

Sanctuary Diocese Taskforce: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

This document has been prepared to provide administrative clarity and pastoral guidance in direct response to the April-May 2026 diocesan survey regarding the Diocese of Albany's commitment to Resolution #6. The survey responses indicate that while many in our diocese feel called to this work, others harbor deep concerns about its implications.

The following answers address the specific questions, concerns and recommendations we received from that survey. We seek to bridge the gap between our biblical mandates and the practical, legal, and political anxieties shared by our members.

1. Foundational Questions: Definitions and Purpose

Is the Albany Diocese a Sanctuary Diocese?

Yes. At the 2025 Diocesan Convention the delegation considered and passed Resolution #6 with a vote of 110 to 74.

What is the task force charge?

The charge of the task force is "to clarify how the Diocese, individual parishes, and parishioners can practically execute Resolution #6 within diocesan and parish budgetary constraints."

Why use the term "sanctuary" to discuss this ministry when it can be politically polarizing?

Some respondents to the survey expressed concern that the term "sanctuary" suggests an affiliation with a specific political party. We acknowledge that for some "sanctuary" carries a heavy political weight.

Nevertheless, the Church, the diocese and the Task Force maintain that whatever its contemporary *political or cultural* meaning, the word "sanctuary" is fundamentally Christian vocabulary. When the Church, the diocese, or the Sanctuary Diocese Task

Force speak of “sanctuary” we mean its ancient ecclesiastical and historical sense: the church as a place of refuge and mercy.

Some have proposed we use a different word to describe the same concept, but it is inappropriate for the diocese to adopt or create new vocabulary to describe universally accepted Christian concepts. We will continue to use the familiar Christian term “sanctuary” to describe our shared ministry to immigrants, refugees, and migrants.

Is this position politically partisan?

No. While immigration is a debated topic, the Church's ongoing commitment to the principle of the Church as a place of refuge and mercy finds common ground across Christian denominations and the American political spectrum. Moreover, we must remember that migrant ministry is not new to our diocese. Parishes like St. Francis Mission (Albany) and other Diocesan programs including Beaver Cross and Loaves and Fishes have served immigrant communities for years without political labels—simply through the quiet, faithful work of donation drives and hospitality.

2. Practical Implementation: Parish Options and Flexibility

Is every parish required to practice Christian sanctuary in the same way?

No. Resolution #6 does not require a uniformity of action or response, but it requires a common dedication to the spirit of Christian sanctuary. There is flexibility in how we live into this call at this moment in time. Our responses will vary according to our individual convictions, traditions, material resources, and the specific needs of our communities.

What if our parish is small, rural, or lacks an active priest? How can our parish help based on our resources?

Participation is not “one size fits all.” Parishes are encouraged to engage at the level that matches their capacity and there are many low-cost or no-cost options for engagement. See the [Sanctuary Diocese Task Force Commentary on Resolution #6](#) for suggestions on how to develop a ministry that is appropriate for your context.

What if our small/rural parish doesn't see these issues locally?

We recognize that some rural parishes feel these issues are not "relevant" because they do not see migrants in their immediate community. However, the Task Force provides mentorship for these parishes to help them discern their specific call. This may involve advocacy from afar or supporting urban sister-parishes with resources. Collaborating with others actively doing this work is the easiest way for even the smallest congregation to participate in our diocesan-wide commitment to justice.

How can we connect with others doing this work?

Please contact us for assistance in identifying potential community partners for your region.

3. Legal & Regulatory Concerns

How does being a Sanctuary Diocese relate to local, state or federal laws?

The Church's call to be a place of "welcome, refuge, and healing" is a moral mission and wholly compatible with local, state and federal laws. Moreover, the Task Force's goal is to provide a framework for parishes to fulfill their call to this ministry *within the* existing federal, state and local legal systems and structures. We can pursue this moral mission safely, transparently, and legally.

What legal authority do federal agencies like ICE have?

Homeland Security agents have the specific authority to protect federal buildings, grounds, and property. While performing these duties, agents may enforce federal laws, carry firearms, and make arrests without a warrant for any federal felony if they have reasonable grounds to believe a person has committed the crime.

Until recently, local governments could choose to assist federal immigration efforts through programs like Section 287(g) which allows ICE to deputize law enforcement officers to act as federal immigration agents. Twelve New York law enforcement agencies including Rensselaer and Otsego Counties had entered into such 287(g) agreements with ICE.

