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 Arlington Street Church  
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### *Santuario: Sanctuary for All*

*News Flash:* Thursday's *New York Times* ran a story that the migrant farm workers who harvest tomatoes in South Florida pick by hand for a back-breaking ten to twelve hours a day, earning forty-five cents for every thirty-two pound bucket. During a typical day, each migrant moves two tons of tomatoes. In 2005, they gained their first significant pay raise since the 1970s - an additional one cent per pound. But this holiday season, that pay increase will be rescinded; Burger King is refusing to pay, encouraging Taco Bell and McDonald's to join them. This amounts to a forty percent pay cut for the workers.

It would cost Burger King two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year to provide a decent wage to all its migrant workers. Just to put that number in perspective: In the past three years, Goldman Sachs doubled the value of its Burger King investment. Last year, the bonuses of the top twelve Goldman Sachs executives exceeded two hundred million dollars - more than twice as much money as all of the ten thousand or so tomato pickers in South Florida earned that year.

Might Goldman Sachs share some of its good fortune with those who labor at the bottom of the food chain? Might we just say no to Burger King?<sup>1</sup>

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After we renovated this beautiful space in 2001, we rededicated it as a sanctuary for all people. Those of us who have come through the great doors, who have made of this place the soul of Sunday on our spiritual journey, share a commitment to welcoming the stranger - the not-yet-befriended - a commitment to radical hospitality. This is the heart of our faith: love, service, justice, peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Schlosser, "Penny Foolish," *New York Times*, 11/29/07

As Unitarian Universalists, we stand at the intersection of every major world religion that calls us to this welcome:

The Jewish people, remembering the time of their enslavement as strangers in Egypt, begin their credo with the words, “An ancient Aramean was my father.”<sup>2</sup> “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him,” says their law, “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”<sup>3</sup>

Christians worship a Messiah who was homeless; Jesus said, “For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me.... Inasmuch as you have done this unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me.”<sup>4</sup>

And in the Qur’an, the central religious text of Islam, it is written that Muslims should “serve God ... and do good to ... orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer that you meet, [and those who have nothing].”<sup>5</sup>

As Unitarian Universalists, each of these faith traditions informs the first principle of our faith: the commitment to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every being.

In 1729, this congregation was gathered as a group called the Presbyterian Strangers. The inscription on our Long Lane Cup (historically used for communion) reads, “Gift of Mrs. E.N.<sup>6</sup> for the use of the Presbyterian Church in Long Lane. In remembrance of God’s wonderful mercies to her in a strange land - Boston [New England, December ye 1<sup>st</sup> 7], 1730.”

Over the intervening 278 years, many strangers have taken shelter here at Arlington Street Church: abolitionists, prison reformers, mental health advocates, war resisters, liberationists, sexual minorities, the hungry and

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<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 26:5

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 22:21

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 25:35-36; 40

<sup>5</sup> Qur’an 4:36

<sup>6</sup> According to Phyllis Rickter, this was Eunice Nichols, wife of Mr. David Nichols, Esq.

<sup>7</sup> actually: N.E. Dec' ye 1

homeless ... a great stream of those working and struggling in the margins of society, calling for justice. And now, today, we are called to a new sanctuary movement, called, again, to give sanctuary to the stranger, new wanderers in America, as we, ourselves - save for the American Indians among us - as we or our forbears were welcomed by the native peoples here.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were so few restrictions on immigration that there was no such thing as “illegal” people in the United States. Today, there are roughly 7 million adults and 5 million children - twelve million new immigrants<sup>8</sup> - who are here, among us, without documents to insure their place in the American dream. The comparison between our ancestors’ arrival from a foreign land to what today’s immigrants face is spurious. After World War I, Congress slammed the golden door, imposing limits on immigration.<sup>9</sup> And now that system is so broken, reform is going to take nothing short of a miracle. In the meantime, as people of faith, we are called to “inject the dimensions of justice and morality” into the controversy.

