

## Reflections on Sanctuary

The goal of the evening was to look back and name the graces, the challenges and the lessons learned from our shared sanctuary experience.

**I. Intro: "What is a moment when you felt the presence of God or the Spirit in the experience of sanctuary?"** People shared various specific instances of consolation and connection: feeling called, moments of affirmation that our community is rooted in faith, hope and love; moments when we felt our relationship grow with the sanctuary family in ordinary times; feeling closer as parishes; feeling the work of the Spirit, finding ways for our whole families to be integrated in the church . . .

## II. Timeline: What happened?

- **Nov 2016** - St. Agnes discerns declaring Sanctuary through team meetings, prayer, involvement with Faith in Action and the Interfaith movement for Human Integrity (IM4HI)
- **Jan 2017** - Rapid Response Training; St. Agnes declares Sanctuary
- **Mar 2017** - St. Ignatius discerns Sanctuary through team meetings, prayer, involvement with Faith in Action and the Interfaith movement for human integrity
- **Nov 2017** - St. Ignatius declares Sanctuary; St. Agnes & St. Ignatius publish a joint sanctuary statement on the feast of Christ the King (see attached)
- **"Shortly After"** The Kino Border Initiative puts out a call to help a family, but the connection falls through
- **Summer 2017** - Faith in Action puts out a call about a mother and five children who are in immediate need of shelter
  - The family had been housed with relatives, then homeless, navigated the shelter system for 6 months and then spent a night on the streets when one of the children was hospitalized and returned to the shelter being full
- **June 2017** - The family was put in an SRO for about 2 weeks while the Ignatian Spiritual Life Center was set up to house them temporarily
  - Annette Lomont moves them in up and down several flights of stairs!
- **June or July 2017** The family of 6 is housed in the ISLC; the understanding is that it would be for only a few weeks
- **Sept 2017** - The sanctuary family is approved for a stipend to find housing from Hamilton Families
- **Ongoing support**
  - The family receives legal and social services from a network of providers; the mother receives a temporary work visa; the children are enrolled in school and daycare; the mother receives English tutoring and parishioners donate weekly meals, clothes and a fund for financial contributions is set up through both churches
  - the Huddle for Justice and the Solidarity Committee continue to meet
- **Jan 2018** - A small team from St. Ignatius and St. Agnes rededicates themselves to finding housing for the family before the stipend expires in March 2018
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- **Feb 2018** - The hearing for the mother seeking asylum is cancelled and rescheduled
- **Mar 2018** - The family moves into their own apartment, receiving furniture donations, financial support from Hamilton Families and the two parishes
- **April 2018** - The family is introduced during a Mass at St. Agnes to say a few words of thanks to the parish; we celebrate them in the ISLC
- **May 2018-present** -
  - Accompaniment Training with the IM4HI: the mother sets goals for herself and family and a team of "guardian angels" organizes itself to best support the family in their transition (meals, childcare, employment, daily life, finance, etc.)
  - The Huddle & Solidarity Committee of both parishes has a joint meeting
  - IM4HI hosts a "Sanctuary Convening" in Oakland
  - St. Ignatius plans to invite the family to speak and meet the congregation in Sept.

### III. Lessons Learned / Graces / Challenges

- Huddles were useful - they allowed various perspectives, reflection and thoughtful analysis
- It helped to have events building around the theme (Migrant in the Pulpit series, conversations, Rapid Response training, discernment, educational opportunities)
- Physical signs (banners, etc.) provoked reflection and conversation
- The experience of sanctuary brought important insight for our middle-class, highly educated parishes; it made very tangible the experience of those who are migrants, poor or vulnerable and put a face to this. It also showed us our capacity to share resources and of ourselves
- For many of us, this was a graced experience and even in the midst of challenges, we felt invested and the presence of the Holy Spirit affirming that "this is where we need to be"
- There was an ongoing feeling of "unpredictability" to the process, which was an important experience of humility and put us in touch with powerlessness
- We realized that people who are trained to cope with this situation (social workers, case managers and other professionals) are also overwhelmed!
- We realized that what is offered by an NGO on paper is one thing; what happens in person is another: it was important to meet in person and get on the phone with the agencies supporting the sanctuary family to build a larger network and realize the gaps that we needed to fill in as churches
- At the end of the housing process, we needed the help of the whole community to find a suitable apartment: parishioners on Craigslist and going to meetings and open houses, announcements at Mass; Catholic Charities; Season of Sharing; IM4HI; the Huddle and Solidarity Committee; other NGOs as resources . . .
- A case manager would have been helpful for organizing all the different players and systems to interact
- We wished more young people were involved
- If we were to do it again, we would need to make sure more people spoke Spanish
- The family needed more ongoing accompaniment and relationship-building when they were housed in the ISLC
- More systems / structure for living together needed to be in place in a shared setting (around cleaning, etc.)
- We learned we need to prepare for a long-term commitment; we were brought deeper and into a longer commitment than we realized, which was both a challenge and a grace
- Goals need to come from the family, not just what we think the family needs; we need to respect the family's agency
- There needed to be a combined spirit of listening, openness, patience to not expect immediate solutions and the trust that God would help us together with complete systematic, strategic, administrative organization.
- We grew together as "St. Agnatus" in this process

### IV. Looking forward / Emerging Questions

- Do we do this again? How?
  - Are we considering alternate spaces if another call comes to house a family?
  - What would housing hospitality look like in parishioners homes: legally, personally?
- Are we considering other resources (ex: City College; political action, etc.)
- Are we asking the family how the experience was for them?
- Are we writing up our experience?

### V. The process of reflecting . . .

- Was important to name what happened
- Helped us realize how we dealt with chaos
- Was both practically-based and gave us the sense of the Spirit in the midst of the process
- brought us back in touch; we feel stronger
- We all experienced Sanctuary uniquely
- Reflection was time well-spent
- We want to continue to meet as small groups and combined as parishes.