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**A SANCTUARY WORLD:  
UNDERSTANDING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE  
OF THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT**

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1 December 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for all who helped contribute and give support throughout this experience.

Many special thanks to my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, for being a constant source of advice and guidance and giving so much of your time. Thank you to my readers, Dr. Kristen Wallitsch and Dr. Fedja Buric, for their wonderful lessons and insight. I would like to thank all of the faculty that has encouraged my curiosity and learning, helping me gain the skills necessary to complete this thesis, as well as, special thanks to Dr. Dominique Clayton and Dr. Hoon Choi for their continuous encouragement and motivation.

Additionally, I would also like to express my genuine appreciation for all the participants who agreed to speak with me, share their experiences with sanctuary movements, and point me in the right direction. This thesis would not have been possible without their meaningful contributions. Thank you to Theresa Butler, Julie Driscoll, John Fife, Jim Flynn, Felix Garza, Joan Gregory, Ricardo Gomez, David Horvath, David Hulefeld, Raphael Schweri, Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

Finally, thank you to my friends and family, who are a backbone of support and inspiration for me.

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## ABSTRACT

In the late 1970s through the 1980s, sanctuary movements emerged in the United States to support and provide sanctuary for immigrants and asylum seekers without a legal status of U.S. citizenship. This movement has its roots in the ancient church tradition of offering sanctuary to people accused of crimes. Religious leaders offered protection against the government in the name of their beliefs. It is a cycle that has often been repeated throughout history from the medieval European era to abolitionists helping runaway enslaved people in the United States to the contemporary movements existing today. This project explores and analyzes three past sanctuary movements and includes an oral history of contemporary sanctuary activists in an effort to gain an understanding of the past and present of sanctuary. Through an analysis of diverse sources, I offer up my own understanding of sanctuary its current context: an adaptable refuge (whether it be church, home, city, or country) providing hospitality, healing, and protection, and as a call to action against injustices to achieve the necessary reform and healing as a path to move forward.

## INTRODUCTION

We see Sanctuary as the umbrella that covers all of us from the storm, and the womb to birth a new world. We are committed to the work of building not just a Sanctuary City, but a Sanctuary world.<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, formally organized in 2007, issued an original statement in response to the 2016 U.S. presidential election and the following inauguration of President Trump.<sup>2</sup> The statement alludes to the Trump campaign’s depiction of immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border as a danger to the United States and the then-presidential candidate’s pledge, “I’m gonna build a wall.” The organization also references Trump’s executive order created within his first week of office to redefine “secure communities” and target any declared sanctuary jurisdictions with threats to withhold federal funding from any school, city, county, or state that supported public sanctuary measures.<sup>3</sup> In direct response of these statements and actions, the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia asserts a new vision of “Sanctuary” as an opportunity to reimagine the purpose and the future of the movement. Hundreds of other congregations, advocacy groups, networks, and schools followed the organization’s recommitment to the sanctuary movement in 2017 and a second wave of the New Sanctuary Movement spread throughout the country.

The policies and political rhetoric that fueled the first wave of the New Sanctuary Movement began in 2005 when the controversial Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act, otherwise known as the “Sensenbrenner Bill” was passed through the U.S. House of Representatives. The bill ultimately did not pass through the Senate as it garnered

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<sup>1</sup> “2017 Statement on Sanctuary,” New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, 2017, accessed July 31, 2021, <https://www.sanctuaryphiladelphia.org/who-we-are-new-sanctuary/2017-statement-sanctuary/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Donald J. Trump, “Executive Order: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States,” issued January 25, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-enhancing-public-safety-interior-united-states/>.

large public criticism towards the manner in which the bill linked immigrants from Central and South America crossing through the Southern border with the idea of terrorism.<sup>4</sup> For sanctuary activists, the bill also included penalties for any people providing aid to undocumented immigrants. In the late 1970s to 1980s, sanctuary networks had formed to offer sanctuary in places of worship to mostly Central American immigrants who were blocked from gaining asylum in the United States. Nearly two decades had passed since the beginning of the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, but this new crisis reinvigorated the sanctuary activist network. The backlash to this bill was swift and while it did not pass, failing to receive enough votes in the Senate, the proposed policy and the rhetoric used to garner support, sparked new discussion amongst sanctuary activists about the present and future of the movement.

In 2006, a sanctuary case brought national attention to what would officially be labeled as the New Sanctuary Movement. Elvira Arellano, a Mexican immigrant, sought sanctuary with her seven-year-old son inside Adalberto United Methodist Church in Chicago to escape deportation.<sup>5</sup> After being arrested in 2002 at a workplace raid, Arellano had been on probation for three years, awaiting a scheduled date for deportation. She allied herself with faith-based advocacy groups and decided to make her case public. Her story drew the attention of a new wave of sanctuary activists. Numerous high-profile magazines featured articles referencing Elvira Arellano's story and the official organization of the New Sanctuary Movement. Ultimately, when Arellano left the sanctuary of the church that provided her safe haven for about a year to be a part of an immigration reform rally in Los Angeles, she was arrested and deported.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Grace Yukich, *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26-28.

<sup>5</sup> Vikki Ortiz, "Immigration activist Arellano allowed to remain in United States for another year." *Chicago Tribune*, March 15, 2017, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-elvira-arellano-ice-update-20170315-story.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Arellano's story reflects the cases of how many undocumented immigrants are seeking sanctuary today. While the Central American Sanctuary movement often directly accepted immigrants crossing the border into churches or places of worship, people now seeking sanctuary are often in the United States for much longer, living and working in the country sometimes for years, before they are arrested by immigration authorities. The idea of sanctuary also began evolving, as activists began to push to provide other types of support for undocumented immigrants, as well as actively working to address the more recent failures and legal issues of the immigration courts in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the Obama administration, sanctuary activists sought smaller, but still significant, legal victories, including the issuance of a "sensitive locations" memorandum, which stated that federal immigration enforcement would not occur at places of worship, schools, weddings, or public demonstrations.<sup>8</sup>

Recent sanctuary movements in the United States have arisen in the past, in response to the actions of different presidential administrations that have targeted the safety of undocumented immigrants. The Trump administration followed this pattern but has also triggered the greatest growth of sanctuary congregations and advocacy networks since the activists of the 1980s. Church World Service reports, "within months of Trump's election, the number of 'sanctuary churches' in the U.S. doubled (from 400 to 800) and by 2018 has now nearly tripled (reaching over 1,100)."<sup>9</sup> The number of individuals volunteering as part of a larger sanctuary network has also greatly increased. Not only did the number of religious sanctuary activists grow, but in the secular community many schools, cities, and states issued their

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<sup>7</sup> Yukich, *One Family Under God*, 92-119.

<sup>8</sup> John Morton, "Enforcement Actions at or Focused on Sensitive Locations," accessed January 20, 2018, <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/ero-outreach/pdf/10029.2-policy.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd Barba and Tatyana Castillo Ramos, "Sacred Resistance: The Sanctuary Movement from Reagan to Trump," (2019), accessed September 1, 2021, [https://perspectivasonline.com/downloads/sacred-resistance-the-sanctuary-movement-from-reagan-to-trump/#\\_ftnref73](https://perspectivasonline.com/downloads/sacred-resistance-the-sanctuary-movement-from-reagan-to-trump/#_ftnref73).

resistance to the action of the Trump administration by pledging their support to the undocumented community. In these instances, the definition of sanctuary starts to fluctuate and shift.

The shifts in the definition of sanctuary in this second wave of the New Sanctuary Movement typically concern what protections are actually being offered under sanctuary. For many places of worship, sanctuary refers to the act of harboring and offering shelter and protection to undocumented immigrants, as immigration officials will not enter the houses of worship to arrest the immigrants. For secular governances, sanctuary refers to laws passed to protect the identity of undocumented immigrants by not handing over their information to immigration authorities.<sup>10</sup> Sanctuary campuses often promise to protect identities, but also provide pathways of support for undocumented students. Faith-based organizations and secular advocacy organizations alike offer legal aid and support to accompany immigrants on their journey through the immigration courts.

The U.S. immigration courts are an increasingly arduous challenge as the Trump administration's restrictive immigration policies continued to build off of the country's history of excluding immigrant groups from entering the United States. There are numerous patterns in the nation's past of these restrictions from the 1880 Chinese Exclusion Act that set a standard restricting entry for people of a specific race to the Immigration Act of 1917 that restricted immigration from the Middle East and Southeast Asia and established literacy tests to the use of quotas passed in various acts that restrict immigrants' admissibility.<sup>11</sup> This pattern remains

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<sup>10</sup> Melvin Delgado, *Sanctuary Cities, Communities, and Organizations: A Nation at a Crossroads*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 107.

<sup>11</sup> "Timeline," Immigration History, June 22, 2020, <https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/>.

relevant today as recent years have seen a bout of restrictive immigration laws resulting in crises at the borders.

In 2017, President Trump signed his first version of the executive order commonly known as the “Muslim ban,” targeting foreign nationals from predominantly Muslim countries.<sup>12</sup> Later that year, former Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced plans to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, though this plan has been continuously blocked by the courts. Throughout 2017 and 2018, the administration also terminated the Temporary Protected Status designated for many Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Salvadorans seeking entry in the United States, another controversial order again blocked by litigation.<sup>13</sup> In 2018, the administration implemented a program officially called the Migrant Protection Protocols, but also known as the “Remain in Mexico” program. This policy allowed immigrants from Mexico to be immediately sent back across the border without the legal assistance to support their applications for asylum and exposing many back to the dangerous conditions they were originally attempting to flee from.<sup>14</sup> The “zero tolerance policy” issued by the U.S. Department of Justice in May of 2018 also became widely known for its effects of separating families and housing children in jail-like conditions at the border, which is still an unresolved crisis today, with reportedly around 2,100 children still separated from their families.<sup>15</sup> These policies are only a few examples of the long-lasting actions of the Trump administration that has left the safety of undocumented immigrants in question and prompts the need of the ever-growing sanctuary networks.

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<sup>12</sup> “Trump Administration Civil and Human Rights Rollbacks,” The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Accessed July 30, 2021, <https://civilrights.org/trump-rollbacks/>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Family separation the Trump administration- a timeline,” Southern Poverty Law Center (2020), Accessed July 30, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/06/17/family-separation-under-trump-administration-timeline>.

The second wave of the New Sanctuary Movement is still active today and the existing legal and human rights crises for undocumented immigrants also persist. The work of the movement is not yet done and continues to adapt to the present-day problems. For example, in late September of 2020, the First Unitarian Church in Louisville opened its doors to offer sanctuary to protestors who were avoiding curfew arrests following a grand jury's decision to not indict officers for the death of Breonna Taylor.<sup>16</sup> Protestors were able to safely gather inside the church that was surrounded by police officers. While not an example of a church offering safety to an immigrant, this example of sanctuary showcases the changing nature of sanctuary in response to different social and political movements and calls for an opportunity to examine the path sanctuary has taken to get to this present point.

#### *Past Studies of Sanctuary Movements*

Many sanctuary movements have been studied throughout history and examined to explore the historical background and purposes of these individual sanctuary movements. Several authors have examined timelines of sanctuary to understand the historical basis for these movements. Linda Rabben, an anthropologist and human rights advocate, traced the path of sanctuary through history from examples in the Bible to the political and legal challenges of the present New Sanctuary Movement in *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History*.<sup>17</sup> Another example of a broader outlook on sanctuary comes from the collection of chapters in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*

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<sup>16</sup> Shaquille Lord, "Louisville Unitarian Church offers sanctuary to protestors downtown." WLKY News (September 25, 2020). Accessed March 18, 2021, <https://www.wlky.com/article/louisville-unitarian-church-offers-sanctuary-for-protesters-downtown/34153767>.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History*, (University of Washington Press, 2016).

(2012), edited by Randy Lippert and Sean Rehaag.<sup>18</sup> The scholarly essays in this collection focus on the historical origins of the sanctuary movement and provide numerous examples of sanctuary practices in the United States, as well as examples of sanctuary movements that have occurred in Europe and Canada.

Specific examples of the more prominent sanctuary movements have also been studied by individual scholars. Several scholars have examined the prominence of sanctuary law in the Middle Ages and studied the emergence of sanctuary in late medieval England relating to canon law, including a work by Karl Shoemaker called *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages*.<sup>19</sup> Shoemaker draws from primary texts and laws to understand the basis of sanctuary and to analyze its changes throughout the history of medieval England. Within the larger picture of sanctuary law in medieval England, scholars have delved deeper into examining the specific ways sanctuary was enabled and supported by both canon law and secular law.<sup>20</sup>

The sanctuary movement in recent years that has garnered the most scholarly attention is the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. Journalists covered the unfolding of the events, especially the famous “Sanctuary Trials” of several founders and leaders of the movement, including Jim Corbett and John Fife.<sup>21</sup> In the 1990s, academic scholars examined many different aspects of the Sanctuary Movement, beyond its origins in Tucson, Arizona and explored how the movement began to spread geographically throughout the western regions of

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<sup>18</sup>Randy Lippert and Sean Rehaag, *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500*, (Bronx: Fordham University Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> A fuller summary of these authors’ works will be included in Chapter One: An Understanding of Sanctuary in the Past. These specific works are : J.H. Baker, ”The English Law of Sanctuary.” *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 2, no.6. (1990).; John Frederick Matthews, *Laying Down the Law: a Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven: Yale University, 2000); J. Charles Cox, *The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Mediaeval England*, (Kessinger, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Ann Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); Miriam Davidson, *Convictions of the Heart* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988).

the United States and then throughout the entire country.<sup>22</sup> These in-depth examinations discussed the growth of transnational advocacy networks, as well as the individual actions of local activists. The more recent nature of the New Sanctuary Movement, particularly the second wave, indicates the wide array of future possibilities for the study of this topic.

The trend amongst the previously existing studies on sanctuary movements is that they tend to primarily on the historical and religious events that led to the need for sanctuary. These movements are also mostly viewed through the lens of the individual time period or as they occur in a chronological timeline. Due to the need for privacy to protect the identities of those seeking sanctuary, the personal information of individuals is not often shared, unless the individual chooses to take their story public, at the risk of their own safety. The previous scholarship on the idea of sanctuary movements still allows for growth and expansion for future studies, especially focusing on the motivations and significance of offering sanctuary, because the study of sanctuary is constantly changing as movements emerge throughout different contexts. In this project, I combine an understanding of both the historical context of sanctuary and pair it with an oral history of sanctuary activists today to offer an understanding of how sanctuary practices adapt and shift and what it looks like in today's context.

### *Further Questions to be Explored*

What will the future of sanctuary look like? In this thesis, I will explore several questions as we look at a past so rich of sanctuary history and look to a future where the importance of

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<sup>22</sup> A fuller summary of these authors' works will be included in Chapter One: An Understanding of Sanctuary in the Past. These specific works are: Mario T. Garcia, *Father Luis Olivares, a Biography: Faith Politics and the Origins of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2018); Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Hilary Cunningham, *God and Cesar at the Río Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

sanctuary seems unlikely to dissipate. How has the idea of sanctuary evolved throughout time to the point where it is today? What are the connections between sanctuary movements of the past and the New Sanctuary Movement of today? What draws someone into the sanctuary movement even when involvement comes with some personal risk? How are the concepts of sanctuary and justice related to each other? What is the ultimate purpose of sanctuary? This investigation necessitates an understanding of sanctuary in the past and of sanctuary today and relies on comparative analysis and an oral history of sanctuary activists to achieve these goals.

The first chapter, “An Understanding of Sanctuary in the Past,” offers a comparative analysis of three historical sanctuary movements. There are many examples of past sanctuary movements to examine, but this exploration chooses to focus on three important periods of evolution in the history of sanctuary. The first movement discussed is that of sanctuary practices in medieval England, roughly from 500 CE to 1500 CE. In the Middle Ages, sanctuary practices were incorporated into society and upheld by the Church and state. The exploration delves into the rise and fall of the popularity of offering sanctuary. The Underground Railroad movement in the United States is also explored through the work of abolitionists who offered sanctuary to enslaved peoples and as an example of a movement formed through religious beliefs and convictions of equality. The third period is the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s. Up until the creation of the New Sanctuary Movement, the 1980s movement was the most recent and also widely known throughout the world. The interfaith network advocated for and offered protection to immigrants seeking asylum in the United States. After the historical origins of each individual movement is explored, further analysis will showcase the overlapping elements that have developed between the three movements and reflect the evolution of the idea of sanctuary.

Chapter Two, “An Understanding of Sanctuary Today,” discusses the New Sanctuary Movement and the recent developments of sanctuary in the past fifteen years. The timeliness of this movement and of recent events allows for a unique opportunity to hear directly from activists who are involved with sanctuary, whether it be in congregations, cities, schools, or secular organizations. Common themes of sanctuary realized from a compiled oral history of activists will be examined to map a path of what sanctuary currently looks like. After reaching out to a diverse range of activists and scholars involved in the movement through either a secular or faith-based lens, I assembled an oral history with twelve participants across the United States who agreed to speak with me and share their insights into sanctuary. The participants are: Theresa Butler, Julie Driscoll, John Fife, Jim Flynn, Felix Garza, Joan Gregory, Ricardo Gomez, David Horvath, David Hulefeld, Raphael Schweri, Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. Their stories and connections to the movement are explored throughout the chapter as I continue to reflect on the purpose of sanctuary.

In the third chapter, “An Understanding of Sanctuary in the Future,” I present a guideline for what sanctuary might appear as in the future. Recent social and political movements showcase how sanctuary can be utilized in new manners or in response to different crises. The analysis conducted of past and present movements leads to conclusions about how the idea of sanctuary will continue to change and adapt. Chapter Three examines several key questions about the future of sanctuary and allows for an opportunity to explore some elements of sanctuary that have yet to be discussed. In response to the question of how the New Sanctuary Movement can continue forward, the answer lies in the ideas of sanctuary through accompaniment and advocacy for immigrant justice reform. The second question concerns the

possibility of sanctuary cities and explore potential models of past cities. The final question this chapter explores is: what is a sanctuary world?

This exploration uncovers the central elements of sanctuary's ultimate purpose and possibilities in a world where sanctuary is currently needed as an alternative form of justice. An analysis of historical movements and an oral history compiled from people directly involved in the movement today reveals that the practice of sanctuary is constantly adapting to reflect the current needs of a community affected by unjust systems. This understanding of a sanctuary world that can become a more just world and a world where sanctuary will eventually not be needed is ultimately what drives my conclusions as I reflect on the purposes and contexts of the sanctuary movements of the past and of today. After examining the multitude of ways sanctuary can be defined, I offer up my own understanding of sanctuary: an adaptable refuge (whether it be church, home, city, or country) providing hospitality, healing, and protection, and a call to action against injustices to achieve the necessary reform and healing as a path to move forward.

