

AN IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT PREPAREDNESS GUIDE FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES

BJC90



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WHY THIS GUIDE?

The erosion of sensitive location protections, along with heightened ICE activity across the nation, has undermined the conditions necessary to make religious freedom possible. **BJC acknowledges that pluralism and full participation in civic life are prerequisites to religious freedom** and is fighting back against degradations of sensitive location protections.

It is an unacceptable infringement on religious liberty when faith practitioners cannot attend church for fear of enforcement, are intimidated and dehumanized by the government, and are unable to access other essential resources, such as education and health care.

BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) wants to help congregations counter these threats to religious liberty. This guide contains educational, training, and other resources to protect your congregations in the midst of heightened immigration enforcement threats.

IMPORTANT REMINDER

This guide is not legal guidance. We encourage you to consult your own legal counsel, as local laws vary widely and each community's situation is unique.

LEARN MORE AT [BJCONLINE.ORG](https://bjconline.org)



SECTION 2

guidance surrounding

SENSITIVE LOCATIONS

THE MAYORKAS MEMO

Dating back as far as the Clinton Administration, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) had guidelines and protections in place to limit immigration enforcement in sensitive locations. This policy was strengthened in a 2021 memo, by then-Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, which dictated that officers “should not take an enforcement action in or near a location that would restrain people’s access to essential services or engagement in essential activities...we can accomplish our enforcement mission without denying or limiting individuals’ access to needed medical care, children access to their schools, the displaced access to food and shelter, people of faith access to their places of worship, and more.”

RESCINDING THE PROTECTIONS

Protections for such locations were rescinded in a memorandum issued on January 20, 2025 by the DHS. This memo, titled “Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas,” instated a new standard of “common sense” and “discretion” for individual officers to decide if enforcement at a sensitive location was necessary.

It revoked long-standing protections and standards prohibiting immigration enforcement at houses of worship and other sensitive locations.

In a DHS press release issued the day after the memorandum, a spokesperson said the intention was to ensure “criminals will no longer be able to hide in America’s schools and churches to avoid arrest. The Trump Administration will not tie the hands of our brave law enforcement, and instead trusts them to use common sense.”



SECTION 3

Prepare Your

HOUSE OF WORSHIP

ASSESS AND PREPARE YOUR SPACE: DESIGNATE PRIVATE SPACES

Houses of worship are public spaces open to all. As such, these buildings are not granted the same legal protections as private property. However, certain spaces within houses of worship can be designated as private. Examples include youth and childcare spaces, classrooms, offices, and other places only accessible by invitation. **For more details on the legal nuances of private versus public spaces and how it specifically relates to your physical space, contact an attorney. In the meantime, take practical steps to designate parts of your space as private**, to make it less likely that enforcement officers will access all locations within your building without a warrant or legal documentation. Print out posters and place them in clearly visible locations designating certain rooms as private, and ensure that such spaces are not easily accessible to the public.

CREATE A COMMUNAL MAILBOX

Another tangible way to prepare your space to care for immigrants in the event of enforcement is to establish a communal mailbox. Some members of your community may not have a permanent address and need a reliable location for their physical mail concerning immigration proceedings to go. Keep it in a designated private location in your church and inform your congregation of the appropriate address to put down if they are in need of the mailbox.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

The effects of immigration enforcement can permeate all aspects of life outside your place of worship. **It is essential that your staff and congregation are informed of their legal and constitutional rights.** Such rights may include the right to record law enforcement action, to remain silent, or to know when officers can or cannot access a private location via warrant. **One way to prepare your church is distributing bilingual “know your rights” cards.** These can be put in baskets near the entrance of your space, in newcomer packets, or be made available at request. We recommend you distribute bilingual resources as fitting the demographics of your congregation. Ways to access distributable cards, as well as trainings for your staff, can be found in Section 6.

