

## TEMPLE BETH AM SANCTUARY RESOLUTION

August 1, 2017

### **Requested Board Action**

The Sanctuary Action Team (SAT), under the auspices of TBA's Interfaith Intercultural Initiative (I<sup>3</sup>), requests the TBA Board of Directors to declare TBA an "Immigrant Justice Congregation" as defined by the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism (RAC). The SAT also seeks Board approval of TBA's participation in the "re-launch of the sanctuary movement" by the Church Council of Greater Seattle (CCGS). TBA would not provide any physical shelter. Participation in the CCGS approach to sanctuary includes any provision of volunteer support to immigrants facing the threat of deportation and the local faith communities that are providing them with short- or long-term physical shelter.

Please keep reading to learn more about the immigrant justice issue, the Jewish values and the work of the RAC behind this request, TBA's historical advocacy for immigrant justice, the role of the CCGS on this issue, and the proposed scope of TBA's involvement.

### **Issue**

Today we are called upon to respond to the need to protect the lives and well-being of undocumented immigrants fearing deportation. More than 11 million such individuals currently live within the United States, having entered without legal documentation or having overstayed the period for which they were granted legal status. It is not a crime to enter our country without legal documentation or to overstay a visa; it is only a civil offense. Before January 2017, the government focused its deportation efforts on those who had committed real crimes and gave government prosecutors a lot of discretion as to whether to execute final deportation orders. The current administration has passed executive orders, severely curtailed prosecutorial discretion, increased enforcement quotas, and proposed other actions aimed at deportation of those living in the United States without legal documentation who have no criminal record of any kind. In response, cities around the country have designated themselves as "sanctuary" or "welcoming" or "neighborly" cities. (Seattle is a "welcoming" city.) Houses of worship across the country have also committed to taking meaningful action to assist undocumented immigrants facing deportation.

### **Jewish Values**

The Reform Movement has long supported comprehensive just and humane immigration and refugee policies. Its [earliest recorded resolution](#) on immigration dates back to 1913. Most recently, in 2017 the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) passed the Resolution on Protecting Individuals at Risk of Deportation from the United States, which contains the following preface:

We are instructed in the Holiness Code to treat the strangers in our midst with justice and compassion: "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall do him no wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33). This teaching permeates Jewish tradition and is echoed 35 times in the Torah – the most repeated of any commandment. The

history of the Jewish people from Egypt through the Holocaust until today reminds us of the many struggles faced by immigrants throughout the world. As a community of immigrants, we are charged to pursue justice, seek peace and build a society that is welcoming to all of God's creatures, regardless of their immigration status. In Genesis, three strangers visit Abraham, and he welcomes them into his home and into his heart without question (Genesis 18:1-22). This virtue of *hachnasat orchim*, welcoming the stranger, drives both our commitment to protecting undocumented immigrants from deportation and our dedication to the hospitality and inclusion of all people.

The Resolution goes on to recommend that congregations,

after discussion within their congregations and with legal counsel, respond to the need to protect the lives and well-being of undocumented immigrants at risk of deportation by adopting a plan that could include one or more of the following:

- Providing sanctuary in the form of temporary shelter within their facilities;
- Providing legal assistance to fight deportation cases; and
- Providing material, financial or educational support.

[\(Click here for the full text of the Resolution.\)](#)

To support congregations seeking to engage in social justice work, the RAC, in 2017, launched the Urgency of Now initiative (UON) and is asking congregations to sign on to a *Brit Olam* (Covenant with the World) (*see Appendix*). One facet of UON is the North American Immigrant Justice Campaign (IJ), which will provide resources to congregations working on this issue and carrying out the actions supported by the URJ resolution.

Congregations wishing to join the IJ campaign can declare themselves “Immigrant Justice Congregations” if they meet specific criteria consistent with the URJ resolution. Those criteria include engaging in one or more of the following actions: supporting undocumented immigrants with financial, legal, materials or other forms of support; working to advance pro-immigration policies and legislation on a local, state or federal level; or providing physical shelter to one or more undocumented immigrants within their facilities (also known as providing “Sanctuary”). More information on becoming an Immigrant Justice Congregation can be found at <http://rac.org/become-immigrant-justice-congregation>.

Rabbi Ruth Zlotnick as TBA’s Senior Rabbi, along with Shelly Cohen and Diane Baer as lay leaders, signed the *Brit*, pledging TBA to work on one or more social justice activities including “acting in solidarity with vulnerable communities” and “[d]efending the rights of immigrants at risk of deportation.” The *Brit* will be submitted to the RAC once the Board has affirmed TBA’s participation.