## CHAPTER ONE

### AN UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTUARY IN THE PAST

Giving asylum or sanctuary can be seen as one of the basic manifestations of altruistic behavior and human morality. In the face of conflict humans wander or even flee, sometimes thousands of miles from home, seeking safety among strangers who may have little apparent reason to welcome us.<sup>1</sup>

The word sanctuary first originates from the Old French *saintuaire* (sacred relic, holy thing) then derived from the Late Latin *sanctuarium* (a sacred place, shrine) which in turn originated from the Latin *sanctus* (holy).<sup>2</sup> Sanctuary typically refers to a building dedicated to the worship of God or the gods for different religious communities. The term also describes the practice of providing refuge in a consecrated space. Sanctuary's own past has developed and shaped itself through different centuries, societies, and beliefs. Examples of sanctuary have been interspersed throughout history, tied to sacred places of worship, and carried out through movements of people. The key to understanding sanctuary today lies in its past. While there are vast examples of sanctuary practices, this chapter will focus on three main examples of sanctuary movements in the past that build upon one another to create a layered understanding of the origins and theological basis of the contemporary sanctuary movement. This exploration begins with the history of sanctuary in medieval England, offering an insight into the beginnings of practices upheld by canon law and intersecting with secular law. Next, I consider the abolitionists who offered sanctuary on the Underground Railroad and provided a basis for an early sanctuary movement in the United States formed through religious beliefs and convictions

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger: The Past, Present and Future of Sanctuary* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 44.

<sup>2</sup> "Sanctuary," Oxford Learner's Dictionary.com, Accessed March 20, 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/sanctuary>.

of equality. Then I move on to explore the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s which features an expansive interfaith network advocating for feasible policy and legal change. These three cases map out a formative background of sanctuary that can be summarized in five main concepts: sanctuary emerging as an alternative form of justice, religious beliefs as a motivator for offering sanctuary, the growth of sanctuary as an interfaith network, the conflict between sanctuary and secular law, and the practice of sanctuary transforming into civil initiative.

## Medieval England and Sanctuary

### *The Early Beginnings of Sanctuary*

Sanctuary is often associated with the Christian faith and its presence through medieval Christendom. However, examples of sanctuary practices are found throughout many early traditions. The ancient Greeks and Romans both considered certain sites to be sanctuaries for fugitives escaping crime. Temples built in honor of gods and emperors proved to be sacred, inviolable spaces.<sup>3</sup> Still, it was not until the Middle Ages that sanctuary practices were commonly incorporated into society. While the period of the Middle Ages covers roughly 1000 years from 500 CE to 1500 CE, the High Middle Ages between 1001-1300, as well as the Late Middle Ages showcase the rise of sanctuary practices domesticated by secular law, soon followed by the collapse of sanctuary practices in medieval England.

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, church sanctuary was formally codified through the Theodosian Law Code of 392.<sup>4</sup> Previously, Catholic Church councils had

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<sup>3</sup> Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 49.

<sup>4</sup> John Frederick Matthews, *Laying down the Law: a Study of the Theodosian Code* (New Haven: Yale University, 2000).

already discussed rules for sanctuary and had preached on the sanctity of church grounds. One of the earliest proclamations of the right to provide sanctuary came in 344 CE when the Council of Sardica officially recognized sanctuary in churches, but did not proclaim any right to asylum in churches.<sup>5</sup> The Church sought to strengthen their position on sanctuary by detailing what qualifies as sacred grounds. Historian John Charles Cox records the changes in law that provided the basis for sanctuary in the Middle Ages. He says, “the Council of Orange, 441, ordered that no fugitive seeking sanctuary should be surrendered, and in 511 the Synod of Orleans extended the privilege to the bishop’s residence and to thirty-five paces beyond the walls of the building.”<sup>6</sup> These basic rules set to establish the domain of sanctuary to include not just the church building, but the consecrated space surrounding it. Pope Leo I discussed the purpose of sanctuary as a means to allow sanctuary seekers the opportunity to seek out spiritual discipline. Bishops could then serve as advocates and intermediaries for those claiming sanctuary.<sup>7</sup> The original intent behind these decisions was to provide mercy, not punishment, for the fugitives who came seeking help at the church’s door.

Biblical passages help provide precedent for these rulings. A basis for sanctuary is found in the law the Lord gave Moses. “Whoever strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death. But if he did not lie in wait for him, but God let him fall into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place to which he may flee” (Exodus 21:12-13). This law details an exception for those who may have committed a crime unintentionally. With an exception clearly stated, the next precedent is visible in the Book of Joshua when the Lord commands for cities of refuge to be appointed as a specific allowance for someone who may have unknowingly committed a crime against another.

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<sup>5</sup>Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 56.

<sup>6</sup> J. Charles Cox, *The Sanctuaries and Sanctuary Seekers of Mediaeval England*, (Kessinger, 2010), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Siebold, “Sanctuary,” *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* 4, (1937): 535.

Six cities were named: Kedesh in Galilee, Shechem in Ephraim, Hebron in Judah, Bezer in Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golan in Bashan. “These were the cities designated for all the people of Israel and for the stranger sojourning among them, that anyone who killed a person without intent could flee there, so that he might not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, till he stood before the congregation” (Joshua 20:9). These two examples show a willingness to offer sanctuary based on the intent, or lack thereof, for a crime committed. The six cities in Israel offered not only a place of refuge from the “avenger of blood,” but a place to stand before the congregation and seek fair judgment for the crime before being able to leave the city in peace.

Churches in medieval England offered that same chance to fugitives who were hoping for fair judgment from an intermediary instead of a blood feud. Lawlessness in medieval Christendom reigned supreme throughout the secular legal system. While the king was the lawgiver, the time period in the Early Middle Ages was so tumultuous that he was often absent or in conflict with the local nobility.<sup>8</sup> No stable criminal justice system existed. As such, blood feuds occurred between families seeking the right to carry out vengeance, sometimes through violent punishment or death. Rabben states, “the church served as an intermediary between the fugitive and the offended group, helping to determine what punishment or compensation would be levied.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of backing private vengeance, the church stepped in to offer the opportunity for repentance and reform.

### *Domestication of Sanctuary Law Through the High Middle Ages*

The High Middle Ages ushered in by the Norman Invasion of William the Conqueror struck a new tone for sanctuary in England. After the military victory at the Battle of Hastings,

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<sup>8</sup> Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

King William reportedly stated that a church should be built on those very grounds and be named Battle Abbey.<sup>10</sup> The Battle Abbey charters stated a speech that the king made regarding sanctuary privileges people could claim at the abbey. In the speech, the king specified that any thieves, murderers, or other criminals should be allowed to flee to churches and then be released to freedom.<sup>11</sup>

These charters have significant importance, despite the fact that William the Conqueror was not making a revolutionary or unusual statement about sanctuary and the fact that the authenticity of these charters is highly disputed. After all, the idea that a felon who was deemed guilty could escape punishment by claiming sanctuary inside of a church was by that point widely accepted, and in fact, encouraged, by the Crown. These famed Battle Abbey charters have also been acknowledged as forgeries, written by monks at the Abbey hoping to benefit from their affiliation with the former king. Historian Karl Shoemaker explains, “The forged charter evoked a pleasing confluence of royal and ecclesiastical power, reminding its audience that good Christian kings looked favorably on sanctuary protections for fugitive criminals.”<sup>12</sup>

The importance of this charter lies in the fact that sanctuary was now so widely accepted that the Crown sought to use it to uphold their image. This acceptance created the appearance of a strong alliance with the Church and many kings sought to affirm their reputation as a sanctuary-respecting king. A forged charter was given credibility with its references of invoking sanctuary. In fact, sanctuary-respecting kings could now begin to domesticate the law for their own advantages. In 1160, King Henry II implemented massive reforms of English criminal

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime in the Middle Ages, 400-1500*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Alfred Cronne and R H C Davis, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 62.

<sup>12</sup> Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 9.

procedure, including sanctuary law. These new reforms instructed any person seeking sanctuary to identify themselves to royal officials who would document the alleged felony the seeker had committed.<sup>13</sup> These policies created an official record of anyone who had committed a felony and were now seeking refuge inside of a church, thus allowing the Crown to benefit from this system as they monitor their subjects who admitted to a felony.

As the secular law of sanctuary evolved, two categories were created: general and special. The general privilege consisted of the common practice of seeking sanctuary in any churches, but now special privileges could be granted by a royal or papal grant, demonstrating the power authorities began to hold over the practice of sanctuary.<sup>14</sup> Any person seeking sanctuary could continue to claim refuge in any church after identifying themselves to an official, however a new time limit was set. After 40 days, the fugitive's sanctuary privileges would expire. If the fugitive stayed in the church and refused to leave past the 40 days, the authorities would not enter the consecrated grounds. The law, instead, demanded that the fugitive be starved out and anyone who helped the fugitive at that point would be fined.<sup>15</sup> At the end of that time limit, the fugitive had a choice to surrender to the authorities, make an escape to a different church to claim sanctuary again, or in the case of a felony, abjure the realm.

Abjuration of the realm was a wholly unique process that set a large break apart from canon law. Through this process, accused felons in sanctuary would be able to leave the realm and be exiled. A coroner would be chosen to see the felon in sanctuary, record his confession in the presence of witnesses, and then require the felon to swear an oath to leave the country by

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<sup>13</sup> Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> J. H. Baker, "The English Law of Sanctuary," *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 2, no. 6. (1990):9, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0956618x00000788>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

ship and never return.<sup>16</sup> The fugitive's journey to the port was often protected by a passport in the form of a wooden cross and a group of constables who escorted them to the port safely. After leaving the country, the fugitive would be assumed dead, and all their personal possessions were given away. With the new time limits, abjuration oaths became a common feature of sanctuary. For those choosing to leave England and never return, it often provided a better alternative than being put on trial and potentially losing their lives. For the Crown, abjuration provided the benefit of identifying felons for their crimes, removing them from England entirely, and claiming their personal possessions. Sanctuary and abjuration worked hand in hand throughout the rest of the High Middle Ages.

Another element of sanctuary throughout this time period were the special privileges appointed to certain communities or buildings on a case-by-case level by the Church. Some of these communities thrived near places like Westminster, Clerkenwell, and St. Martin's-le-Grand in London where there was very little regulation and consequences. Inside these communities some sanctuary seekers would continue illegal activities and use the church as a base, as they could not be arrested while inside.<sup>17</sup> The use of special sanctuaries and the process of abjuration allowed for many felons who admitted to a crime the ability to not face any legal repercussions at all. These changes to the sanctuary process began to spark uneasiness about the efficacy of the practice.

### *The Fall of Sanctuary Throughout the Late Middle Ages*

While at first the process of sanctuary and abjuration seemed to work hand in hand with both the cooperation of the Church and the Crown, tensions involving sanctuary started to arise

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<sup>16</sup> Baker, "The English Law of Sanctuary," 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

in the Late Middle Ages. Public opinion about the integrity of sanctuary had darkened due to the lack of punishment people often received for their crimes. In places that were scarcely regulated, many fugitives continued to stay inside the churches, and some continued to uphold their criminal activities from the safety of the consecrated space.<sup>18</sup>

Both the Church and the Crown also started to grow discontent from the way sanctuary had progressed in the past two centuries. Indeed, a remarkable shift from the perspective of canonists began to signal the downfall of sanctuary in common law. While the Crown had now established sanctuary as their jurisdiction, medieval canonists sought to clarify their position on sanctuary and the dominion they professed to uphold. The focus of the later medieval canon law emphasizes the Church's authority to impose its own sanctuary laws, regardless of the Crown's position.<sup>19</sup> The original stances of the Church focusing on the opportunity for mercy and penance no longer appeared to be the priority. Instead, the Church hoped to combat the increasing dominion of sanctuary by secular law in order to present their own rulings.

The papacy's application of sanctuary discussed specific instances where sanctuary would not be allowed. For example, in 1317, Pope John XXII took the firm position that any heretics would not be able to seek the protection of sanctuary.<sup>20</sup> Pope Innocent instructed that *servi* (slaves) were also not underneath the protection of sanctuary and should not be allowed to stay in sanctuary, a stance that was also grounded in Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Pope Clement V also ordered a bishop to remove a criminal who was guilty of homicide from sanctuary in 1310.<sup>22</sup> Each of these

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<sup>18</sup> Baker, "The English Law of Sanctuary," 10.

<sup>19</sup> Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 152.

<sup>20</sup> Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 160.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

instances showed examples of the Church's shifting stance on the privileges of sanctuary.

Heretics, slaves, and murderers were no longer falling under the narrowing branch of protection.

These manufactured limitations on sanctuary also reflected the feeling of the Crown who wished to deny traitors the ability to claim sanctuary. During the 15th century and the Wars of the Roses, Westminster Abbey became a key place of sanctuary for those trapped in the political conflict. After the Tudor kings rose to power, they hoped to eliminate the ability of those they deemed traitors to claim sanctuary in the churches and to escape punishment.<sup>23</sup> Kings Henry VII and VIII put their plan to limit the bounds of sanctuary into action through a series of laws. In 1534, a law excluded traitors from gaining refuge and in 1540, any serious felons were excluded as well.<sup>24</sup>

As King Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and ended the chartered privileges of the major abbeys, the 1540 statute allowed for parish churches to remain as sanctuaries. The time limit of 40 days remained, but the Act of 1530 had ended abjuration from the realm, blocking any options for people to safely flee the country.<sup>25</sup> Henry VIII decided to designate eight cities in England to serve as privileged places for people that chose to abjure, similar to the six cities in the Bible named for refuge. In Britain, the eight designated places were: Wells, Westminster, Manchester, Northampton, Norwich, York, Derby, and Lancaster.<sup>26</sup> However, abjuration to these cities was rare as the Act of 1530 had also set extreme limits on what types of crimes would disqualify a person from abjuring.

By the end of the 16th century, sanctuary was fading away from both the Church and the

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<sup>23</sup> Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 67.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Teresa Field. "Biblical Influences on the Medieval and Early Modern English Law of Sanctuary," *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 2, no. 9 (1991): 225, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0956618x0000123x>.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

Crown. In 1591, Pope Gregory XIV issued a papal bull effectively abolishing sanctuary within canon law.<sup>27</sup> Parliament also issued a final statement. Baker explains that, “In 1624 the whole institution of sanctuary was swept away in England by the simple enactment that 'no sanctuary or privilege of sanctuary be hereafter admitted or allowed in any case.'”<sup>28</sup> What once had been a principal practice in British society was now effectively banished.

Sanctuary in medieval England had begun as a way to offer people a chance for a fair punishment and penance. Driven by ancient traditions and Scripture, churches were seen as sacred grounds to protect against the dangers of vengeance. The Early Middle Ages proved there was a need for sanctuary due to the lawlessness and blood feuds that were pervasive in society. Churches then offered up a different alternative to solve feuds without violent punishments. As sanctuary grew within England, people’s perceptions of it changed as well. By the High Middle Ages, kings were now realizing the importance of appearing to the public as a sanctuary-respecting king with the power to legislate sanctuary. New reforms changed the process of sanctuary significantly by allowing guilty people to admit their crimes and then flee the country. Others were able to manipulate the system and stay inside churches or privileged sanctuary spaces while still committing crimes. At first, this system worked for the Church and Crown until certain abuses had begun too much. Both tried to exercise their authority by restricting the powers of sanctuary before getting rid of it entirely. Ultimately, the legacy of this time period portrays a tarnished version of sanctuary. By the end of its time, the perception of people who had entered sanctuary was that of criminals who were able to abuse and manipulate the system to escape punishment, a perception that still exists today.

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<sup>27</sup> Shoemaker, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Baker, “The English Law of Sanctuary,” 13.

## Abolition and Sanctuary in the United States

### *Quakers and Sanctuary*

While no longer accommodated by secular law in England, a new concept of sanctuary became the dream for those pursuing religious freedom. Different religious groups began suffering persecution after the removal of sanctuary protections in England during the Protestant Reformation. The Quakers, a group well-known in the United States today for its abolitionist work, originated in England before fleeing to find their own sanctuary. The Religious Society of Friends (RSF), commonly known as Quakers, was founded by George Fox and Margaret Fell. However, in the mid-1600s during the English Civil War, members of the RSF were prohibited from preaching and faced punishment if caught and found guilty. Historian Willis Duke Weatherford says that “Friends who persisted in such activities were arrested, imprisoned, whipped, banished, and even executed. During the sect’s first 50 years, some 15,000 Quakers were imprisoned, and about 450 died in American prisons.”<sup>29</sup> While being unwelcome in England, many Quakers sought sanctuary in the American colonies. Not all colonies were friendly to Quakers, with many Friends continuing to be persecuted by the Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.<sup>30</sup> In 1691, William Penn, a Quaker who had suffered repeated imprisonment, founded the colony of Pennsylvania as a sanctuary for religious dissidents. Pennsylvania became a thriving community for Quakers free to practice their faith.<sup>31</sup>

Equality is a theme that is central throughout the Quaker’s beliefs. Fox began preaching about a faith where individuals can experience an “Inner Light” or the voice of God speaking

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<sup>29</sup> Linda Rabben, “The Quaker Sanctuary Tradition †.” *Religions* 9, no. 5 (2018):2 <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9050155>.

<sup>30</sup> Willis Duke Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro: an Historical Study from Early Slave Days to the Present*, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1957), 50.

<sup>31</sup> Rabben, “The Quaker Sanctuary Tradition,” 2.

through them.<sup>32</sup> This key belief suggested the idea that anyone could experience God without the aid of a priest and that all people contained spiritual equality. During meetings, any person could speak if they felt the call by God. This stance of spiritual equality also prompted women to make up 45 percent of the early Quaker movement as they were free to speak during meetings if they felt called to do so.<sup>33</sup> Founder Margaret Fell preached about the important role of women speaking in Scripture to advocate for women's religious leadership based on the argument of spiritual equality and the right of all humans to possess the Inner Light.<sup>34</sup>

However, while Quakers were insistent on the spiritual equality of all people, a unified stance against slavery and for abolition was slow to take place. There were some Quakers who owned slaves and supported the slave trade throughout the 17th century; it was not until 1758 that an official statement was put forth at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to denounce the owning of slaves.<sup>35</sup> Nearly twenty years later, a larger next step was taken as a collective to dedicate themselves to abolitionist causes. The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held In Bondage was founded by Philadelphia Quakers in 1775.<sup>36</sup> This society began providing sanctuary through its legal aid and shelter for escaped enslaved people.

Several Quaker preachers also began traveling throughout the frontier regions to speak out against the wrongness of slavery and the need for abolition. John Woolman and Anthony Benezet were two such preachers who had an influence on explaining the beliefs of Quakerism against slavery.<sup>37</sup> Benezet discussed how specific tenets of Quakerism like the doctrine of

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<sup>32</sup> Pink Dandelion, *The Quakers: a Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Margaret Fell, "Women's Speaking," Quaker Heritage Press, accessed March 20, 2021, <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/fell.html>.

<sup>35</sup> Weatherford, *American Churches*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Kathleen L. Villarruel, "The Underground Railroad and the Sanctuary Movement: A Comparison of History, Litigation, and Values," *Southern California Law Review* 60, no.9 (July 1987): 1435.

<sup>37</sup> Rabben, "The Quaker Sanctuary Tradition," 3.

nonviolence, a rule against laziness and sloth, and the belief of equality in the sight of God, all connected to the need for abolitionism. His belief that the quest for wealth corrupted humans rested on the example of the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>38</sup> Known for being pacifists, the Quaker abolitionists considered slavery to be an act of war. As such, any participation in the slave trade, would show support for that very war. The preachers' work set up the foundation for the abolitionist stances Quakers continued to develop well into the 19th century.

