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# DRAFT — The Process of Becoming a Sanctuary Church at Congregational Church of San Mateo (CCSM)

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E-Booklet as of March 13, 2017, Valerie Duecker, Editor, Co-Chair Sanctuary Team, dueckerv@me.com

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## **Ministry of Service & Justice develops Motion to Become a Sanctuary Church**

Over a period of a few years, the Ministry of Service & Justice (MSJ) at CCSM moved from primarily funding worthy causes to creating several service projects (32 of them now) in the local and wider community. While continuing both valued functions, the group hoped to work toward a more just, equitable society—not just helping people survive in this community. Immigration policy and its effect on our neighbors especially troubled the group. By the end of 2016, MSJ leadership realized that it was time to ask the congregation to take the first step toward justice for our neighbors and asked the congregation to consider becoming a Sanctuary Congregation.

MSJ then created a new Sanctuary Team under its wing with two co-chairs who would grow the team and manage activities during the study month.

## **Congregational Meeting Calls for Month of Discernment, Education and Discussion**

The original MSJ motion to the annual Congregational Meeting on January 29, 2017 recommended that the Congregation enter into a month of prayerful discernment and discussion about becoming a sanctuary church. There was no recommendation for a later vote - just a study during February.

At the meeting, the congregation approved the motion, with an amendment to vote on declaring CCSM as a Sanctuary Church at a special congregational meeting on February 26th.

During February our Moderator asked the congregation to consider:

- 1) What it means to be a Sanctuary Church,
- 2) How the process of providing Sanctuary works,
- 3) What legal risks are involved, and
- 4) Our own, personal points of view on this matter

## **Education about Sanctuary Movement**

The Sanctuary Team, MSJ and congregational leadership provided several resources:

1. Updated the CCSM website with descriptions of the New Sanctuary Movement, Sanctuary Cities, what Sanctuary looks like, legal risks, the UCC approach to Sanctuary, and links to a variety of information and media. <http://ccsm-ucc.org/justice/>
2. Rev. Deb Lee led a special CCSM forum on the New Sanctuary Movement. She answered questions about what sanctuary means and why it is particularly important right now for houses of faith to consider their role in welcoming the stranger.

3. Sanctuary Team Members wore special name tags during Coffee Hours, inviting anyone to talk with them about Sanctuary.
4. Rev. Kibbie Ruth met with the Mid-High Youth to discuss Sanctuary at CCSM.
5. Created Handout - CCSM - Sanctuary Church Initiative - Q & A
6. Offered two Sanctuary Conversations before worship, so interested people could share their immigration stories and talk about what it means to be a Sanctuary Church.
7. During a “Second Hour” presentation, invited an immigration lawyer to inform us about Immigration and Customs Enforcement activities locally and nationally.

### **Sanctuary Movement Conversations Summary**

The Sanctuary Team gathered many comments, concerns and questions during coffee hours, two Sanctuary Conversations before Sunday services, in informal discussions and through email. Here are some of the main topics:

1. Legal risks to the congregation and individuals that become involved in hosting and helping a guest in physical Sanctuary. Liability issues.
2. Logistics of providing physical Sanctuary. How to create a safe, comfortable space in the building. CCSM already has an available bedroom with bath.
3. Other ways of being involved in the New Sanctuary Movement (advocacy, accompaniment, Sanctuary in the Streets/Rapid Response).
4. Financial obligation to guest in Sanctuary and costs and financial risk for CCSM and its members.
5. Working with immigration attorneys and supporting congregations.
6. Concerns about rapid changes enacted by the new Administration and how it may affect Sanctuary at CCSM and our neighbors, a primarily Latino immigrant population.

### **Testimonies during Services**

Three members of the congregation offered testimony during January and February services from their experiences with Sanctuary and Immigration.

Soon after President Trump’s inauguration Alicia, a third generational Congregationalist recalled her teenage years when her church became a Sanctuary congregation in 1984. They hosted a refugee couple fleeing San Salvador on their way to Canada. This was a life-changing experience, as she told us: “Being part of a Sanctuary church left an indelible impression on me

that continues to guide my moral compass and urges me to serve a God that I believe accepts and loves ALL people, that sees a human race without borders or walls, and that teaches us to give what we have to help those that are without.”

At another service, Tony spoke to us about the power of one person — how one ordinary hero made a stunning difference in his and his family’s lives, as they immigrated from Cuba in 1961. At the U.S. border in Miami, immigration authorities threatened to send Tony’s mother, an Italian citizen, back to Italy, leaving 9 year old Tony and his two younger brothers alone at the airport. But, then a passerby intervened. Read his story in full, below.

A few weeks later, Valerie spoke of losing her husband, who was killed by a drunk driver and undocumented immigrant from Mexico. In the ensuing months and years, she worked through a consequential pocket of prejudice about Mexicans. She now has a grandchild, whose father was originally an undocumented, child immigrant from Mexico. Valerie states: “Part of creating sanctuary is naming our prejudices and working through them so they don’t taint the work we do together to make all of ours and our neighbors’ lives more just, open, free and loving.”

## **Sermons**

(Penny - do you want to do a summary of how you referred to Sanctuary during your sermons? )

## **Congregation Wide Communications**

December 2016 A Word from Penny.

## **Special Congregational Meeting - CCSM Declares itself a Sanctuary Church**

With a vote of 151 in favor, 14 opposed, and 3 undecided, the congregation adopted the following resolution on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

Whereas, As a faith community, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That The Congregational Church of San Mateo declares itself a Sanctuary Church and as such will open our doors to welcome into Sanctuary undocumented individuals who are facing deportation and in need of safe refuge.

## **Next Steps**

1. As an immediate first step, Penny Nixon signed the National Sanctuary Movement pledge on behalf of the Congregational Church of San Mateo.
2. CCSM issued a press release in coordination with the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo.
3. Offering a 4-week Lenten Sunday Series - Looking in the Mirror: The Inner Work of Allies, which looks at questions of race and class, while drawing from the UCC’s curriculum on

White Privilege. How do we become effective and supportive allies as people who may not be on the front lines? Are there ways our socialization and skin color affect how we show up to the justice issues of our day? How do our own stories come in to play? Are we willing to unearth and face our “unconscious biases”?

4. The Sanctuary Team is developing opportunities for involvement and advocacy for our community and continuing to broaden and solidify the coalition of faith communities on the Peninsula in support of Sanctuary. Along with our internal vetting team, they are in communication with immigration lawyers regarding potential candidates for physical sanctuary at CCSM.

## ***CCSM Website Content re Sanctuary***

### **SANCTUARY MOVEMENT**

Welcome! We invite you to look through the materials on this webpage to familiarize yourself with the New Sanctuary Movement.

#### **What is the New Sanctuary Movement?**

Calling upon the ancient traditions of our faiths, which recognized houses of worship as a refuge for the runaway slave, the conscientious objector, and the Central American refugee fleeing the civil wars of the 1980s, sanctuary is once again growing among communities of faith that are standing in solidarity with immigrants and marginalized communities facing immoral and unjust deportation and discrimination policies.

View the video below for an overview.

(Sanctuary Sample Reel from Theo Rigby, Vimeo) <https://vimeo.com/189690725>

#### **What are Sanctuary Cities?**

Sanctuary Cities are municipalities that have adopted a policies of protecting undocumented immigrants by not prosecuting them for violating federal immigration laws in the country in which they are now living. Such a policy can be set out expressly in a law or observed only in practice. The term applies generally to cities that do not use municipal funds or resources to enforce national immigration laws, and usually forbid police or municipal employees to inquire about a person's immigration status. The designation has no precise legal meaning.

This January 25, 2017 Wall Street Journal Article describes how Sanctuary Cities work and how President Trump's recent executive order may affect them.

#### **What are Sanctuary Churches?**

Sanctuary Churches support the efforts of the Sanctuary Movement or are willing to open their doors to people fearing repatriation. Churches, along with schools and hospitals, are considered "Sensitive Locations" by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection. That means federal agents will avoid arresting, searching or interviewing people there under most circumstances.

Read ICE's 2011 Memoranda regarding its enforcement policy on Sensitive Locations.

Prior to the November presidential election, there were 400 Sanctuary Churches nationwide. Since the election, there are over 800 churches across the country now involved in creating sanctuary spaces for undocumented immigrants and people in need.

Currently, there are no Sanctuary Churches that offer physical sanctuary on the San Francisco Peninsula.

#### **What is the UCC's opinion on the Sanctuary Movement?**

In a recent commentary, The United Church of Christ states that it "must escalate our bold and prophetic voice as we work alongside partner organizations and interfaith efforts to help protect human rights and advance unity, love, respect and dignity for all."

Read this commentary in full and another recent article from the UCC on The Sanctuary Movement.

### **What does Sanctuary look like?**

There are four ways that congregations are demonstrating their commitment to Sanctuary: physical sanctuary for someone facing final deportation; accompaniment of immigrant families or youth; advocacy; and networks of projection of rapid response.

Congregations that offer physical sanctuary on religious property, as a way to protect individuals from the reach of ICE, are supported by other congregations and community groups committing to be part of a local network of Sanctuary by assisting with hospitality, protection, and advocacy.

Read more about how Sanctuary is being provided.

### **What are the legal risks for congregations?**

Those who are entering sanctuary will most likely have an opportunity to win relief from deportation. This means that they are not a high priority for deportation and that ICE can and should grant them prosecutorial discretion. In essence, the Sanctuary Movement is holding the administration accountable to their own standards and guidelines as put forth by the President's Executive Actions.

There is risk in offering Sanctuary, however, the field practice over the last forty years shows that no congregation has been prosecuted for allowing undocumented people to find shelter and safety in their house of worship.

Read the following Sanctuary Legal Tool Kit for an opinion and FAQs.

### **What additional resources exist to learn more?**

National Sanctuary website and toolkit: [www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org](http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org)

Bay Area Organizations: [www.im4humanintegrity.org](http://www.im4humanintegrity.org)

Sign the Sanctuary Pledge: <http://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/sign-the-pledge.html>

## ***Sanctuary Church Resolution developed at January Congregational Meeting***

### **Sanctuary Church Resolution Special Meeting \* February 26<sup>th</sup>**

Dear Friends,

At our Congregational meeting last Sunday, members voted to carry the following motion:

*During the month of February, the Congregation enters into a month of prayerful discernment and discussion about becoming a Sanctuary Church and holds a Special Meeting on Sunday February 26<sup>th</sup> to vote on this matter.*

For those of you who were not able to attend this meeting, it is important to mention that the original motion put forward did not include any verbiage about a vote. The Board of Ministries' intention was to provide the Congregation with the time and space needed to engage in active discernment without the undue pressure of an arbitrary deadline.

During the course of our discussion, however, the energy and excitement around this issue was quite palpable and the members voted to amend the original motion to include the Special Meeting on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

#### **So, what does this mean, exactly?**

On **February 26<sup>th</sup>**, we will be voting on whether or not to become a Sanctuary Church. As such, CCSM would register itself as part of the larger New Sanctuary Movement and, working with a network of interfaith communities, non-profits, and immigration lawyers, open its doors to provide safe refuge for undocumented individuals who are facing deportation.

During the month of February, we want to make sure that all of our questions are asked and answered so that we are all clear on:

- 1) What it means to be a Sanctuary Church,
- 2) How the process of providing Sanctuary works,
- 3) What legal risks are involved, and
- 4) Our own, personal points of view on this matter

#### **To this end, we have made the following resources available:**

- **CCSM's Website** – Our Social Justice page contains a link to a variety of information and media for you to familiarize yourself with the Sanctuary Movement and Sanctuary Churches. <http://ccsm-ucc.org/justice/>
- **Our Sanctuary Team** – Throughout the month of February, these individuals are ready to answer your questions before and after worship. Look for their identifying nametags during Coffee Hour.

- **Sanctuary Conversations**

**February 12 & 26 • 9:30am, Fireplace Room**

You're invited to come and be in conversation about the Sanctuary Movement. Come share your immigration stories (we all have them) and enter into conversations about what it means to be a Sanctuary Church. This will be a safe place to express your feelings and practice active listening. The Sanctuary Team is hosting these conversations

- **Coffee and Conversation about ICE in our Community**

**February 19, After Worship, Buckham Room**

Schools have hosted special sessions to calm their families' fear of ICE; citizens have accompanied immigrants to court hearings and visited those in detention; civic leaders have rallied to advocate for Muslims and other minorities. Before you attend, please read the information and view the videos sent in Penny's Connections—this Second Hour will not be a presentation but a conversation as we struggle with the question of what might we do as individuals or as the Body of Christ.

### **Proposed Sanctuary Church Resolution**

Below is the proposed resolution for consideration on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

Whereas, As a faith community, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation; therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, That The Congregational Church of San Mateo declares itself a Sanctuary Church and as such will open our doors to welcome into Sanctuary undocumented individuals who are facing deportation and in need of safe refuge.

I look forward to a month of discernment together and to our Special Meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup>!

With gratitude,  
Jeanne Back, CCSM Moderator

# CCSM SANCTUARY CHURCH INITIATIVE Q & A

## 1. Why a New Sanctuary Movement?

Because about 1,100 people a day are being deported. Many of them are long term residents woven into the fabric of our communities and congregations. Many have families, often families with children who are U.S. citizens. Time after time Congress has refused to address our broken immigration system. Donald Trump launched his campaign for President pledging to build a wall and deport immigrants. During his first two weeks in office he issued orders intended to begin implementing his vision for America. An order establishing a travel ban on Muslims from six majority Muslim nations has had a chilling effect on nearly all foreign nationals living among us as friends, neighbors, classmates, coworkers or family in communities nationwide. Consequently, a New Sanctuary Movement is rapidly gaining momentum.

## 2. Why get involved as a Faith Community?

The second of our congregation's three priorities is: "to strengthen our commitment, action and effectiveness in social justice and outreach: We commit our beliefs to action recognizing that God has no hands but our hands, no feet but our feet, no face but our face." Deportation of our neighbors and the breaking up of immigrant families in our communities are among the most compelling social justice issues of our time. Our congregation can make a difference. We can get involved in the New Sanctuary Movement by becoming a Sanctuary Church.

## 3. What does it mean to be a Sanctuary Church?

Principally, it means helping prevent deportation of persons facing an order of deportation, on a case-by-case basis, one at a time, in concert with their legal representation. Our role would be to host the person in our church, and possibly their family too, while the person is engaged in legal proceedings intended to prevent them from being deported. We anticipate that the duration of a person's stay with us in Sanctuary would be from three weeks to three months.

## 4. Is a church a safe place?

Today churches, schools and hospitals are classified as "sensitive locations" under the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Sensitive Locations Policy. ICE will not enter any of those venues to take custody of a person facing an order of deportation.

## 5. How are candidates for Sanctuary vetted?

As a Sanctuary Church, we will have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with one or more not-for-profit organizations providing legal services for immigrants in or around San Mateo County. That organization, in concert with a person's lawyer, will determine that the individual would be an appropriate candidate for Sanctuary: (1) ICE would not likely consider them a priority for deportation; (2) they are a good candidate for prosecutorial discretion, winning a stay of removal or an order of supervision or some other form of legal relief from deportation; and (3) they would satisfy any other requirements specified in our MOU. Where a candidate meets the requirements, the organization

presents the case to the Sanctuary Church's Pastor and Vetting Team. Our Vetting Team will make the determination if a candidate is an appropriate fit on CCSM's behalf. Congregation members John Duty, Jim Granucci (former San Carlos Chief of Police) and Mike Mullery (retired) immigration attorney have volunteered to serve on our Team.

