

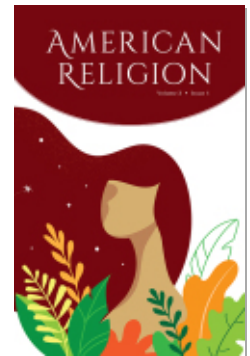


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1980–2020

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LATINX LEADERSHIP AND LEGACIES IN THE US SANCTUARY MOVEMENT, 1980–2020

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Abstract

A longstanding criticism of the Sanctuary Movement in the United States has held that it is an immigrant rights movement without immigrant leaders and instead is merely a movement of white American activists. While there has historically been some merit to this criticism, this article covers a growing body of evidence which undercuts this argument and demonstrates how this criticism often obscures more than it reveals. This article revisits studies on the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s as well as the New Sanctuary Movement since 2006, with special attention given to more recent activism since former president Donald Trump's election. Latinx leadership comes in many forms and is best exemplified by activists and (ex-)sanctuary seekers in Chicago and Denver among other locations. Finally, this article considers how Trump's draconian, zero-tolerance policy emboldened Latinx, especially Latina, sanctuary seekers and leaders to speak up, lead, and resist on an unprecedented scale.

Keywords: activism, immigration, Latinx, leadership, public religion, resistance, Sanctuary Movement, women

LIDERAZGO Y LEGADOS LATINX EN EL MOVIMIENTO SANTUARIO DE EE. UU., 1980–2020

Resumen

Una crítica ya bien establecida al Movimiento Santuario en los Estados Unidos sostiene que es un movimiento por los derechos de los inmigrantes sin líderes inmigrantes, compuesto en su mayoría por activistas estadounidenses blancos que hablan por los inmigrantes en lugar de con ellos. Si bien ha habido históricamente cierto mérito en esta crítica, este artículo aborda un creciente conjunto de evidencias que refuta este argumento y demuestra cómo esta crítica a menudo oculta más de lo que revela. Este artículo retoma los estudios sobre el Movimiento Santuario de la década de 1980 para argüir que el liderazgo latinx ha estado en juego en diferentes formas incluso desde los comienzos del movimiento. La última parte de este artículo considera cómo en el Nuevo Movimiento Santuario, ya en 2006 y particularmente al revitalizarse durante la presidencia de Trump, tanto quienes buscaban refugiarse como activistas latinas se animan a liderar y a resistir a una escala sin precedentes. Al revelar las funciones esenciales de las mujeres y el esfuerzo latinx en el Movimiento Santuario, este artículo demuestra cuán fundamentales son los liderazgos femeninos, maternos y encubiertos para el éxito de este movimiento religioso y político.

Palabras clave: activismo, inmigración, latinx, liderazgo, religión pública, resistencia, Movimiento Santuario, mujeres

“No soy ni criminal ni terrorista. Soy madre y padre para mi hijo y soy una obrera más. Si voy a tener que pasar diez o veinte años allí en la cárcel, no me importa pero voy a luchar porque mi hijo, porque yo me respetará, porque el pueblo indocumentado, porque el pueblo ciudadano sea respetados.”

“I am neither a criminal nor am I a terrorist. I am both mother and father to my son and also am a worker. If I need to spend ten or twenty years in prison, it doesn't matter to me because I am going to fight for my son, my self-respect, and the undocumented and citizen community shall be respected.”¹

—Elvira Arellano, 2006

1 “I Am an American—Elvira and Saul Arellano,” YouTube video, September 3, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cbC94Iuw34M>.

By 2005 immigration debates gripped the country but resulted in few policy changes in any one direction. The diminishing hope for the passage of a comprehensive immigration bill and the awareness of immigrant vulnerability led activists to officially launch the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) in 2007.² The epigraph above captures an excerpt of an August 2006 statement that the Mexican-born Elvira Arellano, a sanctuary seeker at the time, delivered in Chicago, the city she had called home since 2000. Arellano became the face of the NSM alongside other immigrants, as this article will further detail. On Christmas Day in 2006, Arellano's own story of flight, immigrant precarity, and maternal care for her American-born son Saul would reach a national audience when *Time* magazine named her in that year's prestigious list of People Who Mattered.³ In this context of immigration debates Latinx activists and undocumented immigrants would not merely watch their fate be discussed by others; they too would speak up and lead.⁴

2 The Sensenbrenner Bill, formally called the Border Protection, Anti-terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, was passed by the House of Representatives but not by the Senate. The bill marked a high tide of anti-immigrant policies, discursively tying immigration to terrorism in the mid 2000s. Provisions in the bill *inter alia* included penalties to any person or group providing aid to undocumented immigrants, the significant expansion and fortification of the border, harsher sentences for immigrant documentation fraud, and increased penalties for knowingly employing undocumented workers. On the bill's relation to the NSM, see Grace Yukich, *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26–28.

3 Wendy Cole, "People Who Mattered: Elvira Arellano," *Time*, December 25, 2006, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2019341_2017328_2017183,00.html.

4 In the spirit of thinking more inclusively with respect to the role of women and in keeping with scholarship that pushes for more gender-inclusive language, we have opted to use the term Latinx to describe Latin-American descended individuals and groups in the United States. While such a term may appear to be anachronistic given the time frame we cover, alternatives such as the more common term "Latino" also fail to describe, for example, how Salvadorans and Guatemalans arriving in the US in the 1980s would have identified themselves. In the absence of a more apt term, Latinx should suffice provided that readers understand our recognition of its use. Furthermore, in this article we focus on Latinx leaders for two reasons. First, the 1980s movement was launched specifically for Central American refugees. Second, while the NSM has expanded to be inclusive of more immigrants, deportation in the United States has long targeted racialized Mexicans and those who are perceived to be Latinx and, as such, the immigration debate has continued to be colored as a Latinx problem. This is reflected in the larger number of public Latinx sanctuary activists than other ethnic groups. On links between deportation and Mexican immigrants, see Adam Goodman, *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020).

Arellano's decision to take sanctuary at Adalberto United Methodist Church in Chicago resulted in the effective renewal of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement. The original movement garnered attention in the study of American religion as a standoff of church vs. state in which immigrant rights activists participated in a broader Central American solidarity movement by harboring Central Americans in houses of worship, fighting for their legal claims to asylum, and helping many with transportation to Canada. Like the 1980s movement, the NSM drew upon millennia-old traditions of offering safe harbor to individuals who would otherwise be prosecuted by authorities. Offering safe harbor would only be one of the many characteristics of the NSM, as activists also focused on sanctuary as a moniker, identity, and strategy.⁵ The NSM would further be characterized by high-profile cases of individuals who had already resided in the United States entering sanctuary, rather than the older model in which newly-arrived Central American refugees took refuge in houses of worship clandestinely. Through the NSM's efforts, the general public was able to better learn about sanctuary seekers' names and life stories. Women in such cases stepped to the forefront to share their *testimonios* and speak to the sacredness of motherhood, the many difficulties for families, and a range of other concerns that fit into a pro-family narrative.

