

## Manhattan



### Churches To Offer Sanctuary To Illegal Immigrants

May 09, 2007

Leaders of several congregations around this city and others announced a campaign Wednesday to provide sanctuary to immigrants facing deportation, detention or raids.

The legality of the new sanctuary movement – announced at The Church of Saint Paul the Apostle in Midtown – is still up for debate. NY1's Sandra Endo filed the following report.

Ignorance is bliss for this little two year old, who has no clue her parents are in a fight for their lives.

Joe and Mei came here from China more than 10 years ago to seek asylum; now they are facing deportation.

"We're afraid our family will tear apart, so that's why we're here," says Joe.

It's a similar story for Jani and Jean. He came to the states with a green card from Haiti in 1986, but he's facing deportation after being convicted of a drug charge he served time for years ago.

"I could be turned into a single mother any day because of this immoral system," says Jani.

Religious groups are now coming together to help families like these. They're calling it a new sanctuary movement for illegal immigrants facing deportation.

"The citizens of the United States recognize there may be borders and fences, but in the great vision of God, we are all God's children," says the Reverend James Forbes of Riverside Church.

Church officials say they'll try every avenue to help people facing deportation stay in the country, but they say some churches are prepared to house immigrants if it comes to that.

In the 80s some churches housed immigrants in a similar sanctuary movement which sparked a heated legal battle, one that churches lost.

Religious leaders say they're hoping the situation won't get so severe.

"I think INS and the local authorities are in legal la-la land," says Donna Schaper of Judson Memorial Church. "I don't know if they know what legally they can do."

The Department of Homeland Security's immigration and customs enforcement says its required to enforce the laws and anyone who violates them will face the consequences.

New Yorkers NY1 spoke with are split on whether this movement is a good idea.

"I don't think churches would be any more effective than government policy, but it's a good place to start," said one New Yorker.

"It's nice that the churches are doing what they're doing, but it's absolutely not a solution," added another.

The bigger solution is in the hands of the federal government, and church officials vow to keep up the pressure for immigration reform.

- Sandra Endo