6. Where would we house a Sanctuary guest?

We have a guest bedroom with a full bath on the second floor of CCSM's main building that is suitable for this purpose. Our guests would also utilize our kitchen to prepare meals.

7. What are the risks?

During the last 40 years, no congregation has been prosecuted for allowing undocumented people to find shelter in their Church; no person associated with a Church Sanctuary Program has been convicted for offering Sanctuary; and no Church's tax-exempt status has been affected. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "There comes a time when a moral man can't obey a law which his conscience tells him is unjust. And the important thing is that when he does that he willingly accepts the penalty – because if he refuses to accept the penalty he becomes reckless, and he becomes an anarchist."

8. How can I learn more about being a Sanctuary Church?

Talk to any Sanctuary Team member during Coffee Hour. Plan to attend Sanctuary Conversations scheduled to take place on February 12 & 26, before worship, at 9:30 a.m. in the Fireplace Room, and/or Coffee and Conversation about ICE in our Community on February 19, after worship, in the Buckham Room. Also, review the Sanctuary Movement information posted on our website's Social Justice page (found under the "Grow" menu).

9. Will I have a voice in this matter?

Yes. On February 26 members of our congregation will be voting on whether to become a Sanctuary Church. If the vote is in the affirmative, CCSM will register as part of the larger New Sanctuary Movement and, working with a network of interfaith communities, non-profits, and immigration lawyers, open its doors to provide safe refuge for undocumented individuals who are facing deportation.

**Commit your beliefs to action**

***Moderator Letter preparing for Vote at February 26, 2017 Special Congregational Meeting***

**February 26<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting  
\* Childcare Provided \*  
Additional Information**

Dear Friends,

This Sunday after worship we will be holding a special meeting to vote on the proposed Sanctuary Church Resolution below:

*Whereas, As a faith community, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation; therefore, be it*

*RESOLVED, That The Congregational Church of San Mateo declares itself a Sanctuary Church and as such will open our doors to welcome into Sanctuary undocumented individuals who are facing deportation and in need of safe refuge.*

In this email I'll address the meeting's format as well as questions that we have received about the risk to CCSM should this resolution be adopted.

**Meeting Format**

To ensure the privacy of our members, we will have paper and pencils on hand for a ballot vote. Our bylaws do not specify this voting method so a motion will need to be initiated and carried by a majority vote to use it. We will facilitate this procedure prior to voting on the resolution.

We'll be dealing with the resolution in two parts – first the actual motion (“Resolved...”) and then the preamble (“Whereas...”). Members can amend the specific wording of either part via a majority vote.

This meeting is not intended to be “informational” and, therefore, we are assuming that members will have taken advantage of the various informational resources made available throughout the month of February. With this being said, we will, of course, answer any lingering questions members might have.

The Sanctuary Team is holding one more informational session prior to worship this Sunday at 9:30 am in the Fireplace room. Additionally, there is information available in handouts located on the table in the Narthex and on the Social Justice page of our website. Please see links below to the information on sanctuary on the CCSM website.

**Risk to CCSM**

It is the Board of Ministries' role to create the conditions necessary for members to live out their faith in ways that are personally meaningful to them, including championing social justice issues like becoming a Sanctuary Church. However, it also has a fiduciary

obligation to safeguard CCSM from any imprudent actions that could jeopardize our beloved community.

While we cannot assert that the risk to CCSM would be “zero” should we become a physical Sanctuary Church, we can say with a reasonable degree of confidence that we believe the risk to be very small. By “risk” I am referring to some sort of prosecution and/or loss of our tax-exempt status.

As shared in the informational handouts provided by the Sanctuary Team, during the past 40 years no congregation has incurred criminal prosecution or has had their tax-exempt status revoked for providing Sanctuary to an undocumented individual.

We have also factored into our analysis:

- The president’s January 25<sup>th</sup> Executive Order, “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” and the Department of Homeland Security’s recently signed policies in support of this order
- The priorities, methods and jurisdictions of ICE (Immigrations and Custom Enforcement) the US Federal District Attorney’s Office and the IRS; how these agencies interrelate; and the public relations issues they are seeking to avoid – this includes ICE’s current “Sensitive Locations Policy”
- The assurance from San Mateo Chief of Police, Susan Manheimer, that the local police has “no interest” in pursuing immigration “status offenders”. And, rather, how they are working diligently to build trust within the local immigrant communities
- The United States Constitution and, in particular, the rights and protections afforded to CCSM (and individuals) under the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Amendments
- The vetting process and legal services utilized by the immigration non-profit community when suggesting an appropriate candidate for Sanctuary as well as our own internal vetting process
- The support of a local network of interfaith communities and immigration lawyers we’d be partnering with in these efforts
- The training that we would initiate for our clergy, staff and Sanctuary Team volunteers in how to appropriately handle ICE agents

Since our risk (although small) is still greater than “zero”, we have researched the broad financial ramifications of a loss to our tax-exempt status as well as the penalties associated with violations to the Federal Immigration and Nationality Act.

I should point out that “declaring” ourselves a Sanctuary Church in and of itself incurs no risk. And, that CCSM would carefully monitor the quickly changing political landscape to inform its decision-making before sheltering a particular individual going forward.