But was Arellano merely an exception as a Latina immigrant leader of the NSM, a resistance tradition historically comprised largely of white middle-class leaders? Two longstanding criticisms of the NSM have been that there is a dearth of Latinx voices speaking publicly for the movement as well as the lack of immigrants in leadership positions.⁶ Soon after her bold step into the public, Arellano would be joined by a larger cast of immigrant leaders in this movement. Moreover, recent developments in the NSM since late 2016 suggest that Latinas are increasingly taking on public-facing leadership roles.

This article proceeds by approaching the dominant narrative of the US Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s in a manner that notes Latinx and women activists.⁷ By beginning there, scholars of American religion not only gain a more

5 Yukich, *One Family Under God*, 6.

6 *Ibid.*, 142–170.

7 Among these accounts of sanctuary, we include texts not only written while the movement was underway but that also gained a wide readership in the scholarship. These works include: Ignatius Bau, *The Ground is Holy: Church Sanctuary and Central American Refugees* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist Press, 1985); Gary MacEoin, ed., *Sanctuary: A Resource Guide for Understanding and Participating in the Central American Refugee's Struggle* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986); Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986); Robert Tomsho, *The American Sanctuary Movement* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987); Miriam Davidson, *Convictions of the Heart* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988); Ann

inclusive perspective on the classical accounts of the movement but also see how gender, womanhood, and maternal images have mattered for political activism. While these classical accounts were written during and shortly after the 1980s movement and mostly focused on the activism of white, middle-class activists, there is far more to the story. Thus, this article addresses gender and racial disparities in the rendering of the movement. After setting forth a preliminary ethnic and gendered reformulation of the dominant 1980s movement narrative, the article proceeds to detail high-profile cases of sanctuary leadership in the age of the NSM, all of which involve Latina leadership. By way of conclusion, we consider the stakes of this debate in our approaches to the movement and the study of American religion.

This new narration of the Sanctuary Movement offers a corrective to the aforementioned criticism of the movement and provides students of American religion a new way of conceptualizing the Sanctuary Movement, its majority workers, Latinx actors, and its immigrant leadership. It is easy—and in some cases even correct—to assume that immigrants played a background role to white American religious activists in the Sanctuary Movement. In most cases in the 1980s, the names of those seeking sanctuary were kept secret by local leaders; even in cases when they appeared before congregations they assumed anonymity (see Figure 1 below). By contrast, the NSM largely broke away from the practice of anonymity with local leaders and sanctuary seekers going public. In this manner, then, the seekers themselves became leaders in ways that were generally not advisable for those in the 1980s. The NSM further calls for scholars of American religion, activism, and history to ask new questions about what leadership looks like and who assumes those roles. While many scholars of American religion have scrutinized the ostensibly male spaces and public leadership positions by uncovering the essential roles of women, a focus on Latinx labor in the Sanctuary Movement demonstrates how feminine, maternal, and intentionally hidden leadership can be central to a political movement.

THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT NARRATIVE

The story of the 1980s US Sanctuary Movement for Central Americans develops from a long tradition of Latinx immigrant advocacy in the US-Mexico borderlands in the respective states of Arizona and Sonora. The conventional narrative, however,

Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993); Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Río Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

mostly stays north of the border, beginning with Tucson as the birthplace and cradle of the Sanctuary Movement. But the events that developed in Tucson ought to be understood in light of greater regional, national, and even transnational developments. The Sanctuary Movement arose against the backdrop of a hostile anti-Latinx immigrant context in the Tucson area, as demonstrated in two events which brought international attention to the region. First, the lynching of three undocumented Mexican workers at the hands of white ranchers in 1976 highlighted the lack of civil and human rights upheld for undocumented workers. In addition to this scandal, macabre details circulated in national news in July 1980 regarding the case of thirteen Salvadoran immigrants who had perished in the Sonoran Desert Organ Pipe National Monument and the thirteen others who barely survived the journey.⁸ One park official noted, “We’ve found a few bodies in the past, but nothing of this magnitude.”⁹ Together these events brought into sharp relief the larger Latinx immigration crises beyond the typical story of Mexican immigration.

Tucson’s own immigrant-rights group, the Manzo Area Council (MAC), had already been active in assisting refugees fleeing Central American civil wars. According to one MAC leader, Isabel García, their work with Central Americans began on the day that a Salvadoran woman “walked in with a bullet lodged in her ribcage.”¹⁰ By early 1981, MAC began taking on an increasing caseload of Central American clients as the number of new arrivals had noticeably grown since the late 1970s and would peak in the 1980s. Female leaders such as García, activist and teacher Guadalupe Castillo, and attorney Margo Cowen constituted the leadership of Tucson’s immigrant rights advocacy. It was their work as well as that of the Tucson Ecumenical Council that “laid the foundation” for the Sanctuary Movement to develop in the manner it did.¹¹

In the summer of 1980 the first pieces of the story that are distinctly discernable as religious sanctuary practices began to fall into place. The revelation of the twenty-six aforementioned Salvadorans represented not only the horror of migrants’ journeys across the desert but also the extent to which Central Americans would go in order to flee the violence of the United States’ proxy wars that uprooted them in the first place.¹² Caught in the crossfires of civil wars, migrants fled north by the thousands in hopes of finding some semblance of

8 Geraldo Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground: The Making of a Sunbelt Borderland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 188–211.

9 Al Senia, “13 Smuggled Salvadorans Found Dead in the Desert,” *Washington Post*, July 7, 1980, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/07/07/13-smuggled-salvadorans-found-dead-in-us-desert/06e736ff-07bd-4cc2-8695-374f839278ea/>.

10 Quoted in Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground*, 201.

11 *Ibid.*, 201.

