

## Immigration injustice is why Forest Hill Presbyterian became a sanctuary church: John Lentz (Opinion)

Rev. John Lentz

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As pastor of a congregation that became a "sanctuary church" - a church that offers housing to an undocumented immigrant who is threatened with immediate and forceful deportation - the issue of immigration has become personal to me.

Over these last six months I have received many emails and notes from people who are angry at the church for "breaking the law," "harboring a criminal," and "not following the Gospel." Members of the church have been called many names and we have even received threats on our property.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" reminded us of the difference between just and unjust laws: "Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust."

My Christian faith drives me to speak out against unjust laws that degrade human beings and to support those who are so degraded.

Many people, most of whom are white, call undocumented persons "illegals," designating them as undesirable "others." They believe that immigrants bring crime to the neighborhoods and steal jobs from American workers. I have heard: "Why can't these Mexican immigrants just get in line like everybody else and apply for legal citizenship?"

According to the American Immigration Council, "There is no line available for unauthorized immigrants and the 'regular channels' do not include them."

The AIC report goes on to say: "Immigration to the United States on a temporary or permanent basis is generally limited to three different routes: employment, family reunification, or humanitarian protection. Most unauthorized immigrants do not have the necessary family or employment relationships and often cannot access humanitarian protection, such as refugee or asylum status."

The vast majority of those who cross the border are seeking safety from violence and simply trying to find a better life. They cross the border because they do not feel as if they have any other choice.

And once immigrants enter our country, evidence shows, according to Michelangelo Landgrave and Alex Nowrasteh, writing last year for the Cato Institute, that they "do not increase local crime rates and are less likely to cause crime than their native-born peers."

Furthermore, immigrants usually are willing to do the jobs that no one else will take. Immigrants actually grow our economy by working, paying taxes, buying things that others make, and becoming members of the community.

Even as they pay taxes, undocumented persons do not receive Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid. As Robert Stribley noted in a November Huffington Post [article](#), they are not eligible for health insurance (the Affordable Care Act and Children's Health Insurance Program); food stamps (SNAP); or disability (Supplemental Security Income).

It is not right that these good people are demonized.

Rather, President Donald Trump and Congress should address immigration with legislation that gives these undocumented persons who have lived peacefully and responsibly in this country, as well as "Dreamers," a path to citizenship.

Furthermore, American citizen children of undocumented persons should not be threatened with the destruction of their family. What happens to the children left behind when their mothers and fathers are deported? What good occurs when children, who are American citizens, are, for all practical purposes, orphaned and become dependent on social services?

This administration's stand on immigration makes no sense and is not supported by any data. The hateful rhetoric against undocumented immigrants and refugees, particularly from Latin American, Caribbean and Arab countries, is racist fear-mongering and antithetical to true American values.

Please contact your senators and representatives and tell them to support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, and allow law-abiding undocumented persons to live among us as fellow citizens.