I hope this additional information has been clarifying and I look forward to seeing you on Sunday!

With gratitude,

Jeanne Back, CCSM Moderator

## ***Moderator Letter announcing adoption of Sanctuary Resolution and Next Steps***

Dear Friends:

Thank you to those who attended yesterday's special meeting and to the many individuals who had scheduling conflicts, but reached out to Penny, Board of Ministry members or myself ahead of time to personally express their regrets. It is a privilege to serve as the Moderator of such an engaged and vibrant community!

The below Sanctuary Resolution was adopted with a vote of 151 in favor, 14 opposed, and 3 undecided:

*Whereas, As a faith community, we are called to accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation; therefore, be it*

*RESOLVED, That The Congregational Church of San Mateo declares itself a Sanctuary Church and as such will open our doors to welcome into Sanctuary undocumented individuals who are facing deportation and in need of safe refuge.*

### **So, What's Next?**

As an immediate first step, Penny signed the National Sanctuary Movement pledge on behalf of the Congregational Church of San Mateo. If you would like to sign as an individual, I've attached a link [here](#) for your convenience.

Also, we will be issuing a press release in coordination with the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo who yesterday also adopted a resolution to provide physical sanctuary to those facing deportation.

### **Moving Forward...**

The Sanctuary Team will be developing opportunities for involvement and advocacy for our community and will be continuing to broaden and solidify the coalition of faith communities on the Peninsula in support of Sanctuary.

Along with our internal vetting team, they will be in communication with immigration lawyers regarding potential candidates for physical sanctuary at CCSM.

Please join me in thanking Penny and those involved in Sanctuary Leadership -- Valerie Duecker, Mike Hill, Mike Mullery, Jim Granucci and the Ministry for Service and Justice - for all of their hard work these past few weeks and for their continued efforts going forward. Thanks to the powerful testimonies of Alicia Santamaria, Tony Gallo and Valerie Duecker.

Stay tuned for updates and opportunities for involvement in the coming weeks via the Pine Tree, CCSM Connections and pulpit announcements.

With gratitude, Jeanne Back, CCSM Moderator

## **Testimony - Alicia Santamaria**

### **January 22, 2017 Congregational Church of San Mateo My Testimony**

Good morning, my name is Alicia Santamaria and I have been a member here at CCSM for close to 20 years. My husband Manuel and I were married here in 1999 by Louise Bastille and Father José, a Catholic priest who was willing to participate in the service. Both our children, Mateo and Santiago were blessed here as infants by Jim Keck and Cynthia Riggins respectively. Because of CCSM's guiding principle of open-mindedness my family has been able to be part of this church community and also honor my husband and children's Catholic faith as members of St. Veronica's parish.

Although I have not been as active a member as I would like to be due to the demands of work and family, it was important for me when I moved to the Peninsula to find a U.C.C. Church that I could call home. I am a third-generation Congregationalist and was raised UCC in Syracuse, New York. I am here in front of you this morning, two days after the inauguration of our 45<sup>th</sup> president and one day after historic protest marches across the nation and the world, to share my testimony of what it means to be an open-minded, progressive Christian and member of the United Church of Christ and what it truly means to be God's hands and feet on this earth.

My testimony centers on the topic of Sanctuary as it is something this church has been learning about recently in response to the proposed immigration policies of the new presidential administration. I am excited our church is learning more about what the New Sanctuary Movement is all about...how we as a congregation might explore ways to show our solidarity and support for the hard-working immigrants living in our very neighborhood. Immigrants who without legal status face tremendous uncertainty, loss of human rights, and real fear of deportation.

**Sanctuary.** A concept rooted in our Judeo-Christian faith that can be traced back thirty -five hundred years to when Yahweh commanded Moses to set aside cities and places of refuge in Canaan. These cities of refuge were for the Israelites, "as well as the stranger and sojourner among you." (Num. 35:15). It can be traced to God liberating the Hebrew people and being on the side of the first refugees...it can be found in the Psalms..."God is our refuge and strength."

**Sanctuary.** A concept rooted in civic tradition that manifested in civil disobedience in such movements as the Underground Railroad that provided a sophisticated network to transport slaves to freedom and later during World War II in Europe helping Jews escape Nazi Germany.

**Sanctuary.** A word, a place we worship, an experience, a movement, faith in action, an act of love, Jesus' footsteps followed...that was part of the coming of age of an average American middle-school teen in upstate New York in the mid-1980's.

I was that teen, of course...daughter of university language professors, granddaughter of a Michigan mill owner and Italian immigrants. I had a bad perm, braces, and glasses and faced all the travails of being an awkward teen trying to make my way in the world. But when I was at church, I belonged...because at open-minded Plymouth Congregational Church... everyone belonged. Even people who the government said could not be here.

It was exactly during my last year in middle school and the beginning of high school that my world opened up and I learned about problems that far surpassed having a bad perm or not being part of the "in" crowd at school. I learned what it meant to ACT for justice...not just talk about justice as some sort of well-intentioned theoretical construct. I saw my mother and the leaders of my church face the very words Penny shared last week from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. ...that "one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws."

