

FIRST UNITARIAN  
CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY  
BROOKLYN  
A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION

**Transforming Lives**

**Marisa Lastres**

(Member since January 15, 2017)



Since the first time I came here in August 2014, First Unitarian has been an integral part of my closest friendships. It's given me a wide circle of like-minded friends and acquaintances. It gave me a stable commitment during a nine-month battle with severe depression in 2015. It's given me a place to spiritually heal from being a queer woman raised in the Catholic church. It's a place to be in community, which was especially important for a young person who moved, alone, 850 miles from home. It's been a place to go for comfort in grief—especially after the Orlando shooting, and after the 2016 election. And it's a place where activism is supported: where I can talk with other activists, where I can learn, where I'm inspired and encouraged on a weekly basis, and where I find people who will physically go a protest with me.

That activism piece is the bit I want to dig into today.

As many of you know, I'm the Chair of the Immigrant Solidarity Committee. Today is our congregation's first day live as a sanctuary space. That doesn't mean anyone is in sanctuary here now—nobody is—but it means that we are ready to host someone in sanctuary any time a call comes in, day or night, for the foreseeable future. It's a really proud day for me and for everyone who has worked on this, which includes a lot of you.

The sanctuary effort at First U began fifteen months ago, when about a dozen of us gathered in the library on a Monday night to participate in a three-hour webinar about the practicalities of bringing UU congregations through a discernment process about sanctuary. We weren't an organized group, just a bunch of First U members and friends who knew that the new Trump administration would target immigrants and who wanted to do something about it. Whatever we could do, with whatever resources we had.

The fact that we have reached this point, today, is a testament not only to an extraordinary commitment of time and energy on the part of the organizers (shoutout to my beloved Committee), and not only to all of you who are volunteers, but also to First Unitarian as a whole—as a community that really supports activism.

For us organizers, the central question throughout this process has been, do enough people at First U support this? Enough to vote to make us a committee? Enough who will take an hour

and a half out of their day to come to a discernment meeting? Enough who care so much that, even if they're unsure about First U doing sanctuary, they'll come to another meeting and get their questions answered? Enough to vote to actually establish a sanctuary program?

Enough who care so much they'll volunteer? Enough that we can have a volunteer physically at the church whenever someone is in sanctuary? Enough to staff a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week on-call schedule? Enough who not only sign up, but actually come to training? Enough who'll continue to care, as the months go on and we're not quite there yet?

Every single time we've asked this question, the answer has been a resounding yes.

For somebody who was raised with people who talk a good game about compassion and service but don't tend to actually do the work, every single "yes" has been healing.

For somebody who has until this point pretty much hated group work, every single "yes" has been stunning.

For somebody who is often fighting not to lose hope in people as I see in the news and in my own life and my loved ones' lives how much people can hurt one another, every single "yes" has been an affirmation.

And in the midst of some pretty dark times, every single "yes" has been a blessing.

Thank you all so much for caring, thank you to those of you who've acted on it, and thank you to this congregation for sticking with this for fifteen months and counting.

I look forward to doing good work with all of you for a long time to come.

April 29, 2017