Throughout this era, a split occurred in the Quaker community that would cause lingering concerns over the future intersection between religion and government. Two groups in the United States split off and were labeled as Orthodox Quakers and the Hicksites. The main crux of the issue focused on whether their faith should be guided more by the Bible or by the role of the Inward Light in guiding members' consciences. Orthodox Quakers disowned the Hicksites for their errant theology while the Hicksites disowned the Orthodox for a lack of discipline.<sup>39</sup> The Hicksites were named after prominent Friend Elias Hicks who also advocated for the abolition of slaves. In a detailed argument, Hicks presented the *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans* in defense of equality of all people. The most central theme of his argument mirrors that of his fellow preachers: supporting slavery would be akin to supporting a war. Thus, he also called for a boycott of all products of slave labor, such as cotton or rum. His call for social reformation "was the cultivation of personal transformation as the most critical means for promoting social transformation."<sup>40</sup>

However, the split in the Quaker community also highlighted the split in members' beliefs about abolition. Not all Quakers considered themselves to be abolitionists. Some claimed

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<sup>38</sup> Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Gilbert Plank, *Quakers and Abolition*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2018), 73.

<sup>39</sup> Dandelion, *The Quakers*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> Carey and Plank, *Quakers and Abolition*, 25

that “the Lord would abolish slavery in his own time,” and that it was not their place to be involved in any political issues.<sup>41</sup> Others supported the idea of colonization as an alternative. The American Colonization Society was formed in 1817 with the hopes of sending former enslaved people to the coast of West Africa. The organization promoted the idea as a liberation, but it was met by backlash by some abolitionist Quakers.<sup>42</sup> In addition, while spiritual equality was often touted as a tenant of the Friends’ beliefs, yearly meetings and gatherings were still not open to Black communities and members. As such, the work of the abolitionist Quakers regarding sanctuary was still quite limited in the early 1800s. Divided by clashes within the tradition, abolitionists were able to provide support and aid for free Blacks in the North but did not call for any drastic changes in the South. Authors Brycchan Carey and Geoffrey Plank examine the complexity and diversity of Quaker antislavery views in an edited collection of essays entitled *Quakers and Abolition*. They argue that, “The statutory framework they supported called only for the gradual elimination of slavery and directly affected only the North, leaving the slavery regime in the South intact.”<sup>43</sup> Throughout the struggle, as Quakers attempted to solidify their beliefs regarding abolition, the atrocities of slavery continued to rage on in the South. A possible escape from slavery pointed north but not without the significant dangers and risk of being caught and captured.

### *Sanctuary on The Underground Railroad*

Despite the internal debates over abolition, Quakers are well-known for their work on the Underground Railroad, providing sanctuary for escaped enslaved people making their way to the

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<sup>41</sup> Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>42</sup> Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Carey and Plank, *Quakers and Abolition*, 4.

northern states or to Canada. Along the different routes and paths existed a network of people who would offer shelter in private homes, churches, or schoolhouses. Many famous Quaker conductors and stationmasters like Levi Coffin, Lucretia Mott, and Thomas Garret, who were driven by their beliefs for equality and peace for all, operated safe houses.<sup>44</sup> Levi Coffin, a stationmaster in Indiana, said “that as a boy in North Carolina he had read in the Bible that it is right to take in the stranger and administer to him in distress...that the Bible, in bidding us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, said nothing about color, and that he should try to follow out its teachings.”<sup>45</sup> Sanctuary was not a word that was often used to describe the role of the stationmasters on the Underground Railroad; yet, the Quaker abolitionists were committed to their role in offering sanctuary along the path for freedom.

The Shaker community was also a part of the Underground Railroad from Indiana to New York. Not only did the Quakers collaborate and share the same abolitionist mission with the Shakers, but they also shared comparable values. Similar to the Quakers, Shakers shared their beliefs about race and gender equality, ultimately coming to the conclusion that the laws of God did not justify slavery and decided to take action.<sup>46</sup> The communities were isolated against non-Shaker visitors which was ideal for protection on the Underground Railroad. Some Shaker communities also had Black members who also helped to provide sanctuary for the escaped enslaved people.<sup>47</sup>

While mentioning the Underground Railroad and the other religious groups involved, it would be remiss not to mention the free Black communities and churches that also created a

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<sup>44</sup> Rabben, “The Quaker Sanctuary Tradition,” 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> “Shakers and the Underground Railroad,” Shaker Heritage Society, February 16, 2012, <https://home.shakerheritage.org/shakers-and-the-underground-railroad/>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

sanctuary network. Archaeologist Cheryl LaRoche explained, “African American ministers, their churches, and their denominations combined with free Black communities to form a distinctive network separate from, yet integrated with, White abolitionists and Underground Railroad worker.”<sup>48</sup> The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was one such network. AME elder William Paul Quinn was instrumental in building churches along the Ohio River in Indiana.<sup>49</sup> Crossing the Ohio River into the Northern border states did not signal complete safety but it did provide a comfort of the free Black communities willing to help. The church communities in these settlements quietly organized with many of their homes and churches serving as stations on the Underground Railroad. Not only did these stations offer the basic necessities of sanctuary with food, shelter, and clothing, but they also provided emotional and spiritual comfort.

The work of the Underground Railroad was not the result of the actions of only one religious group; instead, it became a collaboration of churches and faiths offering sanctuary. Nor was it solely the work of benevolent white abolitionists, as is often mythologized. Free Black communities played an active role through their own church networks. LaRoche emphasizes the fact that “denominational affiliation of abolitionist and antislavery workers formed vital links along the Underground Railroad. Quakers and African Americans lived near and among each other, giving shape to Underground Railroad paths to freedom.”<sup>50</sup> The interconnectedness of these networks led to successful journeys to freedom on the Underground Railroad.

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<sup>48</sup> Cheryl J. LaRoche, *The Geography of Resistance: Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad*, (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

## *The Politics of Abolition and Sanctuary*

Now with an understanding of the activity of the Underground Railroad and the religious motivations behind the people involved, the reaction to the politics of abolition and sanctuary should also be discussed. A large turning point leading up to the Civil War was the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. This piece of legislation famously made it a criminal act to help aid any enslaved person seeking freedom.<sup>51</sup> This law was also a continuation of the preexisting Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which had rarely been enforced in the Northern states. Under public pressure from Southern states, unhappy with the acts of the Underground Railroad and threatening to concede from the Union, Congress amended this law to allow any slave catchers or marshals the latitude to capture and transport escapees without any judicial oversight.<sup>52</sup> Southern states also hoped this act would put more pressure on the abolitionists involved in the Underground Railroad to cease their actions, due to a fear of imprisonment.

However, in the face of possible arrest and prison, abolitionists on the Underground Railroad continued to offer sanctuary. But for many in the Quaker community dedicated to abolition, this law and the compromises following it, dashed the idea that “peaceful moral persuasion” could end slavery in the United States.<sup>53</sup> Instead, a choice was presenting itself over a fight for freedom and the preservation of the United States. The question to be peaceful, law-abiding citizens or to continue to go against the law was now at hand. There was no statutory basis for the abolitionists to claim their actions were legal; instead, they relied upon their moral sense of law driven by their teachings of equality. Black churches were also confronted with the reality of the political situation and the pressures to obey the law. In response, many churches

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<sup>51</sup> Villarruel, “The Underground Railroad,” 1437.

<sup>52</sup> Reece Jones, *Open Borders: in Defense of Free Movement*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019), 113.

<sup>53</sup> Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse*, 120.

rose to a public stance to demonstrate an opposition to slavery.<sup>54</sup> The Civil War was still over a decade away, but tensions and the threat of violence was already on the rise, even for those who were committed to peace.

The first test of the Fugitive Slave Act occurred with the 1851 riot in Christiana, Pennsylvania, a free Black community that was providing sanctuary to four runaways. In total, 38 abolitionists and free Blacks were indicted by the government for their participation and also charged with treason.<sup>55</sup> The case drew significant public attention and outcry from Northerners. In the end, the charges were dropped against all 38 defendants and the case only helped to bring more public sympathy to the cause from the side of the North. The government was now facing opposing pressures from public opinion by the divided sections of the Union. Despite the fact that the Fugitive Slave Act was intended as a way to brand the abolitionists who offered sanctuary on the Underground Railroad as criminals and deter further such actions, the law only spurred on the work of the abolitionists who grew more committed to their cause and beliefs as the nation continued to fracture.

In the end, the Emancipation Proclamation provided the legal framework for the ending of slavery and the Underground Railroad was no longer in use by the end of the Civil War. It leaves behind its legacy as an early sanctuary movement in the United States. This time period was brought about by the Quakers fleeing England from religious persecution as they searched for sanctuary. Their belief in the Inner Light and spiritual equality for all drove some Quakers to become abolitionists and create a network dedicated to helping end slavery. The movement provide sanctuary on the Underground Railroad in homes, schoolhouses and churches, for escaping enslaved people. The work of the abolitionists came into direct conflict with the

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<sup>54</sup> LaRoche, *The Geography of Resistance*, 139.

<sup>55</sup> Villarruel, "The Underground Railroad," 1439.

government and its laws as they chose to disobey the law and continue to provide aid, often citing faith and commitment to God as a reason to actively break the law. This noncompliance to the law marks a shift in history going forward as it splits people's perceptions of those who offer sanctuary through the lens of two options: criminal or protector.

## The Central American Sanctuary Movement

### *Origins of the Sanctuary Movement*

Another version of an Underground Railroad movement in the United States occurred during the Central American Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. Violence and conflict in Central America from authoritarian regimes had led to an increase of immigrants hoping to cross the Sonoran Desert and enter the United States. Civil wars in these regions often led by right-wing paramilitary death squads targeted many students, peasants, priests, labor leaders, and human rights activists and led to an escalation of human rights abuses and poverty.<sup>56</sup> It should not be overlooked that the United States, under the administration of President Ronald Reagan, often funded and supported the right-wing authoritarian regimes in Central America, in response to the spread of Soviet-Cuban communism. For example, in El Salvador, the military and economic support, including training and weapons, provided by the United States exceeded \$6 billion.<sup>57</sup> This violence by the Central American authoritarian regimes sponsored by the United States government ultimately triggered a mass of Central Americans fleeing to the U.S.-Mexico border.

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<sup>56</sup> Hilary Cunningham, "Sanctuary and Sovereignty: Church and State Along the U.S.-Mexico Border," *Journal of Church and State* 40, no. 2 (1998): 374, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/40.2.371>.

<sup>57</sup> Hector Perla and Susan Bibler Coutin, *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*, edited by Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 76.

A legal policy did exist at this time that would purportedly support the Central Americans seeking asylum in the United States. The Refugee Act of 1980 raised the annual ceiling for refugees to 50,000 and amended the definition of a refugee to define a person “with a well-founded fear of persecution.”<sup>58</sup> However, many Central Americans were being rejected in their plea for asylum status, as the U.S. government instead chose to primarily consider the Central American applicants as economic migrants.<sup>59</sup> The difference in these classifications determines that a refugee is forced to flee their country due to a threat, but a migrant is choosing to leave for other reasons. An asylee enters a country seeking a petition for refugee status due to being unable to return to their home country in fear of persecution. In this context, instead of accepting the applicants as asylees fleeing from the violence of the governments the United States helped sponsor, the reaction of the U.S. government was to claim that any human rights violations were exaggerated.<sup>60</sup> The classification of many Salvadorans and Guatemalans as economic migrants, instead of refugees, led to only about three percent of asylum applications being accepted.<sup>61</sup> With the majority of asylum applications ending in rejections, thousands of Central Americans were caught crossing the U.S border without papers and were deported back to unsafe situations. The Immigration and Naturalization Service also began invading factories and workplaces to further find and deport undocumented immigrants.<sup>62</sup> Not only was the potential legal repercussions of crossing the borders without papers was dangerous, but the border crossing itself provided other treacherous challenges.

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<sup>58</sup> “Refugee Act of 1980,” National Archives Foundation, January 19, 2016, <http://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/refugee-act-1980/>.

<sup>59</sup> Serin D. Houston, and Charlotte Morse, “The Ordinary and Extraordinary: Producing Migrant Inclusion and Exclusion in US Sanctuary Movements,” *Studies in Social Justice* 11, no. 1 (2017):30, <https://doi.org/10.26522/ssj.v11i1.1081>.

<sup>60</sup> Cunningham, “Sanctuary and Sovereignty,” 375.

<sup>61</sup> Stoltz Chinchilla, et al., “The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x09350766>.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*,108.

On July 4, 1980, 27 Salvadoran refugees fleeing violence from the paramilitary groups in their hometowns were rescued at the Organ Pipe National Monument in southern Arizona. Thirteen members of the party had died due to dehydration and heat stroke while the rest of the party had to be hospitalized.<sup>63</sup> Orders for the deportation of the refugees still stood, so the Presbyterian Church and the Catholic Diocese, along with the Tuscan Ecumenical Council, helped to provide legal representation and raise bail funds for the refugees. The Tuscan Ecumenical Council also joined forces with a local nonprofit called El Concilio Manzo to create a legal aid strategy for the Central American refugees that were denied asylum.<sup>64</sup>

At a weekly prayer vigil for the Central American refugees in 1981, a Quaker by the name of Jim Corbett learned about the dangerous situation at the border and felt called to help, inspired by the idea of a new Underground Railroad movement.<sup>65</sup> Corbett decided to create links with the local parishes to seek help. First, Corbett connected with a Catholic priest at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on the side of the Mexican border, who had begun sheltering Central American refugees in his church before they crossed the border. Then, Corbett turned to Reverend John Fife from the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona to ask if the church would be willing to shelter the undocumented refugees.<sup>66</sup> Thus, a new Underground Railroad movement was born across the U.S.-Mexico border.

After the congregation of Southside Presbyterian Church officially voted to declare itself as a sanctuary for Central American refugees, four other congregations (University Lutheran Chapel in Berkeley, CA, First Unitarian Universalist Church in Los Angeles, Community Bible

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<sup>63</sup> John Fife, "From the Sanctuary Movement to No More Deaths," in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, edited by Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 258.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

Church in Lawrence, NY, and Luther Place Memorial Church in Washington, D.C.) all agreed to declare sanctuary.<sup>67</sup> These congregations officially established themselves at the start of what would be known as the Sanctuary Movement. The Quaker community also upheld a strong presence, relying on its heritage of the Underground Railroad to inspire members to help. Contacts on the Mexican side of the border would house refugees in safe spaces until a U.S team could safely transport the refugees past the checkpoints to congregations in Tucson.<sup>68</sup> Other members of these congregations helped by providing food, medicine, and clothing, as well as legal services. In providing sanctuary and actively helping to accompany undocumented refugees across the border, the workers of the sanctuary movement were actively choosing to counter the secular law.

The history of Hebrew sanctuary traditions, the medieval traditions, and the work of the abolitionists on the Underground Railroad provided examples and justifications of the past sanctuary efforts. For the early sanctuary workers of this movement, their faith called them to oppose a seemingly unjust law and provide sanctuary for the persecuted.<sup>69</sup> Jim Corbett described the choice to offer sanctuary by saying “every covenant congregation is empowered to serve in establishing the earth itself as a sanctuary for all life.”<sup>70</sup> These early decisions to offer sanctuary to Central American refugees would only be the start of a large and interconnected faith movement.

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<sup>67</sup> Fife, “From the Sanctuary Movement,” 259.

<sup>68</sup> Cunningham, “Sanctuary and Sovereignty,” 382.

<sup>69</sup> Perla and Bibler Coutin, *Sanctuary Practices*, 89.

<sup>70</sup> Jim Corbett “The Covenant as Sanctuary,” *CrossCurrents*, 1985,404, [www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24458930.pdf](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24458930.pdf).

### *Collaboration of the Sanctuary Movement*

In just three years since the official declaration of sanctuary in 1981, the Sanctuary Movement had grown exponentially to around 237 Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish congregations.<sup>71</sup> Sanctuary activists collaborated with the refugees to share their experiences of escaping violence and activate a social base determined to demonstrate support. With a large network growing in Mexico and in California, activists were able to help transport more undocumented refugees across the border and to California. Los Angeles became an important transfer city before refugees were able to move on through the Chicago Religious Task Force organization.<sup>72</sup>

Los Angeles also displayed the pattern of a variety of congregations choosing to provide sanctuary. The first known congregation was the First Unitarian Church in Pico Union, well-known for its activism work. In 1983, the Pico Rivera United Methodist Church became the first Methodist church in the country to offer sanctuary. A third influential congregation in Los Angeles was Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic Church.<sup>73</sup> The Southern California Inter-Faith Task Force on Central America (SCITCA) also participated in the Sanctuary movement and provided educational and legal resources. The first chair of SCITCA was Sister Jo'Ann DeQuattro who helped to bring calls to the Los Angeles City Council in the call to become a sanctuary city.<sup>74</sup>

There were some disagreements among the active members of the Sanctuary movement as it struggled to find its footing between theological and political. Key organizations like the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America and the Tucson Ecumenical Council

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<sup>71</sup> Fife, "From the Sanctuary Movement," 261.

<sup>72</sup> Stoltz Chinchilla, et al., "The Sanctuary Movement," 110.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

disagreed whether the crisis should be a local issue decided on by individual congregations or whether it should be a centralized, national movement.<sup>75</sup> Eventually, the agreed-upon principal components of the movement emerged as community-centered, volunteer-based, truth-centered, germane to the victim's needs, and dialogical with government officials.<sup>76</sup> The movement continued to gain public attention as legal changes began to take place. Cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York led the way by declaring themselves as "Sanctuary Cities." Stanford University was the first to declare itself as a "Sanctuary Campus." Even legislation was introduced to Congress by Congressman Joe Moakley and Senator Dennis DeConcini who intended to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to undocumented refugees from El Salvador.<sup>77</sup> The Sanctuary Movement now had national attention as it began to transcend beyond the confines of churches.

### *Conflict Between Politics and Sanctuary*

In the beginning of this movement, the U.S. government did not pay much attention to the activists at the border. However, the word sanctuary had gained national attention. The grid of organizations like the Tucson Ecumenical Council, Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America, and the Southern California Inter-Faith Task Force on Central America had not only created a network of sheltering undocumented refugees in communities throughout the United States, but they raised awareness and gained further public support, despite the government's attempt to sway public opinion against the movement.<sup>78</sup> Sanctuary activists had also gained the

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<sup>75</sup> Fife, "From the Sanctuary Movement," 263.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>78</sup> Pirie, Sophie, "The Origins of a Political Trial: The Sanctuary Movement and Political Justice," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 2, no. 2 (1990): 382.

support from a few lawmakers in Congress in order to seek policy change. In response to the growing popularity and proliferation of the Sanctuary Movement, the government launched an undercover operation called Operation Sojourner. Several agents and paid informants were sent to pose as volunteers in the underground movements of Phoenix, Tucson, and Nogales. For six months, they secretly collected tape recordings from meetings in churches and conversations with the activists and refugees.<sup>79</sup> The undercover operation then led to the indictment and trials of eleven sanctuary workers in what would be known as the Sanctuary Trials.