I won't recount all the complicated and tragic details of the late 1970's and early 1980's in Central American...except to say that while profound oppression, persecution, and civil wars raged on in countries like El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, journalists like Pedro Ramos fled for their lives. Pedro, like hundreds of thousands of people seeking political asylum and refuge in the United States were turned away due to certain foreign policy decisions and federal immigration laws.

The religious and moral response to these laws started by a Presbyterian minister in Tucson, Arizona (to openly defy INS laws and provide Sanctuary to Central Americans) eventually spread to over 500 congregations across the United States. After much discernment and prayer, on April 8, 1984, my UCC Church in Syracuse, NY, adopted a resolution that stated:

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“Therefore be it resolved that the Congregation of Plymouth Congregational Church, fully cognizant that this resolution may propose an act of civil disobedience, does this day, with all humility turn toward a higher law – the law of faith – and declare Plymouth Congregational Church a sanctuary. In a spirit of hope and unity with congregations of many faiths through the United States, we invite refugees from El Salvador to accept temporary sanctuary with us.”

So later that year, there I was, awkward teen, spending my weekends helping to clean out our church's 2<sup>nd</sup> floor youth room which we had given up to create a living space for Pedro and Sylvia Ramos. As I mentioned, Pedro had been a journalist in San Salvador and after witnessing unspeakable horrors and fearing for his life, fled with his wife to eventually find Sanctuary in Syracuse before making it to Canada. Because my mother spoke Spanish, she served as one of the main translators for Pedro and Sylvia and also took them to appointments with doctors and a dentist who supported our efforts.

My mother...from a small town in Michigan, not a hippy, nor a sign-waving protestor, but a quiet protestant, a Christian...lived her deep faith by the risks she took in helping people who were not in this country legally. Being part of a Sanctuary church left an indelible impression on me that continues to guide my moral compass and urges me to serve a God that I believe accepts and loves ALL people, that sees a human race without borders or walls, and that teaches us to give what we have to help those that are without.

And so here I stand, more than 30 years later, in a country that still hasn't figured out a humane and just immigration policy, on the eve of a presidency that promises to test our courage and sense of justice, with my testimony of what faith in action looks like when we follow Dr. King's "arc of the moral universe" because although it is long...it DOES bend towards justice.

## **Testimony - Tony Gallo**

### The Power of One

We are accustomed to thinking that great deeds require great people of exceptional talent, power, and determination.

We have a name for these people: heroes or heroines. Webster defines them as a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

Searching on Google, there is actually a list of all time heroes voted on by people that, well, vote for such things on Google!

The first name on the list is Abraham Lincoln. The list also includes names like Martin Luther King Jr., Helen Keller, Neil Armstrong, Rosa Parks and John Kennedy. These names are instantly recognizable and known by all of us for their great contributions and the impact each of them made to our lives.

In preparing for this reflection, I noticed that lesser known heroes are finally getting attention from Hollywood. I will try not to spoil it for those of you that may have not seen these movies.

One of the characters in the old movie "The King's Speech" is one of those lesser-known heroes. We learn that Lionel is NOT a doctor but he wanted to help soldiers that were returning from WWI trench warfare and shell-shocked. Against the strong wishes of the Anglican Church, Lionel helps the stuttering King George VII prepare for and deliver a profound speech to the country, announcing the declaration of war against Germany.

And in the current movie "Hidden Figures", we get to know Katherine Johnson and Al Harrison, both heroes in very different ways. In what is incomprehensible to us today, they started a transformation at NASA by smashing racial barriers, each with different tools. Katherine with a sharp mind and a sharp pencil and Al with gifted management skills and a crow bar!

These people are being recognized decades after they chose to do things differently and made real impacts in this world.

And then, there are the heroes that will likely never be recognized. Ordinary people like you and I. Something makes us dig deep inside to make a statement and try to make a difference, not knowing if our efforts will succeed or not. We are not looking for fame or glory in our actions. We are just trying to do the right thing.

I am inspired by the many in this room today that made signs, went out in the rain, and made a statement against the new administration last week. You all made it clear that we will not tolerate going back to deplorable times in our history. And yes, all of you are heroes. You speak for those that can't or won't. All of you are impactful in ways yet unknown.

And last week as I attended Penny's discussion on becoming a sanctuary church, I was reminded of a hero of mine. The story goes back to 1961 when I was just 9 years old. I don't know his name. I

don't remember what he looks like. I don't know where he lives or even if he is alive. I don't know why he did what he did. But he did it. And it changed lives.

My mom, two younger brothers and I left Cuba to flee Communism and gain our freedom. I really did not understand what that meant. As far as I could see, life was pretty good. We played. We had a beautiful home and family life. We were members of a private beach club near our house and we attended Catholic school. Truth be told, I remember it was pretty cool to see the revolutionary soldiers march on our school playground and set up anti aircraft machine guns on the corners against the US invasion that never came.

We went to the finca, my uncle's farm, and had huge family dinners in the calm of the countryside, eating rabbits and pigeons my uncle had slaughtered earlier in the day for us to feast on. I remember that my grandfather took me to see the alligators in the swamp and in a crazy, improbable event, we saw Fidel Castro coming out of his helicopter there in one of his frequent travels throughout the island to give his famous speeches against imperialism and the evils of the US oppression.

