The Modern Sanctuary Movement: How Might We Act in Our Time?
By Rev. Mark J.T. Caggiano

Some History

The towns that you give to the Levites shall include the six cities of refuge, where you shall permit a slayer to flee… Numbers 35:6

The idea of sanctuary is ancient. In the Book of Numbers, the Levite cities of refuge were set up to create places to which a "slayer" might flee. These were indeed killers, though it is unclear whether they were murderers, to highlight the distinction between bringing about someone's death and being legally responsible for do so. Israelite justice was often "outsourced" to the families of victims, meaning the only justice available was through blood feud. The cities of refuge were protected places, controlled by the priestly class, where those responsible for the death of another might find peace from the mob. This did not necessarily prevent finding the accused responsible for a crime, but it did offer time to examine events. Sanctuary in this ancient sense did not absolve one of anything, but it potentially provided a pause in a cycle of violence.

Centuries later, the concept of sanctuary changed in medieval Europe. Rather than whole cities of refuge, many Catholic churches became designated places for retreat. In an example of the deeply rooted nature of the practice, after William the Conqueror took over Saxon England, there was concern that the Normans might eliminate this key principle of law. The people had little to worry about -- William did nothing of the sort, for sanctuary was also an ancient right in Normandy.

Some contemporary charters for English churches nonetheless contain express grants of the right to offer sanctuary, some actually fraudulent, forged to increase the stature of the church. This form of religious sanctuary was often more fundamental than that offered by the Israelites. It was not a pause but a *pardon* – those making it into the church would be absolved of the crime. As in Ancient Israel, the practice of sanctuary was a response to weak or non-existence systems of justice. At the time, a "trial" could be a familiar weighing of evidence, but it could also be a trial by fire, meaning only an innocent would remain unburned by flames, or trial by combat, meaning God would not let the guilty prevail in mortal combat. "Courts" were in fact the courts of lords and kings who meted out justice at varying intervals and often with little consistency. The escape valve of offering religious sanctuary provided an element of mercy within a harsh and arbitrary system.

Over time, however, Europeans grew less fond of the practice. The offering of sanctuary was seen as allowing enterprising criminals to break the law with impunity, at times mere steps away from a church. As law and order became more regulated, though often no less harsh, support waned for the

idea of sanctuary as outright forgiveness of a crime and disappeared almost entirely by the time of the Reformation.

The Sanctuary Movement

In the 1980s in the United States, a sanctuary movement began in response to the wars in Central America, conflicts alternately sponsored and opposed by the U.S. government. Refugees from the conflict sought asylum in the U.S., but not with equal success. As a silent partisan in these wars, the American government did not necessarily recognize that there was anything from which to flee in certain countries.

The risk of returning home to war-torn countries was so great, religious communities sought ways of helping refugees. And thus the Sanctuary Movement was reborn. Church buildings were opened to asylum seekers, who lived for varying periods in seclusion. Immigration officials, then called the Immigration and Naturalization Service, had to contend with a growing movement of churches and synagogues across the political spectrum opening their doors to migrants fleeing violence in El Salvador and Guatemala (Nicaraguans and Cubans fleeing leftist regimes were more formally acceptable to the Reagan Administration).

The federal government did not simply let this movement unfold, as in the case of *U.S. v. Aguilar*, 883 F.2d 662 (1989). A network of Americans developed a system for finding and sheltering Central American refugees, in association with churches in the U.S. Southwest. Rev. John Fife of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, AZ, was a leader of the movement which was in many ways patterned after the Underground Railroad movement of the 19th century. Fife would later say in response to the more recent struggle over immigration to the U.S.:

In the 1980s, people were fleeing death squads and massacres in Guatemala and El Salvador, and our government was refusing to acknowledge them as refugees and deporting them back to those same death squads – because those countries were allies of the U.S. Now the government is threatening human rights and family integrity, and parents are the disappeared from the workplace. U.S. policy is to use death in the desert as a deterrent to coming here, and that is a violation of international law and human rights. Churches ought to stand up for the right of people to work and feed their families.[1]

In the 1980s, Fife and others were prosecuted and convicted of violating U.S. immigration laws. These crimes took the form of shielding migrants from detection within the U.S. and assisting their passage through Mexico to the relative safe harbors of the sanctuary community. This was not merely an effort to house asylum seekers in church buildings, but also to organize a complex international system for finding, moving, and supporting these immigrants. As Fife suggests in his remarks, there is more to sanctuary than a building.

