Free from Intimidation or Fear](#)

[Beyond Bond and Legal Defense Fund](#) - by the Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network

From Commonwealth Attorney General: [guidance for service providers \(including FAQs\)](#) and [additional resources, including finding legal help](#)

The Conference has an [Immigration, Refugee and Asylum Task Team](#). Use the form on this page to contact them for resources.

### Trainings & Events

Conference staff is in the process of contacting civil right organizations in the region to facilitate trainings for churches in this area. In the meantime, some upcoming trainings and events in the area include:

Know Your Rights Training hosted by the Greater Boston Jewish Community JCRC and the Mass Council of Churches: [Recording Available Here](#) -Youtube (1:26)

The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition is holding **"Know Your Rights" trainings for individuals and groups**. Find those here: <https://miracoalition.org/news/know-your-rights/>

**CT ACLU Town Hall Meetings** The ACLU of CT is bringing their legal, policy and communications experts on tour through a series of [Civil Rights Town Halls](#) in locations across the state. They are outlining how they plan to use every tool at their disposal – litigation, advocacy, and grassroots organizing – to protect people's rights. Bring questions for a robust conversation around the issue areas you care about most....immigration, LGBTQ+, religious discrimination, and other issues.

*Spotlight:* The Second Congregational Church, 81 Hancock Road, Williamstown  
Website: [secondcongregationalchurch.org](http://secondcongregationalchurch.org)

### UPDATE THE DASHBOARD

Please take some time this month to go to your SNEUCC Dashboard and make any changes for 2025.

Also: To help us better stay in touch with clergy, and church leaders, please also furnish names and contact information for 2025. We would love to have contact information of Moderators and Vice Moderators, Treasurers, Delegates, and chairs of your primary committees Facilities, Mission/Outreach, Stewardship, Diaconate/Called to Care, Spiritual Formation and Christian Education, and Fellowship or their equivalents in your church.

Go to <https://www.sneucc.org/dashboards>. Create an account. Go in and update your clergy and lay leaders as updates are needed.



## STAND OUT

First Congregational Church, Lee held a Stand Out on Valentine's Day, Friday, February 14, 2025 from 12-1pm at lunchtime with signs that said:

- LOVE no matter your immigration status
- LOVE no matter your gender expression
- LOVE no matter your sexual identity
- LOVE no matter the color of your skin

A note from Rev. Marissa Brown Ludwig, "Rev. Carol Killian and a friend joined us, as well as two members from UU Housatonic and Josh Bloom from FB Lee Community Page! We succeeded in getting lots of whoops and thumbs up. Only a few thumbs down, and one fellow who leaned out of his car and told us 'You are embarrassing!!' We just smiled."



## For even more news...

Would you like to delve more deeply into the news of member churches? There is a lot of great information in their newsletters.

Here are the links to two:

[Messenger Archive – First Congregational Church of Lee, MA](#)

[News – First Congregational Church, Stockbridge, Massachusetts](#)

And check out the [blog of Church on the Hill, Lenox](#).

## SHARE YOUR NEWS

Items for the newsletter can be sent to: [berkshireassociation@gmail.com](mailto:berkshireassociation@gmail.com)

We hope to feature any event, program or project your church is planning that is open to all of our congregations. If including pictures, it is preferred to use jpeg.

We also welcome a reflection, a story about your church, a best practice to share across all of our churches. Both laypersons and clergy are welcome to contribute to the newsletter. We welcome your voices!

The **Canaan Congregational Church** (right) has welcomed the Rev. Mike Denton to become our Designated Term Pastor. He is not new in the Berkshire Association. Initially, two plus years ago, Mike was called to serve South Congregational Church in Pittsfield. Then together with Rev. Cara Davis he worked through the process of exploring the development of a covenant between South Congregational Church and First Church of Christ, Congregational. We recall that last May they voted to become one congregation as United Church of Christ, Pittsfield.



What did this energetic, creative minded, problem-solving pastor do in his next chapter as he continues in his 3/4 position as Pastor of United Church? He responded to the call of a smaller sister church seeking a 1/4 time pastor. Canaan is feeling very blessed to have the chance to work with Mike Denton as we strive to serve and be the church in our rural community in new ways.

Jay Aronson, Moderator, Canaan Congregational



### FREE

One awesome manual folding machine. Fold up those Sunday bulletins in a jiffy. Interested? Contact Will Garrison at The First Congregational Church, Stockbridge [office@stockbridgeucc.org](mailto:office@stockbridgeucc.org)



## Berkshire Association Council

- Rev. Cara Davis, Moderator
- Rev. Janet McKinstry, Vice-Moderator and chaplain to the Delegates
- Rev. Quentin Chin, Registrar
- Donna Bishop, Treasurer
- Rev. Joel Huntington, COM chair
- Amy Chin, member
- Rev. David Hurst, member
- Sara Milano, member
- Barbara Mahoney, member
- Carrie Waara, member
- Rev. Terry Yasuko Ogawa, Area Conference Minister, SNEUCC

Berkshire Association email:  
[berkshireassociation@gmail.com](mailto:berkshireassociation@gmail.com)

## Our Churches' Delegates

Lee: Olivia Tousignant Kuhn, Valerie Brey, Elaine Gross

UCC, Pittsfield: Carol Killian, Scott Eldridge, Sally LeBarron

Dalton: Donna Bishop, Tom Towne

Lenox: Emily Johnson, Bob Gardiner, Amy Chin

Sheffield: Julie Hannum, Alicia Brazie

Stockbridge: Margaret Hornick, John Canning

First Williamstown: Samuel Smith, Elizabeth Smith

Canaan: Susan Bues, Jay Aronson

North Adams: Julie Filkins

Great Barrington: (alternate delegate) Bonnie Daniels

## Member Churches

- Canaan Congregational Church
- First Congregational Church of Dalton
- First Congregational Church of Great Barrington
- First Congregational Church of Lee
- Church on the Hill (Lenox)
- Monterey UCC
- First Congregational Church of North Adams
- Second Congregational Church (Pittsfield)
- United Church of Christ, Pittsfield
- Richmond Congregational Church
- First Congregational Church of Sheffield (Old Parish)
- Church of Christ in Mt. Washington
- The First Congregational Church, UCC, Stockbridge
- First Congregational Church of Williamstown
- Second Congregational Church of Williamstown

