

South Church & Immigration Justice Past – Present – Future?

Members of the Social Justice Associates (SJA) and Immigrant Support Fund (ISF) Oversight Team are researching the option of South Church becoming a Level 1 Sanctuary congregation and are eager to keep members of the congregation informed and engaged. This overview lays the groundwork for future updates. Stay tuned!

RECENT PAST

2017 – The first Trump administration attempts to deport 50+ Indonesian Dover residents, law-abiding non-citizens reporting to ICE annually. None had criminal records; many were long-term residents with American citizen children, homeowners, gainfully employed. With Dover's Quaker Meeting leading, multiple congregations, including South Church, form the Seacoast Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition (SISC).

November/December 2018 – A family fearing deportation is housed for two months in the Quaker Meeting House. South Church members are active in providing support.

January 2019 – South Church votes to become a Level II Sanctuary congregation, providing support to Level 1 congregations who house threatened individuals.

2019 - 2020 - SJA makes immigration a focus topic. They display on the church fence posters with photos/bios of migrant children who died in detention at the border and hold a widely attended immigration forum.

2021 - South Church establishes the ISF, with a mission to "...raise and allocate funds to assist undocumented immigrants located in the Seacoast with housing, living expenses, health care, legal services, and other needs. The Oversight Team manages the ISF.

2021– 2023 – South Church members are active in the first area Neighborhood Support Team (NST), co-chaired by a South Church member, created for an Afghan family settled in Portsmouth

2022 – South Church is shuttered during COVID. We open our Parish Hall to house immigrant detainees released from the Strafford County jail for two-week quarantine stays, 3 in all. 24/7 coverage is required. 50+ South Church members and 25+ Seacoast residents sign on to provide support.

PRESENT

2023 – 2025

- South Church Shared Plate funds immigrant justice activity, often our own ISF.
- ISF continues to fund individual requests and support other congregations in immigrant justice work.
- ISF Oversight Team becomes a group working in affiliation with the Social Justice Associates (SJA). SJA.
- September – November: SJAs and ISF Oversight Team members create a three-part education program for church members and the general public, focusing on immigrant justice and beginning the dialogue around the future role of South Church.
- South Church members volunteer in the work of SISC congregations and participate in SISC activities
- The original group of 2022 volunteers remains connected through direct communication about the needs of immigrants seeking asylum

South Church members are active in Neighborhood Support Teams (NST) for specific people

- February 2023 – February 2024: A Haitian family is settled in Dover and supported until their move to Fall River.
- 2024 and ongoing: An Ecuadorian couple in donated housing in Durham with a newborn child.
- October 2024 and ongoing – A Haitian man is released from Strafford County jail first housed by South Church volunteers, currently settled in Kittery, supported with ISF monies and an NST co-led by a South Church member and a member of Temple Israel.

January 2025 Annual Meeting - South Church congregation approves a resolution to investigate becoming a Level 1 Sanctuary, despite the US Department of Justice rescinding its restriction on pursuing individuals housed in sanctuary in churches.

FUTURE

Members of the ISF Oversight Team and SJAs have joined together to assemble a report to the congregation for a future vote on the question of whether to become a Level I Sanctuary congregation. Watch for updates here as we gather information about this process.