

Solidarity & Sanctuary: Options for Congregational Action



There are many ways we are all currently called to act to resist injustice and increase solidarity in defiance of the threats made by the new Trump administration to the rights and safety of undocumented people, immigrants and refugees, Muslims, Black Lives Matter activists, people of color, LGBTQI individuals, and people with disabilities, among others. Many of us are struggling with what to do now when so much feels at stake.

We have heard that many people of faith want to do community work and organizing that directly relates to those who are being targeted now because of their identities. The work towards solidarity is most effective and transformational when we:

- Listen to and make central the leadership, insights, and experiences of those most targeted by the current political climate, and the long history of systemic oppression that has led us to this moment; and
- Take the time to ground ourselves in our deepest values, and in spiritual practices that sustain us for the long haul. (See below for some resources.)

The following ideas have been developed through conversations with grassroots leaders in immigrant, Muslim, LGBTQ and other high-risk communities. Every local circumstance is unique, so it is still important to consult local groups. If you don't have existing partnerships, consider connecting with the local chapters or affiliates of national justice movements. The following are few examples (click the links to go to their websites):

Immigrant-Led	Muslim-Led	Racial Justice	Faith-Based
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mijente • #Not1More • Cosecha • United We Dream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MPower Change • Muslims for Social Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Lives Matter • Showing Up for Racial Justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PICO Network • We Say Enough • Interfaith Immigration Coalition • The New Sanctuary Movement

The strategies are labeled by the level of capacity and commitment they require, and are organized into five categories. We recommend partnering with a cluster of congregations or an interfaith group for any of the actions labeled “high capacity.” The categories are:

- Education & Awareness
- Practical Support for Immigrant, Muslim, LGBTQ, and Other Community Organizing
- Local Advocacy with Cities, Schools, and Law Enforcement
- Community Transformation & Alternatives
- Active Resistance & Rapid Response

Education & Awareness

Informing ourselves and others is the starting point for all action. There are many ways to learn more about issues and what is happening in our communities. Some methods involve building relationships to learn about someone else’s experience and perspective about community life and what needs to be done. Below are a few examples of how you might go about this:

Study Circles: As a first step to prepare for action, invite members of your congregation to be part of a “Solidarity and Sanctuary” study circle. The UU College of Social Justice will be offering study resources for these circles. *(Low capacity)*

Self-Assessment & Asset Mapping for Congregations: Use [these accompanying tools](#) as part of a study circle or independently, to guide your action planning as part of “Solidarity and Sanctuary.” *(Low capacity)*

Yard Sign or Door-Mat Outreach: Distribute yard signs or doormats that share a message of multi-lingual welcome and hope—‘Standing on the Side of Love’ or ‘[We love ALL our neighbors](#)’. Sell them at-cost to members of the congregation, or even go door-to-door giving them away and speaking to neighbors, building a list of those interested in future engagement. *(Medium capacity)*

Host Speakers During or After Services: Invite leaders in grassroots organizations to speak about their campaigns and experiences; raise money for them with share-the-plate. In larger cities, organize rotating grassroots presenters to visit different congregations each Sunday. *(Low to medium capacity)*

Community-Building Meals: Partner with local community institutions or groups to talk about issues that matter to people most, rotating among host sites. Facilitate an environment for conversations and relationship-building, without an organizing agenda. Plan for translation if you will have non-English speakers attending. The congregation should provide the meal or, alternatively, invite an immigrant or refugee community member to cater and pay them for their services. *(Medium to high capacity)*

Practical Support for Immigrant, Muslim, LGBTQ, and Other Community Organizing

This is a critical time to demonstrate solidarity with groups led by people most at risk in the current environment. Many of these grassroots groups have no paid staff and little infrastructure. The following suggestions are just some of the ways that congregations can provide practical support to help them grow, as well as be responsive to immediate organizing and support needs.

