

## **Proposal to the Congregation**

May 19, 2019

### **Resolution:**

The Congregation resolves to continue the Immigrant Solidarity Committee as proposed to the Board of Trustees on April 25, 2019.

### **Proposal:**

The Congregation initially authorized the Immigrant Solidarity Committee for a two-year term beginning May 2017. The Committee proposes for the Congregation at the Annual Meeting on May 19 to re-authorize the Committee with the following parameters:

- The purpose of the Committee will be to mobilize activity of the Congregation in support of immigrants and refugees who wish to establish or maintain residence in the United States under the law.
- The Board of Trustees will appoint the Chair or Co-Chairs of the Committee.
- Each year the Committee will submit a report of its activities to the Board.
- The Board will retain authority to continue the Committee, such as by recording the Committee's revenues and expenses in the Congregational budget and accounts, or to discontinue the Committee.
- The Board will have authority to expand or restrict the activities of the Committee, consistent with the purpose of the Committee as stated above.
- As of May 19, 2019, the activities of the Committee include:
  1. Providing sanctuary on the church premises for up to 72 hours as originally authorized by the Congregation in May 2017.
  2. Providing housing and support on the church premises for up to 7 days to an individual or family applying for asylum, as authorized by the Board of Trustees in July 2018.
  3. Coordinating ongoing housing and support outside the church premises to individuals and families applying for asylum, as a continuation of #2.
  4. Support and advocacy for immigrants and refugees in the community at large, together with other religious and community groups.
  5. Fundraising in support of the above, as authorized by the Board of Trustees in January 2018.

### **Background:**

At its Annual Meeting in May 2017, drawing on UU Principles, the Congregation authorized the Board of Trustees to form the Immigrant Solidarity Committee, initially for a two-year term, to:

- Stand in solidarity with immigrants and refugees and their families, and encourage the Congregation's members and friends to volunteer in support and advocacy on their behalf
- Lead the Congregation in a period of discernment of whether to commit to a program of offering sanctuary to immigrants and refugees.

In the fall of 2017, the Congregation completed its discernment and in a Congregational Meeting in November 2017, adopted a program of sanctuary up to 3 days on the church premises (item 1 above). Since late winter / early spring of 2018, Congregants have volunteered to be on-call 24x7 to open the church for people in need of sanctuary, and to accompany them while they are in sanctuary in the church.

In July 2018, the Board of Directors authorized expanding the Committee's activities to include providing transitional housing and support on the church premises for up to 7 days to an individual or family applying for asylum, whose status with Homeland Security allowed them to go out into the community (item 2 above).

- From July 28 to August 5, 2018, over 45 members and friends of the Congregation hosted at the church a Honduran mother and son, whom Homeland Security had been holding in separate detention for 51 days, in Texas and Arizona respectively, and now released to re-unite and relocate to Brooklyn as they apply for asylum in the US. At August 5, they relocated to the home of friends of the Congregation, and members of the Committee continue to offer them social, emotional and financial support.
- Since November 7, 2018, members of the Congregation have been hosting a Cuban refugee in their home, after Homeland Security released her from detention in Texas to relocate to Brooklyn to pursue her asylum application.
- Since December 30, 2018, members of the Congregation have been hosting a Nicaraguan refugee in the same situation. With help from the Committee and others, she is now trying to get Homeland Security to release her partner from detention in Georgia, so she and he can pursue their asylum applications together in Brooklyn.
- From January 2 to 4, members of the Congregation hosted in their home a Guatemalan father and son whom Homeland Security had released from detention, to relocate to Brooklyn to pursue their asylum application. From January 4 to 13, over 40 members and friends of the Congregation hosted them at the church while the Committee looked for longer-term housing. On January 13, they relocated to the home of friends of the Congregation, and members of the Committee continue to provide social, emotional and financial support.
- Members of the Committee and the Queer Caucus are now exploring whether any members or friends of the Congregation could host an LGBTQI asylum-seeker. If so, they will contact existing channels to find an LGBTQI refugee who could especially benefit from a supportive host environment.

- In January, the Committee launched a Go Fund Me site to raise funds for direct support of our guests. Over \$10,000 has been raised so far through the Go Fund Me site and through direct contributions to the Committee's account at First Unitarian.
- Since February, the Committee has been reaching out to other UU Congregations in New York City, congregations of other faiths in Brooklyn, and other grass-roots immigrant support groups to build a stronger network of collaboration in support of immigrants and refugees. Several of those groups want to participate in supporting our guests.
- On April 27, the Committee is hosting Songs for Solidarity, a concert to bring together First Unitarian and other congregations and groups supporting refugees, and to raise funds for direct support of our guests.
- The Committee is co-sponsoring the Sanctuary Neighborhoods conference April 27-29. The conference brings together grass roots groups providing housing and other support to immigrants and refugees, to learn from each others' experience and build collaboration.

While the Committee has not yet found undocumented Brooklynites who need to take sanctuary in the church building to avoid imminent detention or deportation, as anticipated in 2017, the Committee has found that many refugees who are pursuing legal applications for asylum need a healthy place to live during the long asylum process, as opposed to remaining in federal detention near the southern border, and find the immigration courts and people in New York City more receptive to them. Asylum seekers sometimes arrive in Brooklyn with no place to live, and several days of transitional housing on the church premises can be essential before they move into the community. The asylum process is long, and for the first 6 to 12 months applicants are generally not authorized to work. The Committee is glad to mobilize social, emotional, and financial support for our guests throughout this process.

The Committee greatly appreciates the support the Board, clergy, staff, and whole Congregation have provided for the immigrant solidarity program since its inception.

**For Further Information:**

Please contact Committee Co-Chair Tom Check at [checktf@cs.com](mailto:checktf@cs.com) and (917)626-9127. The Committee's Board Liaison is Vonda Brunsting.