

Excerpted in its entirety from the RAC website

On March 30, 2017, the [URJ adopted a resolution on Protecting Individuals at Risk of Deportation from the U.S.](#) The [Central Conference of American Rabbis \(CCAR\)](#) adopted the [resolution](#) soon thereafter. As the resolution states:

- “Some congregations, after serious discussion within the congregation and with legal counsel, have decided to offer temporary physical shelter to undocumented immigrants facing deportation, recognizing the legal risks of their action. In his challenge to King David, the prophet Nathan offers an exemplary biblical model for confronting a state authority that wields its power unjustly and abusively. To a show of might, Nathan responds with rights, with truth.
- The Union for Reform Judaism celebrates the many ways in which Reform congregations are responding to fix what is broken in the U.S. immigration system and to support undocumented immigrants who are in need [and] recommends 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.”

Background and Jewish Values Regarding the Protection of Undocumented Immigrants Fearing Deportation

Background

- Throughout our history, Reform Movement Congregations have acted as safe-havens for those seeking refuge from persecution and deportation. In the 1980s, congregations provided temporary shelter (also known as sanctuary) primarily to Central Americans at risk of deportation. As the Union for Reform Judaism stated in a 1985 resolution:
 - We are instructed in the Holiness Code (Lev. 19:33) to take to heart the lessons of our own history by treating aliens 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." Judaism affirms the supreme value of human life and the equal dignity of every human being. The prophets of Israel bade us to pursue justice, seek peace, and build a society of loving-kindness among all of God's creatures...

- Though some of the underlying issues from 1985 and now remain the same, today we face new challenges in addressing the flaws in our immigration system and the 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States.
- [The Obama administration was among the most aggressive in deporting undocumented immigrants](#). At the same time, President Obama created programs including the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA), intended to provide some protected status for key constituencies while prioritizing the deportation of people who pose a higher risk to the U.S. More than 750,000 undocumented immigrants are currently enrolled in the DACA program.
- The increase in immigration enforcement activity since the Trump Administration took office has instilled new levels of fear into the undocumented immigrant community.

Jewish Values

- 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.

Providing Sanctuary for Immigrants Facing Deportation

The concept of “sanctuary” congregations has many definitions and applications. In the 1980s, Reform Movement congregations provided sanctuary primarily to central Americans at risk of deportation. As the Union for Reform Judaism stated in a 1985 [resolution](#):

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Thousands of men, women, and children are fleeing oppressing, torture, and murder and are seeking a haven in the United States and Canada... In response to this situation, hundreds of churches and synagogues have offered "sanctuary" to Central Americans fleeing violence and oppression. The concept of "sanctuary" embodies various actions, including legal assistance, material support, financial support, public advocacy and education, and/or temporary physical shelter.

Though many of the underlying issues then and now remain the same, today we are facing different challenges, and the applicable laws in each state also differ. Congregations that seek to declare themselves places of sanctuary should do so in consultation with their counsel and in awareness of local and state laws concerning immigration and the role of law enforcement. It is also best to coordinate with local immigrant advocacy and resettlement groups like [HIAS](#), [LIRS](#) and others.

On February 9th, the RAC hosted a webinar called Learning About the Sanctuary Movement for URJ rabbis, lay leaders and congregants around the country. The webinar featured experts Liza Lieberman from HIAS, Barbara Weinstein from the RAC, Senior Rabbi Jonathan Roos from Temple Sinai in Washington, DC, Senior Pastor Rev. Robin Hynicka from Arch Street United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Ryan Lilienthal from Ryan Stark Lilienthal Law Offices and Richard Morales from PICO. To watch that webinar, click [here](#).

A [webinar](#) from late last year, featuring Rabbi Jonathan Klein of United For Economic Justice (CLUE) in LA, discussed the importance of providing sanctuary in our communities.

A recent [New York Times article](#) outlines the role some houses of worship are playing as sanctuaries.

A [Guardian article](#) outlines how religious groups are protecting undocumented immigrants facing deportation.

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) outlines [your rights](#) as they pertain to interactions with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

For congregations that are looking to get involved in the Sanctuary Movement, here is a [memo](#) on tax-exempt organizational law to review.

Several national organizations have resources on providing sanctuary, and you can view those resources below. This list will be updated with additional resources as they become available.

- [The interfaith Immigration Coalition](#)
- [Church World Service](#)
- [Unitarian Universalist Association](#)
- [The Sanctuary Movement](#)
- [Demos and Latino Justice PRLDEF](#)
- [Groundswell Movement](#)
- [Catholic Legal Immigration Network. Inc.](#)
- [Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law](#)

Several URJ Congregations have already declared themselves Sanctuary Congregations, and the materials they used to make such a decision are linked below.

- [Temple Sinai, Washington D.C.](#)
- [Congregation B'nai Israel, Sacramento](#)