

St. Andrew Catholic Church stands behind immigrants

Kenia Garnica-Avila



Photo by KENIA GARNICA-AVILA

St. Andrew Catholic Church shows its support for immigrants and refugees with a welcome sign outside its parking lot entrance.

St. Andrew Catholic Church in Portland, Oregon, announced Sunday its support for immigrants and refugees.

According to President Donald Trump, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids were said to begin on Sunday but were delayed. In response, the St. Andrew parish set to protect and unify the community.

During church announcements, parish members Alejandro Bautista and Paul Riek provided information about available resources and actions the church was taking to protect community members. They also reminded the Hispanic community that St. Andrew is a declared sanctuary parish.

St. Andrew officials reaffirmed its status as a sanctuary parish in January 2017. The parish distributed a sanctuary update document Sunday including all available information about St. Andrew's status and role. The mission statement provided on the document says: "We stand in solidarity with immigrant and refugee families, working through accompaniment, advocacy, and action to live by the word of the Gospel and the example of Jesus Christ."

Bautista and Riek explained the steps unauthorized immigrants should take if they encounter immigration enforcement officials. These steps include exercising the right to remain silent and calling an immigration hotline for help.

Riek said the parish has created an immigration hotline specifically for St. Andrew community members when they need help. Bautista advised community members to contact the hotline if they are approached by ICE officers.

"It is important that you contact us immediately. Once you give them your name and show them your license or any falsified documents, there is little we can do," Bautista said.



Photo by KENIA GARNICA-AVILA

The St. Andrew Catholic Church in Portland can provide physical sanctuary to immigrants and refugees in the community.

St. Andrew pastor Dave Zegar said any community member who is in direct danger or fear of immigration enforcement can contact the St. Andrew immigration hotline to get help in taking physical sanctuary within St. Andrew's property.

"Although they wouldn't be able to stay forever, they can be provided a temporary place to stay," Zegar said.

Pamphlets containing Portland-specific and St. Andrew-specific immigration hotlines were distributed after church. Other pamphlets contained information on knowing one's rights, preparing for deportation or arrest and contact information for Oregon attorneys who take immigration detention cases.

Zegar said the unity and safety of families is fundamental to the social teachings of the church. He said the church gives priority to migrant families who seek safety and a better life.

“The community’s response has been very positive, and a number of people have been helped already in seeking legal assistance,” Zegar said.

St. Andrew parish member Karla Martinez said she values St. Andrew's support of not only the community, but also her family.

"I wasn't very concerned before because I wasn't in danger, but with my husband's current status my family is now directly impacted by the current immigration issues," she said. "I feel supported and I think it's great because (St. Andrew members) are practicing their belief. Not all churches do that."

St. Andrew has organized a group of trained volunteers known as navigators. These volunteers assist families and individuals through the deportation process and other immigration issues. A navigator’s role includes help with obtaining legal advisers, translating and transportation. They cannot offer legal advice or representation.

In addition, Bautista said the parish will create and distribute wallet-sized cards that can be easily carried and handed to immigration enforcement officers if need be. He said one side will read the immigrants’ rights to remain silent and to an attorney. The other side has instructions in Spanish for the Hispanic community members.

Kenia Garnica-Avila is a bilingual reporter from Vancouver, Washington.