

Mid-Lent in 2017

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

This lengthy letter describes where Epiphany is with regard to *refugee ministry* and *sanctuary ministry*. My goals in writing are to make sure that all of us have the same information, and that all are invited to participate. My fervent prayer is that each of us will hear the words, “come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (*Matthew 25:34-35*).

The Background

Several of us have been working outside of the parish to advocate for Syrian refugees, and in a larger sense, the Parish of the Epiphany, through our relationship with the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (of which Syria is a part) has long been active in advocating for Christians in the Holy Land. In my annual address two years ago I asked us to mobilize ourselves to welcome a Syrian refugee family. Many of you offered help and expressed interest. For a number of very good reasons, including Governor Baker’s position that he is not yet willing to have Syrian refugees in our Commonwealth, as well as our federal government’s commitment to thorough vetting of those applying for refugee status, we weren’t able to see this dream come true. We did, however, make a financial contribution to friends who are tutoring for German language acquisition several young Syrian refugees living in Austria. Our energy planted some seeds to “seek and serve Christ in all persons” (from the Baptismal Covenant), and many at Epiphany are eager both to welcome refugees and to safeguard immigrants who are living in our country without documentation.

The Ministry Opportunities

- 1) To work with government and non-government agencies, as well as with other faith communities to welcome a refugee family. This desire can short-handedly be referred to as *refugee ministry*. Right now, our efforts in *refugee ministry* are stalled. However, I am buoyed by the excitement from colleagues and neighbors in Winchester that we might soon have something to do in this area, possibly even welcoming a refugee family (probably not Syrian) to Winchester. Nonetheless, right now, there are no specific actions for the Parish of the Epiphany regarding *refugee ministry*.
- 2) To work with the City of Boston, the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts, and the Massachusetts Community Action Network in embodying our recent decision to be a **level two sanctuary church**. This commitment can short-handedly be referred to as *sanctuary ministry*. There are several opportunities for *sanctuary ministry* at the Parish of the Epiphany.

Sanctuary movement

Christians have been involved with “sanctuary” for centuries. In the last three decades the so-called sanctuary movement was reborn through Christians assisting Central Americans. In short, we can think of “sanctuary” whenever a religious community proves safe space to those who are victims of what some believe to be unjust laws.

The Parish of the Epiphany is a level two sanctuary church. What does this mean?

At its February meeting the vestry (the parish’s governing board) voted to declare the Parish of the Epiphany a “level two sanctuary church.” The vestry took this action upon recommendation from the mission and outreach committee, as well as from my words on 29 January during the my annual address. This designation—level two sanctuary church—means that we’re committed to providing a variety of

supports to St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Dorchester, who have declared themselves a level one sanctuary church. This means that St. Mary's may provide physical sanctuary at St. Mary's Church to people who are threatened with deportation. In making this designation, Epiphany's vestry is saying that we're going to be in alliance with people who are most vulnerable.

What kind of support will Epiphany give to the level one sanctuary church, to St. Mary's in Dorchester?

Support can take many forms. At this point the Parish of the Epiphany is committed to providing emotional and pastoral support, help with communications and public relations, and in future, we may choose to provide additional support through donations of food and/or money.

When does the Parish of the Epiphany start providing support?

Not until St. Mary's provides sanctuary to a person or a family. Right now, we are organizing ourselves so that if we are called upon to provide support, we'll be ready.

Are we doing this with other faith communities?

Yes. In the image below there is a web of support listing 11 other churches who are either already level two sanctuary, or who are considering becoming one. In addition to an extensive network in our own diocese, ecumenical partners in the United Church of Christ and the Association of Unitarian Universalists, as well as others, have identified themselves as level one and level two sanctuary congregations; interest and commitment are growing!



Why are we focusing on sanctuary ministry now?

President Trump's executive order to Immigration and Customs Enforcement is broader than the previous administration's focus on deportation of criminals. Advocates for immigrants have suggested to religious leaders, including our own Presiding Bishop, that many immigrants without social security numbers may seek sanctuary.

Where can I get more information?

The Massachusetts Community Advocacy Network (MCAN) has created an eighteen page document, *Sanctuary Toolkit* which describes it from soup to nuts. The **Toolkit** is on our parish's website.

What are the next steps at the Parish of the Epiphany?

A presentation in Hadley Hall from a priest of the Diocese of Massachusetts, the Reverend Dorothea Littlepage, and a leader from the Massachusetts Community Action Network, is open to the entire parish on **Sunday, 26 March from 2:30-4:30pm**. At this meeting we'll learn more about some of the concrete support actions we might provide (if sanctuary is provided to somebody at St. Mary's in Dorchester).

We'll also have a chance to ask questions.

Can our leaders—lay and ordained—face legal consequences for sanctuary ministry?

It is illegal to interfere with federal laws. However, there is no precedent for state or federal law enforcement agencies to target, prosecute, or fine houses of worship, or leaders thereof who have offered sanctuary.

What's the Episcopal Church's official policy?

The Episcopal Church does not have an official policy on *sanctuary ministry*, but it does on *refugee ministry*. Last month the governing body of our church between general conventions, known as the Executive Council, passed the following resolution to authorize the Presiding Bishop to: *File Legal Challenges to the Imposition of Any Religious Test for Lawful Entry into the United States*. Besides this formal resolution, our church's official public affairs office in Washington is offering webinars to help Episcopalians organize ourselves for immigration and refugee advocacy. A caucus of our church, the Episcopal Public Policy Network has created the "[2x4 Fight for Refugees](#)" campaign, challenging us to call national, state and local officials at least four times in the next two months to voice opposition to new laws targeting undocumented immigrants.

Who is the leader of our sanctuary ministry?

There is not one single leader or captain. Several people have attended trainings and meetings, including the chairs of our mission and outreach committee, Celia Ceruolo and Carol Hollingshead. And many other parishioners have been involved too: Judy Cotton, Susan Haskell, Marie Lee, Rosalyn Nazzaro, Betsy Walsh, Joshua Reynolds, and Kate Reynolds. I plan to be an active voice and participant.



The photograph was taken at St. Mary's in Dorchester on Thursday, 9 March at a meeting of the 11 faith communities who have offered support. Pictured from Epiphany are Betsy Walsh, Rosalyn Nazzaro, Susan Haskell, and Celia Ceruolo.

Can others participate?

Yes! We need many hands and voices. **All** are invited to the meeting on March 26th to learn more about leadership and non-leadership positions in our ministry as a level two sanctuary church.

I believe God is the giver of this moment with sanctuary ministry, and hopefully eventually also with refugee ministry. I am ready to step boldly on a firm foundation, looking only to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. This new chapter at the Parish of the Epiphany will reveal old values even as it will equip us to claim new truths, and to discover again the Holy Spirit, who broods over the world like a mother over her children. In this season of lengthening days we are invited to increase our capacity to listen, and to respond with courage and compassion. Let's walk this pathway together.

I am faithfully in Christ your friend and rector,
The Reverend Thomas James Brown