[1] http://reflections.yale.edu/article/who-my-neighbor-facing-immigration/no-more-deaths-interview-john-fife

Notably, Fife's organization was infiltrated by federal law enforcement, leading to the prosecution. Defense efforts to explain the moral and theological bases for the sanctuary movement were suppressed during the court proceedings as irrelevant to the primary question of whether the accused intentionally violated federal law (a tactic that may face stiffer response under subsequent federal laws – see below). The defendants were convicted and placed on probation. In 1986, the Reagan Administration declared a general amnesty for many undocumented migrants, relieving much of the immigration tensions of the 1980s. This did not however eliminate the convictions, confirmed on appeal in 1989, though no time was served.

Tensions over immigration have returned. They have been fostered by post-9/11 terrorism concerns and discussed by Rev. Fife in his remarks from 2008. More recently, a vocal white nationalist surge in American politics has culminating in the election of President Donald Trump, a vocal opponent of immigration. One rallying cry of the Trump campaign had been a call to build a wall across the U.S. border with Mexico. Practicalities and economics aside, the morality of cutting off the flow of people seeking to come to the United States is questionable at best. During the 1980s, a wide range of denominations rallied to the sanctuary movement, across the liberal and conservative spectrum. And now, the calls for sanctuary have resumed.

What Was Then: A Case Study

The Church of the Covenant in Centerville ("Covenant"), is a pseudonymous case study of a Midwestern congregation from the 1980s.[2] Bear in mind that some of the activities of being or supporting a sanctuary location violate federal immigration law, as seen in the case of Rev. Fife, so anonymity would be important as those interviewed could be seen as confessing to federal crimes. Again, this has become more complicated as federal laws protecting religious liberty came into existence after *Aguilar*.

Covenant was a Reformed church on the traditional and conservative end of the religious spectrum. Faced with the humanitarian plight of Central American refugees, Covenant began a process for considering becoming a sanctuary location. There were struggles. One key issue was whether the proposed program would be intended as an effort to help others or as a political statement. People left the church over the conversation, let alone the program. As one of the supporters of the sanctuary effort described it:

I think we were taking a hard look at what the idea of social justice meant and also a hard look at whether we want to take a risk or not. Was this issue worth taking a risk for or not? And how do we really sort through the ideas of gospel versus law?[3]

[2] Nelle Slater (ed.), TENSIONS BETWEEN CITIZENSHIP AND DISCIPLESHIP: A CASE STUDY (Pilgrim Press, 1989).
[3] Id at 6.

Gospel versus law: the context for this decision was the overall framework of Christian and Jewish practices and moral expectations. The ancient reference in the Book of Numbers is an interesting artifact in that discussion, a source and a foundational statement. But the ongoing traditions of sanctuary, through the ages and within living communities, are efforts both to recall traditions and to instill practices in keeping with biblical expectations.

The expectation that people of faith must act, to do good works in the world, is in many ways antithetical to the theological shift of the Reformation. When German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of the distinction between "cheap grace" and "costly grace," the emphasis on grace as unearned can become confusing, particularly looking from outside of his Lutheran context. Grace in this sense is a gift, something unearned and received without payment. To argue "cost" from within Bonhoeffer's Lutheran framework seems to stray into wordplay unless the author is challenging a primary tenet of Protestant thought.

I asked a Lutheran colleague about Bonhoeffer's distinction, which I suggested played too loosely with Luther's conviction about salvation through faith alone. Bonhoeffer suggested it was the Lutheran church that had strayed into cheap grace while Luther was more in keeping with the costly variety. My Lutheran friend stated that Bonhoeffer was more a pastor than a systematic theologian – he them returned to his glass of wine without further comment. Those concerns about the costliness of grace, or at least the expectations of faith, seemed to be front and center for the Covenant congregation. They wrestled with how to live out their faith within their religious community and the larger society.

Walter Brueggemann provided his own analysis of the Covenant case study, noting this tension in his observations.[4] Brueggemann focused in particular on the textual and biblical supports offered within Covenant's process of becoming a sanctuary congregation. He categorized these supporting texts, distinguishing the wide "neighborliness" of the Beatitudes from the greater, more direct action called for in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is one thing to love thy neighbor; it is quite another to carry him to safety and to tend to his wounds.

