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[Episcopal News Service] Announcing the beginning of the "New Sanctuary Movement," the Episcopal Church in Western Washington stood with other ecumenical and interfaith leaders in support of immigration reform on Wednesday, May 9 at St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle.

Also announced in Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego and New York, the movement seeks to provide advocacy, education and in some cases safe space for immigrants. It also hopes to educate non-immigrant members of communities on immigration issues and calls for just and compassionate immigration reform.

"We're talking here about real people and families, about persons who are members of our communities and with whom our lives are deeply interwoven," said the Very Rev. Robert V. Taylor, dean of St. Mark's Cathedral. "That is not a family value that most of us want to be associated with."

The movement comes as legislation has stalled and tens of thousands of immigrants have been detained and deported in recent raids, across the country and in the Seattle area. It is based on a similar movement begun in the 1980s, when Central American refugees sought safe haven. However, movement leaders say, today's immigrants are not just those fleeing political oppression, but workers who have been in the United States for many years, paying taxes, abiding laws and contributing to society.

A member of San Mateo, Auburn, Rene Martinez was arrested May 14 while working at Emerald Downs racetrack. With his 4-year-old son in his lap and through an interpreter, he said it was "a nasty experience" that no one would want to go through. He has been waiting for two months, without work, to learn whether after living here for 10 years he will be deported and separated from his family.

This concern is central to the movement, which opposes the separation that takes place when parents are deported, leaving their U.S.-born children behind.

Rabbi Jonathan Singer of Seattle's Temple Beth Am said people are just beginning to realize how intertwined peoples' lives are, and the impact a broken immigration system has, not just on immigrants but also on employers and citizens.

"We their clients deny our own role in this oppression and suffer little as we await another undocumented person to come and take their place," Singer said.

Bishop Chris Boerger of the Northwest Washington Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) said at its convocation last March, ELCA

bishops signed an appeal to congress to pass immigration reforms, which has not yet happened.

"If the government will not, the church will" take care of the stranger at the gate, Boerger explained.

"We are called to welcome the stranger as our next of kin," said Michael Ramos, director of social justice ministries for the Church Council of Greater Seattle and organizer of the May 9 announcement.

St. Mark's Cathedral; Resurreccion, Mt. Vernon; San Mateo, Auburn; and the Hispanic Ministry Committee of the Diocese of Olympia have committed themselves to the sanctuary movement and encourage the entire diocese to do the same as well as exploring the possibility of providing safe space for those in fear of Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids.