

Congregational Toolkit in support of Edith Espinal





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On a Wednesday evening in late summer 2017, our congregation made the decision to be a place of sanctuary for Edith Espinal. We had known her less than a week. This was our second meeting in four days. People had important questions about the legal risks, building security, where she'd be staying in the building and logistics of day to day life, whether we would have help, and how long she might be staying. We had solid answers for some questions, but others were best answered, "We don't know."

After our discussions, we gathered written feedback from everyone in attendance, registering their support on a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 5 (strongly support). In the end, there was a strong showing of support despite the unknowns. Edith skipped her final ICE check in when she was supposed to report with her one way plane ticket to Mexico, and entered sanctuary in our building.

She's been living here ever since.

In our solidarity with Edith and her family, and our attempts to do what we can with her and her team to get her safely and legally out of sanctuary, we have come up against some hard realities. With this administration, the windows of opportunity are getting smaller for people like Edith to adjust their status. As one can imagine, it has been difficult for Edith throughout. One of the most painful parts of the experience for me has been watching our church building become her prison.

But this experience has also brought about a tremendous outpouring of love, goodwill, and support – more than we could have imagined. First and foremost, it has enabled Edith to stay here with her family. It has given more time for Edith's attorney to work on her legal case. A strong interfaith network has stepped up to be an integral part of the work. The press conferences, rallies, vigils, and conversations among people who hear about her have all served to tell her story in a way that humanizes an otherwise divisive issue and harnesses support. As a pastor, I've been in a privileged position to witness this outpouring of support through the gifts of time, energy, skill, and financial donations this work has inspired. They are all needed.

And it has been a blessing for our congregation. During her time here Edith has become a part of this church body, both in how we think about our mission, and in the sharing of life and worship together.

This is challenging work, and should be entered into thoughtfully. It's the kind of work a congregation can never be fully prepared for, yet can expect to be given graces along the way.

This is a prayer we have written and used many times throughout our worship life during this time of Sanctuary. We invite others to pray and live it with us.

God our Sanctuary, grant us and our neighbors, near and far, courage in our hearts, peace in our homes, and justice in our streets. Amen

Dios nuestro Santuario, concédenos y nuestros vecinos, cercana y lejana, coraje en nuestros corazones, paz e n nuestros hogares, y justicia en nuestras calles. Amen

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(Jewish and Christian Tradition, Leviticus 19:33-34)

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How can your congregation help?

After reading through this document, use this form to let us know how you'd like to help:

<https://goo.gl/forms/Us1HLZmvdKdUbU073>

The process for seeking citizenship while in sanctuary is lonely, lengthy, expensive and confusing...which are all tactics to discourage applicants. But Edith is diligently pushing through. Here's how you can stand with her:

Contribute to the family's legal fund through gofundme.com/ediths-legal-path

Edith has to raise roughly \$8,000 to cover her legal fees and applications for a path to live here. Her legal team is providing pro-bono services, but the process itself is expensive.

Donate directly to the Sanctuary Fund at Columbus Mennonite Church

Your contribution to the Sanctuary Fund will help with rising needs for sanctuary. Donate by either of the following methods:

1. Give online through columbusmennonite.org/donate. Make sure to specify "Sanctuary".
2. Mail cash and checks with the designation "Sanctuary" to:

Columbus Mennonite Church

25 Oakland Park Ave

Columbus, OH 43214

Host or help with a fundraiser/meal train

From yoga sessions to selling lunches, there are several current fundraisers - and potential fundraisers to help Edith with her family expense. Our goal is to raise \$1,000 each month through fundraisers. You can also sponsor a meal for the family through mealtrain.com/trains/r3y3ed

Share about and advocate for Edith: Read more in this toolkit and "like" facebook.com/SolidarityWithEdithEspina to stay connected to current needs.

**Some of Edith's case details and needs may change over time, so please check out the complete resource guide on columbusmennonite.org/resources/sanctuary-toolkit to stay current.*

F.A.Q.

Why did Edith move to the United States?

When Edith was a teen, she moved here with her father as he sought opportunities for his family. Now, more than 20 years later in Columbus, she is desperately trying to keep her family of five together.

Is Edith an illegal immigrant?

No - it is not possible for a person to be illegal. Edith entered the U.S. without necessary documentation. Most recently, she has applied for asylum, which was denied by a federal judge, leading to a deportation order.

Does Edith or her family have criminal records?

No.

How long has Edith been in sanctuary?

Edith has been in sanctuary since October 2017.

Why has Edith been singled out by ICE?

In the past, there have been policies intended to create space for people like Edith, who arrived without documents but *do not* have a criminal record. Now, having a criminal record isn't a requisite for being targeted for deportation.

Is sanctuary permitted?

Humanity's lowest moments include those when people are not legally identified as equals. In these moments, neighbors can take a risk to represent equality and life. That risk has challenged America's understanding of equality for the better. Through current ICE policies, sanctuary allows Americans to continue making this challenge. Namely, ICE has upheld its Sensitive Locations Policy, meaning that community members like Edith can enter into sanctuary.

What's the point of sanctuary?

Applying for citizenship takes time and resources. By entering sanctuary, Edith has a little more of both - and she can stay close to her family. Her legal team is working tirelessly to open a path for official permanent resident status.

What is the process to be in the U.S. legally, and is Edith following that process?

Visas and green cards are the primary means to coming to the U.S.; however, there is a backlog that affects applicants - especially people from Mexico. As of August 2018, The State Department started processing visas for the Mexican married sons or daughters of U.S. citizens who have been waiting in line since May 1995. Over the years, Edith has applied multiple times to go through paths to stay in the U.S. and, up until entering sanctuary, was compliant with each step ICE and the government required from her.

Why can't Edith go back to Mexico while her documents are being processed?

Once someone is deported, they cannot re-enter the United States for a minimum of five years. In many cases, re-entry is not an option. The indefinite nature of this separation between children and parents means it is important to apply while still in the country.

Why is Edith's case important?

Edith's is the longest-standing of all public sanctuary cases in Ohio - and Ohio is one of top states in the nation providing public sanctuary. What happens with Edith will determine how other cases are handled in both the state and the nation.

Advocacy

**Learn more about up-to-date advocacy needs by visiting [facebook.com/SolidarityWithEdithEspinal](https://www.facebook.com/SolidarityWithEdithEspinal). Also, be sure to let us know that you are interested in advocacy by filling out this form:*

<https://goo.gl/forms/Us1HLZmvdKdUbU073>

Advocacy overview

When we advocate, we call out; advocacy literally means “to call to one’s aid.” Our prayers are advocacy... and our advocacy efforts are prayers that are heard by our highest authorities. Advocacy can be done in many forms. Some forms are more effective than others. For example, signing a petition online is not as effective as having a face to face meeting with an elected official. There are countless measures in between.

What has been undertaken so far?

Coordination of advocacy by Edith’s team and legal counsel is important. Based on that guidance, we have coordinated the following advocacy campaigns:

- Speaking directly with and calling elected officials with a particular ask
- Writing letters to elected officials and media outlets
- Holding press conferences and arranging interviews with media outlets
- Speaking to congregations and other groups to ask for their involvement
- Educating the public about Edith’s situation
- Placing signs of support around the community
- Collaborating with other organizations to put pressure on elected officials
- Using social media to raise awareness about Edith
- Holding rallies in front of the ICE office to support Edith
- Inviting the community to fundraisers and events such as Tres Madres
- Creating videos about Edith to raise awareness

Even with advocacy, this is not going to be a short or easy win. It’s will be a long, arduous fight. But we realize that a win for Edith is a win for thousands of other people who live in fear and whose stories are unheard.

Edith's story

Edith Espinal just wants to go home.

Even though she's undocumented, she's called Columbus OH home for 20+ years. And now, since October 2017, she's been living in sanctuary at Columbus Mennonite Church in Clintonville.

This place of worship is deemed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement a "sensitive location", which means that Edith is temporarily safe while discussions around her ability to stay in the United States move forward. But "temporary" has turned out to be much longer than anyone could have anticipated.



Photo: Edith stands by her youngest son

No one feels the weight of this timeline more than Edith. She's not able to spend as much time with her three children and husband as she'd like. And when emergencies strike - as it did when her youngest son was sent to the hospital twice in 2018 - navigating life in sanctuary becomes especially difficult.

Edith is lonely, but she's far from isolated. She has created a very unique, vibrant community. People across faiths, state lines and ethnicities have drawn together in support of Edith. Edith is also a key leader for the increasing number of mothers living in sanctuary in Ohio.

In sanctuary, Edith works hard to create a legal path for herself and mothers like her. She's juggling communication with lawyers, politicians and the community at any point during the day. Without employment, she creates fundraisers like community meals to cover monthly expenses and legal fees (those fees amount to over \$8,000).

Unfortunately, so much of her life - and the future of her family - is out of her hands right now. It rests squarely in the hands of decision-makers who may, or may not, be prepared to help her. And with rhetoric that has hardened so many hearts, the way forward is narrow.

Edith just wants to go home. But to get there, she needs a world of compassion. Each person in our greater community plays a critical role in ushering in that world.

CONGREGATIONAL TOOLKIT | Edith in Sanctuary

columbusmennonite.org/resources/sanctuary-toolkit
sanctuary@columbusmennonite.org

Share Edith's story in your service

Use both Spanish and English resources on https://www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org/uploads/7/6/9/1/76912017/sanctuary_vigil_liturgy_.pdf to build out a service focused on helping our neighbors and compassion for the immigrants:

Reading/Lectura verses:	pg. 7 of link
Songs:	pg. 6 of link
Creed statement and bilingual prayers:	pg. 10 of link
Calls to worship:	pg. 5 of link
Reflection activities:	pg. 8 of link

Other service ideas:

Text for bulletins

General: Please make a special effort this week to pray for Edith Espinal and her family. Under ICE's Sensitive Locations Policy, Edith has lived in refuge at Columbus Mennonite Church since October 2017. Her family is suffering both financially and emotionally while she seeks legal status in sanctuary. We cry out on her behalf for peace and resolution.

For legal support: Join us in supporting Edith Espinal this week. Under ICE's Sensitive Locations Policy, Edith has been taking refuge at Columbus Mennonite Church since October 2017. Her family is suffering both financially and emotionally while she seeks legal status in sanctuary. Please consider acting for peace and resolution by contributing to her legal fund through gofundme.com/ediths-legal-path

For the family: Join us in supporting people in sanctuary this week by donating through columbusmennonite.org/donate (specify "Sanctuary" on the donation form).