

Sanctuary Task Force Commentary on Resolution #6 Passed at the 2025 Diocesan Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany

Throughout history, the church has functioned not only as a place for religious worship and pastoral care, but also as a refuge for the most vulnerable members of our societies. According to *The Episcopal Dictionary of the Church* (1999): “Historically, a sanctuary would be a place of safe refuge for criminals or fugitives. This is also known as the right of sanctuary. It is based on the understanding that holy places such as churches are not subject to the powers of this world.”¹ Christian sanctuary is a concept rooted in a biblical concept that clearly defines how believers should treat and relate to foreigners, namely:

“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34, NIV)

God “defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners as you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 10:18-19, NIV)

The Gospels affirm these Old Testament directives to extend hospitality to foreigners. The Gospels show that Jesus personally understands the life of a refugee, having fled political

¹ “Sanctuary,” *The Episcopal Church*, n.d., accessed February 12, 2026, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/sanctuary/>.

persecution with his parents as a child (Matthew 2:13-15, NIV). Committed to the plight of the displaced (Matthew 25:35, NIV), Jesus taught his followers that there is no greater priority than to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31, NIV). In his early ministry, Jesus extended hospitality, mercy, and compassion to men and women without regard to their race, ethnicity, or immigration status, including Gentiles, Samaritans, and Romans.² In John 8:1-11 (NIV), Jesus provided literal physical protection and sanctuary to a fugitive from the law and admonished her persecutors to choose mercy over judgment (John 8:1-11, NIV).

Such divine examples of radical grace shaped the mission and ministry of the Apostles, including the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, who taught:

“Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it... And do not neglect to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Hebrews 13:1-2, 16, NIV)

In sum, the Bible provides certain and clear directives on welcoming foreigners, and these directives form the basis of the Church’s modern ministry to foreigners, immigrants, and refugees. The Episcopal Church has an especially distinguished history of ministry to immigrants and refugees. In 1883, the Church created a Committee for the Spiritual Care of Immigrants and established chaplaincies in ports in New York and California to minister to immigrants coming from Europe and Asia. In the 1930s, Episcopalians assisted refugees fleeing Nazi Europe. In the aftermath of World War II and the Vietnam War, Episcopalians united with other mainline

² See as examples, Jesus’s encounters with the Roman centurion (Matthew 8: 5-13), the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-42, NIV), the Canaanite woman seeking healing for her demon-possessed daughter (Matthew 15:21-28, NIV), and the healing of the demoniac in the predominately gentile region of Gergesa (Mark 5:1-20, NIV) as examples.

Protestants to reform American immigration law to allow for the resettlement of European and Asian war refugees. In response to the Refugee Resettlement Act (1980), the Department of State entered a partnership with The Episcopal Church to facilitate the safe resettlement of men, women, and children uprooted and displaced by war. Over nearly 50-years, Episcopal Migration Ministries facilitated the safe resettlement of more than 100,000 men, women, and children fleeing war zones in Burma, Somalia, Iraq, East Africa, Afghanistan, and Congo.³

Today the Episcopal Church is an international body comprised of dioceses in the United States, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Europe, and this diverse body has repeatedly spoken with one voice to affirm its commitment to welcoming, resettling, and advocating for refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.⁴ Between 2000 and 2024, the General Conventions of The Episcopal Church have issued more than 30 resolutions on topics of refugee resettlement, immigration reform, the humane treatment of immigrants, family unity, human rights, climate-induced displacement, and church engagement in migration ministries.⁵ At the 78th General Convention (2015), Episcopalians issued a resolution by which we “recommit to the spirit of the New Sanctuary Movement by supporting congregations so they can assist immigrant individuals, unaccompanied minors, families, and communities by being centers of information, services and accompaniment, and by supporting families facing separation in the absence of comprehensive, human immigration reform.”⁶ At the 79th General Convention (2018), The

³ “Episcopal Church to Reach 100,000 People Served in 40 Years of Refugee Resettlement Services,” *Episcopal News Service*, December 8, 2021, <https://episcopalnewsservice.org/2021/12/08/episcopal-church-to-reach-100000-people-served-in-40-years-of-refugee-resettlement-services/>.