Brueggemann also highlighted the more subtle influence of "rendering unto Caesar," a sense of needing to divorce the obligations of a citizen from that of a congregant. Neighborliness in this context becomes a pleasant and socially acceptable form of compassion bounded by a system of social expectations. This compassionate neighbor falls short of the more radical messages in the Bible, those that counsel for the upheaval of social systems that fall short of God's law.

This is one way of understanding the flight of Moses and the Hebrew people. Moses overturned and innovated as a prophet to an enslaved and then wandering people. Conversely, David solidified and consolidated power as a king, assuming a familiar role in the region, as Israel fell in line with an

[4] Id at 48.

international community of monarchies and empires. And this change came into being, even against the caution of the prophets.[5]

The compassionate citizen in this manner can thrive within a traditional framework. But this bounded form of compassion makes for a "shy disciple," someone reluctant to stray from the well-beaten path of cultural and religious expectations. No table turning, no challenging pharaoh. This is not a religious or spiritual impulse.

In Bonhoeffer's response to the challenge of Nazism and the complacency of Lutheranism, he was simultaneously fighting kingdom and church. Paul the Apostle himself wrote of obedience to authority: *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement.*[6] Bonhoeffer argues that the Lutheran church had fallen away from the insights of Luther, that that great figure of the Reformation understood the balance between salvation through faith and the worldly acts stemming from such faith. But Bonhoeffer here seems to be attempting to skirt apostasy, rather than capturing the genius of Luther. Luther's commentaries on the Letter to the Romans imply a different message:

In chapter 13, St. Paul teaches that one should honor and obey the secular authorities. He includes this, not because it makes people virtuous in the sight of God, but because it does insure that the virtuous have outward peace and protection and that the wicked cannot do evil without fear and in undisturbed peace. Therefore it is the duty of virtuous people to honor secular authority, even though they do not, strictly speaking, need it.[7]

There is an impasse. If the citizen is prevented from being a disciple, if the culture and social structure circumscribe the press toward action, compassion for others becomes constrained, tailored to fit into a familiar role. In the Covenant example, the congregation struggled with how to reconcile a political message born out in the sanctuary offer with their adherence to civic religion, to a devote "Americanism" that counseled loyalty to country and obedience to its works. Luther famously rendered unto "Caesar" (*i.e.* his German political patrons) worldly matters.

In Covenant, conversely, the leadership of the church seemed to be operating out in front, beyond where the people might be comfortable, emulating the radical call of Moses more so than the conservative caution of David or Paul (or Luther). The congregation settled into this program

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[5] *1 Samuel 8:6-8*. "Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you."

[6] Romans 13:1-2.

[7] http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/luther/romans/13.html ("Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Paul: an die Romer."in D. Martin Luther: Die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch 1545aufs new zurericht, ed. Hans Volz and Heinz Blanke.Munich: Roger & Bernhard. 1972, vol. 2).

through an acceptance of the compassionate work of the sanctuary movement while maintaining a distant (or oblivious) attitude toward the political implications of that work. Interestingly, the senior minister of Covenant was not an advocate for the effort, placing the pulpit in a neutral position relative to the discussion. Brueggemann noted this as a lost opportunity to embrace the deeper message of the Gospels.

Covenant carefully drafted its policies and resolutions. It defined "sanctuary" as "spiritual, emotional, legal, and educational assistance, and financial support for provisions of housing, furnishings, food and clothing.[8] Covenant was providing a range of services to those in need, not always or primarily a place of refuge. It also sought links among other congregations, seeking support and shared resources for the sanctuary effort. They would host a family, or a group of no more than three people. The election to become a sanctuary congregation would be communicated to the community and directly to the federal government. The decision was to be described as an act of Christian concern in response to the plight of the refugees and the perceived injustice on the INS policies, but not as a stand against U.S. foreign policy.

What About Now?

There are many ongoing conversations about a New Sanctuary Movement. There are many resources and points of contacts available from the UUA website, the Unitarian Universalist Refugee and Immigrant Services and Education (UURISE), and non-UU sources. The Covenant is a historic example of a sanctuary church, while the U.U. Fellowship of Northern Nevada (Reno) is a current example. I thought about cataloguing resources for you all, but I must confess that my efforts would be no better than a Google search and question posed on Facebook.

