Frequently Asked Questions
Sanctuary Renewal Project
Dover Friends Meeting

1. Is Sanctuary necessary now that President Biden has been elected?

The dynamics that created the Immigration system and the factors that fuel the immigration tragedy are still in place and gaining momentum. The underlying causes of the immigration crisis—violence, privation, and population movements due to climate change are ongoing and deep-seeded. The Immigration system has been built by both Democratic and Republican administrations over several decades, so President Biden’s election does not on its own resolve anything. Unfortunately, at this time, there doesn’t seem to be the political will in Congress to overhaul the system.

2. Isn’t this too much money to spend on a very few individuals served?

Dover Friends have a leading that is both pastoral and prophetic. We feel an imperative to offer mercy and refuge on an individual level. But, there’s more. At a prophetic level, we are called to challenge the current system. The Sanctuary movement stands as a living alternative to detention and deportation that is spiritually grounded and community based. The testimony of our actions paves the way for greater change exemplifying a more humane response to the immigration crisis.

3. Is Sanctuary the best way to address the Immigration Crisis? Couldn’t the funds be better spent to help immigrants become more “productive” citizens?

Our primary call is not to be a social service agency, although that is also important. Our primary call is to provide refuge and respite for people seeking safety from deportation which would return them to violence and peril, especially state-sponsored violence. This is a matter of life not livelihood.

Money is but one lens to use in understanding this endeavor. We have received intangible benefits which are deeply important to us. There is the warm fraternity and fellowship we experience as we stay ‘round the clock with guests in Sanctuary at the meeting house. Through this work, we see and feel, and others affirm, the transformational impact it has had on our circle of Friends. Dover Friends are coming to know each other, as Thomas Kelly wrote, “in the things that endure.” This is changing us. We sense impacts on the community around us, too. We cherish the blessings of the good will for our meeting and Quakerism, in general, accorded to us by our broader community as they see us live out our leading.

4. Won’t the neighbors be upset if we are harboring “dangerous” people?

Our guests in Sanctuary are not dangerous just because their legal status may be unclear. Dover Friends offer Sanctuary of both place and time. Our first guests in Sanctuary required several
weeks, safe from the threat of deportation, to establish their legal case as asylum seekers. People in Sanctuary have accompaniment 24/7 and remain inside the meeting house to assure their safety.

The presence of our guests is actually a gift to us. Sanctuary creates an opportunity for dialog across difference. We come to a deeper, collective wholeness as brothers and sisters in the human family. When we are present to the reality of their lives, encountering the fullness of their humanity, we are invited more fully into our own humanity. We draw near that of God within these people who recently were strangers and feel the Love and Truth of it.

5. **Will the Sanctuary Renewal Project wreck the meeting’s budget?**

The leading to offer Sanctuary is rooted in the meeting. It is not in competition with the meeting and its orderly operation, but needs to be held in a mindful balance with it, as a flowering of that Life in the Spirit. Sanctuary Renewal depends on a vital and sound meeting for its energy, guidance, grounding, and financial sustainability.

It is our experience that living into a leading brings abundance and grace in ways that are often surprising. As we embrace Spirit’s creativity and guidance, we both release a false sense of control and enter a partnership where we carry some responsibility. We listen for how we are called to give according to our measure. It is in that dynamic complementarity of both yielding to Spirit and stepping up to offer our resources that we move along the faithful path.

There is also risk in not following this leading or any leading that is given. The purpose of a Quaker meeting is to open us to the divine and to respond in faithful ways to what we find there, together. The danger in not following true leadings is that we ebb out the spiritual vitality in our core purpose and thereby diminish our keenness to perceive what is being asked of us. We run the risk of becoming spiritually numb and complacent.

6. **Isn’t Sanctuary just another form of detention?**

Unlike detention, Sanctuary is a choice. And, it is a fruitful choice that powerfully opens the way for the gifts of community and groundedness in Spirit to come forth. It makes a space for many other elements of liberation and dignity to emerge, as well. Life in Sanctuary supports increased agency such that guests may tell their story, to know and be known. They participate in creating a better world through living a humane alternative to the detention and deportation system. Thus, they may sense that their life is endowed with a larger meaning and purpose. The choice of Sanctuary also brings with it fellowship, spiritual accompaniment, hope, and at best the love that casts out fear.