We know the elements of the solution, and it will demand tremendous, sustained education and advocacy for immigrants and their rights. A reform package must include a plan to regularize the status of undocumented workers, halting deportations that separates families; enforcement of labor laws; and a path to permanent residency and citizenship for all workers.<sup>10</sup>

I grew up with a somewhat romantic view of immigration. But the lofty ideals of seeking religious freedom or the promise of freedom were a thin veneer on the desperation experienced by those who were fleeing violence and poverty, let alone those who arrived as slaves. As one modern worker says, “We come here because of horrible economic conditions at home. We are not here by choice. Who in their right mind comes here knowing they will be insulted and looked at as a threat? Who risks their lives crossing a militarized border and leaves [behind] their family, their culture, their life ... unless they *have* to?”<sup>11</sup>

Why, in this country of strangers, is there so much anti-immigrant vitriol? Historically, there has been that mysterious fear of “the other” -

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<sup>8</sup> p. 3

<sup>9</sup> Mae M. Ngai, “Perspectives on Immigration: How Grandma Got Legal”

<sup>10</sup> Interfaith Worker Justice, “For You Were Once a Stranger: Immigration in the U.S. through the Lens of Faith,” p. 2

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p. 4

specifically, of some combination of immigrant skin-colors, languages, and cultures. The first “other” were, in fact, the native peoples of this land, whom the U.S. government attempted to destroy, ultimately passing the Indian Removal Act in 1830. Between 1820 and 1860, immigrant Irish were “feared as purveyors of [the] alien Catholicism.” In 1882 came the Chinese Exclusion Act, and, in 1948, Executive Order 9066 called for the internment in prison camps of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, there was significant surveillance and racial profiling against people of Middle Eastern descent, in the name of national security. But above all, “the underlying causes of immigration and of backlash against immigrants” have everything to do with labor markets.

Undocumented workers live under the constant threat of deportation, vulnerable to employers who pay them sub-standard wages and afraid to speak out when their rights are violated. As long as they remain outside the full protection of U.S. employment laws, “they can become a subordinate labor class, which helps companies depress wage and benefits standards throughout entire industries.”<sup>12</sup> America was founded on the principle of equal opportunity. Who will defend that high ideal? Who, if not we?

Many people opposed to creating a path to legalization and citizenship argue that undocumented immigrants – who make up less than five percent of our work force – cost U.S. taxpayers huge sums of money, draining the Medicaid, Food Stamp, and education programs. *It’s not true.* In fact, “immigrant workers pay taxes, ... but are unable to claim many public benefits their tax dollars support.... A large body of evidence concludes that undocumented immigrants are net *contributors* to the U.S. economy, providing much more in taxes paid and work provided than they receive in public benefits.”<sup>13</sup> Our covenant calls us to speak these truths, and the deeper truth underneath those: the spiritual health of our nation depends on the guaranteed unalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>14</sup>

On May 8<sup>th</sup>, Unitarian Universalist Association President Bill Sinkford gave our religious movement’s endorsement to the New Sanctuary

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p. 7

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 8. Studies include those conducted at the Kennedy School of Government, the Pew Hispanic Center, the National Academy of Sciences, the U.S. Social Security Administration, and the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Declaration of Independence (The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen States of America, July 4, 1776)*

Movement, calling not just for radical hospitality but for what he named *prophetic* hospitality. He wrote, “For our nation to be whole, we must acknowledge that our lives of privilege are supported in thousands of ways by people whose labor is invisible and whose suffering is hidden. Led by people of faith from many backgrounds who stand in solidarity with immigrant families, the New Sanctuary Movement seeks to take a united, public, moral stand for immigrant rights.”<sup>15</sup>

The New Sanctuary Movement Pledge calls us to covenant to educating, advocating, and standing up for immigrants’ rights. My spiritual companions, let us raise our voices; open our minds, our hearts, and our hands; and throw open our great doors yet wider to welcome the stranger. May we embody the bold tradition of this congregation, and make of our spiritual home a sanctuary for all people.

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<sup>15</sup> see New Sanctuary Movement at [UUA.org](http://UUA.org)