In May 2026, New York State passed the [“Local Cops, Local Crimes Act,”](#) which expressly prohibits local governments from entering into these agreements. Governor Kathy Hochul has also directed local governments to terminate existing contracts. As of this moment, federal-local partnerships to detain immigrants are considered null and void within New York. However, the U.S. Department of Justice has filed a lawsuit seeking to block this effort.

What are the limits of ICE and other law enforcement agents in our parishes and our communities?

Broadly speaking, the Fourth Amendment protects every person against unreasonable searches and seizures. Federal and state laws also distinguish between public and private spaces. While law enforcement generally has broad authority to operate in *public spaces*, such as parks and government buildings, church property is considered *private* property.

Therefore, entry into church buildings and other parish-owned spaces for the purpose of civil immigration enforcement is subject to specific legal requirements and requires appropriate legal authorization, such as a judicial warrant issued by a court. Administrative warrants issued by a federal agency other than a court do not meet these requirements.

New York Civil Rights Law § 29, adopted May 29, 2026, expressly lists houses of worship as “sensitive locations” that may deny immigration enforcement offers access to non-public areas of church property unless the officer presents a qualifying judicial order. Similar protections apply to other “sensitive locations,” including doctor’s offices, private schools, daycares and camps or colleges and universities.

In other words, our church property is more like a private home than a public park. Being open and welcoming to visitors does not make it a public space. Just as police ordinarily need consent, a judicial warrant or another recognized legal justification to search our homes, they also need appropriate legal authority to enter private church property for civil immigration enforcement purposes.

Are parishes breaking the law by providing sanctuary or assistance?

No. Offering pastoral care, humanitarian assistance, spiritual support, worship or other ministries to immigrants regardless of status is not, by itself, a violation of state or

federal law. Such ministry is protected under the First Amendment's freedom of religion guarantee that expressly states the government cannot make laws prohibiting the free exercise of religion.

However, federal law does impose penalties for certain actions that go beyond providing assistance. For example, "harboring" (8 USC 1324) prohibits knowingly concealing, harboring, or shielding a person who is unlawfully present in the United States. The focus of this law is not on providing aid or ministry, but on actions that intentionally conceal an individual from authorities.

Federal law also prohibits interfering with the lawful duties of government officials. Statutes concerning obstruction of agency proceedings (18 USC 1505) and conspiracy to impede an officer (18 USC 372), for example, may apply when individuals (not churches) take actions to unlawfully, forcibly, or corruptly obstruct or prevent federal officials from carrying out their responsibilities.

Does such advocacy affect a parish's 501(c)(3) status?

Generally, no. The primary threat to a church's tax-exemption is not mission related ministry, but political campaign activity, such as endorsing or opposing candidates for public office. Resolution #6, declaring the Albany Diocese of the Episcopal Church a sanctuary diocese, is generally understood as an expression of *religious conviction* and church mission, not political campaign activity.

Neither the diocese nor a parish risks losing its 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status by identifying as a sanctuary church or providing pastoral care, humanitarian assistance, shelter, food, or other charitable services to immigrants or anyone else. Such activities are consistent with the religious and charitable purposes for which churches receive tax exempt status.

4. Resources and Support

Can the Task Force provide "Sanctuary Training" for our Vestry?

The task force does not offer "sanctuary training," but we can assist individuals and parishes in making connections with local and regional organizations that can provide educational programming and training specific to your community. Many organizations across New York State offer customized training sessions covering how to respond if ICE arrives at church property, how to distinguish administrative warrants from judicial warrants, etc. Others offer support and partnership opportunities for developing immigration ministries.

We encourage individuals and parishes to connect with the following groups to learn more about "best practices" and success stories.

- [Episcopal Migration Ministries \(EMM\)](#)
- [New York Council of Churches-Immigration/Racial Justice](#)
- [Columbia County Sanctuary Movement](#) (contact Father William Lytle for information)
- North Country Sanctuary Community (contact Father Ken Hitch for information)
- [New York Immigration Coalition](#)
- New York State Department of State [Office for New Americans](#)

Can the Diocese provide financial support or grants for local migration outreach?

The diocese does not have dedicated funds for immigration specific outreach at this time.

