



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on December 23, 2014

Illegal Immigrant Seeks Sanctuary in Philadelphia Church

Angela Navarro, who has been living in the United States illegally since 2003, has recently taken up residence in a Philadelphia church to avoid deportation. It is an unofficial policy among immigration officials not to apprehend illegal aliens who seek sanctuary in churches.

Navarro and her husband and two children, who are U.S. citizens, have moved into a renovated multipurpose room at West Kensington Ministry in North Philadelphia (shown), which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA).



A message on the church's website notes that its pastor, Rev. Adan Mairena, "served the Presbyterian Church (USA) by contributing to a study guide that called for the comprehensive legalization of immigrants."

The AP reported that Navarro was apprehended by immigration officials in 2003, after she entered the United States illegally. She sought to join her parents, who had been granted permission to live here after Hurricane Mitch resulted in catastrophic flooding of their native Honduras in 1998. However, immigration officials enforced the law and issued her final deportation order.

There was no mention in the report if Navarro had ever applied for a visa to enter the United States legally.

Navarro found the fear of being deported to be a stressful existence, and decided to move with her family to the church facilities on November 18.

"The hardest part has been leaving my life behind — leaving my house, my job, the inability to do normal family things, like going out for a walk or going shopping," Navarro said through an interpreter. Apparently, even after living in the United States for 11 years, Navarro has not learned enough English to be interviewed in America's prevailing language.

A group of individuals supporting Navarro's quest to remain legally in the United States rallied outside the office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) last week, but ICE officials would not meet with them.

However, ICE released a statement that implied it was not interesting in enforcing Navarro's case, since the agency "remains focused on smart and effective immigration enforcement that prioritizes the removal of convicted criminals and recent border entrants." Since Navarro entered the country 11 years ago and has not been convicted of a crime, she doesn't fall in either category.

The Associated Press reported that Navarro will remain at the church property as she continues to organize a campaign to obtain legal status with the help of the local New Sanctuary Movement.

West Kensington Ministry belongs to the nationwide Sanctuary 2014 coalition, which about two dozen congregations have joined. Other illegal immigrants have sought refuge in churches in Denver, Phoenix,



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and Tucson.

[An online article posted September 15 in *The New American*](#) noted that 24 churches and synagogues in Phoenix, Tucson, Chicago, and Portland have offered sanctuary to illegal immigrants and another 52 faith communities have pledged their support of the movement.

The resurgence of this sanctuary movement was announced publicly on September 24, when Rev. Noel Andersen, grassroots coordinator for immigrants' rights with Church World Service (CWS), spoke with members of the press.

"The growth and momentum of sanctuary across the country is a result of congregations and immigrant communities working together to confront these broken human-made laws. We have a higher calling," asserted Andersen.

MSNBC reported that the original Sanctuary Movement was established at Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, Arizona, in the early 1980s when thousands of Central Americans fled their countries and entered the United States illegally. The church rekindled the movement this summer by providing sanctuary to Daniel Neyoy, a Tucson man facing deportation.

Christian churches always have, and always will, follow their mandate to practice the works of mercy that Jesus described in Bible passages. And there are many times when the law and moral principles held by people of faith do not coincide. For example, pro-life advocates have sometime run afoul of the law when championing the right to life outside abortion facilities.

However, our nation's immigration laws have been put in place to protect the wellbeing of all our citizens, to ensure that the immigration process remains orderly and at a level that will not cause undue burdens on all Americans. While believing Christians may see welcoming their brethren into our nation as an extension of their faith, they also have obligations as citizens to support those laws that have been put in place to protect our national interests. For example, is it true charity to admit so many immigrants to our nation that citizens already here lose their jobs as a result?

If our immigration laws need to be modified legislatively to make them more just, that possibility may be debated. In the meantime, harboring fugitives from the just laws passed to protect the wellbeing of all citizens is not charitable; it is detrimental to our rule of law.

Photo of West Kensington Ministry church in Philadelphia: AP Images

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