⁴ “Ecclesiastical provinces and dioceses of the Episcopal Church,” *Wikipedia*, January 30, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ecclesiastical_provinces_and_dioceses_of_the_Episcopal_Church&oldid=1335678884.

⁵ Office of Government Relations, “Summary of Episcopal Church Policy on Immigration and Refugee Issues,” *The Episcopal Church*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ogr/summary-of-episcopal-church-policy-on-immigration-and-refugee-issues-2/>.

⁶ General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Salt Lake City, 2015* (New York: General Convention, 2015), p. 407. https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2015-

Episcopal Church recommended 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, and that we work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people.”⁷

The Episcopal Church has also stated plainly and without reservation that our call to “become places of welcome, refuge and healing” for immigrants is not a call to “open borders.” At the 75th General Convention (2006), we affirmed “the duty and right of a sovereign nation to protect and defend its borders.”⁸ Episcopalians recognize and uphold the right and responsibility of the government to detain and deport undocumented immigrants who have violated the law. We have also urged law enforcement to conduct this necessary work “in a safe and humane manner” for the well-being of both detained immigrants and the federal agents charged with the difficult work of enforcing these laws.⁹ The Episcopal Church includes several dioceses that span both the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada borders, and our brethren in these dioceses have worked diligently to extend compassion and care to migrants and refugees *and* to the federal agents tasked with the dangerous work of securing our national borders and enforcing federal immigration laws and directives.¹⁰

According to the Pew Research Center, many Americans now hold the same views that were expressed in previous General Conventions.¹¹ As an example, at the 79th General Convention

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⁷ “Acts of Convention: Resolution # 2018-C009,” accessed February 12, 2026, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2018-C009.

⁸ “Acts of Convention: Resolution # 2006-A017,” accessed February 12, 2026, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2006-A017.

⁹ “Executive Council: Resolution # EXC062014.08,” accessed February 12, 2026, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/executive_council/EXCresolution.pl?exc_id=EXC062014.08.

¹⁰ “13 Episcopal Dioceses Call for Immigrant Dignity, Justice,” *Episcopal News Service*, January 16, 2026, <https://episcopalnewsservice.org/pressreleases/13-episcopal-dioceses-call-for-immigrant-dignity-justice/>.

¹¹ Hannah Hartig, “Growing Shares Say the Trump Administration Is Doing ‘Too Much’ to Deport

(2018) Episcopalians expressed support for “U.S. executive policies that deemphasize immigration action against those who have not committed felony crimes, and reaffirm our church’s support for action for comprehensive and just reform of the broken U.S. immigrants who have established roots in the United States and are often parents and spouses of U.S. Citizens to have a pathway to legalization and to full social and economic integration to the United States.”¹² Congressman Mike Lawler, a Republican, who represents New York’s 17th Congressional District within the Albany Diocese endorsed this *same position* in a recent guest essay for *The New York Times*.¹³

The Sanctuary Diocese Task Force offers this overview to educate individuals and parishes as we move forward in ministering to foreigners, immigrants, and refugees within the Albany Diocese. Resolution #6 commits the Albany Diocese to offer “sacred hospitality to the immigrant, refuge, and stranger among us by providing sanctuary, basic human necessities, and pastoral care.”¹⁴ It establishes a common commitment and dedication to the spirit of Christian sanctuary. The resolution does not require a uniformity of action or response, but it insists upon a common dedication to this work as a diocese. There is flexibility in how we live into this call in this moment in time. Our responses will vary according to our individual convictions, traditions, material resources, and the laws that govern our communities. By necessity, migration ministry in Plattsburgh will look different than migration ministry in Albany, Unadilla or Hudson.

Here in the Albany Diocese, immigrants are subject to a mosaic of local ordinances and state laws that shape the contours of their life, work, and worship. New York protects immigrants

Immigrants in the U.S. Illegally,” *Pew Research Center*, December 15, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/12/15/growing-shares-say-the-trump-administration-is-doing-too-much-to-deport-immigrants-in-the-us-illegally/>.

¹² “Acts of Convention: Resolution # 2018-C009,” accessed February 12, 2026, https://digitalarchives.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2018-C009.

¹³ Mike Lawler, “Opinion | G.O.P. Congressman: We Need to Wake Up After Minneapolis,” Opinion, *The New York Times*, January 27, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/27/opinion/republicans-minneapolis-immigration-trump.html>.