12 *Ibid.*, 200.

asylum. Because of Cold War politics and the role that the US played in causing this mass exodus, US officials decided to systematically deny asylum to nearly all Salvadorans and Guatemalans.¹³ The inadequate response of the immigration courts and border enforcement officers led many to decry the US for both its role in Central America and how it attempted to deny entry and asylum to these refugees who were fleeing violent civil wars. They would later be labeled “economic migrants” by the Reagan Administration.¹⁴

Revelations of these larger contradictions coupled with MAC’s example of organizing “bond outs” and relocating migrants in Tucson set the conditions and precedents for the work of Quaker rancher Jim Corbett. In the summer of 1981, he began housing migrants in his own home and those of companions in the Tucson area. The number of refugees arriving with little to nothing on their backs and with no place to stay overwhelmed the capacity of the designated safe houses. That fall, Corbett approached John Fife, pastor of Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, to inquire if his church and the Tucson Ecumenical Council might be willing to join the struggle. After a favorable vote by Fife’s church in November of that year, the church spent the next few months preparing an implementation plan as well as coordinating a day of declaration with five churches in the San Francisco Bay Area.¹⁵ On March 24, 1982, a date also marking two years since the assassination of the Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, an advocate against the violence in Central America, Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson publicly declared itself a sanctuary to Central Americans by announcing the following:

We are writing to inform you that the Southside Presbyterian Church will publicly violate the Immigration and Nationality Act Section 274(a). We have declared our church as a “sanctuary” for undocumented refugees from Central America ... we believe that justice and mercy require that people of conscience actively assert our God-given right to aid anyone fleeing from persecution and murder. The current administration of U.S. law prohibits us from sheltering these refugees from Central America. Therefore, we believe the administration of the law to be immoral as well as illegal.¹⁶

This March 24 declaration served as a linchpin of contestation. Within a year, forty-

13 From 1983 to 1990, 2.6 percent of migrants from El Salvador and 1.8 percent from Guatemala received asylum. María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 13–43, 90.

14 *Ibid.*, 86–87.

15 *Ibid.*, 98–99.

16 Quoted in Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 48.

five faith communities followed suit, and over 600 congregations cosponsored the movement's efforts by the end of the decade.¹⁷ Per Fife's own recollection, the main goal since the outset of the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s was to reverse the course of US policy and action towards Central American asylum seekers. That materialized by 1992 after a series of provisions made following a settlement in the *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh* case and the passage of legal provisions such as Temporary Protected Status and Deferred Enforced Departure.¹⁸

With the exception of the foundational role of women heading the MAC, the aforementioned narrative in general represents major components of the typical rendition of the Sanctuary Movement.¹⁹ The very framing of the Sanctuary Movement in most books lends itself to a reading of it as a movement headed by a mostly-white activist core that sheltered migrants, captured stories of human rights violations, and advocated for some legal recognition of Salvadorans and Guatemalans. The courageous and important work of these activists, of course, is in no manner the issue with which we contend here.²⁰ Rather this article seeks to highlight a more inclusive rendition of the American sanctuary saga, one that more faithfully accounts for the voices of Latinx sanctuary workers, supporters, and seekers, especially the voices of women. As such, we may hold fast to the conviction that “[h]alfway across the lines of gender, race, class, nation, or other borderlines of difference lie the thresholds to histories that are more accurate and more truthful ...” as historian Elizabeth Jameson argues.²¹ In the remainder of this article, we account for a Sanctuary Movement history that takes some steps towards crossing these thresholds.

17 Cunningham, *God and Caesar*, 35–43.

18 Garcia, *Seeking Refuge*, 108–112. Ruiz Martinez shows how a St. Louis-based Catholic ministry continued its work until 1996, thus speaking to the varied goals of the movement in local contexts. See Carlos Ruiz Martinez, “The Questions of Sanctuary: The Adorers of the Blood of Christ and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement, 1983–1996,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2020), 65–68.

19 Cadava's recent work provides contextualization of the MAC's role. Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground*, 188–211.

20 Reasons as to why white activists were at the forefront of this movement largely centered on the notion that they carried the social and cultural capital to navigate such legally treacherous terrain and the privilege of not being targeted by INS (and later ICE). In the absence of such risks, they could afford to publicly take a stance against the unfair practices of the US government more than minority congregations could.

21 Elizabeth Jameson, “Halfway Across That Line: Gender at the Threshold of History in the North American West,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 47 (Spring 2016): 20.

LATINX LEADERSHIP IN THE 1980S SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

To begin, we return to the Tucson borderlands area, but this time take the story south of the border. Historian Geraldo Cadava rendered a history of sanctuary activism in the context of transnational grassroots advocacy for Central Americans that was already underway in the late 1970s, arguing that “the sanctuary movement was part of a longer tradition of migrant assistance in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands.”²² His work challenges the traditional origin story of the Sanctuary Movement, showing clearly how the Tucson-based MAC began working with (and sheltering) refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala as early as the mid-1970s. US activists (mostly women) forged binational networks of support for Central Americans, thus laying the groundwork upon which clergy in Tucson would build the Sanctuary Movement and invite others throughout the US to join. Father Dagoberto Quiñones in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, aided migrants through the underground railroad. His church El Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe served as a resting point and rendezvous before he would take migrants over by car or lead them on foot over the border. Both Quiñones and Corbett worked closely with Maria del Socorro de Pardo Aguilar, a laywoman from Quiñones’s parish, in the transportation of migrants, their release from jails in Nogales, Sonora, and teaching them to pass as Mexicans so as to not raise the suspicion of authorities. (If deported, those successfully passing as Mexicans would only be taken back to Nogales.)²³ Much of the Latinx work was done behind the scenes and operated as subterfuge. Although this hiddenness makes such work less immediately visible, it nevertheless represents central modes of leadership. Such framing of the history should provoke a consideration as to what would have become of the movement without the work of Mexican religious activists connecting refugees to their US counterparts. By expanding the Tucson narrative a few miles south beyond the border, we see Mexican activists in action as sine qua non components of the American Sanctuary Movement. American religious immigrant activism in this arrangement complemented the labor of activists a stone’s throw away from the border.

Elsewhere in the larger borderlands context we see the mass mobilization of Latinx advocacy groups. The California-based and Central American-led coalitions El Rescate and the Central American Resource Center were among the few that Corbett worked with at the start of the movement. Since the late 1970s, Salvadoran activists have led initiatives in these networks.²⁴ Norma Chinchilla,

22 Cadava, *Standing on Common Ground*, 199.

23 *Ibid.*, 201–203; Davidson, *Convictions of the Heart*, 39–43.

24 Sergio González, “The Sanctuary Movement,” *The Research Oxford Encyclopedia of American History* (June 2020), 4.

Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky demonstrated how religious groups in Los Angeles, a major destination for Central Americans in the 1980s and 1990s, fostered the growth of advocacy networks.²⁵ Los Angeles quickly became the prime destination for Salvadorans and Guatemalans during the turbulent decades of Central American civil wars. Some estimates suggest that nearly half of the refugees coming through Tucson eventually made their way to the city. The Southern California Inter-Faith Task Force on Central America teamed up with Latinx-led local service organizations to give the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles its robust expression beginning in the early 1980s.²⁶ The resistance of the Sanctuary Movement was embedded within the larger Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement whose Latinx leadership for several years of scholarship had also been underrepresented.²⁷

The sanctuary leadership of Los Angeles's beloved Mexican-American Claretian, Father Luis Olivares, has been meticulously documented in Mario T. García's biography of the priest. Olivares launched sanctuary efforts in the city's oldest church, La Iglesia de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Ángeles, affectionately and colloquially known as La Placita.²⁸ García maintains that Olivares "rose up and headed the most crucial and celebrated sanctuary movement in the country."²⁹ Olivares had been involved with grassroots organizing for several years before he assumed the pastorate of La Placita. The parish already operated a large number of social ministries when he appointed local clergy and laity (some of whom were Catholic) to head sanctuary efforts for La Placita, which already served a majority Latinx (largely Mexican) congregation. These Latinx sanctuary leaders included Lydia López and Graciela Limón who ran a local refugee shelter established by the church. Other prominent workers included Salvadoran refugees themselves, such as Lisa Martínez, Virginia Mejía, Mario Rivas, and Arturo López, all without whom the work could not have flourished. To better serve refugees arriving in the Los Angeles area, Olivares brought on the liberationist Jesuit Mike Kennedy. Together, Olivares and Kennedy assembled a team to establish and run the Centro Pastoral Rutilio Grande, a refugee center

25 Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009).

