

## **Churches to shelter illegal immigrants**

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### **Body**

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**Churches** in five U.S. cities plan to protect **illegal immigrants** from deportation, offering their buildings as sanctuary if need be, as they pressure lawmakers to create a path to citizenship for the nation's estimated 12 million **illegal immigrants**.

This month, a Catholic **church** in Los Angeles and a Lutheran **church** in North Hollywood each intend to **shelter** one person, and **churches** in other cities may do so in coming months as part of the "New Sanctuary Movement."

"We want to put a human face to very complex immigration laws and awaken the consciousness of the human spirit," said the Rev. Richard Estrada of Our Lady Queen of Angels Catholic **Church** in Los Angeles, where one **illegal immigrant** will live.

Organizers don't believe immigration agents will make arrests inside the **churches**.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has not tried to arrest Elvira Arellano, an **illegal immigrant** who has lived at a Methodist **church** in Chicago since August. Her son is a U.S. citizen.

Agency spokeswoman Virginia Kice noted agents had the authority to arrest anyone violating immigration law.

Anti-**illegal**-immigration groups called the sanctuary effort misguided.

The faith groups "don't seem to realize that they are being charitable with someone else's resources, and that's not charity," said Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which favors limits on immigration.

"We are talking about **illegal immigrants** taking someone else's job, filling up the classroom of someone else's child," he said.

The sanctuary effort is loosely based on a movement in the 1980s, when **churches** harbored Central American refugees fleeing wars in their home countries. Organizers of the current movement include members of the Jewish, Muslim, Catholic and other faiths.

Participating **churches** in San Diego, Seattle, Chicago and New York won't initially house **illegal immigrants**. Instead, leaders will provide legal counsel, accompany them to court hearings and prepare plans to house them in **churches** if authorities try to deport them.

The first to receive refuge in Los Angeles will be a single father from Mexico who has two children who are U.S. citizens, said the Rev. Alexia Salvatierra, executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, an interfaith association spearheading the national plans.

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STLtoday.com/current Should **churches** provide sanctuary for **illegal immigrants**? Talk about it in Current Affairs.

## Graphic

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### PHOTO

PHOTO - At a news conference Wednesday, Elvira Arellano, an **illegal immigrant** living at a **church** in Chicago, speaks by phone to an **immigrant** at a Los Angeles **church**. The Associated Press

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