The official charges against the workers were that of violating Section 274 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act by “harboring illegal aliens.”<sup>80</sup> A vast array of churches pledged their support behind the activists, including the American Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches, the U.S. Catholic Mission Association, the United Church of Christ, the American Baptist Churches, and the Rabbinical Assembly.<sup>81</sup> Still, before the trial even began, a motion in limine prepared by the government severely hindered the defense of the activists. A motion was granted to prevent those indicted from using four specific defenses: trial-defenses based upon international law, freedom of religion, the law of necessity, and lack of specific criminal intent.<sup>82</sup> It also barred the defendants from speaking about the plight of the Central American refugees and the United States’ policies. Obstructed by the motion in limine and unable to speak of their defense, eight of the defendants were indicted and an attempt to appeal was overruled.

While the Sanctuary Trials did not acquit the activists in criminal court, a civil suit soon followed that carried more hope for the movement. In July 1985, the American Baptist Church

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<sup>79</sup> Fife, “From the Sanctuary Movement,” 261.

<sup>80</sup> Houston and Morse, “The Ordinary and the Extraordinary,” 32.

<sup>81</sup> Fife, “From the Sanctuary Movement,” 262.

<sup>82</sup> Pirie, “The Origins of a Political Trial,” 384.

filed a suit against Attorney General Richard Thornburg and the director of the INS. The plaintiff had three petitions: for the U.S. government to suspend deportations to El Salvador and Guatemala, stop prosecuting sanctuary activists, and fully implement the Refugee Act of 1980.<sup>83</sup> After being delayed through various motions for nearly four years, the Justice Department reached out to the Sanctuary Movement to discuss a settlement. The administration agreed to cease all deportations to El Salvador and Guatemala and offer the refugees Temporary Protected Status and work permits.<sup>84</sup> The settlement was a significant step for the refugees who had been seeking asylum for nearly a decade. The 1990 Immigration Act officially created Temporary Protected Status and in 1997, Salvadorans and Guatemalans who had fled to the United States during the civil wars were given the right to apply for legal permanent residency.

The Central American Sanctuary Movement dissipated in the 1990s after the legal challenges were won. Still, it left behind a lasting legacy, soon to resurface. The contemporary history of this movement relates directly to the effects of the administration's policies towards refugees and their country of origin. When Central Americans fled violence and instability and were not granted asylum, religious leaders decided to form a new Underground Railroad offering sanctuary in churches across the U.S.-Mexico border. The movement quickly grew throughout the United States and gained significant interfaith support. Activists relied on the past histories of the Underground Railroad and biblical tradition of providing alternative forms of justice to justify their cause. In this movement, sanctuary became not just a sacred place of shelter, but also evolved into a public undertaking to change an inequitable law. The movement directly challenged the government and its policies in its attempt to change the immigration laws that denied so many asylum. In her analysis of the Sanctuary Trials, human rights attorney Sophie

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<sup>83</sup> Stoltz Chinchilla, et al., "The Sanctuary Movement," 118.

<sup>84</sup> Fife, "From the Sanctuary Movement," 262.

Pirie explained that, “sanctuary had moved from charity to challenging the use of legalism to delegitimize the church's role in political protest and to marginalize democratic participation in foreign and asylum policymaking.”<sup>85</sup> The movement utilized their interfaith network and public support to advocate for substantial legal changes. The successful lawsuit following this movement is an example of the rich possibilities of a sanctuary movement: one that can provide an alternative form of justice to a law that may be unjust.

### Summary

Five overlapping elements develop in these three key examples of sanctuary movements. First, sanctuary emerges as an alternative form of justice. The very first example of sanctuary in the Books of Exodus and Joshua details the intention behind God providing sanctuary cities for those who may have unknowingly committed a crime. Throughout medieval Christendom, the church is there to act as an intermediary during blood feuds, advocating for mercy. During the Underground Railroad and the Central American Sanctuary Movement, sanctuary appears and aids those who are deemed “enslaved” or “illegal” through unjust laws. Second, religious beliefs have directed the motivations of those who offer sanctuary. From the Hebrew biblical tradition, to the belief in an “Inner Light,” to following the example of Jesus Christ, the choice to offer sanctuary can be deeply rooted in religious convictions. Third, sanctuary has grown from being a predominantly Christian practice in the Middle Ages into a larger, interfaith network. The Underground Railroad displayed the beginnings of different faiths partnering together on their abolitionist mission and the Central American Sanctuary movement showcased the effectiveness of such a collaborative effort. Fourth, church practice and secular law did once intertwine

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<sup>85</sup> Pirie, “The Origins of a Political Trial,” 407.

together into an understanding of sanctuary but transformed to come into conflict with each other. At the end of the Middle Ages, the Crown had abolished sanctuary as an outdated practice that only served to aid criminals who had broken the law. This perception of people seeking sanctuary as law breakers has not disappeared in the view of the U.S. government during both Underground Railroad movements. In response, the people who chose to become sanctuary activists also faced the possibility of being regarded as a criminal in the eyes of the government. Fifth and finally, the sanctuary movement has evolved into a form of civil initiative against unjust laws, able to influence policy changes. The Central American Sanctuary Movement mobilized people across the United States to take action. Significant pressure was placed on the U.S. government as more and more people joined the sanctuary movement and much-needed policy changes to support Salvadoran and Guatemalan asylees were finally made. These five central components of the past sanctuary movements lead us to the present where the need for sanctuary has not disappeared.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AN UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTUARY IN THE PRESENT

Sanctuary is the role the church has to carve out a space for a little bit of breathing room in a broken world. It is certainly not a solution to any of these problems, but it is a role the church must play.<sup>1</sup>

Sanctuary in the United States today has now expanded past the movement of the 1980s. The New Sanctuary Movement is vast and broad, emerging in hundreds of different faith communities across the United States, and intersecting with immigration advocacy groups. To understand what sanctuary looks like in the present, I conducted interviews with twelve sanctuary activists, scholars, church members and leaders, and volunteers.

The purpose of this oral history is to learn more about individual moments of sanctuary, to discover the actions taken, and to discern the presence of sanctuary today. The small sampling of stories is not meant to be a comprehensive retelling of the movement but is instead an opportunity to closely examine individual acts of sanctuary and engage in conversation. The twelve participants and their stories guided my questions as they shared their experiences and allowed me to record our conversations. The participants are: Theresa Butler, Julie Driscoll, John Fife, Jim Flynn, Felix Garza, Joan Gregory, Ricardo Gomez, David Horvath, David Hulefeld, Raphael Schweri, Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

With each of the participants, I had a list of questions to act as a general guideline for interviews, as seen in Appendix A. However, I allowed the participants to speak freely through open-ended questions and guided the course of the conversation as well, hence the questions

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, September 23, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

asked were always slightly different during each interview, but the main themes were always discussed. After listening to the stories shared with me, there were six themes that stood out and created an image of what sanctuary looks like today: a definition of sanctuary, the idea of giving refuge to the stranger, immigrant-led sanctuary, sanctuary as a network, and the ending of sanctuary.

### *Definitions of Sanctuary Within Different Contexts*

During the conversations, participants were asked to share their personal definition of what sanctuary looked like to them. Every answer was distinct, but these definitions all built off of the foundation of the Central American Sanctuary Movement. The individual answers highlighted the complexity of the sanctuary movement and the way it has expanded beyond the offering of harbor behind a church door to encompass other factors like legal aid, activism, physical and mental health care, and activism. Many of the participants acknowledged that there can be several definitions of sanctuary and the one they share is the one related to the context and environment.

John Fife is one of the participants. As one of the founders of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s, Fife speaks to his experiences at Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona as one of the first churches to declare sanctuary and challenge the U.S. government's stance of not offering asylum to many Central Americans. In 2004, Fife also co-founded the organization No More Deaths, a humanitarian organization in Arizona dedicated to preventing deaths of migrants in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Fife discusses the process for how he and his fellow activists created a definition of sanctuary for the 1980s movement. Originally, Fife thought of sanctuary as a practice of civil disobedience and drew inspiration from the works of Martin

Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. However, Fife soon received a call from an immigration lawyer, warning him against labeling the movement as an act of civil disobedience because it would imply that the immigration laws and policies the activists were violating were just and lawful, instead of actually failing to provide asylees with protection.<sup>2</sup> Fife and the other co-founder of the movement, Jim Corbett, discussed this possibility and came back with a new definition of “civil initiative.” The new basis of the sanctuary work was considered the “legal right and responsibility to directly protect the victims of human rights violations when the government violates human rights.”<sup>3</sup> Fife and Corbett utilized this definition as a tool to signify that the government system was failing human rights and that it was the obligation of faith communities to take initiative and protect those were being failed by the law.

Similar variations of this definition were spoken by other participants who also connected the failure of the legal system to protect people with the necessity of churches or other faith-based spaces to step into that place. Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove is the Executive Director of the School for Conversion in Durham, North Carolina, a popular education center that empowers communities to connect with movements advocating for social change. The School for Conversion has been a host site for sanctuary with its partner parish, St. Johns Missionary Baptist Church. Wilson-Hartgrove emphasizes the necessity of churches to not only realize that the immigration system is unjust, but that places of worship can have a role in providing protection for those who still need it.<sup>4</sup>

In Louisville, Kentucky, members of the St. William Catholic Church who were involved in the 1980s movement, as well as the movement today, gathered to speak with me. These

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<sup>2</sup> John Fife, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, September 16, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

members included Jim Flynn, Theresa Butler, Raphael Schweri, Felix Garza, David Horvath, Julie Driscoll, and David Hulefeld. The participants were on the church's sanctuary committee at different points and have been involved in various immigration advocacy organizations. David Hulefeld, a former member of the Sanctuary Committee, describes sanctuary as a public statement and an act of civil disobedience that is based on faith conviction and principles.<sup>5</sup> The common idea found throughout these definitions is rooted in faith-ideals, but also focuses on the source of the problems that is causing a system to fail in protecting human rights.

The action of sanctuary can also differ according to the context. Sanctuary has long been regarded as the act of harboring people inside places of worship to protect them from the risks of being deported back to an unsafe environment. Joan Gregory is the Sanctuary Director at First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City and leads the church's Social Justice Ministry. In 2008, the congregation began discussing joining the New Sanctuary Movement and Gregory was a part of that initial working group. Then, in 2017, First UU of Salt Lake City actually became a host site for sanctuary. Gregory describes the practice as a "community that surrounds you and helps you get through anything that comes your way, medically, psychologically, legally and physically, whatever comes your way."<sup>6</sup> In the process of sheltering someone, there are many needs, not only for food and clothing and a roof over one's head, but for medical care, legal support, emotional support, and the necessity for the person in sanctuary to have their own agency.

Another participant is Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, the Executive Director of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, headquartered in Portland, Oregon, a state-wide organization

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<sup>5</sup> David Hulefeld, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, October 4, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

<sup>6</sup> Joan Gregory, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, September 28, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

working towards immigrant justice. The organization partners with faith-based communities and immigrant advocacy groups to provide different sanctuary services throughout Oregon. An even broader definition of sanctuary is one offered by the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice detailing how sanctuary can occur in many places: on the streets, in places of worship, and in public policy.<sup>7</sup> The organization utilizes a broad theological framework of sanctuary focused on what the immigrant communities need, including policy reform for an immigration system that will protect the human rights of immigrants.

In this context, the question of whether sanctuary is considered a political or spiritual action was discussed. For the majority of the participants, they view the political and spiritual elements of sanctuary to be intertwined. Religious convictions that the policies of government administrations were unjust and inhumane spur the necessity of sanctuary. One participant from St. William Catholic Church, Felix Garza, explains that sanctuary is not a spiritual connection for him, but he does see it as a “mechanism to protect human life and guard human rights.”<sup>8</sup> Regardless of whether the participants saw any distinctions between the spiritual and political motivations of sanctuary, a common idea throughout discussing their definitions was the motivation to defend human rights and the use of sanctuary a tool to reach that goal.

### *Ninguna Persona es Ilegal (No Human Being is Illegal)*

The emphasis on human rights that was repeated often during conversations centers on the idea that no human being is illegal or *ninguna persona es ilegal*. Rhetoric focused against sanctuary movement often cites the activities of migrants crossing the border to be illegal actions

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<sup>7</sup> Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, October 5, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

<sup>8</sup> Felix Garza, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, October 4, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

against the laws of the United States. Immigration authorities often arrest, detain, and deport the migrants without documentation back across the border. However, conversations from this oral history discuss how justice and laws do not always intersect and a legal system that does not respect or protect the humanity of a person goes against the concept of justice.

Fife discusses how justice has already been defined as a human-centered action after World War II and the Nuremberg trials by the international community. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 and affirmed that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.”<sup>9</sup> This international law emphasizes that all humans have equal rights and dignity, and regardless of whether a person breaks a law, this statement still holds true.

Ricardo Gomez is an associate professor at the University of Washington’s School of Information who agreed to speak to me regarding his research on sanctuary movements in the time of Trump and people’s motivations regarding humanitarian action. Two of his publications Gomez helped coauthor that were relevant to this topic are “Sanctuary Planet: A Global Movement For the Time of Trump” and “Empathic Humanitarianism: Understanding the Motivations behind Humanitarian Work with Migrants at the US-Mexico border.”<sup>10</sup> Gomez emphasizes this conviction of human dignity as he states, “No human is illegal. We are all humans and we all have human rights just by the fact of being born and alive in this planet. Some

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<sup>9</sup> “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations, accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

<sup>10</sup> Ricardo Gomez et al., “Sanctuary Planet: A Global Sanctuary Movement for the Time of Trump,” *Sanctuary Planet: A Global Sanctuary Movement For The Time Of Trump*, May 16, 2017, <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/sanctuary-planet-a-global-sanctuary-movement-for-the-time-of-trump>; Ricardo Gomez, Bryce Clayton Newell, and Sara Vannini, “Empathic Humanitarianism: Understanding the Motivations behind Humanitarian Work with Migrants at the US–Mexico Border,” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 8, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502419900764>.

people do illegal things but moving to a different location is not illegal.”<sup>11</sup> His stance echoes the words of author Elie Wiesel, who urged the media not to use the phrase “illegal immigrant” as it mirrored the language Nazis used to dehumanize the Jewish people.<sup>12</sup> The phrase strips away the humanity of the people it is referring to and poses a danger to the rights of immigrants, if they are only regarded by the status of their immigration papers, and not by the status of their humanity.

Furthermore, Gomez argues that moving to a different location should not be illegal as he states, “Justice is when everybody is able to exercise their complete human rights. Moving to a different country to seek a better life for yourself and for your family is not in opposition to justice.”<sup>13</sup> This perspective offers a viewpoint that the militarization and enforcement of the country’s borders presents a severe obstacle to people who are fleeing the conditions of their home country because it is no longer safe or sustainable. In addition, an immigration system that does not easily allow immigrants a safe and timely path to citizenship hinders justice for immigrants. Gregory renames the U.S. immigration system as a “deportation system,” which was built to keep people out and abuses human rights.<sup>14</sup> Sanctuary activists now push for an immigration system that is human-focused and a shift in language that recognizes the dignity and rights of all people. Just as sanctuary strives to be a human-centered movement, the calls for reform hinge on this conviction as well.

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<sup>11</sup> Ricardo Gomez, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, September 14, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

<sup>12</sup> Lauren Gambino, “No Human Being Is Illegal’: Linguists Argue against Mislabeling of Immigrants,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, December 6, 2015), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/06/illegal-immigrant-label-offensive-wrong-activists-say>.

<sup>13</sup> Ricardo Gomez.

<sup>14</sup> ”Joan Gregory.

## *Give Refuge to the Stranger*

The theological convictions that grounded sanctuary practices in the past centuries continue to support and fuel this movement. From the 1980s to today, biblical stories have been a source of motivation for many faith-based communities. Themes of hospitality and welcoming actions are still intertwined throughout sanctuary work as faith-based communities continue to play a prominent role in the current movement.

Jim Flynn and other members of the sanctuary committee of St. William Catholic Church discussed their theological basis for becoming involved with sanctuary nearly forty years ago, citing the words of Matthew 25 as a basis for taking care of the vulnerable.<sup>15</sup> “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25: 35-36). Members also cited the practices of Jesus Christ in terms of nonviolence and the option for the poor that were values in line with the practices of the sanctuary movement. Flynn shared a story of the first couple who took sanctuary at St. William Catholic Church in the winter of 1984, during the second week of Advent. The choir was singing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and the couple coming to live in sanctuary at the rectory went by the names Manuel and María, who was expecting a child.<sup>16</sup> The connections Flynn saw between the couple seeking sanctuary and the story of the holy family provided another example of values visible in Scripture that also intertwined with the act of sanctuary.

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<sup>15</sup>Jim Flynn, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, October 4, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Other participants cite those same values and convictions. Wilson-Hartgrove emphasizes that while Christians are called to proclaim an eternal Kingdom where justice is realized, they are also called to envision that reality of the Kingdom on this earth until it comes fully by creating spaces now where justice is visible.<sup>17</sup> Again, the idea of sanctuary being a conscious act is essential to this understanding, as faith-based communities decide what actions they will take in the face of injustice to the immigrant community.

### *Immigrant-led Sanctuary*

An important element brought up in the discussion of what sanctuary looks like in the present, especially among faith-based communities, is the need for an immigrant-led sanctuary that still protects the identity and safety of immigrants, as well as a reckoning of sanctuary's history. Several participants discussed the prevalence of places of worship with majority-white congregations offering sanctuary. Felix Garza, who grew up in South Texas, explained that despite the large Latino population that lived in the community, the churches that offered sanctuary did not consist of a large immigrant population.<sup>18</sup> Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra described how in her work for immigration reform with faith communities while living in Washington, D.C., she was often the only immigrant or one of a few in the room.<sup>19</sup> This pattern of majority-white congregations offering shelter can be perceived as drifting into a harmful "savior" stereotype and potentially challenge the agency of the individuals seeking sanctuary. Vilchis-Ibarra also emphasizes that there is a need for an analysis of what this majority-white presence in the

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

<sup>18</sup> Felix Garza.

<sup>19</sup> Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra.

sanctuary movement has looked like in terms of racism, sexism, and colorism and that there is a necessity for a recognition of this history and a repair of its damage.

While many sanctuary activists continue to be from predominately white communities, specifically faith-based communities, lessons can be learned from a collaboration with immigrant-led communities. For example, while the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice largely partners with white faith-based communities, the organization is strategic by connecting with immigrant-led organizations to hear about their specific needs and wants.<sup>20</sup> This action creates valuable connections within the community as a chance to share resources and ideas that will be beneficial to the immigrant community. Joan Gregory also speaks to the importance of listening directly to the sanctuary leader. At the congregation of the First Unitarian Church in Salt Lake City, the term “sanctuary leader” refers to the person in sanctuary, and not to any of the volunteers and workers.<sup>21</sup> The position of the sanctuary leader is an example of defining an individual’s autonomy separate from the support of the church and an example that emphasizes the sanctuary leader knows best what they need. The focus of an immigrant-led sanctuary movement protects against any harm that could come from the actions of non-immigrant communities acting solely from their own different perspective.

