

Sanctuary and Resistance at First Universalist Church

First Universalist Church has made a whole-hearted commitment to offer sanctuary by unanimously passing a resolution on February 19, 2017 declaring that we will provide support and refuge to immigrants, regardless of their legal status. We dedicate ourselves to educate and activate our congregation, to amplify and respond to the voices of immigrant leaders, and to speak out against discrimination toward any and all targeted people.

Our Unitarian Universalism faith is grounded in a message of love, not fear. Our first and seventh principles teach us that everyone counts and we are all connected. As members of this faith, we take our principles to heart by resisting laws and practices that devalue human life and using our voices and resources to work for better laws and protections for anyone who is targeted.

In our religious history we did not always support folks of color and indigenous people. But there were some folks that were faithful allies and activists. We follow the example they have set for us. Some worked alongside Frederick Douglass in an anti-slavery network. Unitarian Mary White Ovington, a co-founder of the NAACP, working with W.E.B DuBois and others, was a white civil rights advocate and organizer who addressed racial discrimination within housing and employment in New York City. During the WW II era Unitarians Martha Sharp and the Rev. Waitstill Sharp, were two of only three Americans honored by Israel as "Righteous Among the Nations" at Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, for their actions in delivering countless men, women, and children out of German occupied territory, facing certain extermination in the death camps. In the 1980's First Universalist Church provided sanctuary for immigrants from Central America, and our own Rev. John Cummins stood at the doorway and turned away the FBI, knowing that if our guests were returned they could face death in their country of origin.

Today, immigrants are under attack in new ways. There is an increase in deportations and an erosion of human rights. At a Sunday service we heard the story of Celia, how her husband, on a lunch break while working for a church member, was taken by ICE and sent back to Honduras, leaving behind a wife and children fighting to survive in his departure. We stepped forward to help out in that very same tradition of love and compassion.

Immigrant and racial justice is the movement of our times, when we are once again called to action. We are preparing our church to provide safe spaces, along with numerous other religious and private institutions called to stand strong with immigrants, many facing either destitution or death or enslavement by gangs if they return.

Nationally, our Unitarian Universalist denomination, with the Love Resists campaign, calls us to live our faith.

“Sanctuary is love’s response to the criminalization of black, brown, queer and marginalized people in America. Love Resists’ sense of sanctuary expands to embrace those who are most vulnerable in our community. It is about offering what we have – a space, a voice, a community, - without hesitation.”

We need YOU to join this movement for justice and real compassion for our neighbors under attack by an intolerant immigration policy that would build walls and destroy lives.

You would not be alone. There are ongoing trainings, legislative and community issues to be promoted, and opportunities for all sorts of activities coordinating with groups like MIRAC, ISAIAH, and others.

If you are interested in getting involved please fill out the Volunteer Profile on First Universalist’s website <http://firstuniversalistchurch.org/sanctuary-and-resistance/> and we will contact you whenever your interests match expressed needs. You can contribute your talents and resources in ways that work best for your schedule.

In the coming months we will be promoting **ART for Action** – a way to raise funds to support immigrant individuals and families who are suffering as a result of the policies and practices of our broken immigration system. We will be asking you to help us make quality products that artistically represent the values we stand for and will help us build a fund to respond quickly to the growing needs. **Together we will act for justice!**