

A MENU OF HOPE

A Resource Guide for Standing with Immigrants in Rural New York (April 17)

INTRODUCTION

Rural & Migrant Ministry (RMM) has stood with immigrant workers, especially farmworkers, in rural New York for over thirty-five years. We were created by a number of prominent faith bodies who entered into a covenant with each other and with RMM, thus we represent over one million people of faith across New York State. Along the way we have also partnered with many major labor unions in the State, as well as a multitude of universities and colleges. As a result of our Mission and our heritage we are not only in relationship with many immigrant workers and allies, but we also serve as a bridge across many communities.

RMM's Mission Statement:

Rural & Migrant Ministry works for the creation of a just, rural New York State through:

Nurturing leadership

Standing with the disenfranchised, especially farmworkers and rural workers

Changing unjust systems and structures

2017 has brought great consternation to the rural immigrant communities of New York. There is tremendous change which has resulted in great fear and in rising tragedy as immigrant families are being threatened with detention and deportation. Our situation is exacerbated by the fact that New York is a border state, and therefore there are additional implications involving the Border Patrol.

We have been asked by many of our members and allies about what can be done, a question we are constantly asking ourselves. The difficulty is that things are constantly changing. Things are being said by the President, and then Executive actions, and actions on the ground conflict with the statements. Policies are being implemented in differing ways – and the result is confusion, fear and upheaval.

One inspiring action is the courage of many immigrants to go forth determined to live life as fully as possible in hope. Another inspiration comes from the number of allies who are saying that they will not tolerate such an unjust disregard for humanity; and they are responding with compassion, creativity, courage and determination.

Please know that RMM remains steadfast in our commitment to work with our immigrant brothers and sisters through our traditional leadership development programs so that leaders can continue to emerge who are able to effectively face this new environment. This *Menu of Hope* is primarily directed to those allies who want to do something.

We have reached out to many of our sister organizations and coalitions in putting this *Menu* together. It is by no means complete, and indeed will need to keep changing, as our environment keeps changing. Our intention is to create some doorways for you to go through as you seek to live into your witness. We do not profess to know the map through all doorways, but we trust once you get going – you will not only find your way, you will help create new doorways. At this point, let us pause for a moment and say thank you for your witness – it means a great deal to many.

Many have asked about participating in sanctuary. This is important, and we focus quite a bit on sanctuary. That being said, we also believe it is important to stand in many different ways – many of these ways are rooted in the traditional missions of faith and labor communities. Many are things that we already do – we just need to remind ourselves of our own traditions of justice and mercy, and perhaps reconfigure and reconnect. Sometimes the most helpful things are not the most obvious, and sometimes they take extra effort – sometimes it is about bearing witness and living into faith. Standing with someone can make a great difference– even if there is no change, it is still important to bear witness and show solidarity.

RMM is focused on the rural areas of New York, with centers in Suffolk, Sullivan, Dutchess and Wayne counties. While there is much in common in the immigration situation, between rural and urban areas, we have found that there are also many differences. Therefore, this Menu has been created with a focus on rural areas. Our contributors are the Staff, Board and Senior Fellows of RMM (and you can see brief bios of the contributors at the end.)

This *Menu of Hope* is divided up into sections that we thought would be useful. There is, of course, much more to be said and explored, and again, we would remind you that we are only providing some doorways, and hopefully some inspiration. We begin with three basic underpinnings: Faith, International Human Rights and U.S. Democracy that we believe will be helpful to any of us who are facing questioning about why we are standing with our immigrant brothers and sisters.

In each of the other sections our goal is to highlight doorways and action steps, as well as available resources. We do this by relying on the amazing work of our sister organizations and coalitions – and when possible, we hold up links to their efforts. (Of course there is much more going on – and we apologize for our inability to link to all). In each section we attempt the following:

- Brief Introduction and explanations
- Action Steps
- Links to organizations/coalitions etc. that are working on various aspects of this issue
- Some links to articles (please note there has been, and continues to be much written – there is no way we are able to list even a comprehensive list here
- Links to resources

OFFERING SANCTUARY

Rural & Migrant Ministry has a 35 year history of working with people who live on the margins of society. Farmworkers have always been a vulnerable community. Throughout the years we have faced the presence of the Border Patrol and Department of Homeland Security on the northern border of the State – and frequently their presence has been terrifying and disruptive.

Offering sanctuary is not something that anyone aspires to. It is an emergency response, a moral action that must be taken because our laws have failed us. At its essence, sanctuary is meant to stop the immediate deportation of an individual or a group of persons and to provide safety and comfort.

Offering sanctuary and being part of the Sanctuary Movement involves many different contributions and approaches (as outlined in this *Menu of Hope*). Participating in direct sanctuary can also take a number of approaches – through both private and public means.

Allow us to pause for a moment and acknowledge that some are having difficulty with the word/title sanctuary. Some instead are using ‘hospitality’ or ‘radical hospitality.’ We have chosen to use the word/title sanctuary, but when all has been said and done it basically comes down to shelter and solidarity.