### *A Movement and a Network*

The vast range of the current sanctuary movement and all of the shifting and intersecting pieces between faith-based communities, secular organizations focusing on public policy, immigrant-led organizations, and the immigrant community does lead to various interpretations actions of sanctuary, but it also provides large opportunities for collaboration. Just as the 1980s

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<sup>20</sup> Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra.

<sup>21</sup> Joan Gregory.

Central American Sanctuary Movement thrived off of different partnerships across the United States, the participants of the oral history all emphasized different types of partnerships and collaboration that made their work possible.

The sanctuary work done at the First Unitarian Church of Salt Lake City is a crucial example of this collaboration. Gregory discussed that when there is a more dominant religious community in a region, for example, in Utah with the Latter-Day Saints, it provides a beneficial opportunity to work together alongside other congregations. Gregory also emphasizes the importance of working with secular organizations like Planned Parenthood, the Rape Recovery Center, and Unidad Inmigrante that correspond to the different needs a sanctuary leader might have while living in sanctuary.<sup>22</sup> Volunteers in the community including lawyers, doctors, and therapists offered their time to help support certain needs of the sanctuary leader.

With all of the possibilities for sanctuary advocacy, collaboration between organizations also helps to make reform possible. At the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, Vilchis-Ibarra recognizes that the organization's individual work is part of a broader movement with other organizations completing essential elements of that work. For example, they can connect with lobbyists who work with Oregon legislators, while Vilchis-Ibarra meets with regional bishops and church leaders to gain their support.<sup>23</sup> David Horvath also speaks about his experience with the Immigrant Coalition for Immigrant Justice in Louisville and the collaboration involved to stand against Kentucky state legislature that removed resources for immigrants.<sup>24</sup> The importance of collaboration between the moving aspects of sanctuary work

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<sup>22</sup> Joan Gregory.

<sup>23</sup> Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra.

<sup>24</sup> David Horvath, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, October 4, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

continues to prove to be an essential factor in the process to make any changes in immigration reform.

### *An Ending to Sanctuary*

The current sanctuary movement cannot be discussed without considering how it can end. The 1980s movement drifted off as significant legal battles were won in court granting Temporary Protected Status to people from Central America seeking asylum. Then, sanctuary was no longer greatly needed because there was a legal path of protection. Today, no such legal reform appears to be on the horizon. Instead, when people enter sanctuary to protect themselves from deportation, there is no clear solution for how to leave sanctuary and how it might all end.

Wilson-Hartgrove explains this problem as one of the main challenges to the current sanctuary movement. He likens the dilemma to a situation of “house arrest,” one where the sanctuary leader is not free until they have full citizenship.<sup>25</sup> With no clear path to citizenship, there is no clear way out of sanctuary, except for deportation. People choose to enter sanctuary instead of deportation because it is the only option to protect them from the dangers of going back.<sup>26</sup> The people whom I interviewed shared the belief that this sanctuary movement will not end until there is a path to citizenship for everyone. Sanctuary provides a temporary solution, but the past movements have shown that until there is legal reform, there is no true solution to the problem. This necessity for reform is what pushes organizations for immigrant justice to make calls for changes like stopping deportations, decriminalizing immigrants and refugees, and providing those timely paths to citizenship and all of its protections.

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove.

<sup>26</sup> Joan Gregory.

## *Summary*

The individual stories shared are a small offering of sanctuary experiences across the United States that give insight into the ways that context defines the practice. It is not possible to offer a single definition for sanctuary. For some, sanctuary remains to be the obligation of faith-based communities to provide shelter in a space of worship for the most vulnerable. Sanctuary can also be the act of providing legal support to immigrants and accompanying them through the process of gaining citizenship or providing medical care. Faced with the issue of immigration reform, sanctuary work is also realized in the advocacy to push for a just immigration system, locally and nationally. Two common motivations of sanctuary work continue to be the emphasis of the humanity of every person and the human rights they deserve, as well as a theological commitment to giving refuge to the stranger. Sanctuary today has grown into a vast movement and network with many opportunities to provide essential elements of sanctuary and to share the responsibility of the work to push for immigration reform. However, a challenge of sanctuary is the necessity for the focus of the work to be immigrant-led and to move forward with goals that best serve that population. Additionally, the challenge in not knowing how sanctuary will end without significant legal reform that protects those on their way to citizenship leaves questions to consider for the future about the possibilities of such reform and for the future of sanctuary.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN UNDERSTANDING OF SANCTUARY IN THE FUTURE

An ideal world would be one where sanctuary is not needed because people can go to the place where they can live a better life.<sup>1</sup>

In response to the question, “Where do you hope to see sanctuary in the future?”, Ricardo Gomez says he looks to “a future in which sanctuary is not needed.” Sanctuary emerges out of necessity, as an alternative form of justice when the laws of society do not offer protection, shelter, or equal rights for everyone. For there to be no need for sanctuary to exist in the future, justice and equality would take its place, but until that goal is realized the work of sanctuary must continue. This final chapter will explore three themes to consider about sanctuary movement in the future. The first theme concerns what the persistence of the New Sanctuary Movement will look like and what essential elements of the movement should move forward or be reevaluated. Then, there is the question of how sanctuary cities will be utilized in the future. The possibilities of sanctuary cities and jurisdictions are an element of sanctuary models that will be further discussed here through the examination of several different models and the potential each model holds. The third aspect of this chapter examines the question of what it means to be a sanctuary world and will inspect the influence of various other social and political movements, as we look to an encompassing global view of sanctuary that goes beyond the issue of immigration.

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<sup>1</sup> Ricardo Gomez, Interview by Annaleigh Cummings, September 14, 2021, Zoom from Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY.

### *How can the New Sanctuary Movement Continue Forward?*

The New Sanctuary Movement will continue into the future by building upon the legacies of its predecessors and adapting to the needs of the current environment. The 1980s Central American movement established itself as an example of a movement that drew upon religious values to directly challenge the morality and legality of the Reagan administration's policies.<sup>2</sup> Sanctuary movements throughout history have been rooted in a deep religious and spiritual commitment, but increasingly today, it is intermixed with a variety of secular motivations. An examination into the motivations of volunteers who are integral to these movements suggests a center of empathic concern and other-centered belief that motivates those who advocate for sanctuary.<sup>3</sup> The movement grows through the actions of those who are supporting a community targeted by injustice and through the ability for the perspective and the voice of that community to be made visible. These perspectives fuel the two central ideas that continue to be critical to the future growth of the New Sanctuary Movement in the United States: sanctuary through accompaniment and advocacy for immigrant justice reform.

Accompaniment within the NSM accentuates collaboration between faith-based and secular organizations. The New Sanctuary Movement defines accompaniment in four different strategies: accountability, collective liberation, activism, and faith in action.<sup>4</sup> Accountability emphasizes the racial structures set in place in the courtrooms and promotes a physical presence of community supporters who will stand to bear witness in the courtroom, while being self-aware

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<sup>2</sup> Stoltz Chinchilla, et al., "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x09350766>.

<sup>3</sup> Ricardo Gomez, et al, "Empathic Humanitarianism: Understanding the Motivations behind Humanitarian Work with Migrants at the US-Mexico Border," *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 8, no. 1 (2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502419900764>.

<sup>4</sup> "Accompaniment." New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, 2017. Accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www.sanctuaryphiladelphia.org/accompaniment>.

of patterns of whiteness. Collective liberation stresses the need for a recognition of the structures set in place that prevent immigrants' rights from being recognized and then the need for these systems to be reformed. Activism describes the physical process of representation, collaboration with different organization, and communication of the injustices occurring. Faith in action affirms that sanctuary is rooted in the conviction to see the intrinsic human dignity in every person. Offering legal services, housing, material needs, language interpretation, medical and mental healthcare, education, social and spiritual needs, and employment are some areas of accompaniment work.

Efforts to humanize each other by walking in solidarity are essential in the future because they will challenge the perception of superiority.<sup>5</sup> Accompaniment emphasizes individual agency, the practice of confidentiality, and a spirit of love and hospitality. The NSM of Philadelphia asserts that accompaniment is not the opportunity for the people accompanying to promote one's own activism or share people's confidential stories and instead, an opportunity for accompaniers to practice anti-racism and engage in a deepening self-analysis of the U.S. immigration system.<sup>6</sup> The work of accompaniment adapts to the individual's need and will continue to be influential in the development of sanctuary until changes occur within the unjust immigration systems.

Actions taken within the context of the New Sanctuary Movement also display the evolution of sanctuary practices changing from sheltering those needing protection from the law to the concept of changing the law to protect those who seek sanctuary. Ending the need for sanctuary ends with a comprehensive immigration reform and the work of the NSM strives

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory Freeland, "Negotiating Place, Space and Borders: The New Sanctuary Movement," *Latino Studies* 8, no. 4 (2010): 499, <https://doi.org/10.1057/lst.2010.53>.

<sup>6</sup> "Accompaniment."

towards accomplishing that unfinished goal.<sup>7</sup> Not only does the NSM establish sites of sanctuary to harbor people, but the people involved in the network also act as sanctuary advocates, navigating the political system that hinders the protection of immigrant rights. The NSM has taken to framing its mission through the lens of an appeal to humanitarianism and moral sensitivity, as well as reinforcing its theological background through the strategy of highlighting the legal cases of immigrants which reveal the legal and moral injustices of the current immigration system.

Regionally and nationally, sanctuary campaigns are advocating for immigration reform in the hope to rebuild the current immigration system. An example of a regional campaign by the NSM of Philadelphia is that of a statewide coalition named Driving PA Forward, which seeks to obtain driver's licenses for all residents.<sup>8</sup> This campaign stresses the importance of listening to the needs of the immigrant community, as the movement only chose to collaborate on this campaign after meeting with over 200 immigrant community members and hearing their feedback. A recent national campaign for immigrant justice called "We Are Home" launched this year by various immigration advocacy groups including United We Dream, United Farm Workers, and Community Change Action, emphasizing the collaborative aspect of this sanctuary advocacy. The campaign demands that the Biden-Harris administration complete three essential goals: reviewing all Trump administration executive policies on immigration, transforming the immigration system into one that is fair, humane, and functional, and creating a timely pathway to citizenship.<sup>9</sup> These are just two examples of hundreds of sanctuary advocacy and reform

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<sup>7</sup> Freeland, 487.

<sup>8</sup> "Driver's Licenses for All in PA," New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, 2017, Accessed October 4, 2021, <https://www.sanctuaryphiladelphia.org/campaigns/drivers-licenses-for-all/>.

<sup>9</sup> Jose Munoz, "Leading Organizations Join Forces, Launch Nationwide Campaign for Immigrant Justice," United We Dream, January 25, 2021, <https://unitedwedream.org/2021/01/leading-organizations-join-forces-launch-nationwide-campaign-for-immigrant-justice/>.

occurring at the city, state, and national levels that directly addresses the needs of the immigrant community.

*What is the purpose of sanctuary cities?*

The topic of sanctuary cities has not been largely touched upon in this analysis, yet it remains an essential and timely discussion. The purpose of sanctuary cities is something to consider for the future as well. To analyze what this future for sanctuary cities could be, it is helpful to look at the model of sanctuary cities in the United States compared to the model of sanctuary cities in the United Kingdom as these examples reflect two different purposes of sanctuary jurisdictions. In the United States, sanctuary cities mirror the example of San Francisco, which became the first sanctuary city after passing a symbolic “City of Refuge Resolution” in 1985.<sup>10</sup> Then, the city passed the more legally binding “City of Refuge Ordinance” which prohibited the use of city funds to assist with immigration enforcement, including a ban on requesting, recording, or spreading information about a person’s legal status, effectively introducing a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy for immigration status.<sup>11</sup> These actions were taken to protect the identities of Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees fleeing from the economic and political conflicts in their home countries, setting a pattern of U.S. sanctuary cities being born in opposition to national policies.

Today, there are approximately 280 cities and counties in the United States that have labeled themselves as sanctuary jurisdictions.<sup>12</sup> Many of these cities declared themselves after

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<sup>10</sup> Harald Bauder, “Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective,” *International Migration* 55, no 2 (2016): 176, [https:// doi: 10.1111/imig.12308](https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12308)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Bryan Griffith and Jessica Vaughn, “Map: Sanctuary Cities, Counties, and States,” Center for Immigration Studies, March 22, 2021, <https://cis.org/Map-Sanctuary-Cities-Counties-and-States>.

the inauguration of President Trump in 2017. All of these jurisdictions have the common element of passing laws or ordinances that shield the identity of undocumented immigrants from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Local jurisdictions are able to choose whether they will voluntarily assist ICE. Some municipalities deny cooperation with immigration authorities or pass laws to issue identification cards for all residents, even if they do not possess immigration documents or a driver's license.<sup>13</sup> However, these laws do not provide ultimate protection against the detection, detention, and deportation of undocumented immigrants by U.S. federal immigration authorities. There are other limits to sanctuary jurisdictions in the United States, as well. Legally, federal laws still hold precedence and "sanctuary cities" have become a heavily politicized term after former president Trump threatened to withhold funding. The term has become more of a symbolic presence of disobedience and the ultimate goal of these municipalities is not to guarantee protection from federal immigration authorities or address the root problem of immigration issues in the United States. Instead, the sanctuary ordinances help provide a limited protection for the safety and privacy of undocumented immigrants and are typically passed as a form of resistance against the policies of the federal government. The state of sanctuary cities in the United States today presents an opportunity to discuss manners in which they could function differently.

Sanctuary cities in the United Kingdom and Europe provide a different format for consideration. In 2005, Sheffield became the first sanctuary city in the United Kingdom followed by sixteen other municipalities in the subsequent years.<sup>14</sup> However, the purpose and reasoning behind the formation of these cities was very different compared to the United States. The cities

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<sup>13</sup> Bauder, 176.

<sup>14</sup> Blanca Garcés-Masareñas, and Kristin Eitel, "Sanctuary Cities: A Global Perspective." Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, June, 2019, [https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/anuario\\_internacional\\_cidob/2019/sanctuary\\_cities\\_a\\_global\\_perspective](https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/anuario_internacional_cidob/2019/sanctuary_cities_a_global_perspective).

formed not as a way to resist against the policies of the national government, but simply to extend hospitality and solidarity towards the growing refugee crisis. From 2015 onwards, many more cities in Europe began labeling themselves as places of solidarity and refuge. Several examples of these occurrences include Barcelona labeling itself as a “Refuge City” in 2015 and the organization of the Pan-European Solidarity Cities network.<sup>15</sup> Both of these cases promote the rights of any undocumented migrants, as well as advocating for the local inclusion of migrants and refugees. Increasingly, city networks throughout Europe have joined together to advocate for the rights and protections of all people, to urge the acceptance of asylees into their cities, and to promote the needs for healthcare coverage and sufficient housing needs.

Many of these European sanctuary cities provide an essential difference from the United States noncooperation model. Their practices are put in place to promote a culture of hospitality towards refugees and migrants, regardless of immigration papers. This movement is still a push created by municipalities, instead of national governments, but it focuses on the themes of inclusion, acceptance, and solidarity.<sup>16</sup> In response to the needs of refugees and asylees, the cities established resources and citizens took initiatives to coordinate the needs of migrants, if public services were not available. These models do not, however, pledge to not cooperate with any immigration authorities, and while their national governments may not provide and promote the same services and culture of hospitality, these cities do not act in direct opposition of any federal laws.

By examining these two models, it is clear that in the future cities will continue to have an essential role in responding to the growing refugee and migration crisis. Approximately 80

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<sup>15</sup> Bauder, 178.

<sup>16</sup> Garcés-Mascareñas and Eitel.

percent of the world's migrants live or work in urban spaces.<sup>17</sup> The response of the city does depend on its respective government. For the United Kingdom, its cities' responses are complementary to the state, whereas in the United States, there is a level of disobedience and potential confrontation between local and federal governments. Ultimately, cities do not have the authority to pass immigration law and make any decisions related to deportation, but they do have the ability to help ensure civil and social rights of migrants. Cities can create a vision and identity of being a welcoming place, even if the nation-state's policies differ. They can help mitigate and they can help advocate. If the burden to protect and to aid migrants is falling upon the city and not the state, then the city leaders and citizens have an opportunity to question and challenge the politics that are leading to this division and to advocate for new national policies. In the future, sanctuary cities globally have a chance to go beyond the resistant noncooperation models and create sanctuary networks dedicated to passing immigration reform and resettling refugees and asylees. Partnerships between cities will allow the sanctuary city movement to further thrive with a sharing of resources, information, and a larger reach.

### *What is a Sanctuary World?*

The focus of sanctuary in this project has mostly been centered around immigrant justice in the United States, however, globally, sanctuary in regard to the needs of refugees and migrants will continue to grow. Oppression, violence, and the effects of climate change are continuing to force people to leave their homes and countries. According to the World Bank 2021 report, by 2050, there will be an estimated 200 million people around the world forced to leave their homes

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<sup>17</sup> Garcés-Mascareñas and Eitel.

due to climate change.<sup>18</sup> While much of this displacement will be internal within the nation-states, climate change disasters can also force people to cross borders. However, international refugee law does not address this cause of forced migration, nor does it address the plight of economic migrants. The current definition of a refugee recognized by the United Nations is someone who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”<sup>19</sup> This definition was defined and ratified through the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol which are the global legal documents asserting a refugee’s right of non-refoulement or the right to not be sent back to their home country out of serious threats to their life. While persecution will continue to displace people, this current definition of a refugee does not reflect the existing environment and reasons for forced migration.

For a new refugee convention to be called, all UN member states must issue a call to redefine the causes of what makes someone a refugee. Linda Rabben asserts that, “Without serious reconsideration of the unintended consequences of reform and rededication to the protection of basic human rights, any law, regulation or policy governing asylum is soon to fail.”<sup>20</sup> Nation-states, faced with an increasing level of refugees and migrants, must monitor asylum systems that are able to combine legal efficiency and the protection of human rights. Despite the deterrence established by nation-states through means of border patrols, detention, deportation, and immigration quotas, people will continue to seek better and safer lives in other countries. However, their right to movement is restricted, even as globalization has enabled

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<sup>18</sup> “Climate Change Could Force 216 Million People to Migrate Within Their Own Countries by 2050,” The World Bank, September 13, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/09/13/climate-change-could-force-216-million-people-to-migrate-within-their-own-countries-by-2050>.

<sup>19</sup> “Refugees,” United Nations (United Nations), accessed October 2, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/refugees>.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger: The Past, Present and Future of Sanctuary* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011), 220.

capital and goods to move across borders efficiently and freely, people's movement is regulated and even criminalized.<sup>21</sup>

Sanctuary movements are working towards a future where globally the rights of all migrants, refugees and internally displaced peoples are recognized. Some movements, like the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, advocate for specific steps like the decriminalization of immigrants and refugees, the demilitarization of borders, real and timely paths to legal status, full access to education, health and employment, an end to mass deportation, and an end to xenophobia and discrimination.<sup>22</sup> These goals are mentioned in relation to U.S. policy, but are also relevant globally, especially in context of other Western nation-states. These types of goals can be helped by a reexamination of international law to discuss the causes that are forcing people to leave their homes and to then ask the international community itself to provide sanctuary globally, in light of the mounting number of people being forced to leave their homes, living without safety and without the protection of internationally recognized human rights.