Contact Information

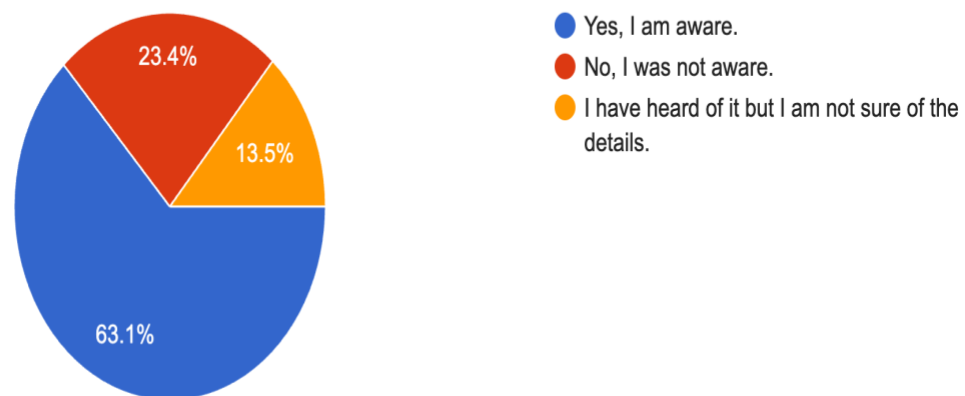
For specific questions, mentorship requests, or to share a story of how your parish is welcoming the stranger, please contact the Sanctuary Task Force directly. Please look for updates and new resources in the Weekly Diocesan Update and on the [Diocese Website](#).

Survey Results

In April 2026, the Sanctuary Diocese Taskforce conducted a diocesan-wide survey to align our work with the specific needs of the diocese. The survey included questions to gather objective feedback and open-ended comments. We received over 100 responses, which informed our work moving forward. Below is a summary of the survey results:

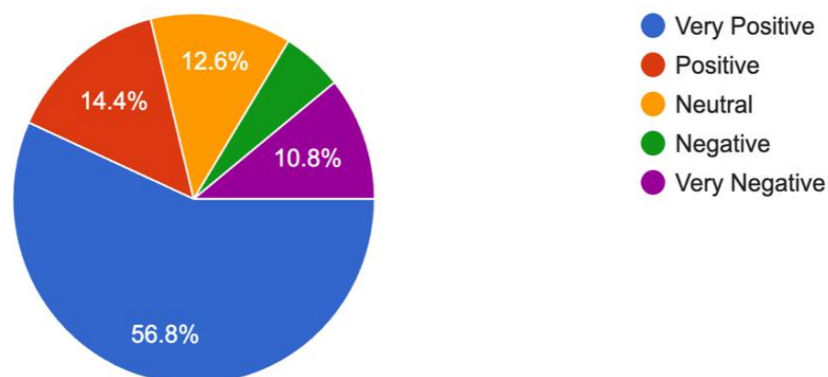
Are you aware that the 2025 Diocesan Convention passed Resolution #6, which officially pledges the Diocese of Albany to be a "Sanctuary Diocese"...pport, and advocacy for immigrants and refugees?

111 responses



How do you feel about the Diocese of Albany's commitment to being a "Sanctuary Diocese"?

111 responses



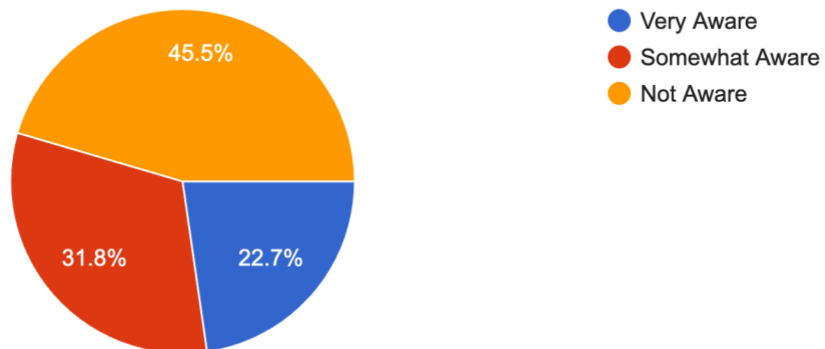
Are you aware that Bishop Williamson appointed a Sanctuary Task Force to clarify how the Diocese and individual parishes and parishioners can practically execute Resolution #6?

111 responses



The Resolution #6 Task Force Commentary that provides the biblical, historical, and legal foundations for the "right of sanctuary" and offers guidance on how parishes can fulfill this call.

110 responses



The Litany, Suffrages, and Prayers of the People designed for the 2026 Lenten season, focusing on themes such as "Welcoming the Stranger" and seeking "Justice and Mercy" for refugees and migrants.
110 responses

