**What is Sanctuary?**
Sanctuary is a way to be in solidarity with the undocumented community by creating safe spaces for the prophetic voices of immigrant leaders to be lifted up as we together confront unjust laws. Through the Sanctuary Movement, faith communities can powerfully enact and embody their commitment to justice. A church that declares itself a Sanctuary congregation is one willing to engage on a spectrum of solidarity actions including welcoming undocumented people, advocating to help stop deportations, assisting with legal clinics, and physically sheltering an immigrant in danger of immediate deportation.

Sanctuary is one way for faith communities to resist destructive and racially charged policies. When our response includes action grounded in the universal religious values of compassion, hospitality for the stranger, and the fundamental dignity of each person as a child of one God, we help bring about the Beloved Community.

**A Short History of Sanctuary**
The original concept of religious spaces as sanctuary for refugees is rooted in Judaism. The ancient Hebrew people allowed temples and even whole cities to declare themselves places of refuge for persons accused of a crime which they may not have committed. This practice allowed those wrongfully accused to escape swift and harsh retribution until they could receive a fair trial. In the late Roman Empire, fugitives sometimes found refuge in Christian churches. Later, during the medieval period, the English common law permitted an accused felon to seek sanctuary in a church, and then choose either to submit to trial or to confess and leave the country.

In the United States, there is no law that prevents law enforcement from entering places of worship, but there is a symbolic protection. The first practical case of anything like sanctuary occurred in the years before the Civil War, when slaves fleeing through the Underground Railroad found safety along the way in churches and private homes throughout the country. Another example occurred during the Vietnam War, when some churches opened their doors to young men resisting the draft. This gave temporary refuge to the resistor, and allowed the congregations to amplify their religious message against war.

In the 1980s, refugees from military oppression and civil wars in Central America began to flee to the United States. The U.S. government did not recognize them as political refugees, even though many were threatened by death squads in their home countries. The Sanctuary Movement was born in response, first established at the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, AZ. At its strongest, the movement included over 500 congregations that collaborated to move refugees through the United States to safe houses and safe congregations.

The Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s reminded the United States government that it was not following its own asylum and refugee laws for the refugees of Central America. Some clergy members in Arizona and elsewhere were charged with felonies for their involvement in offering sanctuary. The movement declared victory when the U.S. government awarded refugee status and legal asylum to those fleeing violence in Central America.
Several decades later, beginning in 2007, the New Sanctuary Movement took shape among coalitions of congregations in cities throughout the country. As immigration raids in neighborhoods and work places escalated in a climate of political paralysis for immigration reform, these congregations opened their doors to provide refuge to those facing deportation.

The New Sanctuary Movement helped win prosecutorial discretion through the Morton memo in 2011 and President Obama’s Executive Actions on Immigration in 2014, along with local and state ordinances restricting police collaboration with immigration enforcement. Together, these policies helped stop thousands of deportations through case-by-case advocacy. However, under the administration of President Trump, these policies have been rolled back. New policies have been introduced that seek to prevent entry for the tens of thousands of refugees fleeing violence and death threats in their own countries.

Sanctuary and resistance in the era of President Trump
In the United States, immigration is addressed and controlled at the federal level. Though state and local governments can influence the American immigration system through enforcement and cooperation, it is federal leaders whose decisions have the widest impact in the system. With the inauguration of Donald Trump as President in January 2017, we have entered uncharted political territory. In addition to the President himself, senior administration leaders, including Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, have been vocal in their intent to reverse many Obama era policies and step-up a hardline approach to immigration enforcement.

The first weeks of the Trump administration set in motion some ominous changes. On February 20th, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued two memoranda: “Implementing the President’s Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvement Policies”, and “Enforcement of the Immigration Laws to Serve the National Interest”. These are designed to implement President Trump’s Executive Orders on border security and on interior enforcement. The memos solidify the intention of the Trump administration to deport people at mass levels; they have generated tremendous fear and, if fully enacted, will exponentially increase family separation.

As people of faith, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation. Offering physical sanctuary, or helping another group to offer sanctuary, is one way to help individuals who face this threat. An offer of physical sanctuary is a way to fight individual cases, advocate to stop deportations, and keep families together. It is a powerful witness to justice and a concrete way in which to live out our faith. But it is a decision that requires thorough preparation and a clear discernment process by the host congregation, in close collaboration with local migrant rights organizations. It also requires great dedication on the part of any person entering as a sanctuary guest, since for them the experience is tantamount to house arrest: they cannot leave the campus of the church for any reason until their immigration case has been decided without risking arrest.
The Sanctuary Movement has grown and flourished because of the courageous leadership and fierce drive of the undocumented people who have put themselves and their freedom on the line. Their voices, wishes, opinions and leadership should be prioritized and respected throughout the process. Through providing or supporting sanctuary, we are doing this important work with them, not for them.

Again, the offer of physical sanctuary is just one form of action toward immigration justice: there are many other ways for your congregation to enact our religious values and stand in solidarity with migrants! If your community is unable to offer physical sanctuary, you can still become a support congregation to another church, synagogue or mosque, and engage in vigorous advocacy for immigration justice.

Specific goals of the current Sanctuary Movement include the following:

- Accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation through joining the Sanctuary Movement and working to stop deportations case-by-case, and by advocating to stop unjust deportation policies;
- Amplify the moral imperative to stop deportations by lifting up the stories of sanctuary cases and ensuring the prophetic witness of the immigrant taking sanctuary is heard at the national level;
- Defend administrative policies such as Prosecutorial Discretion so that we can still win stays of deportation case by case and keep sacred spaces and schools protected under the Sensitve Locations guidelines;
- Work alongside undocumented students to defend the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival program (DACA);
- Support local work to defend Sanctuary cities or local detainer policies and push back against unjust policies that enlist local police to do immigration enforcement such as the Secure Communities (S-Comm) or 287 g in the jails;
- Participate and help create protection networks to provide know your rights education, sanctuary space, legal assistance, housing assistance and bail support funds;
- Stop extension and further militarization of the border wall and any attempt to increase criminalization or mandatory sentencing for immigrants;
- Defend asylum seekers by pushing back against expedited removal and helping provide critical resources such as legal assistance so they can defend and win their case.