

Community Church Sanctuary Statement
The Community Church of Sebastopol, UCC
March 30, 2025

Intro

We, the Community Church of Sebastopol, are a diverse congregation. We are people of different ages, races, sexual orientations, abilities, gender identities and expressions, who come from a variety of social, economic, political, religious, geographic, and ethnic backgrounds. Our congregation has long been committed to seeking justice, both within our community and in the world at large.

Background

Our ministry and mission are rooted in bold responses to important crossroads moments.

- In 1942, youth from Community Church maintained a 24/7 vigil to protect Sebastopol's Enmanji Temple after an arson attempt damaged the building.
- In 1975, our church collaborated with Sebastopol United Methodist to open Burbank Heights to low-income seniors.
- In 1979, our congregation sponsored a family who immigrated to Sonoma County from Vietnam.
- In 1983, we opened the Inter-Church Food Pantry to serve vulnerable people in our community.
- We voted to become an Open & Affirming congregation in 1999.
- In 2008, we sponsored "Tents of Hope," an art installation to raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur, Sudan.
- In 2019, we helped form a West County Accompaniment Team that has helped two families from Honduras seeking asylum.

We have taken these actions as we strive to embody Christ's beloved community here on earth.

Context

We again find ourselves at a crossroads as more than 11 million undocumented immigrants face the real threat of persecution and deportation, and other marginalized people suffer under increased surveillance as well as physical, rhetorical and political attacks. How are we, as a people of faith, called to respond?

- Leviticus 19:33-34 tells us, "When an alien resides with you in your land,

you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

- Jesus Christ and his family also were immigrants who were forced to flee from their homeland to Egypt because of the cruel dictates of an imperious ruler. (Matthew 2:14)
- Through his teachings, Jesus stressed the importance of compassion and providing aid to anyone in need. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” (Matthew 25:35)

Sanctuary Declaration

As people of faith and people of conscience, we declare that we will resist policy proposals that seek to deport, detain, or otherwise target millions of undocumented immigrants and that enable, affirm, or codify discrimination against immigrants and other vulnerable and marginalized communities. We make this declaration both because we are called to stand in solidarity with immigrants and other vulnerable and marginalized people everywhere, and because members and friends of Community Church belong to one or more of these groups.

We will accordingly marshal the efforts and energies of our congregation and wider community in a spirit of hope, faith, inclusion, and love to help those targeted by fear, suspicion, bigotry, and hate. We will work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.

- We declare ourselves to be a Sanctuary Congregation and affirm our responsibility to seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. We will work together with partner organizations to resist any harmful or unjust policy proposals that undermine due process, lead to discrimination based on identity, or otherwise violate Constitutionally-protected rights.
- We are dedicated to educating ourselves and our community concerning destructive policies and practices related to immigration, deportation, criminalization, incarceration, enforcement, and family separation. With this education as a foundation, we will work to activate our community to respond to these destructive policies and practices.

- We pledge to stand in solidarity with all those who are facing persecution based upon their identity, with a focus on national origin, immigration status, faith, race, language, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- We note that historically the Sanctuary Movement in this country has concentrated its efforts on providing shelter to immigrants at risk of deportation. Following careful consideration, Community Church of Sebastopol UCC does not presently commit to housing individuals or families on church property. We will, however, stand in solidarity with and provide accompaniment support to those organizations and individuals who do provide physical refuge.

Recommendations

The Sanctuary Task Force recommends the church become involved in the New Sanctuary Movement in the following ways:

1. Publicly declaring our commitment to being a Sanctuary Congregation by placing publicly visible signage, adding a statement to our website, and communicating this as part of our identity in other formats as appropriate.
2. Coordinating the efforts of both individual congregants and the congregation as a whole in resisting unjust policies and actions that target marginalized people.
3. Continuing to discern what Community Church and its members and friends are called to do in support of the Sanctuary Movement.
4. Developing and maintaining connections with other organizations involved in the Sanctuary Movement.
5. Providing a gathering place for marches, trainings, and lobbying efforts.
6. Working with other entities to provide resources and support to undocumented immigrants, other marginalized individuals, and their families.
7. Directly lobbying local, state, and federal government to enact equitable immigration policies and laws that are fairly enforced with humanity and compassion, to demilitarize interactions between police and individuals, and to develop a pathway to citizenship for all immigrants.