26 *Ibid.*

27 Héctor Perla Jr., "Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.-Central Peace and Solidarity Movement," *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 136–158.

28 Mario T. García, *Father Luis Olivares, A Biography: Faith Politics and the Origins of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

29 *Ibid.*, 11.

at La Placita named in honor of the first priest killed during the Salvadoran Civil War by the infamous death squads. Mostly Mexican-Americans staffed El Centro (as it was called), which provided food, clothes, medical assistance, legal guidance, and English and Spanish language instruction (the latter for Maya arriving from Guatemala). The staff also arranged the logistics to see refugees through the Sanctuary Movement's underground railroad to Canada. By 1986 El Centro housed over 250 families and assisted many more both at the center and in the sanctuary of La Placita by offering them a place to sleep safely. Sanctuary leaders in Los Angeles declared how "we could have never done our work without the Mexican community," who, by and large, despite some initial resistance, supported the efforts at La Placita to minister to those greatly in need.³⁰ Efforts at La Placita further garnered international attention, including high-profile visits from Archbishop of El Salvador Arturo Rivas y Damas, then-president of Nicaragua Daniel Ortega, and Hollywood star Martin Sheen.³¹

The day of the sanctuary declaration at La Placita attracted all the news coverage that a media guru such as Olivares could have hoped for. Media conferences with live testimony had already proven to be an effective method for the movement.³² Olivares had made his intentions clear in a press release one month ahead of the declaration:

La Placita (Our Lady Queen of the Angeles Church) will be the first Roman Catholic Church in the city of Los Angeles to offer PUBLIC SANCTUARY to Central American refugees. This is the fulfillment of Mary's mandate to Juan Diego at TEPEYAC: Build a temple "where I can demonstrate and impart all of my love, compassion, aid and defense."³³

On December 12, 1985, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the "Mother of the Americas," Olivares declared La Placita to be a sanctuary for Central American refugees. As shown in the photograph below, at the declaration service a Salvadoran couple along with a Guatemalan mother with her three children were brought before the congregation. Dressed in all black clothes with only small slits in the eye area, they sat to the side of the altar during the Mass. Fr. Ken Gregorio, who assisted Olivares that day, described the unsettling image of their anonymity as "'non-people' in the United States who were being hunted down" and thus had to hide themselves for protection.³⁴ They offered *testimonios* to the

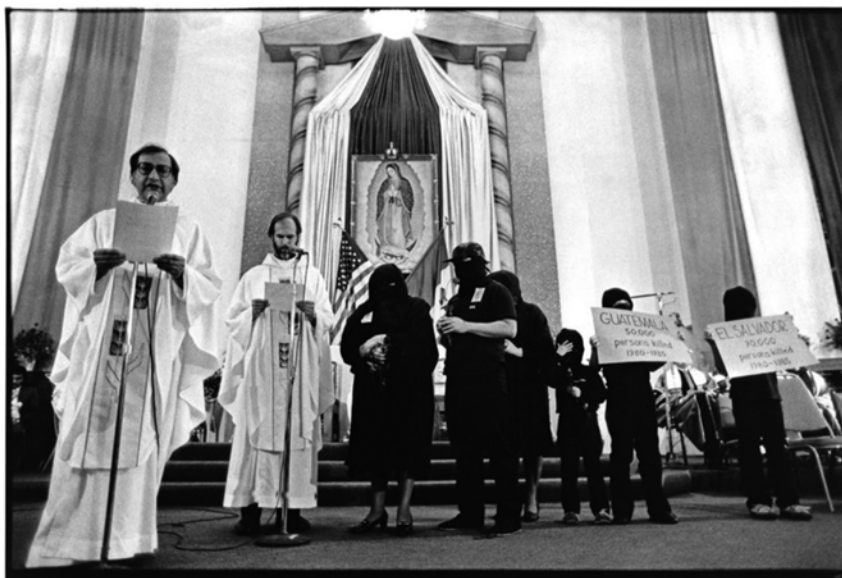
30 Ibid., 305.

31 Ibid., 258–306.

32 González, "The Sanctuary Movement," 6.

33 Quoted in García, *Father Luis Olivares*, 320.

34 Ibid., 328.



Olivares leads the sanctuary declaration on December 12, 1985. To his right, father Kennedy, the Salvadoran couple, and the Guatemalan mother with her three children stand before the congregation. The two children farthest to the right hold signs which read: “EL SALVADOR 70,000 persons killed 1980–1985” and “GUATEMALA 50,000 persons killed 1980–1985.” Watching over the ceremony at La Placita is the Virgin of Guadalupe. UCLA Young Library. Los Angeles Times Photographic Archive (Collection 1429). Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

packed church about the brutal violence they fled and the overall conditions back home.³⁵ Central Americans across the movement, in so many cases masked and anonymous, used their “prophetic platform” to be crucial spokespeople for refugees and values of the movement.³⁶

In Los Angeles, as in the Tucson-Nogales borderlands areas, it appeared to be the case that the invisibility of Latinx labor in the movement mirrored that of the leaders at La Placita. While it is true that many sanctuary seekers in the 1980s movement could not risk public exposure, even those such as Olivares (who quite admittedly sought out media exposure) have until recently been overlooked in the history of the sanctuary movement. This oversight seems curious given

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 328–330.

³⁶ González, “The Sanctuary Movement,” 15.

the scale of the work that Olivares and the base of Latinx and non-Latinx leaders and supporters mounted. Indeed, Olivares's sanctuary activism stands out in several important ways. In 1987 he extended his sanctuary policy to undocumented Mexicans, a group that falls outside of the Sanctuary Movement narrative. The greater Los Angeles area, which received more Central American refugees than anywhere else in the country, was primed for such large-scale activist work by North American Latinxs. But it took the work of not only a Latino priest, but also a broader ecumenical movement and the rank-and-file activists and Catholic faithful to carry out La Placita's sanctuary plans. Garcia maintains that no other Catholic church in the Los Angeles archdioceses or nearby Protestant churches matched La Placita's efforts, rendering it one of the most significant arenas of the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s.³⁷

WOMEN SANCTUARY WORKERS IN THE 1980S

Women kept the Sanctuary Movement afloat throughout the 1980s, running everyday duties and, at times, clandestine operations.³⁸ With respect to the former, male sanctuary leaders such as Corbett were among the earliest to express frustration at how “the Media [had] consistently focused on male clerical ‘charisma’ and authority to the exclusion of women who provide the major daily support and maintenance of the sanctuary movement.”³⁹ With respect to the latter, responsibilities such as navigating and planning the sanctuary “underground railroad” routes largely fell on women. But not all successfully eluded law enforcement authorities. From February to March 1984, Mennonite volunteer Stacey Lynn Merkt, nun Diane Muhlenkamp, and Kathleen Flaherty were all arrested for their involvement as transporters.⁴⁰ Merkt came to prominence within the movement for being among the very first to transport refugees. Even in her high-profile arrest, media attention swarmed in on her lawyer rather than the activist herself. Moreover, when the charges resulting from the FBI infiltration of the Sanctuary Movement (Operation Sojourner) came to light in 1985, six of the eleven co-conspirators found guilty of the numerous charges were women: María del Socorro Pardo de Aguilar (Catholic), Mary Kay Dean Espinosa (Catholic),

37 García, *Father Luis Olivares*, 15, 258–281.

38 Robin Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1991); Renny Golden, “Sanctuary and Women,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 131–149.

39 Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 60.

40 Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Civil Disobedience: An Encyclopedic History of Dissidence in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 256–258; Golden, “Sanctuary and Women,” 143–146.

Peggy Hutchinson (Presbyterian), Wendy LeWin (Unitarian), Nena MacDonald (Quaker), and Darlene Nicgorski (Catholic). Pardo de Aguilar and her priest Dagoberto Quiñones hailed from Nogales in Sonora, affirming the movement's transnational operations and origins as well as the mobilization of a core base of Latinx activism.

The failure to recognize women's sanctuary work proved widespread. This was especially true of Chicago's Sanctuary Movement where women outnumbered men by about two-thirds at all levels of organization and by about one hundred to four in the Chicago Catholic Sanctuary. Regarding the Chicago branch of the movement, sociologist Robin Lorentzen argued that "homemakers and women religious literally produce[d] the movement through local and national women-based groups in religious and community settings."⁴¹ Framings of the Sanctuary Movement that are built on male clerical charisma are undoubtedly influenced both by Western patriarchal ideals prevalent in American society and by religious hierarchies.

The Latinx and women's dimensions of the movement did not necessarily dovetail neatly. The overwhelming majority of the visible workers have been, and now in the NSM continue to be, white middle-class Americans. Some of the Latinx activists, such as those who guided Central Americans through Mexico to offer expedited and safer travel, conducted their work covertly. Among the most instrumental were refugees themselves who arrived with experience in grassroots activism but for practical purposes had to remain silent about their work.⁴² As such, conflicts developed between Central American women and US women when it came to organizing the Sanctuary Movement in Chicago. Many of the US women involved were influenced by (white) feminist activism of the day, and they strongly resented how men dominated strategy meetings despite the presence of more women in the movement. The US women suggested that they needed to have equal amounts of US and Central American men and women on the national steering committee. However, the Central American women reportedly refused to draw lines with respect to gender, believing that issues of gender should be kept out of the organization of the movement. The white, North American women perceived this conflict as one of gender issues and were dismayed to see that the Central American women "sided with the patriarchy." Central American women grew weary of US women's application of feminist

41 Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement*, 3.

42 Hector Perla, Jr., and Susan Bibler Coutin, "Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement," in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migrations, Citizenship and Social Movements*, eds. Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013), 73–91; González, "The Sanctuary Movement," 7.

ideals to organizational politics, citing larger issues at hand and expressing how they believed that whoever had the best ideas should be at the table. When lives were at stake, they believed gender parity paled in comparison.⁴³

Previously we have discussed how retelling the Sanctuary Movement to better center the voices and experiences of women and Latinx participants gives us a more accurate and truthful account of this movement. As we move into the latter half of this article, we emphasize how, given the obscured participation of women and Latinx activists in the 1980s movement, Latinas in particular would become the most unlikely leaders to emerge. Fittingly, as we will see, foregrounding Latinx actors in the New Sanctuary Movement necessarily means putting Latinas at the forefront of the movement.

LATINA SANCTUARY LEADERS IN THE NEW SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

In the following section, we lay out cases that offer various models of Latina immigrant leadership in the NSM. From 2006 to today one can quite visibly observe several examples of Latinx and immigrant sanctuary leadership. The public profiles of these cases observed below challenge models of leadership that necessarily privilege positions derived from social and/or cultural capital. Given the vulnerable position of immigrants, especially that of sanctuary seekers, the stakes of contestation are heightened between sanctuary seekers and the swift and punishing hand of the deporting state. We maintain that while the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy made it nearly impossible for sanctuary seekers to receive stays of removal, his draconian policies unintentionally emboldened Latinx seekers to speak up, lead, and resist on an unprecedented scale.

Elvira Arellano

Elvira Arellano's case caught the public's attention, putting the NSM on the map. Arellano, an undocumented Mexican woman, was working at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago until stricter immigration regulations post 9/11 led to her arrest in an INS (Immigration and Naturalization Services) sweep of employees at the airport in 2002. She was sentenced to three years of probation and given notice of deportation. However, because she had a son who was born in the US and thus an American citizen, she appealed to stay in the US with her child. By 2006 Arellano had officially expended all of her resources and in August of that year took sanctuary at Adalberto United Methodist Church. During her time in sanctuary Arellano became an outspoken advocate for

⁴³ Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary*, 87–89.

immigrant rights, particularly for the rights of undocumented parents. Her influence and message attracted a national audience as she co-founded La Familia Latina Unida (the United Latino Family), which lobbied Congress to offer aid to children who would otherwise be separated from their parent(s). Arellano's case, then, was in large part able to go as public as it did because of the well-established foundation of Latinx activism already in place in Chicago.⁴⁴

Arellano, like most sanctuary seekers in the NSM, had been in the US for quite some time. This demographic shift changed the stakes of sanctuary practices to prioritize families already rooted in the United States rather than recently arrived refugees. From Arellano's case, we learn how the NSM would foreground the importance of family and motherhood both to garner support and in an attempt to wrest religious public discourse on family away from the religious right. Her advocacy for undocumented parents facing separation from their children put her in a position to draw on her identity as a mother. For example, when asked why she kept fighting to stay in the US, she replied "It's wrong to split up families. I'm fighting for my son, not for myself. It's a matter of principle. I don't want him treated like garbage. I am a mom and a worker. I am not a terrorist."⁴⁵