## **TBA’s Historical Advocacy for Immigrant Justice**

Temple Beth Am has a strong history of supporting humane immigration policies and joining together in faith-based support of actions to protect and support immigrants in vulnerable situations. In the 1980s, thousands of Central Americans fleeing political and economic repression in their home countries, in particular El Salvador and Guatemala, sought asylum in the U.S. During that time, TBA joined the sanctuary movement and together with other Seattle faith-based communities provided material and in-kind support for individuals who were provided safe harbor by local churches. On June 1, 1986, the TBA Board

of Directors established a Sanctuary Fund for this purpose. In 2007, following congregational discussion, Rabbi Jonathan Singer, on behalf of TBA and its Social Action Committee, signed the New Sanctuary Movement moral support pledge<sup>1</sup>.

Temple Beth Am also has a history of strongly engaging in refugee support, often in conjunction with global conflicts involving the U.S., including sponsoring Indo-Chinese refugees in 1979 and 1980, Soviet refugees during the 1980s, and Bosnian refugees in the early 1990s.

## **Current Sanctuary Responses within Seattle's Faith Community**

In response to political rhetoric and campaign slogans appearing during the 2016 presidential race, faith groups began to organize sanctuary efforts across the country. Here in Washington state, a number of churches and synagogues are declaring themselves sanctuary congregations.

Local Jewish congregations are beginning to actively engage in various efforts. With the approval of its board, Congregation Beth Shalom has established an immigration and sanctuary committee engaged in a number of support efforts for undocumented immigrants. In partnership, Kadima and Madrona Grace Church have committed to offer a sanctuary space in their existing shelter. Kol HaNeshama and Kol Ami have also begun efforts to participate in the sanctuary movement.

CCGS is coordinating the faith-based sanctuary effort across Washington state. A well-established leader in organizing congregations on this and many other social action issues in the region, the CCGS leadership has been attending meetings at churches and synagogues throughout the state to help create networks of faith-based communities designed to provide sanctuary and support services for individuals threatened with deportation. The CCGS effort has identified groupings of churches and synagogues in the North End and the University District. Members of Temple Beth Am have attended meetings for both groups.

The CCGS has identified four interrelated actions for the local sanctuary movement, motivated by standing on the side of love, providing hope, and changing unjust policies and practices that lead to dehumanization and persecution. There is a continuum of risk associated with each of these four actions, outlined below and more fully covered in the ACLU document called Sanctuary Congregations and Harboring FAQ, dated March 2017. ([click here](#))

1. Long-term Hospitality
  - Providing long-term hospitality for individuals at particular risk of deportation, and sometimes their families, is the biggest commitment a Sanctuary congregation can make. We are not pursuing this option.
  - Note: If there are individual congregants who are personally interested in offering long-term hospitality of immigrants or refugees, they can contact the Church Council of Greater Seattle directly to learn more about the financial and legal considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> April 16 2007 Social Action Committee report to the board; June 2007 Bulletin article by Rabbi Jonathan Singer regarding moral support for the New Sanctuary Movement and comprehensive humane just immigration policy that keeps families together.

## 2. Rapid Response Hubs

- Rapid Response Hubs or “Safe Spaces” provide gathering places of respite and refuge on a short-term basis from two hours to two days. Such a Safe Space could allow individuals or families to gather and regroup, especially in the case of a local raid, sweep or communal fear of harassment or hate violence. We are not pursuing this option.