CREATE AND TRAIN A RESPONSE TEAM

Your response team should include all individuals in positions of leadership in your organization, as they take forward facing roles and may have to interact with officers should enforcement occur. **A member of the team should be designated as point person.** Direct all legal questions to this individual, and direct enforcement officers to avoid others unwittingly answering probing questions. The point person should be trained in de-escalation, work closely with legal counsel, and be present at the house of worship for all major gatherings. Other members of the team may include worship leaders, clergy, childcare volunteers, and receptionists.

Train each team member on their role in the event of enforcement:

- **Childcare volunteers and youth leaders:** Be able to keep private spaces and classrooms secure. Know how to identify a legitimate judicial warrant. Record relevant information during enforcement, such as an officer's agency. Calmly coordinate with the point person on how to reunite children with their parents during or following enforcement.
- **Greeters or receptionists:** Know how to identify probing but seemingly innocent questions. Keep an eye out for enforcement officers or individuals who may be a risk to the congregation.
- **Worship leaders:** If your team chooses, have a few backup songs or a plan if enforcement occurs during a service. This will allow any other members of the enforcement response team to leave the stage and interact with enforcement officers as needed.

These are all just examples. Your team knows best how it is structured, and what training needs may arise.

Once your team is established and trained, you should work together to create an enforcement response plan.

Note: Depending on your locality, enforcement officers may follow the law with varying degrees of accuracy. Additionally, each house of worship has unique situational needs and considerations while preparing for the event of enforcement. This is why seeking legal counsel should be a primary step in your preparedness efforts.

Enforcement may occur at any time, including during a service or event at your house of worship. If it happens, here are some key actions you should take.

When interacting with officers, respond calmly and de-escalate as much as possible. If relevant, seek out de-escalation and conflict resolution training for your staff. Some resources for this are listed in Part 6. Keep officers and congregants as calm as possible. Ensure that members of your community are not encouraged to run, as that can establish probable cause for enforcement officers to conduct arrests.

Keep the childcare zone secure. Ensure all people who staff that area know what to do if enforcement attempts to enter or fails to produce a warrant. Have your point person trained in how to keep parents calm and reunite parents and children once enforcement activity lessens. **If your community livestreams your services, keep the recording going.** Save it as evidence once enforcement action ends.

Train your staff to document all aspects of enforcement to the best of their ability.

Your team should meet after enforcement occurs to write down relevant details and share information. Documentation may include recordings, photos, information about warrants, officer information, what was said by whom, the timeframe, if people's rights were infringed upon, etc. It is important to note that if individuals document during enforcement, they should know their rights and stay out of the way from any enforcement action. Church leadership should then take this information and report it to legal counsel. Enforcement documentation can also be shared with local immigrant rights coalitions.

DECIPHER WARRANTS AND SUBPOENAS

Your enforcement team must be trained to identify whether officers have the ability to enter private locations in your public house of worship. Officers can enter any space if given verbal consent, so it is important your team is trained to remain silent and answer questions carefully. If they have any doubts, they should refer to the point person. If verbal consent is not given, **the only valid legal document that allows entry to a private area is a judicial warrant.** Other warrants and subpoenas do not grant legal access. All are explained below.

JUDICIAL WARRANT

This is a formal written order that authorizes an officer to conduct an arrest, seizure, or search. It must be issued by a state or federal judicial court. It must be signed by a judge or a magistrate judge. Once identified as legitimate, compliance is required to avoid legal repercussions. This is not the same as a warrant signed by an immigration judge.

ADMINISTRATIVE WARRANT

From a federal agency such as the Department of Homeland Security, this authorizes an officer to make an arrest or seizure. This warrant may be signed by immigration judges or officers. It does not authorize a search like a judicial warrant does. If you are shown one of these by an officer, it does not mean they get access to a private location. However, they may make a seizure or arrest in a public area depending on the circumstances.

JUDICIAL SUBPOENA

This is a directive from a judicial court compelling testimony or production of evidence. It must be complied with, but not every member of an organization's team is authorized to accept a judicial subpoena. Refer to your point person to answer questions about compliance if an officer gives you one.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUBPOENA

This is issued by a federal agency and signed by immigration officers or immigration judges. Immediate compliance is not legally required. It does, however, become compulsory to comply if the issuer of the subpoena takes steps to enforce the subpoena in federal district court.