Instead, I chose a different project, one that I could undertake unlike most UU colleagues. I would like to present a sketch of the legal framework for offering sanctuary to immigrants. Please do not think of this as legal advice to use when you get home. There is only one answer to every legal question: *it depends*. It depends on what state you live in, the layout of a building, the legal status of the entities involved, what the judge had for breakfast, etc. There is a lot more to be considered and the thorough processes undertaken by places like Covenant and UU Reno are worth emulating.

I offer this section as a "heads up." The call to resist is often attractive because it is transgressive. Being arrested at a demonstration becomes a point of pride rather than a constructive step towards achieving a goal. Sometimes it will be better to be boring and, often, it is worth knowing what can be done within the bounds of the law. So here is some law.

Sanctuary and the Law

[8] Slater at 12-13.

There are many political and philosophical reasons for protecting those seeking shelter and a new life in the U.S. I do not mean to ignore those or to diminish their importance. But I will focus on the religious reasons for doing so. I select these reasons over the others for a very technical purpose: to use existing federal law to formulate legal protections for those churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship that seek to create sanctuaries for undocumented immigrants in the United States. Much of the sanctuary movement, and the larger movement for resistance against new authoritarian tendencies in the U.S., is couched in terms of defiance of systematic oppression. Those oppressive tendencies are said to be "baked in" or enshrined in the laws, policies, and practices of the federal government and law enforcement. I do not mean to disagree with or to embrace that perspective, but to offer another avenue for religious organizations using existing federal law.

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution is generally associated with freedom of speech. That is in fact the third clause of the amendment. The first two clauses are as follows: *Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.* This was the first matter in one sense, a concern of such importance that it was put before all others, even before the right to speak freely or the right to assembly peaceably. These initial two clauses are referred to as the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause.

These rights, however, have never been applied in a vacuum. Prior to the American Civil War, for example, the First Amendment was strictly limited to the *federal* government. Many states had formally established churches predating the U.S. Constitution, such as the Congregationalists of New England (and the Unitarians by the way). Congress could not establish a religion, but the individual states could. Similarly, the freedom to exercise one's religion was varied across the states. In the 19th century, Catholics, Jews, and Mormons in particular faced repeated restrictions legally and persecution socially.

After the Civil War, the Constitution was dramatically altered. The so-called Reconstruction Amendments were made to address the endemic problem of slavery, but were broad in scope and long in effect. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, excepting those who have been convicted of a crime (a loophole of ever-growing width). The Fifteenth Amendment protects voting rights. The Fourteenth Amendment however was the linchpin:

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

Over time, the Fourteenth Amendment has been used to "incorporate" the rights of the U.S. Constitution. For example, in the 20th century, the First Amendment was incorporated, meaning it was applied against the states for the first time. The logic behind incorporation was that the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution required equal protection under the law and so was

then explicitly applied to the states. This equal protection also implied protection of religious liberty. The First Amendment was thereafter clause by clause applied to the various states, in 1940 for Free Exercise and in 1947 for Establishment.[9] More recently, the Second Amendment was incorporated and in this way it is worth noting that incorporation is no a solely liberalizing phenomenon.[10]

This step created protections for religious organizations and individuals, but in time the changes posed problems for the states. In the case of *Sherbert v. Verner*,[11] a woman collecting unemployment insurance was removed from the program when she refused to seek jobs that required work on Saturday, the Sabbath day for Seven Day Adventists. The Supreme Court restored her to the rolls, holding that a state may not exclude anyone from its public welfare legislation due to that person's personal faith. In a similar case, *Wisconsin v. Yoder*,[12] members of the Old Order of Amish objected to mandatory public school for their children, citing their beliefs limiting such education beyond the age of 14. Their objection was upheld. This trajectory of cases reflected a strong bias toward protecting religious rights, often those in the minority. But it presented no end of headaches for state governments trying to enforce laws that otherwise seemed to be of general applicability.

In 1990, the Supreme Court issued another decision, *Employment Division v. Smith*.[13] Oregon law prohibited use of controlled substances, including peyote, a hallucinogenic mushroom also used by certain Native American religious groups. Two men were fired from their jobs at a drug rehabilitation facility for having ingested peyote for sacramental purposes.