## 3. Volunteer Opportunities

- Volunteer Support for University District Sanctuary Congregations and Rapid Response Hubs: Most local congregations that have committed to providing long-term or short-term hospitality need support from a network of other faith-based communities. One University District church in particular has committed to long-term hospitality, but due to the small size of its congregation needs the help of a network of volunteers from other faith organizations. Volunteers with expertise and availability can help with a long list of tasks such as running errands, shopping for food and supplies, translating, tutoring, providing mental health counseling, medical and dental care, legal advice, financial support, and of course offering companionship and moral support to the people at risk. TBA has a large number of members, some of whom may be interested in volunteering. Identifying those volunteers can be done via word of mouth and through regular TBA communications, such as the newsletter.
  - Legal Implications: Volunteering to support long-term and short-term hosting congregations is low on the risk continuum, but Know Your Rights training is recommended for all who participate and they should review the ACLU publication called Sanctuary Congregations and Harboring FAQ dated March 2017 ([click here](#)).
- Accompaniment: There is a great need for volunteers to accompany undocumented individuals and their families to immigration check-ins and hearings in Tukwila.<sup>2</sup> There is currently a high level of anxiety among non-citizens when they go for periodic check-ins, and having the support of compassionate lay people can make a difference. CCGS is preparing training materials and establishing a list of volunteers now. A few TBA members could volunteer and then share their experiences and provide more information to other congregants who may be interested. Their experiences could also form the basis of some teen and adult education and possibly a guest d’var torah.
  - Legal Implications: Accompaniment to immigration hearings (or to the store or to a medical appointment) is most likely not a risk, especially if the volunteer has received appropriate training in advance. According to the relevant federal statute, 8 USC § 1324(a)(1)(A)(ii): Any person who “knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that an alien has come to, entered, or remains in U.S. in violation of law, transports, or moves or attempts to transport or move such alien within U.S. by means of

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<sup>2</sup> Of the approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., about 1 million have so-called “final orders” that previous administrations have elected not to execute for various reasons including pending asylum requests, change of status requests, refusal of countries of origin to accept deportees, etc. There is also a backlog of 500,000 cases in the immigration court system, so many immigrants have been dutifully checking in every six months *for years*. However, the Trump administration has removed nearly all discretion from the execution of final orders and has pressured certain countries of origin to resume taking deportees. Thus, the fear of being deported when showing up for a check-in is well-founded. Sometimes, just the accompaniment by a U.S. citizen has tempered the response of I.C.E. agents.

transportation or otherwise, in furtherance of such violation of law...” According to the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, providing transportation is not enough to cause a problem. The action has to be in furtherance of the person’s presence in the U.S. Driving someone to a hearing or a medical visit is not helping someone avoid detection by immigration officials. Volunteers should review the ACLU publication called Sanctuary Congregations and Harboring FAQ dated March 2017, ([click here](#)), and the guidance from the National Lawyers Guild, ([click here](#)).

4. Solidarity and Advocacy

- Our leadership and our members can advocate for immigrant justice by countering rhetoric and actions that prevent immigrants and refugees from full participation in communal life. Through TBA’s participation in the Faith Action Network, we are already engaged in this effort. However, there are opportunities to do more. At times, advocacy on behalf of a particular individual may be solicited in partnership with legal service providers and immigrant rights organizers. We can promote training and volunteer opportunities through the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project. Through our participation with CCGS, we will be notified of hate crimes against and threats to faith-based communities because of their faith, the immigrant composition of their communities or their advocacy work on behalf of immigrants and refugees. We will have opportunities to stand in solidarity with them. We can also use Facebook and send emails to those who have expressed interest in our SAT, so we can activate a group of volunteers when a need arises for letter writing, phoning or attending a rally.
  - Legal Implications: According to the CCGS-sponsored presentation attended by members of SAT on July 22, there is no legal risk in exercising our state and federal constitutional rights as U.S. citizens to express our opinions on matters of public concern, and there is no legal risk to TBA in promoting these issue-based opportunities. TBA is already represented by Davis Wright Tremaine on governance and tax issues, the law firm that is providing pro bono legal support to the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project in its lawsuit against the Justice Department’s efforts to curtail or eliminate the legal assistance rights of undocumented immigrants. (See *NWIRP v. Sessions*, No. 2:17-cv-00716 (W.D. Wa. 2017).

## **TBA Motions in Support of Immigrant Justice**

1. The Board of Directors of Temple Beth Am affirms TBA's commitment to the URJ's Brit Olam signed by its senior rabbi and president; affirms TBA's support for the Church Council of Greater Seattle's efforts to relaunch the sanctuary movement in Washington State; and authorizes its senior, associate and/or assistant rabbis and its board president to sign documents as agents of TBA advocating support for immigrant rights and immigration justice, the sanctuary movement in Washington State, and URJ efforts to preserve and protect the rights of immigrants at risk. By passing this motion, TBA also declares itself to be an Immigrant Justice Congregation as defined by the Religious Action Center.
2. Recognizing Temple Beth Am's commitment to being an Immigrant Justice Congregation, the Board of Directors approves TBA's participation in the sanctuary movement under the auspices of the Church Council of Greater Seattle. Coordinated through the Sanctuary Action Team, TBA will provide volunteer support to other local congregations that have committed to providing long-term hospitality and being rapid response hubs. TBA will also support and promote immigrant justice opportunities for volunteering, training, advocacy and solidarity.