If you are in a private location that officers are trying to enter, do not open the door. Alert your point person to what is occurring as soon as possible. Ask the officers to identify their agency (such as the Department of Homeland Security or Immigration and Customs Enforcement) and request to see credentials. Record all this information in a safe location. Ask to see a judicial warrant by sliding it under the door, then utilize your training to identify if it is legitimate.

For visual aids distinguishing these documents, refer to the resources in Section 6. **Again, if you or a member of your team receives any of these, consult legal counsel.** Just know that the only one you must comply with immediately is a judicial warrant, which is why it is crucial to know how to identify one.

SECTION 4

education and

PASTORAL CARE

CRAFT A STATEMENT

Once your house of worship has an action plan in place and your staff are prepared, your congregation should be well-informed and grounded in the faith rationale behind such preparations. It is up to your leaders to decide what message to send as you prepare for immigration enforcement and strive to protect and treat your immigrant neighbors with dignity.

BJC suggests that in such a statement or address, you speak to the values of democracy, pluralism, and human dignity.

While immigration can be a contentious and partisan topic, it is important that we, as faith communities, love our neighbors and emphasize that current enforcement standards are putting both families and individuals in crisis.

The current threats to sensitive locations jeopardize the ability of all individuals to fully participate in civic life and access their religious liberty, and faith leaders are in a unique position to step in and help.

Federal criminal law prevents “harboring” undocumented individuals, so it is advisable you contact legal counsel to protect your house of worship from legal fallout based on the stance and preparatory actions you take.

Convey the Values of:
Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Dignity

PASTORAL CARE

The topic of immigration enforcement is intertwined with the need for pastoral care. All members of your community have been -- or will be -- affected on differing scales. From existing members of your community seeing violence and degradation of human dignity in the news, to newcomers with firsthand immigration experience, faith leaders must keep your community grounded in core values.

Human dignity, religious liberty, democracy, and pluralism should remain at the heart of a faith-based understanding of immigration enforcement. Really reiterating to your community the importance of those values will help newcomers feel cared for and supported, keep advocates on the right track, and act as a reminder for why this issue matters.

CARE FOR NEWCOMERS

The first category of pastoral care you should be prepared to engage in is for newcomers and immigrants in your community. As leaders you must be aware of the trauma that migrants who traveled to the U.S. have already, and may continue to experience. Leaving home to travel to a new country often involves losing a sense of belonging. And, among heightened ICE enforcement, many newcomers continue to feel unsafe once they arrive. **Trauma compounds itself in isolation**, which is why faith leaders have an obligation to create community and treat immigrants with dignity. Immigrants arrive to the U.S. seeking human dignity, and faith communities must rise to the occasion.

Some methods of instilling a sense of belonging for immigrants are by engaging in mutual aid, court, or other forms of accompaniment, as well as other work that addresses a sense of isolation.

Further details on these forms of advocacy are in the next section. On a day-to-day basis, creating a support network can be as simple as being welcoming to newcomers during services, inviting younger children to youth groups or fun events, and having bilingual staff members available if needed. Furthermore, many immigrant newcomers can benefit from spaces to speak with faith leaders about their fears and concerns.

Creating such open spaces is essential. During heavy conversations, provide reassurance but do not minimize their trauma. If you think a newcomer can benefit from tangible help, point them to advocacy or other resources. And finally, continue reaching out to check in. **As enforcement crackdowns continue, these communities are in need of ongoing support.**

CARE FOR ADVOCATES AND LONG-STANDING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Existing members of your church, U.S. citizens, and those who choose to engage in advocacy may be experiencing a sense of powerlessness or hopelessness as a result of heavy news headlines, or witnessing direct enforcement in their communities. To help address stress and anxiety caused by the looming presence of enforcement, help people regain a sense of agency by getting involved in advocacy.