The Oregon Employment Division denied the men unemployment benefits due to their actions. Given past cases, particular *Sherbet,* this would seem to have been an easy decision. Instead, the Supreme Court upheld the denial of benefits. The Court did not overrule the cases of *Sherbet* or *Yoder*, but sidestepped them. The Court found that a government system that allowed such exceptions to its laws would be courting anarchy, with the danger only increasing in direct proportion to the society's diversity of religious beliefs and its desire to coerce or suppress none of them. This case was a bridge too far, one that would overturn drug regulations under the banner of religious tolerance.

The United States Congress was not willing to give the Supreme Court its desired respite from contending with these religious matters. Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, known as RFRA,[14] which restored the legal framework for testing religious freedom cases set out in *Sherbet* and *Yoder*. It was a highly unusual move in that Congress by legislation imposed the

[9] *See Cantwell v. Connecticut*, 310 U.S. 296 (1940) (Free Exercise); *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947) (Establishment).

[10] *McDonald v. Chicago*, 561 U.S. 742 (2010)
[11] 374 U.S. 398 (1963).
[12] 406 U.S. 205 (1972).
[13] 494 U.S. 872 (1990).
[14] 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb.

Supreme Court's prior decisions upon itself. RFRA in this sense would have essentially placed Supreme Court decisions under the review of Congress.

In the case of *Boerne v. Flores*, the Supreme Court firmly told the Congress to back off.[15] Some justices thought RFRA disturbed the long-standing balance of power, the checks and balances in the federal system. Others suggested that RFRA itself violated the Establishment Clause. Even the justices who thought the *Smith* case was wrongly decided saw RFRA as a misguided way of addressing that problem. The justices could not agree on how to handle *Smith,* but the Supreme Court unanimously agreed on how firmly it needed to handle Congress.

The *Smith* case, even as restored, was limited in effect. It only pertained to the 50 states as separate legislative entities. The federal government had the power to limit itself, even if those limitations exceeded what was required under the First Amendment. This limitation inspired many of the states to pass their own mini-RFRA statutes, creating a headache inducing patchwork of divergent religious laws across the country. This is where the caution that *"It depends"* comes into full flower.

Note what Congress has done here, a particularly significant step when considering concerns about immigration, a matter almost exclusively of federal concern. "Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability…"[16] Exceptions to that sweeping rule are as follows: "Government may substantially burden a person's exercise of religion only if it demonstrates that application of the burden to the person—(1) is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest; and
(2) is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest."

Recall that Congress passed this law in response to the *Smith* case, which involved the illegal use of drugs. While the subject matter, the receipt of unemployment benefits, was not itself a criminal prosecution for drugs, the significance of the issues in the case underscores the wide scope for what Congress intended. Furthermore, "A person whose religious exercise has been burdened in violation of this section may assert that violation as a claim or defense in a judicial proceeding and obtain appropriate relief against a government." This statute might offer a legal argument that the Federal government may not contravene a religious community's offer of sanctuary.

This series of cases and statutes arose out of a desire to protect religious liberty. Originally, the impulse might be described as liberal, protecting non-mainstream groups live the Seventh Day Adventists and the Amish. The conservative "law and order" response in the drug related case of *Smith* was to protect the rights of government at the expense of another minority group, in that case those who followed a Native American religious tradition. Congress again sought to protect a religious minority.

[15] 521 U.S. 507 (1997).
[16] 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb(1).

Over time, RFRA has been used as a vehicle for protecting other, less disenfranchised groups. In the case of *Burwell v, Hobby Lobby,* the conservative Christian owners of a private for-profit corporation were allowed to express their religious preferences through the corporation as a defense against objectionable requirements of the government, notably the mandate to provide family planning benefits through health insurance policies.[17] This case leveraged the earlier *Citizens United* case, which afforded constitutional rights of free speech to corporate entities rather than to the individuals behind them.[18] These cases are being used to support a variety of significant changes to the landscape of U.S. law.

Regardless of one's feelings about these changes, how might these efforts to protect religious liberty be used to support the New Sanctuary Movement? The notion of sanctuary is ancient, enshrined in the text of the Bible and the history of European Christianity. There is little burden to show the vintage of these articles of faith, let alone the centrality of them to a religious group's practices.

