



## What to Consider Before Hosting Immigrants in Your Home or Meetinghouse

Considerations about your space:

- How many people are you willing to host (single man/woman, a couple, a family of how many/what ages)?
- Where will you host them? If the space does not include a food preparation area or private bath, are you willing to share your kitchen and bathroom? At what times? Are some spaces off limits? Will there be locks on bedroom doors? Are there any shared spaces? Will guests be expected to do chores or have a certain level of cleanliness?
- Will people be expected to work toward certain goals? What is your capacity for supporting them in reaching their goals?
- Are there code issues where you live ?
- Develop a set of house rules. What feels important for guests in your home to follow? Consider your “non-negotiables” and behaviors that may need to be addressed (Mustard Seed House can share possible examples if interested).
  - If children are involved, will the host do any childcare? Is the hosting space childproofed?
- For how long are you willing to host? Will you charge rent or ask for money to cover shared bills? Share this, along with house rules, at your initial meeting.

Considerations regarding resourcing:

- If your guests do not speak the same language as you, what resources exist for communication? Are you comfortable using Google Translate/ChatGPT to communicate about complex topics?
- Identify community resources to which you can connect your guests, as needed: legal services, food pantry/grocery stores, employment, schools, transportation, language interpretation, language learning, meaningful ways to spend time, psychosocial support, health care, faith communities.
- Develop a circle of support to help guests connect to resources, work on goals, or to fundraise for financial needs that may arise

Considerations around just relationships:

- What power differentials will exist between you and your guest(s)? What are the impacts of differences in stability, freedoms, language, access to wealth, citizenship, social networks, and familiarity with the neighborhood and dominant culture?
- What can you learn about different communication styles and worldviews of the culture that your guest(s) come from? Who can you consult about intercultural dynamics that will arise?
- How will you balance being welcoming and holding boundaries? How will you empower guests to meet needs and achieve goals, and support their overall agency and wellbeing?
- How to create space for people to name what they need? How to be attuned to what might be communicated indirectly?
- What communication methods will you use? Texting, calling, meeting over a meal, meeting in private? With what frequency?
- After the “honeymoon period” ends, how will you sustain capacity to host?

Upon meeting for the first time: Give the potential guest(s) a tour, let them see the house and neighborhood, share your expectations/rules, and ask them what their needs are. Think carefully and honestly if those needs can be met.

- If each party is ready to move forward, determine a move-in date together. Orient them to safety features of the house (smoke alarms, fire extinguishers), exchange contact information, and give them a key or lock passcode.
- Consider preparing the space with cleaning supplies, shelf-stable groceries, or offering a meal the first night.
- Consider offering a trial period of 2-4 weeks and then have a check in.
- Introduce them to a neighbor who can be an emergency contact.

During the stay: Plan to have periodic check-ins. Ask guests what their goals are, and if they need support meeting these goals. Scaffold support according to needs.

*Mustard Seed House is a local ministry of radical hospitality led by Sheldon Good, Jennifer Svetlik and their family. Contact [immigration@mosaicmennonites.org](mailto:immigration@mosaicmennonites.org) for more information.*



## **Additional Considerations for Congregations Discerning Sanctuary**

A congregation that declares itself a sanctuary commits to offering intentional support to undocumented persons, including, but not limited to, providing shelter for those who have a deportation order. Sanctuary is not a legally recognized designation and does not prevent ICE agents or other government officials from entering the church to question, arrest, or detain an undocumented person, *if* they have a warrant signed by a federal judge.

The current Department of Homeland Security guidance provides that ICE agents will not, except in an emergency, enter “protected areas,” such as places of worship, schools, or hospitals. This guidance could be revoked or modified at any time. At the same time, ICE’s actions will continue to be informed by political considerations, such as whether the public would support a raid on a church building.

Because the goal of sanctuary is to provide safety while a legal alternative to a deportation order is sought, it is possible a guest may need to remain in the church building for multiple years. Consideration for both the guest’s legal and psychosocial support is needed.

Care should be taken in considering whether or not to publicly declare that you are taking someone into sanctuary. In some cases, a higher profile may help, but in other cases it may do more harm. It is critical to have sound legal support (e.g. the Free Migration Project), when discerning how to approach these situations.

If any church leader is threatened with arrest because of section 1324 (which “prohibits...concealing or harboring unauthorized aliens”) they should contact the Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection at Georgetown Law, which offers pro-bono legal support in these specific cases.

In addition to providing shelter there are many ways congregations can support immigrants including: fundraising for legal defense, supporting local immigration aid organizations, offering know-your-rights training, ESL classes, or citizenship classes, providing transportation, or engaging in detention watch or other forms of advocacy.