Offer Free Space for Meetings and Events: Many grassroots organizations do not have funds for their own meeting or office spaces. Reach out to those near you and let them know that your congregation has free space available for meetings and events. If you have extra room, you can even offer a working space. Making space available is a wonderful way to begin building a longer-term relationship. *(Low capacity)*

Volunteer Child-Care: Organize a small group to provide free child-care at meetings and “know your rights” trainings for immigrants, Muslims, and other targeted communities so that parents can attend and focus. If the need is high and ongoing, create a “childcare collective” volunteer list and supply kit. *(Medium capacity)*

Fundraising: This is a particularly good option for congregations that are located too far from grassroots organizations to partner more regularly. Talk to a grassroots group and identify a specific financial need (an organizer stipend; a vehicle; computers) that your congregation or cluster can commit to raising. Use it as an opportunity to raise awareness of the group and the issues they address, and keep track publicly of progress towards the goal. [Faithify](#) is a UU crowdfunding website you can use to help. *(Medium capacity)*

Serve as a 501©3 Fiscal Agent: Many grassroots organizations have neither the capacity nor the desire to become official non-profits. However, being housed under one (including a religious institution) provides many benefits, creating opportunities to apply for grants and receive tax-deductible donations. *(Medium capacity)*

Offer Pro-bono Services (e.g. legal, accounting, and health): Sometimes grassroots groups need professional services on a short-term or longer basis, such as an attorney to help them file to become a non-profit, or to help with legal defense for someone who has done civil disobedience. Sometimes entire neighborhoods of at-risk people may need these services when public options are eliminated (e.g. doctors and nurses in free clinics; therapists to work with torture and trauma survivors). Use our [“Congregational Asset-Mapping Inventory Checklist”](#) to build a list of possible volunteers. Check on needs with grassroots groups and local service providers and share your list. *(Medium capacity: volunteer; High capacity: host)*

Local-Level Policy Advocacy

There is much that our local cities, counties, schools, and law enforcement agencies can do both officially and unofficially to refuse to cooperate with unjust national policy that targets people based on race, religion, or other identities. It is important to FIRST check with groups representing vulnerable communities about their assessment of the political environment and what they recommend. Without checking, trying to push for a certain policy might create an unfortunate backlash, making a situation worse by bringing unwanted negative attention and actions by officials. That said, here are a few examples of positive advocacy steps:

School District Policy: Organize for your public school board to pass protections for undocumented students and families (“safe zones”), anti-bullying measures, and restorative justice practices to weaken the school-to-prison pipeline. *(High capacity)*

Policing and Surveillance Policies: Cities with “sanctuary city” policies are safer for immigrants, through separating local police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Other model laws protect mosques, and activists of color spaces, and social media from surveillance, and restrict racial profiling. If your city is not yet a sanctuary city, [you can use this new tool from Mijente to organize](#). *(High capacity)*

Hate-Free/Human Rights Zones: Work with local businesses, churches, schools, and cities to declare “Human Rights” or “Hate Free Zones” in which they pledge non-compliance with enforcement that violates human rights. *(Medium to high capacity)*

Coming Soon: Additional resource with model policies.

Community Transformation & Alternatives

This political moment has sparked a new wave of energy, opening up fresh opportunities for forging new alliances which birth alternative visions of what a just, sustainable, and welcoming community looks and feels like. In addition to protest and resistance, these times call on us to heal and transform social divisions, to create new policies, institutions, relationships— new ways of doing things. Here are a few illustrations:

Interrupting the School-to-Prison Pipeline: Aware of the often tremendous racial disparities in suspension rates, some congregations have hosted community dialogues with public school officials and altered school discipline policies to keep teens in school, enabling them to stay on a positive learning track. Other congregations have worked through organizing groups such as DART (Direct Action, Research and Training) to shift how juvenile courts handle low-level offenses. They have been able to introduce “civil citation” as alternative to arrest for youth offenders with minor offenses. This alternative punishment involves community service and counseling, and no permanent record. *(High capacity if done alone; medium if doing this jointly.)*