Movements and organizations across the world have called for an International Sanctuary Principles Statement. This document has been endorsed by over 110 religious leaders, regional sanctuary networks, interfaith organizations, and immigrant justice organizations globally. The statement calls for five essential principles that guide the actions needed for an international sanctuary movement. These five principles are compassionate response, due process, family unity, restorative justice, and civil initiative.<sup>23</sup> These principles are in connection to immigrant justice, however, they are still applicable to other social movements.

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<sup>21</sup> Rabben, *Give Refuge to the Stranger*, 221.

<sup>22</sup> "Resources for Sanctuary Supporters," Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice, accessed September 20, 2021, <http://imirj.org/resources-for-sanctuary-supporters>.

<sup>23</sup> "AEU Signs International Sanctuary Principles Statement," American Ethical Union, October 1, 2019, <https://aeu.org/resource/aeu-signs-international-sanctuary-principles-statement/>.

This exploration of sanctuary movements demonstrates that immigrant justice is not the only demand for sanctuary. In the past movements studied, sanctuary was offered to provide protection for people accused of crimes in medieval England when there was no reliable justice system, and then again, was offered to enslaved peoples in the United States. The cases vary, but the common theme of why sanctuary is offered is to provide hospitality for oppressed peoples. Thus, sanctuary is not bound to a specific group of people, time, or place. Rather, if there is a need for compassionate response or civil initiative, no matter the movement, than sanctuary is applicable.

Rev. Alison Harrington from the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson spoke about the necessity for sanctuary spaces everywhere in the world for all social movements saying:

And as the Sanctuary Movement, we must see the intersectionality of oppression that crosses race, gender, sexual orientation and class. We must call upon our congregations to go beyond talk of loving our neighbor to actual love, so that we can live our faith by opening our doors and hitting the streets to create sanctuary alongside Black Lives Matter, undocumented people, the LGBTQ community, and the Muslim and Sikh communities to stop the violence and seek justice in all that we do.<sup>24</sup>

Sanctuary has proven itself time and time again to be a malleable and adaptable practice, responding to injustices throughout history, and it can continue to do so in various social movements. During Black Lives Matter protests, churches across the United States opened their doors to protect protestors in danger of being arrested. Offering shelter to protestors protesting unjust laws and systems reflects the traditional form of sanctuary, but a sanctuary world must also be visible in the advocacy for tackling the root forms of injustice and inequality and dismantling the systems that uphold them. A sanctuary world offers actions of love, protection, and a commitment to change until there is no longer a need for sanctuary.

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<sup>24</sup> Alison Harrington, "Sanctuary Is a Stronghold of the Movement," Auburn Seminary, September 20, 2016, <https://auburnseminary.org/voices/sanctuary-stronghold-movement/>.

## CONCLUSION

The practice of sanctuary is a constant throughout history, one that can transform itself according to the needs of different people across generations forced to seek shelter and protection from the ancient world to the present day. In this thesis, I have mapped out an outline of how sanctuary has emerged in the past and the present and considered how it might realize itself in the future. The goal of this exploration was to establish an understanding of sanctuary by learning through its various iterations throughout the centuries about its common purpose and evolution.

The rich history of sanctuary movements in the past allowed me to examine three very different examples. Each movement served a different community: in medieval England sanctuary protected alleged criminals, in the antebellum United States sanctuary assisted Black enslaved people seeking freedom, and in the 1980s sanctuary accompanied Central Americans crossing the border into the United States. The community served is one variance throughout these different examples, but the comparative analysis between the three case studies demonstrated key, essential elements of sanctuary that intersected with each other. Sanctuary is an alternative form of justice, a necessary means of offering protection for when the laws set in place fail to defend a community's rights and protections. Those who offer sanctuary are often driven by faith-based intentions to offer hospitality to others. But in every example of a movement, the need for sanctuary drifted away as reform to legal systems addressed the key problems that led people to be exposed to injustice. Each movement evolved, but these essential elements remained constant.

The oral history component of this thesis offered the unique opportunity to speak directly with people involved in both the Central American Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s and in

New Sanctuary Movement efforts today and ask them questions to learn about what sanctuary personally means for them. Each participant had their own definition of sanctuary, demonstrating the flexibility and transience of the practice, as well as the personal connection each participant discovered throughout their work. Speaking with the participants also uncovered some of the challenges and concerns of the sanctuary movement, including its history of majority-white congregations and organizations taking the lead and its current lack of pathway towards legal reform. Rather than taking a historical approach to examining sanctuary, this chapter focuses on the words and actions of sanctuary activists and scholars, ultimately moving towards the conclusion that sanctuary's fundamental purpose is to address the root issues causing the injustice and push for legal reform.

Until that point is reached, sanctuary will be needed in the future. Long-lasting effects of the recent presidential administration's executive orders concerning immigrant enforcement are still being reckoned with. The DACA program remains in limbo, the effects of family separation at the border remain, and there is still no timely path towards citizenship and all of its benefits. The Covid-19 pandemic has also exacerbated many of the issues the immigrant community had previously been contending with: immigration bans and family separation, extreme backlog of USCIS cases, and an overall lack of protection and social security. Globally, potential unrest and violence, as well as threatening effects of climate change, have the possibility to create millions of refugees in the coming decades. Ignoring this issue through an exclusionary attitude and policies will only fuel the need for sanctuary. In these instances, sanctuary can step up in the forms of accompaniment, sanctuary cities, the act of offering hospitality and shelter, and advocacy and reform. Additionally, a sanctuary world may be viewed through the lens of many

different movement and communities with the promise that sanctuary is not tethered to a specific time or place.

Future studies of sanctuary can explore the possibilities of this intersectional practice that might be realized in other movements. Already, the practice has taken shape into the Black Lives Matter movement, but can also be relevant to combating other systems of oppression. Protection, education, hospitality, advocacy, and reform are all transferrable elements of sanctuary movements that can play a role against other injustices. With reform being a critical aspect of ending the need for sanctuary, the laws set in place enabling these injustices can be identified and dismantled through the work of sanctuary in its new context.

After having the chance to examine sanctuary movements in their many different contexts and learn of the different ways people understand sanctuary, I want to offer up my own personal definition and understanding of sanctuary. Throughout this thesis, the choice of language describing sanctuary has been deliberate and unique from each perspective. The opportunity to hear so many stories and connections to sanctuary has been a rewarding and challenging gift, as it necessitates reflection and insight into the systems created which perpetrate this need for sanctuary. In this instance, it is an immigration system, not a broken one, but an exclusionary system built off of a fear of the “other.” Regardless of the system of oppression, I understand the practice of sanctuary to exist within two important dynamics: an adaptable refuge (whether it be church, home, city, or country) providing hospitality, healing, and protection, and as a call to action against injustices to achieve the necessary reform and healing, as a path to move forward. Sanctuary paves the way for a more just world, a world where sanctuary will no longer ever be needed.

## APPENDIX A

### ORAL HISTORY GUIDING QUESTIONS

*These questions were used as a guide throughout the oral history process. However, I allowed the participants to speak freely through open-ended questions and guide the course of the conversation as well, hence the questions asked were always slightly different during each interview, but the main themes were always discussed.*

1. Please introduce your full name and a little bit about yourself.
2. What is your personal history with the sanctuary movement?
3. How do you define sanctuary?
4. What are the motivations behind your decision to do sanctuary work?
5. How did your congregation Southside Presbyterian Church/school/organization decide to be a part of the New Sanctuary Movement? What were the motivations behind that decision?
6. Are you able to share any stories of the circumstances of the people you've met and helped in the movement that would not put them at risk?
7. What actions do you take as a sanctuary congregation/school/organization?
8. What connections do you see between the New Sanctuary Movement and the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s?
9. What are some of the risks and concerns when declaring sanctuary? How did you think through that and respond?
10. Were there any other challenges in providing sanctuary that you encountered? Do you have any regrets concerning your involvement with the sanctuary movement?
11. Do you collaborate with other faith communities or local organizations in this movement? What does that collaboration look like?
12. What was the most surprising thing to come out of your sanctuary movement?
13. What's the most important lesson you'd want to offer from your experience living out sanctuary?
14. What hopes do you have for the future of the New Sanctuary Movement?
15. Do you consider the New Sanctuary Movement to be at odds with the concept of justice? Why or why not?
16. Is there anyone else you would recommend I talk to about this subject?

## APPENDIX B

### ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPTS

Transcript of Phone Interview with Rev. John Fife  
Recorded on Sept.16, 2021

*On Sept. 16, 2021, I conducted an interview with Rev. John Fife from the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, AZ, one of the first churches in the United States to offer sanctuary to Central American migrants. This conversation discusses the beginnings of the Sanctuary Movement and Fife's work with civil initiative.*

Annaleigh Cummings: Would you introduce yourself and tell a little bit about who you are?

Fife: Sure, my name is John Fife, F-I-F-E. I am 81 years old. I was a Presbyterian pastor in Tucson, Arizona for 35 years and the church that I was pastor of was the first in the United States to declare sanctuary.

Cummings: Could you talk a little about the decision-making factors your church, Southside Presbyterian Church, went through to offer sanctuary?

Fife: It was kind of a two-year process. We started by realizing that there were Central American refugees on the border that were undocumented and were being picked up, detained, and deported back to the conditions going on which were massacres of hundreds and thousands, death squads and torture chambers in El Salvador and Guatemala. We pulled together folks that we had done work with on various issues in Tucson around the needs of people in the barrio. The Southside Church in Tucson is located in the oldest and poorest barrio in Tucson, so we had lots of work to do to meet people's needs. Among those were immigration issues, of course, with undocumented folks who lived in the barrio and their families, so we had some experience with working on immigration issues, but this one required a coalition effort. So we formed a partnership between the Tucson Ecumenical Council which was a group of Catholic and Christian churches in Tucson, and with immigration law providers in Tucson who agreed to provide legal support and representation for refugees from Central America. We began that partnership and represented lots and lots of Central Americans who were applying for political asylum. After about eight or nine months, we realized no one was getting political asylum if they were from El Salvador or Guatemala because the United States considered the military and the governments of El Salvador and Guatemala to be our allies. Of course, they did not qualify for political asylum, only refugees from communist countries did. Jim Corbett came to me and told me that we don't have a choice given the circumstances, the circumstances being everyone was being deported by immigration authorities. He thought we had no choice under the circumstances except to smuggle refugees safely across the border, so they're not captured by border patrol because once they are captured by border patrol, they're deported. And I said, "Really? How do you think about it like that?" And he pointed to moments in history, first the abolition movement when people helped smuggle runaway slaves across the border and moved them across the Underground Railroad safely across the border. Then, he pointed to the failure of the Church in Europe and the United States to protect Jewish refugees and he said that was one of

the biggest church failures in history and they got it all wrong and I said, “Yeah, that’s the way I read church history too.” So, we started to smuggle refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala across our border and then shortly after that, he came to me and asked if he could bring the refugees to my church. After a long meeting, my church began to shelter Central American refugees in the church. Then, a government lawyer at a political asylum hearing took one of our attorneys aside and warned that the government knew what we were doing and warned about indictments. We had a series of meetings about what to do and the only thing we could think of doing was to go public. Part of that discussion was the idea that maybe we can call the Church as a sanctuary as a way to go public. We went through a two-month process with the congregation, meeting with lawyers and legal experts, and then declared the church a sanctuary in March of 1982, as a result of that long process. We received a mother, father, and two small children from El Salvador into the sanctuary of our church. We also sent letters to other churches across the country about our plans, so when we got to that date, there were other congregations that would declare sanctuary on the same day.

Cummings: You mentioned some of the concerns and legal risks that went into your decision-making process. Were there any other challenges that you encountered during this journey?

Fife: We dealt with most of the challenges from the beginning. How do you feed 50-100 people sleeping on the floor of the church and provide them with medical care and mental health support, because they had dealt with all kinds of trauma on their journey across the border? It involved the whole congregation in terms of meals and doctors to provide medical care and social workers to provide counseling and support, and the relocation of people in sanctuary at the church to their relatives in the United States. All of those were serious challenges, but we had figured it out by the time we went public. The basic threat by the time we went public was the threat of indictment.

Cummings: What would you say is your own personal definition of sanctuary?

Fife: When we started and had the vote to receive the first family publicly inside our church, our definition was pretty clear. We acknowledged what we had been doing for a year or so, as helping people cross so they would not get caught by Border Patrol and protecting them in the Church from deportation. So, we defined it when we declared sanctuary as a civil disobedience, in the tradition of the civil rights movement like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. I quoted all of those folks, including the Bible. That was the context and the strategy we believed we were employing. A month after we declared sanctuary, I get a phone call from my office and this guy introduces himself as a human rights attorney in New York. He said “Stop talking about civil disobedience. You’re not doing civil disobedience.” This attorney said, “Listen dummy, it’s not you that’s violating United States law, it’s the United States government that’s violating United States refugee law by continuing to deport refugees back to El Salvador and Guatemala. So every time you talk about civil disobedience, you’re confusing people about the issue.” So I talked to Jim Corbett and relayed to him the phone conversation, and he came back with a paper calling our work civil initiative. And that became the basis of our sanctuary movement from that point on. We defined civil initiative as the legal right and responsibility to directly protect the victims of human rights violations when the government violates human rights. He based that whole thesis on the Nuremberg tribunal after World War II, after the legal defense from Nazi officials who said they were just following the orders of our nation-states, and

the tribunal said there was a higher legal mandate than the nation-state and that is human rights and international law which is the legal standard we are all accountable for. So we went around to churches and synagogues and told them, “We don’t want you to violate the law, we want you to stand up against the U.S. government who’s violating the law and human rights.”

Cummings: Your movement grew exponentially during the 1980s, but now there is also the New Sanctuary Movement. What connections do you see between the two movements today?

Fife: The movement has grown, not just in the United States, but in the European Union, Israel, Australia, Canada, and Mexico. My first experience with sanctuary was in El Salvador when people fleeing the death squads in El Salvador had gathered in church grounds to protect family members there. It’s evolving into a phenomena. The next step after we were successful in the 1980s movement by helping Salvadoran and Guatemalan gain Temporary Protected Status was to help bring families together. Then, in 2007, the New Sanctuary Movement grew up to help protect those families from legal deportation, until we could create a legal argument to protect those deportations. During the Obama administration, priorities were established and we could argue these families do not fall under the priorities and many families were protected that way. The movement also grew from primarily a faith-based movement to a primarily secular movement, that then became 400 or so cities, counties, and states who declared themselves jurisdictions of sanctuary. It has evolved depending on the needs of the communities and the families and I’m delighted to see how it’s evolved.

Cummings: I also wanted to talk about the organization you founded, No More Deaths. Could you speak to the formation of that and how it connects to your ideas of civil initiative?

Fife: It was organized by people who were involved in the 1980s movement. The crisis was the border enforcement strategy called prevention through deterrence that forced migrants into the deadliest areas of the border and thousands of people began to die in the desert. Tucson became the epicenter of these deaths. We took what we learned in the Sanctuary Movement and translated that strategy and what we learned about the practice of civil initiative into the desert. That was the basis of No More Deaths so people could receive humanitarian aid to resist the strategy of prevention through death as a deterrence, which continues to be the strategy of our Border Patrol. We took what we learned to try to save lives in the desert.

Cummings: What has been the most surprising thing to come out of your work with sanctuary?

Fife: The most surprising thing has been the growth and support of the movement. When we declared sanctuary, we were thinking of our legal defense and what would happen in we got indicted. Hopefully, we would build up some support in the faith community when we got indicted. We had no idea that the movement would succeed in challenging the Reagan administration and succeed in getting everyone Temporary Protected Status. We never thought anything like that could happen and we were as astonished as everyone else was. Then, to see it transfer in the desert and to see that this theory of civil initiative could be used in other circumstances to protect human rights and advocate for a change in policies and strategies of the Border Patrol. We have been able to win the 50 or so cases the Border Patrol has brought against our volunteers. They have been acquitted in federal court and the movement for reform of

immigration policies and border enforcement strategies is obviously winning in the last election. We are making headway, but we are not ready to claim success at any moment.

Cummings: Looking forward, what hopes do you have for the future of sanctuary?

Fife: I think globally, the reason that the sanctuary movement has grown in so many places is because the crisis of migration has grown globally for so many reasons like war, climate change, violence, and it is reaching new dimensions every year. There is a failure of nation-states to follow the mandate that all nations received after World War II, which was the responsibility of providing asylum and protecting victims of these disasters. These nation-states have failed in these responsibilities. That failure means that other institutions have to pick up those responsibilities or we fail again, as the world failed during the Holocaust. The growth of people providing sanctuary for the most vulnerable has grown because of that failure. I expect that will happen until nation-states stop trying to prevent folks from entering their borders and recognize that they have a global responsibility to not only stop the wars and repression that results in migrants and deal with climate change, so people do not have to leave home. Until that happens, then the sanctuary movement will grow wherever the need is.

Cummings: For those who would consider themselves to be opponents of the sanctuary movement and the support it provides undocumented immigrants because they consider it to be at odds to the concept of justice, how would you respond to that opposition?

Fife: Justice has already been defined after World War II when we vowed to not let this happen again. Justice is not allowing human rights violations to happen again. That definition has already been determined and ratified by faith communities globally. If they want to come up with another definition of justice, then they would have to go against international law. Every faith community has defined the need to protect the most vulnerable as an essential element of human rights. I don't have much sympathy for folks who want to change that universally accepted definition of justice.

Transcript of Zoom Interview with Dr. Ricardo Gomez  
Recorded on Tuesday, September 14, 2021

*On September 14, I conducted an interview with Dr. Ricardo Gomez, an associate professor at the Information School at the University of Washington. This conversation is centered around his previous scholarship on sanctuary.*

Cummings: What is your personal history with the sanctuary movement?

Gomez: I guess it all started in the 1980s, when I spent some time in Nicaragua and witnessed the activities of Americans who would go down to Nicaragua, return to the US, and speak at churches and church basements. At that time, there were a lot of people fleeing war in El Salvador and Honduras who were seeking refuge in the United States. That was my first exposure to the sanctuary movement.

Cummings: Looking at the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s and the New Sanctuary Movement, in your research and experiences, what connections do you see between the two?

Gomez: Yes, there are many parallels. In fact, many of the original activists are still alive today. Not only is there the continuity of the people, but there is a continuity of the cause and the reasons for it. When there is an egregious violation of human rights and the international community does not respond to it as they should to offer refuge, sanctuary is the next step in offering a humanitarian response to give protection to people who are vulnerable and who the international community are not offering a response.

Cummings: In the publication, “Sanctuary Planet: A Global Sanctuary Movement for the Time of Trump,” you and the other authors mentioned a formation of a Global Sanctuary Collective. Could you expand on that?

