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Local Man on Life Support, Facing Deportation, Enters Sanctuary

Mohamed, a 44-year-old man from the West African former French colony of Guinea-Conakry who has been threatened by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with immediate deportation, has taken sanctuary in Ann Arbor Friends Meeting House (Quakers). Mohamed, who has been living and working in the United States for fifteen years, suffers from a serious, life-threatening disease that requires ongoing medical attention. According to his physician, he is essentially on life support. His home country lacks adequate facilities for this kind of care, so returning there would be a death sentence. His mother, who suffered the same hereditary condition, died there due to inadequate treatment. The average per capita income in Guinea is \$825/year, and average life expectancy is 52 years. The United Nations Development Program ranks Guinea 175th of 189 countries included in the Human Development Index rankings.

A member of Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (Quakers) who met with Mohamed in the hospital before he entered sanctuary said,

"How could we say no to Mohamed? His situation is dire and we have the willingness and ability to help him. We welcome him to stay under the care of our Meeting in Sanctuary as long as he needs us."

Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (Quakers) is one of twelve faith communities in Washtenaw County that have made the commitment to provide refuge and assistance to those facing cruel and unjust deportation. They are part of Washtenaw Congregational Sanctuary (WCS), an interfaith coalition formed in early 2017. WCS includes the Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (WICIR), the Interfaith Council for Peace & Justice (ICPJ), and other faith communities and people of conscience.

WCS represents people who have joined together to offer support and solidarity with immigrants and their families. Washtenaw County congregations that have joined the New Sanctuary Movement include: the Church of the Good Shepherd/United Church of Christ in Ann Arbor, First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor (UUAA), Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (Quakers), First United Methodist Church in Ann Arbor, the Wesley Foundation, Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Temple Beth Emeth, Beth Israel Congregation, St. Clare's Episcopal Church, the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church in Chelsea, and First Congregational United Church of Christ in Ypsilanti.

The faith communities and others affiliated with Washtenaw Congregational Sanctuary publicly oppose President Trump's deportation machine targeting millions of immigrants. Arbitrary mass deportation under the Trump administration is tearing apart families and harming our communities. This is not an immigration crisis, it is a crisis of immoral policies. Immigrants, whether they are fleeing the violence and economic strife in Central America (often exacerbated by US policies), or simply trying to stay alive with health care that is a basic human right, must be treated with dignity and care.

In Washtenaw County, faith leaders are declaring they are ready to provide sacred spaces of Sanctuary for immigrants facing deportation and targeting from Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE). Washtenaw Congregational Sanctuary calls on congregations across all faiths to open their doors and provide refuge for immigrants facing detention and deportation. As part of the New Sanctuary Movement, WCS calls for humane and just immigration policy.

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Speakers:

Mary Anne Perrone - Washtenaw Congregational Sanctuary (WCS) – introduction
Mohamed, sanctuary guest – personal story
Johanna Kowitz, Ann Arbor Friends Meeting (Quakers) – statement of welcome
Jennifer Blackwell, Church of the Good Shepherd – a faith perspective
Rabbi Josh Whinston,* Temple Beth Emeth – a faith perspective
Chuck Warpehoski, ICPJ – how to support immigration justice

For more information on Washtenaw Congregational Sanctuary (WCS), to volunteer, or to make a donation:

<https://www.icpj.org/blog/program-areas/one-human-family/washtenaw-congregational--sanctuary/>