This motherhood-centric language coupled with the fact that she was taking sanctuary in a church, which in and of itself bore strong religious significance, positioned her to relate to sacred matriarchs, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. Throughout her time in sanctuary, Arellano drew on the trope of sacred motherhood in order to present herself and her cause in a favorable light to the media and the public. Luis D. León explains, "the idea of sacred motherhood, symbolized by Guadalupe, resonates throughout Mexican culture."⁴⁶ To be sure, the sacrality of Marian motherhood (as reinforced through her various apparitions) animates Latin America's diverse religious landscape, both on a regional and transnational scale. Importantly, the Virgin Mary more generally is also a figure recognizable to a larger American Christian audience. Because Arellano embraced the language of motherhood, not only was she speaking to multiple cultural Christian sensibilities, she was also using the rhetoric of family values that is commonly seen as exclusive to the political right in the US. By shifting the narrative of immigrant

44 The background of Latinx organizing that helps launch these sanctuary movements is worth noting though it is beyond the scope of this study. For more, see Walter L. Coleman, *Elvira's Faith and Barack's Challenge: The Grassroots Struggle for the Rights of Undocumented Families* (Ann Arbor, MI: Wrightwood Press, 2016); Cole, "People Who Mattered." Yukich offers the idea of "midwife movements" that birth sanctuary in Los Angeles. See Yukich, *One Family Under God*, 82.

45 Arellano quoted in Cole, "People Who Mattered."

46 Luis D. León, *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 78.

rights to frame it as an issue of sustaining family values, she had turned the discussion to keeping mothers and their children together and away from the vague economic threat of immigrants “stealing American jobs” (which also unintentionally gendered the immigration debate). Arellano leaned into this association and began to make appearances with the symbol of La Virgen de Guadalupe (or other Marian imagery) nearby or in the background.⁴⁷ Such gestures placed the religious dimensions of the revived movement in the foreground. Thus, in the NSM, discourses of family and motherhood would enter the terrain of the religious left. To study the role of women in the sanctuary movement necessarily involves a consideration of the symbolism and rhetorical suasion of sacred motherhood, as sanctuary-seeking impacted entire families.

THE METRO DENVER SANCTUARY COALITION AND THE PEOPLE’S RESOLUTION

Arellano is one of two sanctuary leaders to be named in *TIME* magazine’s esteemed list of People Who Mattered. The other sanctuary leader also sought sanctuary herself.⁴⁸ In terms of media coverage and mobilizing sanctuary activism, Jeanette Vizguerra stands out as a unique example for her leadership since Trump’s election. In fact, Vizguerra entered sanctuary a month after Trump assumed office. Due to the precarity in which she navigated everyday life, Vizguerra had a plan for what she would do if she were to receive a deportation notice. In an online video, she described what it meant for her to take sanctuary in the calculated way that she did:

My name is Jeanette Vizguerra. My experience being here, though the harshness that comes with being in a confined space, has been good because I have a space where I can be safe, where my children can visit me, and where we can spend time together. It doesn’t surprise me because I founded sanctuary. I created it and made it knowing that there would come a time when I would need it and the time has come ... It is a type of peaceful resistance (pacifism), a peaceful protest, that at the same time tries to bring about change in the system.... I’ve been doing interviews, through various forms of communication with people from Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, all over Mexico, France, Singapore.⁴⁹

47 Amalia Pallares, *Family Activism: Immigrant Struggles and the Politics of Noncitizenship* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 38–61; on the NSM’s appeal to family, see Yukich, *One Family Under God*, 92–119.

48 America Ferrera, “Jeanette Vizguerra,” *TIME*, April 19, 2017, <https://time.com/collection/2017-time-100/4736271/jeanette-vizguerra/>.

49 Unicorn Riot, “Jeanette Vizguerra: Life in Sanctuary,” YouTube video, March 31, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FP7e5OfapPg>.

Vizguerra's immigration case had been known by the local courts since 2011, but from 2011 to 2017 she was able to secure various types of stays. Having been an activist for labor and immigration rights for well over 20 years, she had a feeling that she might eventually be targeted. She was unable to attend the *TIME* 100 Gala in April 2017 in person to accept her award. Rather, she accepted her certificate from within the walls of the church, where she had taken sanctuary two months earlier. Vizguerra had stayed in sanctuary for three months in 2017, and on March 15, 2019, the same day her stay of removal expired and was not renewed, she re-entered sanctuary at the First Unitarian Society.⁵⁰

Vizguerra's public platform should inspire us to reflect critically and carefully about what we mean by leadership. Here we have a case similar to Arellano's in which an activist has been mobilizing the immigrant and Latinx working-class community for change for years, proving herself repeatedly as a capable activist leader and organizer beyond immigrant causes.⁵¹ As Latinas have increasingly become the face of the movement, they also challenge the glass ceiling that is present in so many Latinx churches when women's leadership is challenged or altogether rejected. American religious activism, as far as immigrant rights are concerned, has taken shape with women at the helm.

Vizguerra's work in Denver has left an indelible mark on the NSM. The Metro Denver Sanctuary Coalition clearly credits Vizguerra for "work[ing] tirelessly to identify and open the first congregation's doors in 2013 and 2016" and "sharing her story and inviting faith communities to live our values and fight alongside immigrants facing deportation."⁵² As was the case with Arellano in Chicago, today, one cannot render fair treatment of the NSM in Denver without discussing Latina immigrant labor. In fall 2017 (while Vizguerra was out of sanctuary), four Latinas in sanctuary launched the People's Resolution. Rather than only seeking a stay of removal, they set forth to advance much larger immigration reform goals. Together the four Coloradans, Sandra López, Ingrid Latorre, Araceli Velázquez, and Rosa Sabido, formed one of the most robust sanctuary platforms to date. The People's Resolution declared:

50 Elizabeth Hernandez, "Jeanette Vizguerra once again takes sanctuary in Denver church as she sues ICE to block her deportation," *The Denver Post*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.denverpost.com/2019/03/15/jeanette-vizguerra-sues-ice-denver/>.

51 *The Denver Post*, "Jeanette Vizguerra leaves sanctuary; Arturo Hernandez Garcia also gets stay of removal," YouTube video, May 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qty_iko2Ijk.

52 Metro Denver Sanctuary Coalition, "About Us," accessed May 31, 2021, https://www.metrodenversanctuary.org/about_us.

As we gathered our communities together, we identified a hunger to name the concrete steps elected officials can take now to Create a path to Status. The Sanctuary Four began consulting with lawyers, immigrant and faith communities to pull together simple, direct steps at the federal and state level to keep Colorado whole and strong. The People's Resolution is the result of five months of work and study.

We know a majority of fellow Coloradans, regardless of political party, support creating a path and revamping our immigration system to be just, efficient and transparent. We invite Coloradans to walk with us to Create a Path. Endorse the Resolution and commit to action. Learn more and join us in engaging your local elected officials, businesses and faith communities.

