



UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK DECLARES ITSELF A SANCTUARY SEMINARY

Students, Faculty, Staff, Administration and Board of Trustees Stand Together to Adopt Sanctuary Protections

NEW YORK, NY - APRIL 10, 2017—Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York continues to speak out against the Trump Administration's xenophobic anti-immigrant policies, issuing a third official statement since the US Presidential Election of November 2016. While the two previous statements expressed condemnation and concern, today's statement declares Union as a "Sanctuary Seminary" and charts clear measures the 181-year-old seminary is prepared to take to ensure the safety and success of its students, faculty, staff, and community members. This declaration was initiated by Union students and has been formally approved by both its Board of Trustees and faculty. It stands as a testament to Union's longstanding commitment to inclusion and diversity and is as outlined as follows:

Union Theological Seminary has a long tradition of taking public positions on matters of pressing political importance and grave theological concern. In light of recent policies and statements issued by the Donald Trump administration threatening massive deportations, dangerous anti-immigrant policies, and travel bans targeting immigrant, refugee, and Muslim communities, we feel compelled by our religious convictions to declare Union a sanctuary seminary.

For decades, communities of faith and grassroots movements have enacted their commitment to radical hospitality through the sanctuary movement. By declaring Union a sanctuary seminary, we join this movement and stand in solidarity with those affected by the injustices of deportation, criminalization, incarceration, enforcement, and family separation. We applaud the institutions of higher education across the country who have responded to the current threats by adopting immigrant rights policies.

However, our reason for taking this position is different from other institutions in one important and distinct way: we are compelled by our deeply-held religious and theological beliefs to take this position and resist policies that seek to destroy vulnerable communities.

As a historically Christian seminary, we have long affirmed the fundamental integrity of each human life, rooted in our belief that all people are made in the image of God. We also affirm the profound interconnectedness of all planetary life, and we believe we are called to enact these beliefs by affirming and protecting life in all that we do. These beliefs include embracing practices of radical hospitality, solidarity, and ethical accountability with respect to all our neighbors and, particularly, the most vulnerable communities.

The present immigration and refugee policies contradict our theological stance in that they build upon and lift up long-standing legacies of white supremacy, imperialism, and institutionalized forms of violence that are death-dealing and destructive, and as such, blasphemously contradict our commitments. By declaring sanctuary, we commit to stand against these policies and follow a different, life-giving path. We encourage seminaries and communities of faith across the country to join us in actively listening to and follow the leadership of those harmed, and join their movements to resist these policies and affirm life.

In response to the present hostile immigration environment, the following eight declarations summarize Union's specific intentions as a Sanctuary Seminary:

1. We publicly denounce all US federal, state, and local policies that promote draconian migration "walls," detention, and deportations of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.
2. We will work against all forms of violent and unjust international and US foreign, domestic, ecological, and economic policies that create refugees, asylum seekers, internationally displaced persons, and unwanted displacements of people around the world.
3. We commit to challenge all forms of religious, xenophobic, and racially motivated hatred that undergirds destructive immigration actions and policies.
4. We will provide additional support, to the fullest extent we can, for Union's international and immigrant students and the families of students, faculty, and staff as they navigate an extremely precarious and hostile immigration system, including legal advice and advocacy, and, when needed, accompaniment to immigration proceedings.
5. We will continue to encourage all qualified immigrant students to enroll, and we will support their attendance by providing undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students with equal access to our financial aid and scholarship funds. This policy includes using available funds to fill gaps created by discriminatory laws that exclude immigrant students from accessing ordinary financial aid and scholarships on equal footing with other students

and prohibits any form of housing discrimination.

6. We join universities and colleges across the nation in advocating for the continuation of DACA and other immigration-affirming educational policies.
7. We will refuse all voluntary information sharing with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs Border Protection (CBP) and other enforcement institutions to the fullest extent of the law, in all aspects of Seminary life. This policy includes not using e-verify, and prohibiting campus security from inquiring about an individual's immigration status, enforcing immigration laws or participating with ICE/CBP in actions and raids.
8. We will use Union's resources to encourage, support, and host trainings for other theological institutions and religious communities who wish to understand the current immigration climate and may seek to declare sanctuary status.

In today's threatening environment, we humbly recognize that our resistance is a work-in-progress. These issues are inherently intersectional, and our understanding of their complex interconnections grows daily and requires ever new and creative responses from us. We are committed to the project of actively listening to and following the leadership of those who have been harmed or are in harm's way.

We do not take this responsibility lightly. We firmly proclaim that Christian obedience to God, the flourishing of human community, and the greatest power of all—love—requires that we meet these injustices with resistance.



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