

It's Time to Bear Witness on May 6

For the dead and the living, we must bear witness. In the spirit of those famous words, written by Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, St. Martin's will bear witness to the cruel and inhumane treatment of our immigrant neighbors as we gather as a church community outside the Philadelphia field office of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) on Wednesday, May 6.

All parishioners are invited to the witness, which will be from noon to 1 p.m. on the sidewalk in front of the ICE office at 114 N. 8th St. in Center City. Nothing is required of you other than showing up and joining in prayer and song. Ours will be one of 40 such witnesses sponsored by the interfaith New Sanctuary Movement. Each Wednesday, a different faith organization in the Philadelphia area hosts a witness.

Our rector, the Rev. Dr. Mary Barber, will lead us with a Bible reading, artwork, a mini-sermon, call-and-response prayer and song. St. Martin's immigration ministry encourages everyone who is able to join in this peaceful and nonviolent demonstration of our religious values – and invites you to bring your friends! The more people we have, the more impactful we will be.

In our witness, we will defend the human dignity of immigrants and share our faith commitment to welcome the stranger. Both are under attack as ICE carries out President Trump's mass deportation campaign with warrantless arrests, masked and heavily armed ICE agents, and the detention of immigrants in overcrowded and inhumane prisons.

The ICE office is between Market and Arch streets. It is just a few blocks from Jefferson Station if you take the train. If you drive, there are several parking garages nearby. St. Martin's immigration ministry is preparing signs that you can hold during the witness, but feel free to bring your own as well. We ask that you arrive shortly before noon so we can start on time.

The Philadelphia regional headquarters of ICE is one of 25 ICE field offices across the country. It is the place where immigrants who do not yet have permanent legal status check in with the federal government to meet the requirements of their stay in the U.S. As we witness, there will be immigrants coming and going through the front door of the building. We will not be interfering with enforcement of the law by ICE.

You may never have participated in this kind of an event, which is new to many churches in our area. That includes Philadelphia's First Presbyterian Church, which hosted a witness here last February. To get the flavor of their witness, click on the link below to watch a short video.

<https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/news/2026/2/11/philadelphia-congregation-leads-weekly-vigil-immigrants>