The Resolution calls on the Colorado delegation, the Colorado legislature and the Governor to take steps now. Our families and communities will not wait. We know Congress can create an immigration system that values the tapestry of our communities, the unity of our families and our humanity by creating a pathway to citizenship for all undocumented people.⁵³

The People's Resolution's call then proceeds to outline points for Congress, the Colorado Legislature, and Colorado's Governor to respond to. These points include creating pathways for Temporary Protected Status holders and others to obtain legal residency, asylum-seeker protection, requests for ICE agents to act constitutionally, and pardons for those criminalized by recent immigration laws.

Resolutions drafted from within sanctuary seek to address from a personal perspective the conditions of sanctuary seekers as well as the larger policy issues which imperil sanctuary seekers and undocumented people more generally. The People's Resolution's call for action addresses pressing policies head-on and represents one of the most comprehensive Sanctuary Movement platforms. From within the safety of sanctuary, Latinx sanctuary seekers may use their voices in ways that they might not be able to otherwise. The women of the People's Resolution demonstrate how the safety of sanctuary functions as an incubator of Latinx activism. Sanctuary, then, is not only a protection from deportation. Especially in recent years it has also given those in the public margins a platform squarely in the center of the public discourse. Sanctuary amplifies one's voice in the forum of America's debate on immigration. Direct testimony offers a compelling way to change hearts and minds of the general public (a primary goal of the NSM) by inspiring empathy and humanizing the immigration debate.⁵⁴ Because of the importance of their testimonies, sanctuary seekers are essential to the movement. After all, what is sanctuary without the sanctuary seeker? Journalists

53 "Home," The People's Resolution, accessed September 3, 2021, <https://peoplesresolution.org/index.html>.

54 On the goals of the NSM, see Yukich, *One Family Under God*, 39–67.

and scholars would do well to begin describing sanctuary seekers as leaders, a title not accorded as some courtesy designation but based on realities unfolding in houses of worship throughout the US.⁵⁵

If faith without works is dead, as many Christian theological discourses suggest, then new sanctuary seekers demonstrate a vivacious faith in their patience and labor, especially as it pertains to the making of sacred space. The amplified voices of Latinx sanctuary leaders remind us of the politics of sacred space.⁵⁶ Through their rituals of labor and the construction of a more robust counter-narrative to the Trump administration's policies, they, in word and deed, are elevating the sacredness of sanctuary. Sanctuary-seeker and leader Ingrid Latorre called for "esas personas que viven en oscuridad, que no tengan miedo a esta administración" (those people who live in the shadows, to not be afraid of this [the Trump] administration). Latorre and the other sanctuary seekers are well aware of the peril they put themselves in, but, for them, sanctuary provides an unusual, seemingly inviolable sacred platform.⁵⁷ The Trump administration fined those, like Latorre, who had been ordered to leave, but who instead chose to resist by remaining in sanctuary.⁵⁸

The heightened contested nature of sanctuary has garnered even more attention in recent years. For instance, prominent Latinx politicians have responded to Latinx sanctuary seekers. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez briefly visited Latorre in sanctuary in late September 2019.⁵⁹ A month later Julian Castro met with Edith

55 For an example of immigrant women-led NSM activism for Sanctuary Philadelphia, see the work of Peruvian-born Blanca Pacheco and Mexican-born Carmen Guerrero on the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia official website, <https://www.sanctuaryphiladelphia.org/>; Sabrina Vourvoulias, "Carmen Guerrero: From survivor of kidnapping to Philadelphia immigrant leader," *Generosity*, June 29, 2019, <https://generosity.org/philly/2019/06/29/carmen-guerrero-from-survivor-of-kidnapping-to-philadelphia-immigrant-leader/>. In a late-2020 article Barbara Sostaita shares the story of sanctuary seeker Juana Luz Tobar Ortega who, since 2017, has provided counsel to individuals contemplating on whether to take sanctuary. See Barbara Sostaita, "Escape Bound: Juana Luz Tobar Ortega's Fugitive Poetics," *Southern Culture* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2020): 56.

56 David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, "Introduction," in *American Sacred Space*, eds. David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

57 *Boulder Daily Camera*, "Peruvian Immigrant Ingrid Latorre Speaks About Her Sanctuary Situation in Boulder," YouTube video, July 5, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SBvywhd3wE>.

58 Saja Hindi, "Colorado immigrant seeking sanctuary imposed penalty for not leaving the United States," *The Denver Post*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.denverpost.com/2019/07/03/colorado-immigrant-sanctuary-ingrid-encalada-latorre-ice/>.

59 Conor McCormick-Cavanagh, "AOC, Neguse Visit Ingrid Encalada Latorre in Sanctuary Church in Boulder," *Westword*, September 22, 2019, <https://www.westword>

Espinal in Clintonville, Ohio, ahead of the Democratic presidential debate at Otterbein University,⁶⁰ both politicians heard the stories of the sanctuary seekers and resolved to tackle the nation's broken immigration system. In fact, in late December 2019, Colorado Governor Jared Polis officially pardoned Ingrid Latorre, which allows for her immigration case to be reopened.⁶¹ Amid the COVID-19 pandemic the Denver Sanctuary Movement continued to protect and fight for undocumented immigrants.⁶² Both in outspoken public ways (like Latorre and her testimony), as well as in less visible modes still central to resistance (like providing domestic support), Latinas are leading.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the local examples of Latinx leadership in the Sanctuary Movement, Latinas have led regional and national organizations that support the efforts of the NSM. In her capacity as the official Sanctuary Communications and Organizing associate for Church World Service, Myrna Orozco developed coalitions across the country to provide training and resources for those engaging in sanctuary work.⁶³ Lutheran pastor Dr. Alexia Salvatierra of Fuller Theological Seminary led the Los Angeles area Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE) from 2000 to 2011 and later became the first director for a statewide alliance that supported the NSM and other immigrant rights efforts.⁶⁴ As “la madrina” (the godmother) of the NSM in Los Angeles, she co-founded Matthew 25/Mateo 25 and has served as a public intellectual for the Sanctuary Movement and broader pro-immigrant organizations and movements.⁶⁵ We draw attention to Orozco and

.com/news/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-joe-neguse-visit-ingrid-encalada-latorre-in-boulder-church-11489807.

60 Jack Jenkins, “Castro visits woman taking sanctuary in a church,” *Religion News Service*, October 15, 2019, <https://religionnews.com/2019/10/15/castro-visits-woman-taking-sanctuary-in-a-church-other-dem-candidates-voice-support/>.

61 “Colorado Governor Pardons Woman Who Took Sanctuary to Fight Her Deportation,” *Democracy Now!*, December 24, 2019, https://www.democracynow.org/2019/12/24/headlines/colorado_governor_pardons_woman_who_took_sanctuary_to_fight_her_deportation.

