



Omaha Area Sanctuary Network

Welcoming Immigrants and Working for Immigration Justice

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Alejandro Caceres Has a Question for You

Did you ever wonder what you would have done if you'd been alive during the struggle to free the slaves, or the movement for the right of women to vote? Alejandro Caceres suggests looking at what you're doing now to help immigrants, for a clue to what you might have done during previous efforts for human rights.

Speaking at a gathering at Urban Abbey in Omaha's Old Market on Jan. 30, Alejandro pointed out that sometimes our laws do not fall in line with the beliefs of people of faith, and we have historically decided when to obey the laws and when to respond with civil disobedience. "Nothing has ever been accomplished by asking nicely," he said. "Sometimes the values of the church and the government are at opposite ends. The public has to choose."

As for sanctuary, there is a long history of churches and synagogues hiding people who were wrongfully accused. The Austin Sanctuary Network, of which Alejandro is a part, includes 26 faith-based congregations. The network tries to help folks who are the most vulnerable, most marginalized, who have no legal options left. "It's not about politics," Alejandro pointed out, "It's about faith."

The network believes that migration is a human right,



that nobody is deportable. Alejandro calls deportation "kidnapping." He said a private company is paid \$365 per night for every detainee. "Are you telling me that is moral?" he asked.

One way the Austin Sanctuary Network helps is by making sure immigrants know their rights. For example, you don't have to open your door to anyone without a warrant to enter. Sometimes Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) draws up their own "administrative warrant" and signs it themselves, Alejandro says. This isn't a legal warrant and people have no legal obligation to obey.

Alejandro reminded the audience that in the eyes of the Roman state, even Jesus was a criminal.

See Page 2 for more about Alejandro Caceres

Professor Explains Sanctuary Law

"Immigration policies are changing so rapidly, every week feels like a lifetime," attorney David P. Weber told his audience at Urban Abbey on Jan. 16. A professor specializing in immigration law at Creighton University School of Law, Weber pointed out what citizens can and cannot legally do to assist an undocumented person.

The law is pretty broad and open to interpretation, he said. But Weber offered the following guidelines based on past decisions of the 8th Circuit Court:

You can't get money or other benefit for your effort, supply false documents, attempt to delay ICE, not answer questions truthfully, or warn of upcoming raids. You also can't offer substantial support, such as hiring an undocumented person knowingly and encouraging him or her to stay.



Attorney and Professor, David P. Weber Speaking to OASN Group

You CAN bring undocumented persons to an immigration lawyer, rent them housing, provide transportation for short trips that don't require planning, and confer with immigration authorities. You can also be present to witness a raid by immigration authorities, provided you don't get in the way or otherwise obstruct.

So far, the government has not sent agents into churches, schools or hospitals to make arrests, based not on law but by practice.

A Happy Outcome

Members of the Omaha Area Sanctuary Network are rejoicing with Raul Campos and his family. Earlier this month an Omaha Immigration Court judge determined that Raul was not a flight risk, set bail at the minimum amount, and initiated the cancellation of removal proceedings.

A beloved resident of northeast Iowa for 20 years, Raul was stopped on a sunny day in December because the tail-lights on his car were different shades of red, and was then taken into custody.

Raul's daughter Jessica and son Raul Jr., traveled to the Omaha court from Decorah, Iowa, for an initial hearing on Dec. 19, again for a Jan. 16 hearing (cancelled at the last minute when the previous judge recused himself), and for the triumphant hearing on Feb. 1. Members of OASN showed up for all



three court dates in a show of support for Raul and his family.

Jessica is a 25-year-old DACA recipient who works fulltime at Luther College and is a college sophomore. Raul Jr. is an 18-year-old high school student who was born in this country. There were happy tears all around as Jessica and Raul Jr. thanked their supporters. Their father, who was being held in Iowa, was present by video. When the judge told him that there were a lot of people in the courtroom to support him, Raul waved, smiled, and said "Gracias!"

A Note of Thanks from Jessica

My family and I could not have asked for more loving, generous, wonderful people to walk alongside us through this difficult time. We will never forget your words of encouragement, thoughts, prayers, cards, and gifts.