¹⁴ *Resolution #6 Passed at the 2025 Diocesan Convention*, 2025, <https://albanyepiscopaldiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Resolution-6-Passed-at-the-2025-Diocesan-Convention.pdf>.

through policies like the Green Light Law (2019), which provides standard driver’s licenses to all regardless of immigration status. Additionally, Executive Order 170 (2025) ensures immigrants have safe access to state buildings and programs by barring state officials and police from sharing personal information with federal immigration authorities for civil matters.¹⁵ At the same time, local governments can choose to assist federal immigration efforts through programs like Section 287(g). Rensselaer and Otsego Counties have entered partnerships with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), allowing their Sheriff Departments to perform federal immigration duties. Additionally, several counties, including Clinton, Rensselaer, and Montgomery, provide space in their local jails for ICE To hold detained immigrants.¹⁶ Still other municipalities have passed their own ordinances to regulate how businesses engage with undocumented residents.

Every generation of Christian disciples has worked in its own way to extend Christian hospitality to foreigners, immigrants, and refugees, and in this moment, the Sanctuary Diocese Task Force has confidence that we too will find a way forward. We offer this information as foundation for action so individuals and parishes will feel fully informed as they step into their call to minister to foreigners, immigrants, and refugees within the Albany Diocese. Moreover, the Sanctuary Diocese Task Force asserts that our choices in this moment are not limited to “direct action” or “no action.” In a recent open letter to America, Bishop Jeremiah Williamson joined with 153 other bishops remind us that “every act of courage matters. We must keep showing up for one another. We are bound together because we are all made in the image of God. This begins with small, faithful steps.” The letter continues, “each of us has real power: community power, financial power, political power, and knowledge power. We can show up for

¹⁵ “New York State Executive Order 170,” 2025.

¹⁶ “Delegation of Immigration Authority Section 287(g) Immigration and Nationality Act | ICE,” March 24, 2020, <https://www.ice.gov/identify-and-arrest/287g>.

our neighbors, support small businesses and food banks, contact elected officials and vote, and learn our rights so we can speak up peacefully without fear.”¹⁷

How do we apply our “real power” to become places of welcome, refuge, and healing, as we address the authentic needs of the people in our communities? This is for each of us to discern individually and as a parish, but we know from history and the examples set by The Episcopal Church that we can pray, donate to relief efforts, advocate for legal reform at local, state and federal levels, and extend direct relief to those we know are suffering. We urge individuals and parishes called to this ministry to investigate partnering with organizations to learn more about how other Christians are living into this call. The Episcopal Church¹⁸ and the Episcopal Diocese of Central New York¹⁹ have agencies tasked with migration ministry. The New York Council of Churches²⁰ can also lead us to existing faith-based migration ministries that can equip us to engage in education, organization, advocacy, and direct action as the Spirit calls us.

In conclusion, the Sanctuary Task Force is committed to the development of a unique and fluid model of “Sanctuary Diocese.” We trust in the Holy Spirit to lead Albany parishes as they build ministries tailored to their local needs. We believe the Albany Diocese will thrive by embracing and celebrating the different ways we practice our faith. In the meantime, the Sanctuary Task Force is here to mentor every individual and parish in this ministry, and we’re eager to learn from your experiences along the way. We move forward united, acting as “one body” (1 Cor. 12:21-27, NIV) in our call to provide essential care, justice, and mercy for the immigrants among us.

¹⁷ “Sanctuary Diocese Resources – Episcopal Diocese of Albany,” accessed February 12, 2026, <https://albanyepiscopaldiocese.org/sanctuary-diocese-resources/>.

¹⁸ “Episcopal Migration Ministries,” *The Episcopal Church*, January 27, 2026, <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/episcopal-migration-ministries/>.

¹⁹ “Immigration Advocacy & Ministry,” *The Episcopal Diocese of Central New York*, n.d., accessed February 17, 2026, <https://cnyepiscopal.org/immigration-advocacy-ministry/>.

²⁰ “NYSCOC - New York State Council of Churches,” accessed February 17, 2026, <https://www.nyscoc.org/>.

Sanctuary Diocese Force Appointees (2025)