But a few months later, there we were at the Miami airport immigration office. We had been separated from our dad when at the start of the revolution; he was in the US on a business trip and could not return to us. We had no way of telling him we were in the US as we had drawn the lucky lottery number for departure the night before.

Our journey had started 15 hours earlier that day. The soldiers had taken our luggage and money from us at the Jose Marti Airport in Habana. I remember they called us "gusanos", or worms, for leaving Cuba and becoming enemies of the revolution.

We were crying, as we had not eaten all day. A bright red Coke machine 5 feet away taunting us. No one helped. We did not understand. Mom, we just want a coke!

I remember my mom was also crying, but why? Maybe she just wanted a Coke too?

Mom traveled under an Italian passport, my brothers and I under Cuban ones. And because we were leaving a communist country, we were legally given refugee status by the US government. But my mom was not. After all, let Italy worry about her. She was not a US concern. The immigration officer had decided to send my mom to Italy on the next plane out of Miami, and that is why she was crying. In a mere couple of hours, we were to be separated.

So we all cried and cried, each for different reasons, until a random passenger in the building noticed us and came over to ask my mom what was wrong. He spoke a little Spanish and introduced himself as one of the priests in the local area. He was traveling over seas. I don't remember where he was headed, but I know he missed his flight. He was with us for hours. One thing I do remember about him though. He put a nickel into the Coke machine and got us each a Coke.

He then called the head of the diocese in Miami and told the head priest our problem. I learned all of this much later in life of course, when I asked my mom to tell me the story. What was he thinking of doing, I asked her, one man fighting against the entire immigration department of the US government?

He talked on the phone for a while I remember, and then, he came back to my mom and told her everything would be OK.

In the background, I learned later, the head priest had called the church attorney. The attorney had a few contacts and he had made a few more calls. Ultimately they reached a judge who thought it was not right to separate our family and issued a stay for my mom's deportation. 24 hours. As luck would have it, there were no flights to Italy the next day, and we actually got to stay in Miami the entire weekend.

During that time, we finally made contact with my dad, other attorneys got involved and made the case that my dad had a job and that we would not be a burden to the US government. A few more calls and we got some clothing from the church, meals, and another stay for a few months, allowing us to travel to New York City where my dad was staying with his aunt and cousins and get reunited. 13 years later, I became a citizen of the US.

Who knows what would have happened to us if that man had looked the other way, and said, this is not my problem and I need to catch my plane.

The power of one. It changes lives.

And as I look out, I see hundreds of you, each with the power of one to change lives. In a small way you say? Maybe. But it can be the power of 400!

That power is what our Congregational meeting later today is all about.  
What can we do as a small church with limited resources? That is up to all of us.

I hope this story inspires each of you to be open-minded and embrace this challenge.  
If not, at least I hope it shows you to never underestimate the power of one.

I want to close with this. This morning as I was checking my mail and looked on Facebook, I noticed a post by one of our CC Riders bike buddies. He was quoting Edmund Burke who in 1770 wrote :

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

Let us all make sure that we do not do nothing!

## Testimony - Valerie Duecker

Congregational Church of San Mateo - Rev. Valerie Duecker, February 5, 2017

Today, I'm going to tell you a short, but painful and ultimately healing story of my struggles with being prejudiced.

The story begins in 1992 when Phil Duecker came into mine and my three children's lives in a whirlwind of love, faith and courage. Sadly, eight years later, a drunk driver cut short our family life together. As Phil and I headed north one Sunday to visit friends, I watched as a pick-up-truck driver killed Phil instantly. And then ran away into the surrounding fields.

Afterwards, I learned the driver was speeding while heavily intoxicated. Also, he was an undocumented immigrant from Mexico with six previous drunk driving convictions..

As you might imagine, the ensuing days, weeks and months were awful for all of us who loved Phil. I grieved openly, but hid a secret that betrayed my earlier training in civil rights and dismantling prejudice.

As I emerged from that initial cocoon of grieving, I suddenly hated hispanic looking men who drove pick up trucks. Then, I couldn't stand any Mexicans, their music, food, or language. I knew this was wrong, but couldn't help it. Months later, I seethed with anger and heartache at the driver's sentencing hearing. I never knew when his short prison term ended or whether he was deported.

A few months later, I began a second stint at seminary to become a pastor, and then your ministry intern, beginning September 11, 2001. So hiding my prejudices became even more important. Yet, I knew I had to work through them. Of course, God had some tricks up God's sleeve to help me along.

Fast forward to my grandmother years. In 2009 my daughter gave birth to my first grandchild, Adam. Her husband Mohamed, a Muslim, and not-quite legally documented immigrant from Tunisia, insisted that I live with them. In his culture, you don't raise children without a resident grandmother. I gladly moved in, accompanied Mohamed to mosque and shared child care with him. With this experience, God made sure I couldn't harbor prejudice against Muslims, either.

Then, with the birth of my granddaughter Ava in 2015, God added more insurance against any lingering prejudice about Mexicans. Ava is the daughter of a formerly undocumented Mexican immigrant. Because her other grandparents speak only Spanish, I've had to reinvigorate my rusty Spanish so I can more easily share the joys of grandparenting with them.

I adore Adam and Ava. They are a central part of my week to week life. They inherited some physical features and endearing characteristics of their fathers, two hard-working, intelligent men of integrity, love and devotion to their children.