It is our great joy that we were able to bring my father home!

Thank you for providing us with help, guidance, and tools to get through these past two months. May God always shower you with love, health, and blessings.

— Jessica Campos Arzate

No Apologies: The Alejandro Caceres Story



When his Texas teachers insisted that anyone can succeed by working really hard, Alejandro Caceres didn't believe them. He was watching his mother — an immigrant from Honduras

— work three jobs in a struggle to support the family. You can't work any harder than my mamma does, he thought. Something is wrong with this notion.

So instead of the assigned reading, Alejandro chose books like James W. Loewen's "Lies My Teacher Told Me." And when he rebelled against his Spanish teacher's insistence that it was her

version of Spanish that was proper, not his native Spanish, he ended up in Latin class instead.

There, he chose Plato's "The Apology" to translate, because it was the shortest choice, speeding the tedious task. But in translating this account of the speech that Socrates made at his trial, Alejandro realized there was a different way to rebel. He began to delve deeply into philosophy, studying historical giants like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., and became a youth organizer while still in high school.

Alejandro is about 30 now, but who can say for sure? There is no official record of his birth, in a barn in Honduras. His mother, who eventually married a U.S. serviceman and obtained legal status, was able to bring Alejandro and his two sisters to America when he was about 7 years old. After graduating from

Austin Community College, he worked as a legal assistant for an immigration law firm and participated in the "Summer of Human Rights" in Arizona to protest the attacks on the immigrant community led by Sheriff Joe Arpaio and the harsh law signed by Gov. Jan Brewer.

Someday Alejandro intends to return to college to continue studying philosophy, but in the meantime he's busy as an immigration organizer for Grassroots Leadership and the Austin Sanctuary Network. And he's moving into work as a national organizer, connecting the various sanctuary groups across the country.

"The sanctuary movement is not yet quite boiling," he says, "but it's definitely simmering."

Send newsletter contributions or ideas to Jan Rigenbach, jan@rigenbach.info

From the steering committee chair

Larry Jensen



From OASN's beginning, one of our goals has been to be able to offer sanctuary to undocumented immigrants facing deportation. Sanctuary requires space in a church where the person or persons being sheltered can live. Thus, kitchen and bathroom facilities, including a shower, are necessary. The living space must respect the privacy and dignity of the guests and thus not be used for other church functions.

First Unitarian Church formed a task force several months ago to consider offering sanctuary. Their impetus came not from OASN but from a calling to respond to the immigration crisis brought on by our current administration. The task force faces various obstacles, but so far, rather than giving up, they are doing what they can to find solutions. I applaud First Unitarian for

their commitment to serving our immigrant neighbors in need.

OASN stands ready to provide volunteers and donations of food, clothing, other necessary items, and funds as needed for any church giving sanctuary in their facility. If you think your church might be willing to consider this ministry, please let me know (lpjensen@abbnebraska.com).

The basis for sanctuary is a policy memo issued by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) instructing agents not to enter "sensitive locations" such as churches in performance of their duties, without prior approval. There has been concern that this policy might be rescinded by the administration; however, ICE recently stated publicly that the policy remains in force.

The OASN steering committee recently considered many other possible activities that OASN could perform.

We selected three new priorities:

1) Accompaniment to hearings, check-ins, and possibly other events as requested by detainees or their families. This is for persons of any race who are dealing with immigration issues.

2) Education of undocumented immigrants, including Know Your Rights trainings, preparation of detainee folders, and knowledge of immigration law and of ICE practices and procedures.

3) Education of volunteers, including training in accompaniment, knowledge of immigrant rights, immigration law, immigration history, and current immigration policy.

I am very pleased with our new emphasis. It offers the possibility to make a positive difference for people at a time when they're experiencing great anxiety, stress, and personal danger.



Women's March

Members of Omaha Area Sanctuary Network joined an estimated 8,000 marchers on Jan. 20 for the 2018 Omaha Women's March. Speakers included activist and second generation Cuban American Marta Nieves, who has dedicated her life to social justice and community service, and Ashlei Spivey, an African American woman who practices conscious activism on issues including equity and inclusion.