If advocacy is too big of a step, focus on discussions about guiding values and educating them on immigration enforcement. Education and collective action can do quite a bit of legwork to address this sphere.

If members of your community choose to engage in advocacy, faith leaders should guide them in doing it for the right reasons. It can be tempting to engage in advocacy to be perceived as heroic, or to be seen doing good.

This is harmful because it decenters the immigrants who should be the focus of the advocacy. **To re-orient advocates, continuously reiterate the guiding faith values behind their work: human dignity, religious freedom, pluralism, and democracy.**

The ongoing nature of immigration crackdowns may lead to advocates and caregivers burning out. There are a few strategies in pastoral care to address this.



Create a support network within your community for advocates.

Have people vocalize their experiences rather than holding in their emotions. Create small groups or other spaces for people to process what they have seen and done. If possible, create a system that allows people to periodically take a step back and rest. **For advocacy and immigrant care to be sustainable, it must also be grounded in the knowledge that caregivers can't pour from an empty cup.**



SECTION 5

engage in

COLLECTIVE ACTION

THE PROTECTING SENSITIVE LOCATIONS ACT

BJC has advocated for the protection of faith communities from immigration enforcement through our support of the **Protecting Sensitive Locations Act (PSLA)**. While not yet law, this proposed legislation seeks to permanently enshrine the Mayorkas Memo protections. It would protect sensitive locations, including houses of worship, from enforcement at or within 1000 feet of proximity.

Other protected locations would include health care facilities, schools, playgrounds and childcare facilities, government buildings, and more. It would also require annual training for DHS officers about protecting sensitive locations, and it would require rendering void any removal proceedings which violated the enshrined protections.

You can learn more about the PSLA [here](#). You can ask your members of Congress to support the act, hold ICE accountable, and protect religious freedom by filling out [this form](#).



MUTUAL AID

One impactful way your community can respond to the needs of the moment is by participating in mutual aid efforts. Families with individuals either threatened by or detained by officers are put into crisis in financial, emotional, and spiritual ways. **Faith communities are in unique positions to create mutual aid networks to meet these immediate needs.** They can raise support for specific individuals or families as needed, and in the process meet immediate tangible needs. Community members can be the point person for specific families, providing groceries, caring for children, and aiding others ways. If there are not members of your faith community who are in need of help but you still want to get involved, you can contact local immigrant support services. These organizations are overwhelmed amid heightened enforcement, and they may welcome help.

FAITH ORGANIZING AND FREEDOM VIGILS

If your community wants to draw attention to immigrant rights, planning or attending freedom vigils is an option. **Communities, not just those of faith can engage in peaceful organizing** by protesting and walking around either detention facilities or other areas of importance for immigration and religious freedom. If your community engages in freedom vigils, it is ideal for them to happen with regularity. This helps bring increased attention to the issue. Possible activities at the vigils may include singing and making signs. Get creative! **For a deeper religious freedom impact, clergy can show up in their collars, stoles, and other religious vestments. This sends a visible message that faith leaders are engaging with their moral obligation to protect the dignity of immigrant neighbors.** And, faith leaders engaging in such vigils is a great opportunity to utilize your faith witness to call attention to dehumanization and religious liberty infringements.

VISIT DETENTION CENTERS AND DETAINEES

An extension of faith leaders being involved in freedom vigils is the mobilization of leaders to request meetings with detainees. If such requests are denied, there comes an opportunity to publicize and engage in exposure campaigns of egregious religious freedom violations. **All detainees should be able to meet with faith leaders and practice their respective faiths.** It is also relevant to note that members of Congress have the right to visit and inspect such detention centers. Faith communities can engage in outreach and encourage your representatives to join freedom vigils and request to tour detention centers as part of your advocacy.