So now, this pure-English-blooded WASP became a grandmother in a multi-ethnic, extended family that spurs me on to defending immigrants' rights, welcoming immigrants and refugees to our country, and re-committed to a ministry of creating sanctuary for all people. I love how those earlier pockets of prejudice, based on fear, suspicion, mistrust, misunderstanding and some painful experiences, have fallen away.

To conclude, no matter how good we are or try to be, we humans seem to naturally develop pockets of prejudices, based on our experiences, especially the hurtful ones. We look at someone who may have hurt or threatened us somehow and generalize it to a whole group of people who resemble that person.

Thankfully, I found that the reverse is true as well. If you love a Muslim or a Mexican or a Whomever, you look fondly on those that resemble your beloved. And then, the fear and prejudices melt away, while you get to know more about them, their culture and stories.

Part of creating sanctuary is naming our prejudices and working through them so they don't taint the work we do together to make all of ours and our neighbors' lives more just, open, free and loving. God will help us, in ways we can't imagine. Gracias por escucharme. Thank you for listening to me.

## Congregation Wide Communications

- December 2016 Newsletter - The Pine Tree

### A Word from Penny

On Sunday November 27th, I met with the Ministry of Service and Justice (MSJ) and some of their partners. There were 25 people present. The meeting was focused on what social justice might look like at CCSM given our new political reality. I had planned to meet with them in January as they had a desire to move from service into more areas of justice, and also a desire to work more closely in alignment with some of the issues I have been working on. However, given the current circumstances, I asked that we meet sooner. I began by asking people what they were most concerned about in the coming year. They listed a number of things: Immigration, Environment/Climate Change, Education, LGBT Rights, Protection of Women's Rights, Health Care, War, Violence, Hate Crimes/ i.e. Muslims, Racism, Relationship with World Leaders, Housing, Homeless, Inequality Gap. We also talked about what internal work we needed to do, how we needed to change, and how we needed to ready ourselves for the days ahead.

Then we moved on to what some of our responses might be. A lot of ideas surfaced. I then shared some of my ideas and we came to consensus as a group. Here are three responses we want to put in place in the early months of 2017:1. Deepen our relationships with the Muslim community, starting with the Muslim Garden School. Organize a potluck with their families and ours, sharing a meal and getting to know each other. Abeer, head of MGS, is very excited about this. Stay tuned for the date.

2. In February, delve into our internal work by exploring together our own unconscious biases and the racism that is part of the air we breathe. The group committed to being a part of this educational series and to encouraging others to do so.

3. The group also was very interested in exploring the new sanctuary movement. I brought some information on this movement that the UCC has recommitted to. The new administration will probably move on immigration legislation very quickly, particularly in rescinding the DACA executive order, which will leave many dreamers (including a lot of CSM students) vulnerable to deportation. The group was unanimous in wanting to explore this further.

Rev. Deb Lee, who leads the Human Integrity Movement, will provide an informational session on the Sanctuary Movement on January 8th following the church service.

## **Press Release - CCSM and UU Congregation declare Sanctuary**

**For immediate release:**

### **TWO NORTH CENTRAL SAN MATEO CONGREGATIONS PLEDGE SANCTUARY FOR VULNERABLE NEIGHBORS**

In separate but simultaneous votes on Sunday February 26<sup>th</sup> the Congregational Church of San Mateo (151-14) and The Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo (63-6) approved resolutions to provide physical refuge for those facing deportation orders. With overwhelming support, the congregations moved to adopt Sanctuary Status in response to the current administration's policy proposals to target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants. These are the first two congregations on the peninsula to offer physical sanctuary on *religious property*, supported by a growing coalition of multi-faith communities.

In alignment with their beliefs and traditions, CCSM and UUSM are joining with other faith communities across the country as part of the New Sanctuary Movement that call them to protect and stand with immigrants facing detention and deportation.

"Our Unitarian Universalist principles call us to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people; to seek justice, equity, and compassion in human relations, and to create world community with peace, liberty and justice for all. We commit our values to action as we work with other people of faith and moral conscience congruent with these principles and this purpose. Deportation of our neighbors and the breaking up of immigrant families in our communities are among the most compelling social justice issues of our time. Standing together on the side of love, our faith communities can make a real difference." --the Rev. Ben Meyers, minister of the Unitarian Universalists of San Mateo

Each week we gather in our beautiful sanctuary to remember who we are as a people of faith who follow the teachings of Jesus. For us, providing refuge means opening that sanctuary as a "safe place" to those who are an integral part of our community, and providing a haven for families to stay together." --The Rev. Dr. G. Penny Nixon, senior minister of the Congregational Church of San Mateo

Revs. Meyers and Nixon are also active in encouraging and supporting the City of San Mateo becoming a Sanctuary City and work with the Peninsula Solidarity Network, an interfaith collaboration organized to address social justice issues at the local level.

**Contact:** Rev. Ben Meyers [510-367-3789](tel:510-367-3789); Rev. Dr. G. Penny Nixon, [415-269-2259](tel:415-269-2259) ;  
Jamie Dedeoglou [650 619 5794](tel:650-619-5794)

\*\*\*End\*\*\*

2/28/2017

**Providing Sanctuary - Framework for Organizing Volunteers**

(Mike will provide final copy)