62 Metro Denver Sanctuary Coalition, <https://www.facebook.com/metrodenversanctuary/>.

63 “Contact Us,” *Church World Service*, accessed May 31, 2021, <https://cwsglobal.org/about/contact-us/>.

64 On CLUE's involvement with immigrant rights and sanctuary, see Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, *God's Heart Has No Borders: How Religious Activists Are Working for Immigrant Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).

65 On her philosophy of religious organizing, see Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Hetzel, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* (Downers Grove,

Salvatierra by way of conclusion to emphasize that Latina leadership in the NSM ranges from local leaders who have sought sanctuary in churches to leaders of national and regional coalitions.

Latinx leadership and legacies in the Sanctuary Movement from 1980 to 2020 proved to be robust and widespread. If we continue to ignore their work and fail to record the current leaders in critical moments such as now, we run the risk again of perpetuating a story that neglects not only individual people, but also broader understandings of leadership as maternal, as resistance, as subterfuge, as non-white. The clandestine nature of sanctuary practice (especially in the 1980s) necessarily means that many names of courageous seekers whose experiences shaped sanctuary will not be recovered, largely because they were never recorded, the individuals only used pseudonyms, or such privileged information was never intended for the public's eye.⁶⁶ To argue that the Sanctuary Movement is a movement of white religious leaders denies historical agency to those who moved through clandestine networks. If we hew to traditional models of leadership and canonical stories of the movement, the myth that the Sanctuary Movement is a movement without immigrant leaders will continue to control the narrative of its history. When we continue to advance this myth after the clear documentation that this article sets forth, we unintentionally silence the stories of Latinx and immigrant leaders.

In an open letter to then president-elect, Joseph Biden, sanctuary seekers from all over the country described the harm they had experienced in the past few years under the Trump administration which had "tried to turn sanctuary into an offensive word." Sanctuary activists nevertheless remained steadfast that "at its very core, sanctuary represents resilience and human dignity," and thus outlined several immediate steps the Biden administration should take to alleviate the burden placed on sanctuary families.⁶⁷ It is with this resilience and

IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014); select articles authored on the NSM authored by Salvatierra include, "The New Sanctuary Movement," in *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration*, ed. Miguel De La Torre (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 163–167; "Do Not Neglect to Show Hospitality: Sanctuary and Immigrant Justice," in *Liberating Bible Study: Scholarship, Art and Action in Honor of the Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice*, eds. Laurel Dykstra and Ched Myers (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 198–203; and "Welcoming the Stranger: Faith Communities and Immigration," *Boom California*, January 3, 2018, <https://boomcalifornia.org/2018/01/03/welcoming-the-stranger-faith-communities-and-immigration/>.

66 On the clandestine nature of white US and Latin American women's work in the sanctuary movement in the 1980s, see Golden, "Sanctuary and Women."

67 National Sanctuary Collective, "Open Letter to VP Biden – Carta Abierta a VP Biden," <http://thesanctuarycollective.org/open-letter-to-vp-biden-carta-abierta-a-vp-biden>.

human dignity that sanctuary seekers have stepped into their roles as leaders, as demonstrated in the National Sanctuary Collective's press conference held within a week of President Biden's inauguration. The "sanctuary leaders," as described in the video, all hailed from Latin American countries and shared stories to speak of a new, albeit precarious, life in the United States. Within the networks of sanctuary, the toils and testaments that sanctuary seekers encounter do not go unnoticed, occasioning a rhetorical shift in how movement leaders see these immigrants as co-leaders in the struggle. These leaders banded together via video to plead their cases not just as individuals in sanctuary but as "families." Some appealed to Vice President Kamala Harris's understanding as a mother and others to Biden's role as a father, all in hopes of communicating their plight in sanctuary and the toll it has taken on their families.⁶⁸

The whitewashing of the Sanctuary Movement, no doubt, is partly a product of journalism and scholarship that has maintained a patriarchal image of leadership.⁶⁹ Such accounts have focused on the leadership of sanctuary providers rather than sanctuary seekers and thus reinforce a power differential between the two. Rather than preventing further inquiries, the overabundance of historical (and current) materials centering the sanctuary providers instead ought to occasion scholars of American religious traditions to ask questions against accepted categories that—perhaps inadvertently—reinforce asymmetrical representations. The whitewashing of the movement's history has further endured due to an uncritical acceptance of the notion that it was a non-Latinx white Protestant-led project, a critique that seemingly does not look beyond the optics of the movement. Yet worse, such critiques of the movement's ostensible whiteness perpetuate the erasure of Latinx sanctuary leaders. Take the many masked sanctuary seekers, for example, who traveled to various parts of the country to share their testimonies and move people to action, but due to the imminent danger to their lives, could only afford to speak anonymously and often with their faces covered. To suggest that they did not lead would be to gainsay how they educated and inspired future sanctuary providers and sponsors to join them in their critique of the US policies that uprooted them in the first place. If it is difficult to imagine the movement's success without their testimonies, why deny their critical role in the framing of the whole movement?

68 Free Migration Project FMP, "National Sanctuary Collective January 26, 2021 Press Conference," YouTube video, January 29, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESKNbuwr-RE**&feature=youtu.be_.

69 Such reconceptualization of leadership offers a more legible reading of the foundational role of women. See Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement*; Cunningham, *God and Caesar*, 107–110; Golden, "Sanctuary and Women"; Sostaita, "Escape Bound."

The optics of the movement notwithstanding, Latinx leaders in recent years continue to lead, sharing their testimonies before cameras and for audiences willing to hear. I (Lloyd) reflect back on a sanctuary service I attended on October 21, 2019. As I stood in line at the First Church of Amherst (Massachusetts) to participate in the ringing of the church bell 733 times to represent the number of days that Lucio Perez had been in sanctuary up to that point, Perez stood phalanxed by family and friends from his Latino Pentecostal church in Springfield. Together they marched up to the bell to commence the sounding out of what all those observing could only hope would be a stay of removal.⁷⁰ His position at the front of the line reminded me that Latinx actors in many cases sound the bell to call attention to injustices against immigrants. And it is precisely their liminal position and voices in the public margins of sanctuary that we, as scholars of American religion, ought to pay closer attention to. How will these Latinx sanctuary leaders' legacies ring in the future?

70 Perez, surrounded by his family and friends, celebrated his exit from sanctuary on March 13, 2021, during an outdoor rally held at the First Church of Amherst. For a video of the rally, see "Lucio Perez ends sanctuary in Amherst," *WWLP-22News*, <https://www.wwlp.com/news/local-news/hampshire-county/watch-live-lucio-perez-ends-sanctuary-in-amherst/>. Perez has been among dozens of those to finally leave sanctuary since Joseph Biden took office and local activists have successfully appealed cases of sanctuary seekers.