The decision to become a sanctuary has major implications on the lives of not only those who need sanctuary, but also the members of the congregation. For example, does the congregation wish to do this publicly or privately? How many resources (funds, people, living space) do you have to accommodate someone, or a family, and for how long?

Offering sanctuary will look like many things, but the most important thing is that it is solidarity work. That means listening to the people who are most affected by these policies. For those of us who have documents and/or are citizens of the U.S., this means our ideas and thoughts about what should be done or what sanctuary should look like take a back seat. Our first task is to show up and listen, to build relationships with people who are most directly affected - immigrants, and listen to what they need.

Aric Clark, in the book ‘Faithful Resistance’ writes that solidarity demands much from us. Solidarity requires that we actively identify with those who are impacted by unjust policies that likely do not impact us in the same way. Solidarity may demand that I stand with immigrants and others in a way that is personally risky.

Solidarity draws us out of ourselves and encourages us to turn as a group towards those who have been historically marginalized and excluded. A congregation based in solidarity knows that she does not exist for herself, but for the sake of others.

This section specifically focuses upon direct participation in sanctuary.

Becoming a Sanctuary Congregation

There are a number of steps that a congregation can take toward becoming a sanctuary congregation. Here is a basic outline (check our links for more detailed steps.)

1. Educate yourself and your congregation or membership
 - Gain a broad overview. Invite speakers from the affected communities or the organizations that support them. Or, attend information sessions offered by established organizations and coalitions (see links below)

- Participate in the study of Scriptures. How does your faith inform and root you? Our faith perspective is different than our political and societal perspectives
- Examine the legal implications. There are many. It is important to be aware of the rights and vulnerabilities of those in sanctuary, as well as your own, in providing sanctuary.
- Study the realities of the political situation in your community, in the region, and nationally. What will the implications likely be, and how will you interact with these forces?
- Finally, all of this involves the whole of the congregation. Have open and frank conversations in the midst of this whole process. And for those who agree to become involved, establish Working Agreements.

2. Decide on public/private

- Decide whether you will be doing this publicly. If so then you will need to plan a whole campaign for announcing your position.
- It is important that those who you are providing sanctuary for understand your stand, as well as the implications (the government parked outside of your congregation for example)

3. Become a Sanctuary home

- There are those who are stepping forward to offer their homes as either a sanctuary or a temporary part of a rapid response effort. This is done individually as part of an ‘underground railroad.’
- The steps are similar in many ways to the decision to become a sanctuary congregation mentioned above:
 - a) Gain a broad overview. Invite speakers from the affected communities or the organizations that support them. Or, attend information sessions offered by established organizations and coalitions (see links below.)
 - b) Reflect. Why are you doing this? What is your capacity, commitment? What training do you need to engage in in order to be a strong ally?
 - c) There are many legal implications. It is important to be aware of the rights and vulnerabilities of those in sanctuary, as well as your own, in providing sanctuary.
 - d) Study the realities of the political situation in your community, in the region, nationally and in your neighborhood. What will the implications likely be, and how will you interact with these forces?
 - e) Finally, all of this involves the whole of your family. Have open and frank conversations in the midst of this whole process.

4. Short term housing for those reeling from the legal process

- In the aftermath of a detention/deportation, breadwinners may be removed from their families. Some individuals facing deportation can be released to await their hearings but may have lost their jobs and

homes during the process. Subsequently, there will be a need for housing and support. This is different than providing sanctuary, but equally important.

- Again, this is something to give great reflection to – as to what you can offer (time/housing/financial support etc.)
- Offer a place to stay to individuals and families in the deportation process.
- Connect with local organizations/coalitions to alert them of your willingness to be involved in this manner.

5. If you can't be a Sanctuary Congregation/Home, but want to be involved in supporting Sanctuary Congregations

- If you are not in a position to participate directly in a sanctuary program, support those that are involved. There is much work to be done behind the scenes.
- Reach out to those congregations who have publicly announced they are sanctuary congregations and ask what support they need.
- Reach out to organizations who are involved in solidarity work to see if there are congregations/individuals etc. who are providing sanctuary privately – and see what support they need. Slowly, there is an underground developing.
- Things that will be needed: (a partial list)
 - a) Financial support (for both the congregation and the family (including extended family that are dependents.)
 - b) Transportation for a variety of reasons – including their children's regular activities
 - c) Become a part of a rapid response team
 - d) Be a part of 'witness' team that stands in solidarity at needed public demonstrations around the sanctuary congregation
 - e) Determine your willingness to engage in civil disobedience
 - f) Be a part of a team (or create a team) that educates and mobilizes the local public around sanctuary through the media

'For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock.' (Psalm 27:5)

Creating Sanctuary Towns, Cities, Counties and States

There is a determined and public effort to work with our local governments to ensure that they are not participating with federal authorities (above and beyond what the law requires); and in fact are moving beyond a reactive stance to a proactive stance to proclaim that our immigrant brothers and sisters are a valuable part of our community. This witness is a valuable and essential part of reducing the fear and creating a community that we are proud of, and inspired by. The action to create a sanctuary community, is also a critical component of systemic change and advocacy (see above.)