

FAQs: What does it mean to be a Sanctuary Diocese?

On December 3, 2016 the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles adopted a resolution declaring itself a “Sanctuary Diocese.” [Resolution text provided on reverse side.] Here are responses to some of the most frequently asked questions regarding both the intent and impact of the resolution on our work and witness as members of what our Presiding Bishop calls “The Jesus Movement.”

Q. What exactly does the resolution call for?

A. The resolution explicitly calls for resistance to policy proposals to target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants and to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. It further calls for connecting with other local and national sanctuary communities and institutions, immigrant rights groups and coalitions, and engaging in educating, organizing, advocacy, and direct action, and other methods as deemed appropriate in each context, to ensure the safety and security of those targeted due to immigration status.

Q. What specifically does the resolution ask churches to do?

A. It urges congregations and institutions to discern how they are called to serve as places of welcome, refuge, healing, and offer forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted by hate for any perceived status of difference and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people – by sacred resistance when necessary.

Q. What is “sacred resistance?”

A. One of the core promises of our baptismal covenant is to “persevere in resisting evil.” We understand that as a call to stand in resistance to the systemic evils that oppress and marginalize any member of our human family – including but not limited to racism, sexism, nativism, homophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Grounded in our baptismal promises, our resistance to public policies that perpetuate those evils is how we put our faith into action in the world.

Q. What are the legal implications of being a Sanctuary Diocese?

A. Being in the U.S. without proper documents is a civil offense, not a criminal one. It is simply not a crime to be undocumented and describing any immigrant as “illegal” is legally inaccurate. In becoming a Sanctuary Diocese we join with the growing number of cities, colleges and communities of faith declaring themselves sanctuaries and stand ready to challenge the unjust targeting of immigrant members of our communities.

Q. Will churches serve as physical sanctuaries to immigrants under threat of deportation?

If it comes to that, we expect that there will be congregations which would choose to live into the resolution by providing physical sanctuary. Others will provide a broad range of support including legal assistance, material support and pastoral care.

Q. So what are the next steps?

A. The resolution commits the Diocese of Los Angeles to “assist in equipping congregations, clergy and lay leaders to engage in such work, appropriate to local contexts, capacity, and discernment.” Toward that end the Bishop has appointed a Sanctuary Task Force -- co-chaired by the Reverends Jaime Edwards Acton and Francisco Garcia -- to coordinate the implementation of the resolution adopted by our Diocesan Convention.

For more information contact: The Rev. Francisco Garcia, 626-246-4513, fgarcia608@gmail.com

Resolution Regarding Becoming a Sanctuary Diocese

Resolved, that the One Hundred Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the Church in the Diocese of Los Angeles declares the Diocese of Los Angeles to be a Sanctuary Diocese; and be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Los Angeles, as people of faith and people of conscience, pledges to resist the stated policy proposals of the newly elected Trump administration to target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants, and to eliminate the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program that has granted temporary relief for thousands of young people in our communities and families; and be it further

Resolved, that the congregations and institutions of the Diocese of Los Angeles consider becoming Sanctuary Congregations and Institutions, serving as places of welcome, refuge, healing, and other forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted by hate due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference, and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people; and be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Los Angeles connect with other local and national sanctuary communities and institutions, immigrant rights groups and coalitions, and engage in educating, organizing, advocacy, and direct action, and other methods as deemed appropriate in each context, to ensure the safety and security of the undocumented community; and be it further

Resolved, that the Diocese of Los Angeles assist in equipping congregations, clergy and lay leaders to engage in such work, appropriate to local contexts, capacity, and discernment.

Explanation

For many years, immigrant families have suffered on the margins of our society. They have been scapegoated during difficult economic times and victimized by harsh anti-immigrant ordinances passed by some states and localities.

In the aftermath of the recent presidential election there is heightened concern that the campaign rhetoric villainizing immigrants will become policy targeting them because of their immigration status or religious beliefs.

As a people of faith committed to dismantling oppressive systems and building structures and communities that reflect God's compassion and justice, we must do nothing less than make straight a highway in the desert for our sisters and brothers.

This resolution puts our faith into action by standing with the growing number of cities, colleges and communities of faith declaring themselves places of welcome, refuge, healing, for those targeted by hate due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference as we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.

Submitted by:

The Reverend Francisco J. Garcia, Jr., Rector, Holy Faith, Inglewood