Gomez: That was our intent. None of us have the resources to actually do so, but we wanted a call or motivation that invites different types of people. One of the things that we did in that paper was emphasize that sanctuary can take many shapes. It’s not just offering harbor to people in a church basement, but there are many types of action, like art, poetry, music, and performance. There are other ways of protesting inhumane immigration policies so we wanted to broaden the array of actions that can be considered sanctuary, so it’s not just the idea of harboring people in churches. So coupled with that, we wanted to make a call to have more people from varying paths of life to be aware that what they are doing could be sanctuary. Things were so egregious under Trump that the situation was revived after it had been largely dormant. I think it’s true that things have been revived under Trump with many states, counties, and cities and university campuses declaring themselves sanctuaries. We’re in Washington which is a sanctuary state along with Seattle and King County, so there are more official and less official places of sanctuary that protect migrants, but the renewed call for a global movement did not go anywhere. You would need a lot more action, push, fundraising, and grassroots that we were not able to do.

Cummings: Your research also interested me because of the focus on academics and researchers to realize their role in sanctuary. Is there anything else that you would ask of academics and researchers in the time of a renewed sanctuary movement?

Gomez: To get engaged and find ways to relate their work, their teachings, and bring in information, awareness, and potential for action in relation to the inhumane treatment this country, and many other countries in the world, are showing to immigrants fleeing from environmental degradation, climate change, domestic abuse, lack of opportunities, and depletion of resources, given the policies this country and other countries have deployed for years and years. Do something, it doesn't have to be putting water on the trails of the desert, but it can be something done in solidarity with others.

Cummings: In your sanctuary research and your own lived experiences, has there been anything that has come out of your experiences that has surprised you?

Gomez: Yes, one thing that came up that was really interesting was the motivations of the people who actually did something, and I did a piece with some of the authors from the article above that I wanted to send with you. It's called "Empathic Humanitarianism." Let me send it to you. This paper is the result of something really interesting and that's the question of why people would do this. Why would retirees or professors or professionals or young people like yourself would choose to go to the desert moving water, or doing activities to offer or promote sanctuary? Why would you do that? We asked and conducted interviews at the US-Mexico border and suggested a typology of motivations. You already mentioned you had had talked to people with religious and secular motivations and we identified very clearly those two types of motivations. For some, it was religious, but for many it was secular. One person who had been a chaplain his whole life said his motivation was not faith-based, it was not religious, but it was secular. A specific type of motivation we labeled value-based. We ended up creating a typology for the motivations of people who wanted to engage in humanitarian action, not just for migrants, but it could span other domains. So the empathic concern which is other-centered, which is the idea that people act around the motivation of the other and not of myself, we thought was really intriguing and should be expanded on. So that was something that came up on our research that was really intriguing.

Cummings: What hopes do you have for the future of the New Sanctuary Movement and what you might see sanctuary look like in the next five to ten years?

Gomez: My hope is that it would not be needed. It's like doctors and lawyers, it would be better if we did not need it. If we had immigration policies that would respond to the need of embracing and welcoming people who are fleeing persecution and violence, we would not need sanctuary. There is no reason why capital, money, goods and commerce can be globalized, but people movement cannot be globalized. People should be able to go wherever they can find better opportunities to improve their lives, just as people with money can move their money to do better and capital and goods have no boundaries, but people do, which I think is ridiculous. An ideal world is one where sanctuary is not needed because people can go wherever they need to build a better life.

Cummings: Some of the opposition to the New Sanctuary Movement would say it's at odds with the concept of justice. Would you consider that sanctuary movements are at odds with the concept of justice?

Gomez: No human is illegal. We are all humans and we all have human rights just by the fact of being born and alive in this planet. Some people do illegal things, but moving to a different location is not illegal. Justice is when everybody is able to exercise their complete human rights. Moving to a different country to seek a better life for yourself and for your family is not in opposition to justice. Helping others who are trying to seek a better life is not against the concept of justice. It is an explicit act to reinforce justice and social justice.

Cummings: On a different note, I wanted to discuss the University of Washington's policies that they offer to protect undocumented students and clarify that they are not listed as a sanctuary campus?

Gomez: Yes, that is a conscious choice. I actually spoke to the president and she said "Rather, then putting ourselves on the radar at the time of Trump, we will do all the things that a sanctuary campus will do, but we won't call ourselves a sanctuary campus." There is an office of support for undocumented students at the university and they are offered financial help and resources and support that goes beyond what other students are offered. There is no need to call ourselves a sanctuary campus, but we are doing a lot to offer support for undocumented students.

Cummings: Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

Gomez: Yes, let me add an interesting angle to your analysis. You are aware of the new anti-abortion law in Texas? It ties individuals to being the enforcers, rather than the authorities. I also started to see in, I forget which state, but they're calling it a sanctuary for the Second Amendment. They're trying to have a law passed to offer sanctuary for the right to bear arms. They're taking the concept of sanctuary and placing it under the guise of sanctuary and the Second Amendment, without government interference. Then, they add to that and suggest to deputize citizens as the enforcer of that law, and they can sue anybody who tries to obstruct people's right to bear arms. That's why I started with the Texas anti-abortion law because it's the one where they deputize citizens to enforce it. That makes me think about why we don't take that same logic to deputize citizens to enforce the rights of immigrants and protect sanctuary for people who are fleeing and deputize regular citizens as the enforcers of sanctuary in the United States. I leave that to you, to consider.

Transcript of Zoom Interview with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove  
Recorded on Thursday, September 23rd

*On September 23, I conducted an interview with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. He is the Executive Director of the School for Conversion in Durham, NC, a popular education center connecting faith formation and public education, and connected with St. John's Baptist Church. This conversation discusses his work in offering sanctuary.*

Annaleigh Cummings: Could you please introduce a little about yourself?

Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove: I'm Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove. I live in Durham, North Carolina. I have for the last twenty years been a part of the Rutba House here, an intentional Christian community that draws on monastic views here to live together in intentional ways and engage in building justice in the community. We have, for some time, been connected with various streams of Christians and other people of faith who offered sanctuary first in the 1980s. We have been close friends with Jubilee partners in Georgia and have visited the Presbyterian Church in Tucson, which really gave birth to that movement. More recently, we have walked alongside the Dreamers, the college students and out of college adults who were undocumented and trying to change immigration law in this country. They realized the DREAM Act does not provide a space for their parents in this country, so they grew into a movement of Undocumented and Unafraid and we walked with them during those days. During the Trump administration, we began to offer sanctuary to undocumented folks in churches who were in danger of immediate deportation. Our congregation here in Durham, St. John's Baptist Church hosted Pastor Jose Chicas. Since the Biden Administration began, Jose left sanctuary and is trying to navigate the realities of being a person without a real status here and we have been petitioning the Biden administration to make a more workable reality for him and have also been trying to push for legislative change, which I most immediately do through the Poor People's Campaign, which is a national recall for moral revival that considers immigration reform that creates a pathway for citizenship for the 11 million undocumented people to be an essential piece of a moral agenda in terms of public policy.

Cummings: With all of your experience working with different sanctuary movements and accompaniment, do you have a personal definition for how you would define sanctuary?

Wilson-Hartgrove: Well, I'm a Christian. I think about it in terms of the Church, which is always called to proclaim a Kingdom that offers justice for those who are suffering injustice, but also realizes that in the system of this world, that is not a reality. So, I kind of consider all of Christian witness to be about carving out spaces where we can know the reality of the Kingdom now, even as we wait and watch and hope for it to come fully. So, I think sanctuary in the sense that it is offered as a way of preventing imminent deportation in terms of extreme immigration enforcement is a concrete application of that, as a way that churches can resist the violence of the state that is willing to separate people from their families because of their immigration status. In some cases, including the case we worked on here, they can be very arbitrary cases, based on a person's individual mistake or wrongdoing, but very much about having a system that does not work for most people. I think sanctuary is the role the church has

to carve out a space for a little bit of breathing room in a broken world. It is not the answer to any of these problems, but it certainly a role the church must play.

Cummings: You're also the director for the School of Conversion in Durham. Would you mind explaining a little about the identity and mission of the School of Conversion?

Wilson-Hartgrove: We're a popular education center, a place where we try to do faith formation and public education in a way that empowers communities to connect with movements, like the sanctuary movement, in order to connect people with a community and with social change. We consider ourselves very much in the line of folk schools and popular education movements in U.S. history, like the Highlander Folk Schools or the Citizenship Schools of the civil rights movement. In many ways, it was that education movement that connected me with the Dreamers through the School of Conversion and I worked with them for about a decade.

Cummings: With St. John's Baptist Church, that was the congregation that hosted Pastor Jose Chicas?

Wilson-Hartgrove: That's right. Our school is on the campus of St. John's Baptist Church. He actually stayed in the school building and my office was next to his bedroom for those four years.

Cummings: What was the decision-making process like in your congregation to offer sanctuary?

Wilson-Hartgrove: It was something we had decided we'd be willing to do when the Trump campaign had run on an extreme anti-immigrant platform, so we assumed there would be extreme anti-immigration policies. We had decided to do that and it was not a long decision-making process. It flowed out of the relationships we had been in for years. When we got the call about Jose's particular circumstances, it was a brief conversation about logistics and we moved ahead to offer him a space here.

Cummings: What were some of the significant challenges you encountered providing sanctuary?

Wilson-Hartgrove: The biggest challenge is that there is not a clear way out. You are essentially offering someone house arrest which is not an ideal situation. It puts the church in the awkward situation of being prison-keepers. You can try to be the best prison-keeper you can be, but it's still a prison-keeper. Trying to figure out how to give him autonomy, not make it feel like he was stuck or obligated to the Church and the community. Giving him as much autonomy as possible while figuring out what real, physical, emotional and material support he needed. I don't know if we always got it right, but we tried to keep talking about it. Inviting people into the circle when there were things he needed. Things come up when you're confined to a house. For a few weeks you might think you need something like food, but when it turns into months, he started to have health issues. So how can we get medical care? How are these issues related to the changes in his life? All kinds of things came up over the four years. He's a pastor so figuring out ways he could minister from sanctuary, using technology so he can preach. He ended up being a regular guest on the radio in El Salvador and he did pastoral care out of the

house he was staying in. The biggest challenge was figuring out what to do if there is no clear plan for it. Churches are typically good at doing what churches have always done, but this one was kind of an interruption and we had to learn.

Cummings: In all of your experiences and promotion for reform, what has been the most surprising thing that has come out of your work??

Wilson-Hartgrove: It's not a surprise anymore, I've come to realize that it is a huge part of it. But the thing that most impresses me is the incredible courage of the people who take sanctuary as a way to survive and continue life with their families. I've learned that a lot of the kinds of congregations who are involved in this movement are justice-oriented who do it because they think it's the right thing to do. Sometimes there's tensions in these congregations between the people who think it's the right thing to do and those who are more worried about logistics, so internal congregations can become a struggle about whether we have the courage to offer this to someone, but what I've learned is that is not the most courageous thing that's happened. The families that are determined to stay together and are often living by an incredible faith to survive day to day and who are, in many ways, living the biblical story. The biblical story is one where people believe God is with them, even in exile or in bondage, all of these situations that are similar those undocumented immigrants are in. The biblical story makes more sense through the eyes of the people taking sanctuary than the people offering sanctuary, frankly.

Cummings: What hopes do you have for the future of the sanctuary movement in the United States?

Wilson Hartgrove: The people who are willing to come together and stand with folks who took sanctuary are now largely the same type of people who are engaged in the work to achieve a real change in immigration policy. I think that's crucial work. The work is not done. In a very real way for us, José is not free until he can become a full citizen and member of the community. It's not enough to have an administration that is not attacking immigrants from the White House every day and ordering ICE to deport anyone they can, when we clearly still have issues at the border with the whole situation with Haiti in the news. In addition to that, this administration has inherited a real problem that's thirty or forty years in the making, where we have had a double standard where the government has allowed corporations and agriculture to function dependent on undocumented labor, but has not considered itself responsible for the human rights of those laborers, the 11 million people who are Americans, but are not citizens of the United States. We have to deal with that, it is a political impasse, and we need real leadership to make that possible.

Cummings: Some of the opposition to the New Sanctuary Movement would say it's at odds with the concept of justice. Would you consider that sanctuary movements are at odds with the concept of justice?

Wilson-Hartgrove: The people who would see it at odds with justice, I think as I've tried to listen to them, would see justice as compliance with the law. I think there can be an unjust law and the only faithful thing you can do with an unjust law is to not obey it. I see the legal issue of sanctuary is very much in line with the question of whether the civil rights movement should

have complied with the Jim Crow laws. The law itself is inhumane and frankly, there is a political system in which it cannot change. To publicly break unjust laws and submit yourself to the consequences of those laws in order to force the public and everyone who has a role in affirming and participating in those laws to change them is justice, and why all of these churches were willing to risk whatever threats ICE was making, you know, threats to not only deport the people we were hosting, but to charge us with aiding and abetting illegal aliens.

Transcript of Zoom Interview with Joan Gregory  
Recorded on Tuesday, September 28th

*I conducted an interview with Joan Gregory on September 28. She is the director of the sanctuary effort at First Unitarian Church in Salt Lake City, Utah, and throughout this conversation, we discuss her work and its challenges.*

Annaleigh Cummings: Could you speak a little more about your personal experience with the sanctuary movement and how you became involved with that movement?

Joan Gregory: So, I got involved in the sanctuary movement back when the church got involved in the sanctuary movement back in 2008, when we first explored the New Sanctuary Movement and decided to become a sanctuary at that time, and I was part of the working group that began that process with our minister, Reverend Tom Goldsmith. Our Unitarian churches, one of our principles was the democratic process so we had a vote, so we did study the sanctuary movement and then had a vote. Back in 2008, we were totally clueless, especially white churches were clueless about what it meant to offer sanctuary, thinking someone would come stay for a month and everything would be great. We would be offering this space and there would be press conferences, and then a marvelous attorney would show up and solve it all. That's not reality, certainly not during the Trump administration.

Cummings: You spoke about the democratic process. Was there any immediate backlash or concerns to this process that affected the conclusion?

Gregory: Yes, there were excellent questions asked and there were concerns, so that's why we did a discernment process. The minister preached about the process. The concerns were coming from what the liability of the church would be and what were the financial liabilities and some of those concerns came up again in 2017. People just wanted to be sure they still understood the whole process. But when it got down to an actual vote, all the votes were in full support.

Cummings: As you were exploring the new Sanctuary Movement, were you looking back to the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s for any lessons?

Gregory: We were really in the moment of what was happening in the New Sanctuary Movement and our church was not involved in the 1980s. Our church has been and continues to support refugee resettlement and in 2008, had a close relationship with the church on the west side of Salt Lake City. Our sister church, it's an Episcopal church that has a huge immigrant population. Its services are all in Spanish and there are many undocumented folks in that congregation and our minister and their minister worked together to help that congregation. We were working with the IRC and that laid our foundation for our sanctuary work because it was clear there were going to be times when people needed sanctuary, and our sister church would not be able to provide that, but we could provide it.

Cummings: I've heard a lot about collaboration in the sanctuary movement. As you've been working in this movement since 2008, could you speak about the collaboration your church has had with different congregations and secular organizations?

Gregory: Oh yes. We have the ministers of all the churches that work together on a regular basis and speak about social justice issues, especially when there are a lot of communities where there is a more dominant religion in that community. For example, I'm from Rhode Island and Catholicism was dominant, but here it's the Latter-Day Saints. So, there is a lot of collaboration among other congregations and some with the LDS churches. There is a group called the Enriching Utah Coalition, which is a coalition of organizations, churches, and all kinds of groups that work together on immigration, like Planned Parenthood, La Raza, Unidad Inmigrante, the Salt Lake Sanctuary Network, the Rape Recovery Center, and Voices for Utah Children. So, you can see there is a wide range of organizations like the ACLU of Utah and we have many groups working together to try and make life easier for the immigrant population. I mentioned the Salt Lake City Coalition and we had a group of people working there to help congregations figure out if they could become sanctuary churches during the Trump administration. They still maintain a website presence, but they are not actively trying to get churches to join at this time. We are also part of the National Sanctuary Collective (Colectivo Santuario) and that is a group of churches that are promoting sanctuary across the country. There are about 220 people that we have worked with that are in sanctuary or have been in sanctuary. Most of them are no longer in sanctuary and they are across the country from Massachusetts to Chicago to Seattle, Washington, and everything in between. These are the churches and organizations that support people in sanctuary and the sanctuary leaders. In my case, I follow Vicky Chavez and do the work that she leads.

Cummings: There is a lot of language around sanctuary. Do you have a personal definition of sanctuary that you like to use?

Gregory: I have not developed a personal definition of sanctuary, but I say we provided a place of refuge and safety for Vicky and her daughters, a place of love and fun and caring. However, sanctuary is not just a place, it is a community that surrounds you and helps you get through anything that comes your way, medically, psychologically, legally, and physically, whatever comes your way.

Cummings: In all your experiences, what has been the most surprising thing that has come out of your work?

Gregory: I don't know if it's the most surprising thing, but the greatest and surprising thing is that we benefited as much, if not more, as Vicky did. We learned so much about ourselves, as well as, learning about her and growing and changing with her as she went through this ordeal. We all grew together.

Cummings: You spoke about what you expected sanctuary to be like in 2008 versus 2017. Could you expand on what were some of the significant challenges you encountered providing sanctuary?

Gregory: The challenges began in the beginning when she was trying to make her decision about whether to go into sanctuary or not. We were not working directly with her, but through a community-based organization. They were sharing information about us through her, so we knew that we might, but we really didn't know very much other than that, and we needed to get prepared. You would think, it's been like ten years, and we would have time to prepare, but we weren't preparing for what we needed to, but we were much clearer when we began preparing for the possibility of someone really coming in. So, we had meetings every day for at least a month, and it wasn't during Zoom times, we were physically going over there, and the plans were changing every time. What can we plan for that won't change? Is there anything? That was challenging and for Vicky, she had made the decision to self-deport and was on the way to the airport. We had gotten word several days beforehand that she would self-deport and it was not going to happen and we were kind of in shock, but then I got a call saying, "We're on our way." So, I called the minister, and we were in, and the bathroom wasn't ready, and the showers were not working yet. We had beds, but we did not have everything, and we wanted it to be perfect. We didn't know what she needed, but the most important lesson then was that being there was what she needed. All she needed was the door locked behind her and the knowledge that she was safe. Everything else could come later and that acceptance from her made all the difference in the world. So, we made it into a big challenge, and she made it into an easy gratitude.

Cummings: What hopes do you have for the future of the sanctuary movement in the United States?

Gregory: In my perfect world, sanctuary has disappeared forever. Right now, there are very few people in sanctuary because of the Trump administration versus the Biden administration. However, it's also a different world in different ways because of the vigilantes out there, but we know that people are still being deported all the time. So for us, we are still supporting Vicky and so for us, right now sanctuary still means supporting Vicky, and we are committed to her. I just want to tear up this deportation system, defund it, destroy it, and create a new true immigration system that is truly welcoming to the stranger and does not ever have to require sanctuary again. My goal is that sanctuary would not be required in the future.