COURT ACCOMPANIMENT

Another important aspect of immigration advocacy is court accompaniment. It can provide both a source of well-informed support for those undergoing immigration proceedings and a chance for advocacy for community members seeking to stay involved. **Court accompaniment done by faith leaders promotes the rights and dignity of immigrants in spaces that are often degrading, confusing, and scary.** By offering company in such contexts, not only do enforcement officers and power structures have to acknowledge they are being watched, but also immigrants are provided emotional, physical, and spiritual solidarity. Training to be an accompanier often involves legal education and volunteer hours. To get involved, look for immigration advocacy groups in your area for training. Further resources and explainers on accompaniment can be found in Section 6.

SUBMIT PUBLIC COMMENTS

If your faith community wants to take action against unjust federal regulations and executive orders, consider mobilizing them to submit public comments on proposed federal regulations. Doing so helps make faith voices heard past the walls of a physical house of worship. **Immigrants are being attacked across various areas of civic life, not just in regards to religious freedom.** You can also follow immigrant justice organizations that engage in national work to see their suggestions for methods to engage in advocacy. BJC also suggests placing particular emphasis on faith leaders getting involved and being vocal. Visible examples of faith leaders advocating for immigrant rights are deeply impactful, such as the images of faith leaders peacefully protesting in Minnesota during the ICE crackdown.

If you are unsure on how to find where to submit public comments or how to do so, you can [subscribe](#) to BJC's national email list. We share opportunities to submit comments and engage in advocacy.



SECTION 5

check out

RESOURCES & TRAININGS

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

BJC'S BILINGUAL RESOURCES:

BJC created handouts for faith communities that are available on our [immigration](#) page. They are available in both [English](#) and [Spanish](#).

NATIONAL LATINO EVANGELICAL COALITION BILINGUAL POSTERS

These [posters](#) are a similar resource to red cards, and they can be distributed to congregation members to educate them on their rights.

AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES SLIDE DECK:

This [slide deck](#) has information about your rights before, during, and after immigration enforcement action. Each page is printable in PDF format, and it has additional resources at the bottom. This may be helpful to pass along to your congregation.

RED CARDS FROM THE IMMIGRANT LEGAL RESOURCE CENTER:

The [red card request form](#) can be filled out weekly, to request up to 250 Know Your Rights cards in various languages. These cards could be good resources to distribute to congregation members.

WARRANTS AND SUBPOENAS

The ACLU of Northern California created a page explaining the crucial differences between administrative and judicial warrants. It provides annotated photos of both documents highlighting the differences. **Conmigra** also has a page explaining how to read a warrant in a step-by-step process.

IMMEDIATE SERVICE DIRECTORIES

THE NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LEGAL SERVICES DIRECTORY:

This site compiles legal providers by either state, county, or detention facility. It includes only free or low-cost services. For questions, contact directory@immigrationadvocates.org.

ICERR - ICE RAPID RESPONSE RESOURCES:

This is a directory of local ICE advocacy organizations. It includes response areas that are covered, hotline numbers, and the websites of relevant organizations.

TRAININGS

NATIONAL IMMIGRATION PROJECT COMMUNITY TRAININGS:

A website page that is regularly updated with immigration enforcement trainings for community members and attorneys. Check back regularly for new resources.

CLDC KNOW YOUR RIGHTS & RISKS TRAINING REQUEST FORM:

If your church is hoping to inform your staff or congregation about their rights as a part of ICE preparedness, CLDC offers a request form for training.

ORGANIZATIONS

DEMOCRACY SECURITY PROJECT:

DSP provides guidance for houses of worship, as well as other training, safety, de-escalation, and cybersecurity recommendations.

- Places of Worship: Addressing Presence of Federal Agents
- Being An Active Bystander
- De-Escalation Pocket Guide
- Avoiding Infiltration & Traps
- Email: info@democracysecurityproject.org

ORGANIZATIONS CONT.

STATES AT THE CORE:

STAC engages in ICE preparedness work. If your community is interested in upcoming trainings, updates, and getting involved, you can view and subscribe to their Substack here. You can email them at info@stacup.org or visit their website at stacup.org

WEBSITE PAGE FOR POWERED BY FAITH:

PBF is a nonprofit organization that engages in community faith-based organizing to push back against governmental abuses of power. They have resources concerning immigration enforcement and other issues, such as voting rights.

