



# grace presbyterian church

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## **A Statement of Participation of Grace Church in the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance**

Grace Church, after prayerful consideration by Session, has joined with other Montclair churches and synagogues in supporting the work of the Montclair Sanctuary Alliance (the "MSA"). The MSA is committed to offering sanctuary, by means that are consistent with federal immigration law, to individuals facing deportation. We have prepared a statement of support that could be used as the basis for a position paper approved by Session. The statement, and an insightful essay by Deacon Paul Denk submitted to Session, will be available in the church narthex and the Fellowship Room. Please share your thoughts on the Statement and the Essay with Elders, Deacons and our Pastoral Staff. We also encourage everyone to attend an information session on the work of the MSA that will be held at Grace Church on May 9th at 6:30 pm. The event will be attended by Rabbi Elliott Tepperman from Bnai' Keshet Synagogue, who has been a leader in the sanctuary movement (and spoke at Grace last July). A light supper will be served.

### **I. Grace Church is undertaking a Bible-based response to current needs.**

Both the Old and New Testaments contain many specific references to helping the stranger in need. Here are just a few:

Exodus 23:9 "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt."

Leviticus 19:33-34 "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt."

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 "[God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt."

Matthew 25:35 "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...."

Romans 15:7 “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

Hebrews 13:2 “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

## **II. Participation is consistent with Grace's mission and heritage.**

Grace Presbyterian Church has a long history in supporting missions both locally and around the globe. In fact, the church itself was the result of missionary activity in the late nineteenth century. Over the years, mission activity has included all of the ministries Jesus mentions in Matt. 25:31-46 including welcoming strangers (v. 35). Years ago, as a missionary supported by Grace, Pastor Leggett spent a year working with undocumented Mexicans on the US/Mexico border. More recently our missionary, Ken Meyer, who, like Pastor Leggett, grew up in Grace Church, is aiding refugees from the Middle East who have come into Vienna, Austria. Many of these have fled poverty and injustice, sometimes with little or no documentation.

Together with other members of the Alliance, we are prepared to offer sanctuary to individuals facing detention and deportation in order to stay together with their families. We stand publicly against the injustices affecting immigrants and support reforms to promote fairness.

We will be coordinating with MESH and IHN to minimize conflicts.

## **III. All actions will be consistent with the law.**

The Montclair Sanctuary Alliance, with the support of Grace Presbyterian Church, (the “MSA”) is a network of churches and synagogues that have committed to offering sanctuary to individuals facing deportation by means that are consistent with federal immigration law. “Sanctuary” in this context means the MSA creating a space within a building on the grounds of the Bnai Keshet synagogue as a physical shelter for an individual or family that is at risk of being arrested and deported by federal department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”). The MSA sanctuary will provide the person or families being sheltered with an opportunity to seek a deferment or other resolution with ICE without being arrested and detained in federal or state facilities.

The MSA acknowledges that there is no formal legal protection for persons being sought for arrest by ICE. “Sanctuary church” or “sanctuary synagogue” are not legal terms and there is no definition of a “sanctuary church” or “sanctuary synagogue” in federal immigration law. However, ICE has stated that its policy is not to conduct arrests or other “enforcement actions,” at churches, synagogues and other “sensitive locations,” except in limited circumstances.

ICE published its policy on Enforcement Actions at or Focused on Sensitive Locations on October 24, 2011. ICE's policy is not to conduct arrests, interviews, searches or surveillance (i.e., "enforcement actions") at churches, synagogues, schools and hospitals, among other places it considers to be "sensitive locations," except in limited circumstances. ICE officers are generally required to obtain authorization from supervisory ICE officials if they intend to conduct an enforcement action at a sensitive location. Exceptions to the general policy are instances in which the enforcement action involves a national security or terrorism matter; there is an imminent risk of death, violence, or physical harm to any persons or property; the enforcement action involves the immediate arrest or pursuit of a dangerous felon, terrorist suspect or other persons that present an imminent danger to public safety; or there is an imminent risk of destruction of evidence relevant to an ongoing criminal case. ICE has stated that the policy it published in October 2011 remains in effect today. ICE's reiteration of its sensitive locations policy can be found at <https://www.ice/ero/enforcement/sensitive-loc>.

The MSA will provide sanctuary to persons that it determines are within the protections afforded under the ICE "sensitive locations" policy. Bnai Keshet will evaluate specific requests for sanctuary. The evaluation will include a review of the background of the individual seeking sanctuary, the expected duration of the sanctuary; the likelihood that the person will receive a stay of removal, order of supervision or other form of administrative relief; and the willingness to abide by Bnai Keshet's "house rules." The person must authorize MSA to notify ICE that the person is being housed at the MSA sanctuary.

#### **IV. Present and future needs**

Typically, persons seeking political asylum in the US are temporarily detained by ICE while their eligibility for naturalization is considered. After ICE determines that such persons pose no danger to the public, they are released on probation. Once they are granted asylum, they are free to obtain documentation (Social Security cards, work permits, driver's licenses, etc.) and to find employment. In this critical and difficult period, while seeking jobs and long-term housing, they need assistance from private agencies like the Sanctuary Alliance.

In some cases, persons who were denied asylum are at risk of separation from their families. We intend to shelter such individuals to the best of our ability and in keeping with the law.

We are considering the option of providing temporary housing, either on property owned by Grace or off-site.

We also intend to offer tutoring in English as a second language and assistance with job search as needed.