Cummings: Some of the opposition to the New Sanctuary Movement would say it's at odds with the concept of justice. Would you consider that sanctuary movements are at odds with the concept of justice?

Gregory: It's absolutely not against the concept of justice. Our immigration system is unfortunately not broken. It was built this way to keep people out, not to let people in. The indignities and unjust situations that immigrants who come to this country seeking a new life are subjected to are just horrific and disgraceful and Vicky's story is that of lawyers who took her money and did not represent her, who were incompetent, and did not represent her fully during her hearings. She has lost opportunities going forward to make claims on that basis, so doors have closed because of their incompetence and the system that does not allow her to take safety here when there are dangers in her home country for her life and the lives of her children, one of

whom is a US citizen. Like I said, it's a deportation system, not an immigration system. The system is unjust and if we had a just system, Vicky would now be a citizen of this country.

Cummings: Is there anything else you would like to add to this conversation?

Gregory: The thing is, it's not just me. There is a steering committee with ten to fourteen people. There is a whole group of thirty people and then fifty trained people who staff the church 24/7. I was figuring out the number of hours and it's over 4600 volunteer hours in the thirty-nine plus months and that's just the number of hours of volunteers who staffed the church, so there were a lot of other people who gave their time and money. We didn't just have members of the congregation provide that support in terms of staffing the church, there were doctors and people in the legal profession and mental health professionals and teachers helping with school and childcare that's not even included in the 4600 hours. Vicky contributed so much to the church. She started a knitting group when she did not know how to knit, and she got so proficient. It was not all doom and gloom, but it was not easy. Being in sanctuary is something that no one would ever want to do and inflict upon their children without a really good reason. Life and death are a very good reason and our government cannot understand that reason. The baby came into sanctuary at 5 months old and left at four years old. She begs her mother to go back to the church at times now because she misses her home.

Transcript of Zoom Interview with Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra

Recorded on Tuesday, October 5th

*On October 5, I conducted an interview with Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra, the Executive Director of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice in Portland, Oregon. Essential points of this conversation include how she became involved in this work and where she sees the future of sanctuary.*

Annaleigh Cummings: Could you give some background about your work with the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice and how it connects to the sanctuary movement?

Aleide Vilchis-Ibarra: If you were to compare IMIRJ with other organizations, we are the sanctuary organization in Oregon. The root of faith communities doing immigration work are very deep with many people who did sanctuary work in the 80s and are elders of this movement and elders of the work that we do. Today, we are the sanctuary organization in Oregon as we are a state-wide organization that works in both urban and rural communities, which is different from other organizations that focus on urban areas only. We work with people of faith and spirituality doing immigrant justice work.

Cummings: Do you have a personal definition of sanctuary?

Vilchis-Ibarra: Yes, I think there are multiple definitions of sanctuary. Some are more faith-based and focus on accompaniment. But for sanctuary work, it can be recognized very broadly. Sanctuary in action, like showing up on the streets, or sanctuary in the faith community like housing a member, or sanctuary with your voice. We use a broad definition of sanctuary and ultimately, a principle of sanctuary is that it looks like what the immigrant communities want it to look like, not what you assume it should look like. I don't remember all the places our organization has defined, but we've begun a workshop to expand the broad theological framework of sanctuary.

Cummings: To go along with that, what does accompaniment look like for IMIRJ?

Vilchis-Ibarra: We have an accompaniment program where we teach people to accompany others to immigration courts, but we do not provide legal services, though we can refer to others. The other way in which we interact with the legal system is by organizing for reform.

Cummings: What are some of the challenges that you've encountered during your work?

Vilchis-Ibarra: Movement work is really messy and the role of faith communities within the immigrant movement work is really messy. One of the challenges that we are spending a lot of time with is the fact that many of the communities and organizations in faith communities, specifically, has not been led by immigrant community members. It's been led by allies in faith communities and, similarly for IMIRJ, are historically white faith communities, especially in Oregon, where we are one of the most unchurched states in the United States. One of the biggest challenges is what does that history really mean and how does racism, sexism, and colorism

show up in that movement and how does the faith community sometimes see itself as saviors and not accompaniers. It's been a challenge, recognizing where that happens and how it can be repaired. Similarly, other challenges have been the anti-immigrant rhetoric escalating and always hurting. There is so much anger around immigration and that has always been there, but there are white supremacist groups in Oregon that are way more active, and that tension has been hard to navigate as it has hurt immigrant communities. Alongside that, many communities that see themselves as allies came into the movement during the Trump administration and only know themselves through that work, but now we are in a more "friendly" administration. Many people joined this movement through an emergency mode and now some are pulling back because they've exhausted themselves or do not know where to go from here. It became visible for many people what this struggle looks like, but what happens now as we do not have an overtly racist leader, but we still have a leader that is still deporting people and not protecting the immigrant community? So, I see these challenges in big ways and small ways and wonder where do we land after everything that has happened. What does true justice actually mean for immigrant communities?

Cummings: The next question leads into those questions you have raised. What hopes do you have for the future of the sanctuary movement in the United States or globally?

Vilchis-Ibarra: I think that truly there needs to be a reckoning of the history of sanctuary. Again, I think that one of things I have been saying is that so much of the work has been led by non-immigrant people. I would sit in interfaith spaces in DC where people would be doing policies for immigrants, but I would be one of the few immigrants in the room. I think that there needs to be recognition and moving from that and repair, but it does not have to be shame repair, but a life-giving repair. It's an important piece. One thing I love about the sanctuary movement is its presence and truth-telling. For us to be a sanctuary, we always have to continue to look at the systems of oppression that are the opposite force of sanctuary. All of us need to be able to speak to that. I hope there will always be an analysis of the systems of oppression that need to shift or be dismantled and our own individual entities need to be examined as we look at different views. Reimagination and joined dismantling of the kinds of systems that prevent true sanctuary and everybody's humanity needs to be uplifted, including globally because people do not have the abilities to stay within their communities and the U.S. is a huge factor in that. I want sanctuary to include that whole thing because I don't think sanctuary can work without recognizing and repairing and doing the work. It's hard to speak about a movement because there are differences in tactics and what each person is called to do.

Cummings: I'd also like to speak about the collaborative aspect of your organization, especially. Could you share a little about the importance of that collaboration with community members who share that work with you?

Vilchis-Ibarra: For us, we see ourselves as part of a broader movement. We don't have to do everything all the time. We don't have a lobbyist or something, but we can support those organizations who do. So, a lot of our work is with non-faith communities or immigrant-led conversations. Even when our base is allies, we were very strategic by doing our work with what immigrant communities wanted, opposed to what faith communities wanted or needed. So, I think that collaboration with faith communities has been beautiful. We're an interfaith movement

and we bring that action into our private spaces. Having leadership of different faiths coming in to do reflection has been beautiful along with having people share their faith practices, to help others come deeper into their own faith practices. It's been interesting to have that happen, and it also happens in the denominational level, nationally, and regionally. We sit down with bishops and leaders, and they show up to things when needed, because they understand it is their sacred duty and privilege to push for something, so we have a lot of friendship with regional faith leaders. Our work happens often with those communities we work with as we decide whether something is right or not and they help us discern. We see ourselves in partnership with the structures, even as we push the structures. We're working to have a meeting with an Oregon legislator and that came from our friendship with federal people who wanted to partner. We can do that partnership, knowing we can play inside-outsiders and they provide funds for us, which is beautiful.

Cummings: In your experiences advocating for immigrant justice, has there been anything to you that is really surprising that you did not expect?

Vilchis-Ibarra: I think one thing that's surprising to me is seeing how much faith communities are and have always been involved with the work of immigrant justice. I did not come into my work through a faith perspective, but through my work with the immigrant community. I'm from Mexico, but moved to Kansas and met my first nun there, and then in DC, I ran into some of the refugee-resettlement agencies which are broadly faith-rooted. The richness of the faith communities' work, along with all of the other messy things I mentioned earlier, was very surprising to me.

Cummings: Some of the opposition to the New Sanctuary Movement would say it's at odds with the concept of justice. Would you consider that sanctuary movements are at odds with the concept of justice?

Vilchis-Ibarra: It's super interesting to hear that that is the case. I think the sanctuary movement and justice are hard for me to separate one from another. What is radical to me about sanctuary is the radical notion that the humanity should be at the center of what happens with them because there are so many systems and cultures that take you away from that happening. If that is true that there are movements that put humanity at the center, how can that not be justice-oriented? It is very connected. If you put together justice and laws, I guess, but I don't put justice and laws together. I just think that it's unfortunate to see that the laws are created and destroyed by humans. It is based on notions by us, and there is plenty of historical evidence that laws do not equal justice, so that is a lost cause. I really separate the two and I feel sad that that notion is paired together for anyone.

Cummings: Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?

Vilchis-Ibarra: I just think it's interesting how sanctuary is different at the border versus other places in the United States. Just for your analysis, know that it can be different from different perspectives.

Transcript of Zoom Interviews with St. William Catholic Church Members

Recorded on Monday, October 4th

*On October 4, I conducted a group of interviews with members of St. William Catholic Church in Louisville, KY. These members are: Theresa Butler, Raphael Schweri, Fr. Jim Flynn, Felix Garza, David Horvath, Julie Driscoll, David Hulefeld. A central element of this conversation concerned their motivations for becoming involved in sanctuary work.*

Annaleigh Cummings: Could everyone please go around and shortly introduce yourself and why you wanted to join this conversation?

Theresa Butler: My name is Theresa Butler and I was the chair of the Sanctuary Program when we headed it in the 80s. I did want to tell you that I saved some old newspaper articles and you may find them helpful.

Raphael Schweri: I'm not involved in the sanctuary movement now, but I was involved in the 80s with an organization called CISPES, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, and we met at the public library and I was involved with some different stuff. Mainly over the Christmas holidays, I sat with a couple from El Salvador, a young lady and a man and she was pregnant and all I had to do was sit there, and I had a number of a lawyer and I would call the lawyer if someone showed up at the rectory door. That was pretty much my involvement.

Fr. Jim Flynn: I'm Jim Flynn and I'm retired, but I was a pastor at St. William's from 1982 to 1989 when we began sanctuary and received the first people who came to live in sanctuary at St. William's.

Felix Garza: My name is Felix Garza. I'm from South Texas and my family home is about 15 minutes away from the US-Mexico border. When I was a university student in the 1980s, I got involved with assisting people and we had three refugee centers in the area at one point and I was involved in doing some test runs to see how the border patrol would respond to certain situations and helping people try to get further north. If they could get to Canada, that would be great.

David Horvath: I am currently involved with the Immigrant Coalition for Immigrant Justice. The ICRJ is an organization that really got its start right after President Trump got elected and the level of hateful speech and horrible policy just ramped up really quickly, so the ICRJ began to do some advocacy work and organizing work to counter, which led early on to the conversation of what sanctuary would look like now and how its changed from the 80s. At St. William, it's the one and only faith community in Louisville that has publicly declared itself a sanctuary church currently, but we have always been a sanctuary church, so I look forward to your questions.

Julie Driscoll: I was a member of St. William in the 80s and I was on the Sanctuary committee and I learned a lot. You never know what the need is going to be day to day, but at least then you knew it was respected. During the time of Trump, you never knew if it was respected.

David Hulefeld: I was and am a member of St. William and in 1983, when the parish was discerning its role in Central America, I happened to be chair of the parish council because no one else wanted to do it. It was very much Pastor Jim Flynn's leadership that inspired people to want to do that and we came to a consensus that we would offer sanctuary. In December of 1983, we organized a coalition of churches and interest groups to sponsor the program and for that Louisville Sanctuary Coalition, I was treasurer for several years and helped manage the donations and funds.

Cummings: I wanted to ask for the members who were involved in the beginning of the sanctuary process to elaborate on what the discernment process looked like and any particular challenges you encountered?

Flynn: In the spring of 1983, it was presented to us by a priest from El Salvador and he presented to us what was happening to them personally and happening to others fleeing from the violence and the massacres. We listened to him about what they had experienced and we began to discern over a period of months if we wanted anyone to live in the rectory. After discerning through the spring and summer, we decided to be a sanctuary parish, in spite of the legal and religious challenges. We had legal advice telling us what we were risking, but when we presented our choice to our archbishop at the time, who was Thomas Kelly, he as much said we were on our own. So we decided to go ahead with connecting with the sanctuary movement in the Southeast and it was finally in December of 1983, when a woman and her husband and her child, we decided to take them into our care, and they were the first ones. Most stayed just for a few days or for a few weeks.

Garza: I was a translator when I moved here to Louisville and we drove someone to a trial because the asylum hearing was there and I participated in about 600 hearings when I worked at Proyecto Libertad and never attended a successful asylum case until then. The judges always looked for a way to say no.

Butler: Other communities did join us, both Catholic and Protestant, and the First Unitarian. Some of those communities sent representatives to meet with our communities, but we always had to remind our attorney that sanctuary was a spiritually-based thing and not a political thing, which I understand it has a political side to it, but we wanted to make sure people understood it was spiritually based.

Cummings: Could everyone go around and share their own definition of what sanctuary means to them?

Hulefeld: I hadn't thought about it, but to me, it's a public statement and act of civil disobedience that is based on a faith conviction that we are responsible for others and our government's actions and the matters of principle are worth more than our individual security and financial comfort.

Driscoll: For me, it has always been a response to the Gospel. It is analogous to Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food." It's much more spiritually motivated by that. You know, the

author of the *New Jim Crow* emphasizes that the reason we aren't fighting it harder is because it turned into a legal fight, not a moral issue, so for me it is a moral issue.

Horvath: I agree that it starts with the teachings of Jesus and once you follow that, you immediately get pretty political because being a Christian and expressing those values that Jesus professed in terms of nonviolence and options for the poor, gets you in trouble with policies. We wanted to emphasize that these people coming for sanctuary were not going to get asylum because it meant that the governments of El Salvador or Guatemala were wrong, but the United States supported those governments, so it goes from the spiritual to the political pretty quickly.

Flynn: I also think following Matthew 25, if we don't think those quotes are religious and political, we miss the point because the sanctuary movement shows that we are reaching outside of the walls of the church and our religious convictions have political implications. The prophets of the Scriptures were also very political, in terms of the people, for the people. We are being political, but I think people try to divide the two and try to divide us.

Garza: For me, it was never a spiritual connection. It was a mechanism to protect human life and guard human rights. Early on, when only a few people were coming, it was important and useful for those people, but as the numbers grew, it became unnecessary for the sanctuary movement because the immigration systems were not used to such large numbers. At one point, we were seeing 1500 people a month, but the Border Patrol were only able to hold 600 people at a time and were in prison for three or four months at a time, so there was no space. My job at Proyecto Libertad was to apply from immigration authorities permission for these folks to travel north and put people on buses and planes every day, around 85, 86 and 87, there were just too many people. Early on, immigration was not allowing people to move north, but later on, it was easy to get people north, so I submitted about 25 asylum applications a week, which was a ridiculous amount.

Schweri: I didn't like what our government was doing in El Salvador, but I was worried I would be drafted. Once I got old enough that they didn't want me, I thought now I could do it. I looked at it, mainly as helping people out and fighting what the government was doing in El Salvador. I'm also looking at what if you really follow Jesus, what do you need to be doing? Still, the major thing for me is the humanitarian action.

Butler: When I said it was spiritual and not political, I want to clarify that you cannot get around from the spiritual and not the political, but our basis is still the spiritual.

Flynn: Can I go back to a couple things? First, when we accepted someone into sanctuary, it was on the second Sunday of Advent and we had been singing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and the man's name was Manuel and the woman was Maria and she was pregnant, so we connected the religious with the political very quickly.

Cummings: I would like to ask a question about the New Sanctuary Movement as I look at the connections. Could anyone expand about the changes that you've seen from the foundation of the 80s to what it is now?

Horvath: One of the things we were struggling with as we decided to declare ourselves a sanctuary church was that there was some concern that we were only talking about people living in the parish space. That is really not part of how sanctuary began to unfold as the numbers began to increase so dramatically, especially as thousands began to seek asylum, to select one family to go into a physical sanctuary space. The logistics and the point of that was not the same when we were trying to challenge a specific situation with foreign policy and a specific case. The New Sanctuary Movement became much more of an idea of a network that provided the broader wraparound services needed by people that were coming who were seeking asylum. There were so many folks that the best we could do is identify from the population what the needs were. That's when we really clarified our situation as being part of a local church of helpers and the nature of the new sanctuary is to be immigrant-led and get support from the leaders of the local Latinx community and organizations like La Casita Center. This helped us identify the needs of the community who needed additional support and that's what the New Sanctuary became for us. It was also important that we pushed forward with the political aspects of the work, by opposing some of the Kentucky state legislation which has been draconian in removing resources from the immigrant community and prohibiting them from seeking public aid, so our energies have to go forth in a broader sense.

Flynn: I would just add a story if anyone thinks that the government does not think that the religious and the political are connected. In 1984, I was living in a rectory and it was broken into and my particular room was invaded with books thrown on the floor and desk ravaged and money left on my desk which was still there, but they managed to find a file about the couple we had brought across the border. So political and religious cannot be separated so conveniently as the government does not see the difference between the two, in my experience. We were invaded because we were in civil disobedience and religious disobedience, as our archbishop was negatively supportive of us.

Garza: If I might add, in the 1980s, there were a lot of trials going on across the country. The hearings had to be moved because of the media frenzy around it. But I don't see the same energy as it was back then in the early 80s.

Cummings: I have one more question for everybody, which is the question of what you hope sanctuary to look like in the future?

Driscoll: My gut reaction is I hope sanctuary won't be needed, that is my hope. Without that, I think we keep on keeping on. I just wanted to mention it was kind of unique but during the BLM protests, the Unitarian church took protestors in. Maybe by some miracle one day, we'll get some kind of reform, but until then, we just keep doing the work.

Garza: Hopefully, we won't need it because everything is going to be resolved. If it is needed, we have to figure out a way to be more marketable and more out in the community to be recognized as a movement and find a way to involve more numbers. I think it needs to be more political and find a way to involve more diverse groups. How do we involve the Latino community in the movement? In the 80s, in south Texas, 95% of the community was Latino, but

95% of the sanctuary activists were non-Latinos. I think once people figure out what it's about they support it, but they don't know what the next step is to take action.

Flynn: I would hope if there is a need for sanctuary that there would be a network like there was back in the 80s. There were many secular and religious organizations and we all connected with each other in solidarity, but there was a network. Finally, I would hope that we would be able to dismiss the dichotomy between this being religious and political. People who think Jesus was killed because he was religious is all wrong because Pilate didn't care if he was the Son of God, Pilate cared that he would be the King of the Jews.

Horvath: I hope it's not needed in ten years. I hope we finally have an immigration system set up in place that's humane and we treat people coming to our borders as people who have a right to be on the move and we as human beings need to be able to help them with their needs.

Butler: I would add as someone in the Catholic Church, that I wish the bishops would put as much focus on this issue as they do with anti-abortion.

Flynn: Amen.

Hulefeld: I just think of your question and if in the future, there is a government policy that is oppressive and causing suffering, I hope there is the courage and faith conviction to lead faith communities to respond in a tangible way.

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