COURT ACCOMPANIMENT

NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION RESOURCES FOR DOJ RECOGNITION/ACCREDITATION:

NYIC compiled training materials and resources to become an accredited court accompanier. This is a good option for clergy or other congregation members who wish to help immigrants who do not have access to lawyers and ensure they have due process preserved. The website has a calendar of upcoming training sessions, as well as an emailing list for interested individuals.

COURT ACCOMPANIMENT CONT.

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE:

JRS has a court observation project and a volunteer interest form available on their website.

JUSTICE POWER:

Get explanations of what court accompaniment is, and why it matters. Inform your team and answer questions from community members.

IMPORTAMI:

Resources to connect community members going through immigration proceedings with trained court accompaniers.

PASTORAL CARE

NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES ON BECOMING A TRAUMA INFORMED FAITH COMMUNITY:

Migration is often a traumatic process, both in leaving your home country and arriving to a new one which treats you in a hostile manner. Faith leaders should become trained in trauma-informed pastoral care to properly engage with immigrant members of their communities.

PASTORAL CARE CONT.

U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS:

The USCCB compiled a list of suggested pastoral care actions and activities to engage in, as well as faith-based motivations to consider.

YOUNG CLERGY WOMEN INTERNATIONAL ON TRAUMA INFORMED PASTORAL CARE:

This interview with Rev. Kerri Erbig discusses ways faith leaders can engage in trauma informed pastoral care.

MIGHTY STORIES, DANGEROUS RITUALS BOOK:

This book, written by Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, provides an in-depth look at how faith leaders can take human dignity and individuality into account when engaging in pastoral care.

RESOURCE DATABASES

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH IMMIGRATION ACTION TOOLKIT:

This toolkit contains Know Your Rights resources, fact sheets for clergy, and a variety of other resources. They also host weekly webinars on immigration enforcement updates.

RESOURCE DATABASES CONT.

ADVOCACY FOR IMMIGRATION RESOURCES FROM CBF:

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) is one of BJC's member bodies and has been involved in litigation regarding sensitive locations.

CBF is well-versed in immigration enforcement preparedness through a faith freedom lens and has a variety of resources on their [website](#).

ACLU FACT SHEET ON IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP:

This is an overview and generalized [fact sheet](#) on immigration enforcement in places of worship. If congregants have questions, this can be passed along to them, as well as used to train your staff.

INSURANCE BOARD PARTNERS IN PROTECTION WEBINARS:

A [compilation](#) of educational webinars for churches and clergy is available. They also have a [webinar](#) discussing sanctuary laws and protecting sensitive locations.

PROTECTED AREAS FACT SHEET FROM THE NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER:

The NILC has an [explainer](#) on sensitive locations (also known as "protected areas"), legal information, and recommendations for houses of worship.

FAITH GUIDEBOOKS

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ROADMAP FROM THE RAC:

This four page graphic/roadmap provides guidance for clergy on how to prepare their congregations for enforcement both before, during, and after the fact. It also contains advocacy resources on how to support the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act. To receive the form, a faith leader will have to put down their contact information.

AN IMMIGRATION MANUAL BY THE NATIONAL LATINO EVANGELICAL COALITION:

There is a manual for pastors and church leaders. It provides particularly helpful guidance on private vs public locations, and engaging in pastoral care.

A CONGREGATIONAL RESOURCE FOR IMMIGRANT/REFUGEE CARE:

A guidebook created by the SEIA Synod and the ECLA. It contains legal, policy, and other advice around how to protect and engage your congregation in discourse and education about enforcement.

GENERAL SANCTUARY GUIDELINES FROM THE INTERFAITH CENTER OF NEW YORK:

This resource helps faith leaders grapple with how to serve vulnerable immigrant communities. For more info, contact Brennan@interfaithcenter.org, Associate Director of Migrant Outreach.