INS is now referred to as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE. ICE currently has a policy regarding the entry into "sensitive locations." These locations include schools, hospitals, churches, synagogues, and mosques.[19] The locations are highlighted as places in which ICE activities are curtailed. Enforcement actions are not to occur at or to be focused on these sites. Please note this is a policy statement from 2011 during the Obama Administration. Recent ICE raids have pressed near to, if not into, sensitive locations. Passed policies might be discarded and even the old policy allowed for exceptions for matters of national interest, terrorism, etc. There are no guaranties that ICE will not act, but there are arguments to be made that when it comes to a church, synagogue, mosque, or other house of worship ICE should not be allowed to act.

Consider the context of sanctuary. A congregation invites a person into their facility, an undocumented immigrant seeking asylum or citizenship. The federal government through its agency, ICE, is charged with enforcing immigration laws that would ostensible require the detention of the person being hosted. What now?

The federal government has limited itself under RFRA: "Government shall not substantially burden a person's exercise of religion even if the burden results from a rule of general applicability." In this scenario, the congregation and its members are exercising their religious rights. The offer of sanctuary itself is a religious act. The government would counter, however, that it is exercising its police powers in a manner unrelated to the religious rights of the church – the immigrant seeking sanctuary is not exercising religious rights and as a non-citizen may not be entitled to such rights ("person" versus "citizen" would be one point of argument).

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[17] 134 S.Ct. 2751

[18] 558 U.S. 310 (2010).

[19] https://www.ice.gov/doclib/ero-outreach/pdf/10029.2-policy.pdf

The right being violated, however, is not only the right to house an immigrant per se, but the right not to have someone enter into one's house of worship without permission. That right seems to be in keeping with ICE's own policy regarding sensitive locations – there needs to be a good reason for going into these sites requiring a particular analysis of the circumstances, timing, and location of the planned enforcement action. For this reason, it is *critical* that the offer of sanctuary be made within a church, synagogue, mosque or other house of worship. Not the parsonage, not a congregant's house, not even a *rented* location used by a congregationThe hope is to offer the toughest choice. A house is not a sensitive location. A rented space could be entered under the authority of a landlord or another tenant.

Without question, these arguments are "maybes." There is no reason to believe that ICE will honor its 2011 policy under the new administration or comply with the minister at the door declaring "None shall pass!" In the criminal case of *U.S. v. Aguilar*, the organizers went far beyond housing asylum seekers, travelling to Mexico to assist them in their efforts to get to the U.S. This was a full blown conspiracy to circumvent U.S. immigration controls. Notably, these convictions in 1989 predate the passage of RFRA in 1993, so who knows what the impact might be on a current effort to offer sanctuary.

There are many reasons to offer sanctuary to those in need. Two stand out in particular in this consideration of the legalities of such a program: *support and time*. Sanctuary needs to be far more than a place to sleep. It requires a range of supports, spiritual, and financial, and a careful organization of resources often in conjunction with other religious organizations and people. Sanctuary also offers the precious commodity of time. A family can be separated unannounced, leaving children alone and spouses or partners grieving. Sanctuary in the 1980s was about slowing things down long enough to rally the support necessary to help someone fight to remain in the U.S. These were often refugees, rather than longer term residents currently at risk for summary deportation. Their circumstances may differ, but the need for time is the same. Time to consult with legal counsel, time to assure care for family members and particularly children.

Unlike medieval Europe, there will be no amnesty waiting behind the stout doors of a church. In modern America, sanctuary is at best an effort to embarrass law enforcement enough to slow down the speedy wheel of deportation. The current administration might not hesitate to enter into a church, synagogue, or mosque to arrest a sanctuary seeker or to arrest those who sought to shield that person in violation of federal immigration law.

A legal argument is much like an arrow – you might get lucky and hit with one well-placed shot. More likely, you will need many arrows, many efforts, many people along multiple fronts. And yet this is a fundamental religious argument, one familiar to American religious groups across the spectrums of traditions and politics. And breaking down the doors of a church to arrest a frightened soul hiding inside would be an open and obvious act of violence perpetrated against a house of

worship. There may be few points of agreement on the American political landscape. But that scene might well be one that even the most ardent supporter of immigration restrictions might hesitate to see. May it be so.