Empowering Community Development” Individual and faith-based institutional investors (including congregational and denominational endowments) are directing funds to finance community and commercial land trusts, affordable housing, small businesses, and coops—injecting much needed financial resources in under-served neighborhoods, creating opportunities where there had been few before. There are many inspiring examples where the new housing, businesses and co-ops also bring great environmental benefits—as they are designed or renovated to have a low carbon footprint. The Evergreen Co-ops in Cleveland are just one example of what is possible. *(High capacity if organizing; low to medium if just providing funds.)*

Alternative Gift Fairs: In December, many congregations turn a fellowship hall or other large space into a lively venue for music, socializing and “shopping” which supports the good work of non-profits near and far. These efforts help strengthen community ties, reinforce non-materialistic values, and generate much-needed donations for worthy causes. They also can serve as a meeting ground for grassroots groups’ volunteers, neighbors, and parishioners to get to know each other. *(Medium to high capacity, depending on scale.)*

Active Resistance & Rapid Response

This era will require all kinds of creative forms of active resistance and initiatives to "throw sand into the gears" of the federal (and possibly state) government's attacks on our communities.

Congregation-Based Sanctuary: "Sanctuary" means hosting immigrants targeted for deportation inside a church or temple because historically Immigration and Customs Enforcement has not raided religious institutions. You could also participate as a support congregation which provides everyday practical assistance to the host site. Every sanctuary case requires a whole community network and team – no congregation can do it on their own! To get started check out the [New Sanctuary Movement's Toolkit](#). As a first step you or your congregation can [sign the pledge here](#). UU Congregations can reach out to Katia Hansen at UURISE (UU Refugee and Immigrant Services & Education) for guidance at katia@uurise.org. (*High capacity: host; Medium capacity: support*)

Trainings for Active Resistance: Identify skills that members of your congregation and community may need, and then prepare yourselves for action by hosting or attending trainings on civil disobedience, bystander intervention, and de-escalation. Your [regional office of the Unitarian Universalist Association](#) can help connect you to training resources. (*Low to Medium capacity*)

Rapid Response Networks / Sanctuary in the Streets: A whole cluster of congregations and community organizations in a local area can unite to respond to immigration raids and acts of hate. Organizations rooted in undocumented communities and others at high risk of hate crimes or profiling can distribute an emergency line number which multi-lingual volunteers can rotate answering. Following a call, the entire network is alerted. Rapid response volunteers should be trained in advance in de-escalation tactics, bystander intervention, abuse documentation, and know your rights. [One of the strongest models, with over 1,000 volunteer responders, is based in Philadelphia.](#) Rapid Response will not ever be a first step, and is only appropriate for places where some previous relationships and collaboration are already established. (*High capacity*)

Bystander Intervention: Prepare yourself to confront and disrupt incidences of Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia, bullying and [hate speech](#) as they occur in your broader community, including local schools, businesses, faith institutions, public places, and print and online media. A resource from UUSC with some helpful tips on confronting hate speech [can be found here](#), and [here is a link to a quick video training](#) offered by Standing on the Side of Love on intervention and de-escalation. (*Medium capacity*)

Drown Hate with Love: Pledge that your congregation will do a "day of service" in every neighborhood that experiences a hate crime or immigration raid. When those occur, reach out to those affected and together design an activity that invites community interaction—perhaps setting up a garden, a free dinner, a community clean-up, etc. Pay for all costs. (*Medium capacity*)

No matter what else you decide to do:

Sign onto the [Declaration of Conscience jointly issued by UUA and UUSC](#) to commit individually or as a congregation to putting Unitarian Universalist values into action to resist hate, fear, and bigotry.

Ground your work in spiritual practice: Devote yourself to and create space for others to join

you in spiritual practices that equip you to stay centered, courageous, resilient, and persistent in long-haul justice work during these challenging and uncertain times. Whether you find comfort and grounding in art, nature, poetry, prayer, meditation, intentional fellowship, embodied healing practices, or other rituals, make your spiritual sustenance a critical component of your sustained resistance. The [Fortification podcast series](#) from Standing on the Side of Love may offer you some inspiration for starters, or you may find other helpful resources in the “Heart” suggestion of UUCSJ’s blog, [Let’s Get Ready: Finding Our Ways Forward](#).