

The Church as a Sanctuary

At the 79th General Convention **Resolution 2018-C009, *Becoming A Sanctuary Church***, was passed to address the issues around creating a sanctuary Church. The Resolution states that the Church recommends that “its institutions and congregations become places of welcome, refuge, healing, and other forms of material and pastoral support for those targeted for deportation due to immigration status or some perceived status of difference.”

The mission of the Church Insurance Companies (CIC) is to protect the people and property of the Episcopal Church. To support the Church’s work and to help our clients understand and navigate the process of establishing a sanctuary church for immigrants seeking protection, following are details related to the Sanctuary Church endorsement coverage The Church Insurance Company of Vermont now offers, as well as helpful safety tips Episcopal institutions can implement when operating a sanctuary church.

Coverage

The Church Insurance Company of Vermont offers a Sanctuary Church endorsement which offers coverage of up to \$100,000 for legal defense costs arising from a church’s operation as a sanctuary church. The cost for this coverage is \$100 annually.

Plan Before You Open Your Doors

Before you open your church as a sanctuary for immigrants, it is important to determine how your facility will be used. For example:

- Does your church wish to simply supply shelter, or other services, such as meals?
- How many people can your facility hold safely?
- How will you provide security?
- How long will your church serve as a sanctuary?
- Which rooms and buildings on your property will guests be able to access?
- If there is a medical emergency, what procedures will you follow?
- Who will act as the communication liaison between those staying at the church and local authorities?

CIC recommends that you create a safety checklist to share with those who care for and have control of your property and that you agree on who will be responsible for maintaining and cleaning the space being used. You should train staff and volunteers and make educational material available regarding the use of the church as a sanctuary.

It is important to make sure that those staying at the church understand any restrictions or hazards. It is also advised that you make sure that any undocumented immigrants staying at your church recognize that, although it is unusual, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents could enter a sanctuary church.

Churches Taking Action

Many Episcopal churches and church leaders are already taking action to support undocumented immigrants. One example is ***Episcopal Sacred Resistance***, which is a group operating out of Los Angeles, California, “intended [as] a safe place to organize, hope, grieve, share resources, and stories of resistance in these uncertain times.”

Many other churches and dioceses are acting as ***advocates for immigrants*** and refugees in other ways. There are many resources that churches can use if they decide to take the step to become a sanctuary. For example, ***www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org***, provides information about sanctuary coalitions and individual cases, as well as information about building a coalition and other toolkits and written resources.

Choosing to become a sanctuary church is a big step that requires thought and careful planning. Before you act, take the time to survey your congregation and make sure your church is adequately prepared for what this decision will entail.

If you would like additional information regarding risk management and safety, or to add a Sanctuary Church endorsement to your existing policy, please contact us at ***CIACService@cpj.org*** or call (800) 293-3525. We are here to help.

Safe Property for Sanctuary Churches

All churches should follow basic safety guidelines, but sanctuary churches should make certain that their property is a safe place to house guests. Consider the following:

- Do you have an area for the individual or family to use, including a restroom with a shower? Will you need to convert an area of the church for this purpose? Is the area private? Do locks work, and who will have access to the keys?
- If there are children being housed as part of your sanctuary ministry, is the private area sufficiently child-proofed?
- Are all staircases, sidewalks, and handrails in good repair?
- Is the plumbing in good shape and able to handle increased use? Are the hot water and heating/cooling systems operational and set at a safe threshold?