

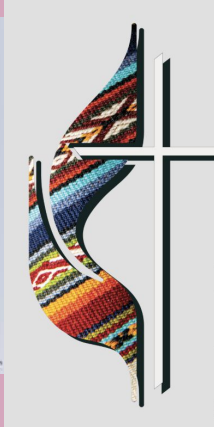
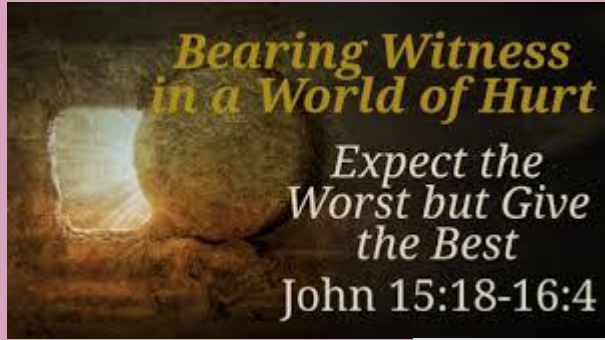
Responding Faithfully to ICE activity in our Communities

UMC CLERGY TRAINING

FEBRUARY 20, 2026



Some Underlying Convictions



We have a biblical and gospel mandate

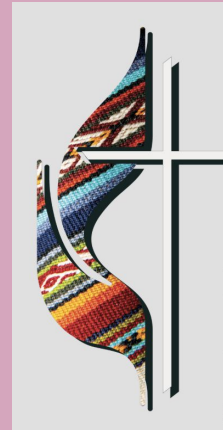
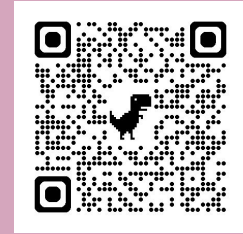
- **to acompañar our immigrant neighbors responding to the challenges of increased immigration enforcement activity.**
- **To bear witness to our opposition on theological and moral grounds to current immigration policies through public acts of solidarity, service, and protest.**

My sources/training.

- SiembraNC—primary partner with Western North Carolina Conference UMC in Charlotte.
- Mennonite Central Committee.
- A variety of Immigrant Support Networks in the DMV.
- El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministry

El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministry

- Four of us attended a 3 day training in North Georgia with delegations from there, Western North Carolina, Tennessee/Western Kentucky.
- An *acompañamiento* model: aimed at decentering the white experience and institutional concerns so that immigrants themselves provide direction.
- Goal to identify and work with 10 congregations in Virginia.



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Some Basic Facts



- We are all human beings, God's beloved. There is no us or them.
- There is a global migration crisis: poverty, oppression and political violence, climate change.
- The documentation process is difficult and the system isn't adequate to the migration crisis.
- Immigration violations are civil not criminal offenses.
- Immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than citizens
- Among those being detained and deported, 77% do not have criminal records.
- All have constitutional rights to due process.

Preparing

your churches
&
it's ministries.

for Immigration Enforcement



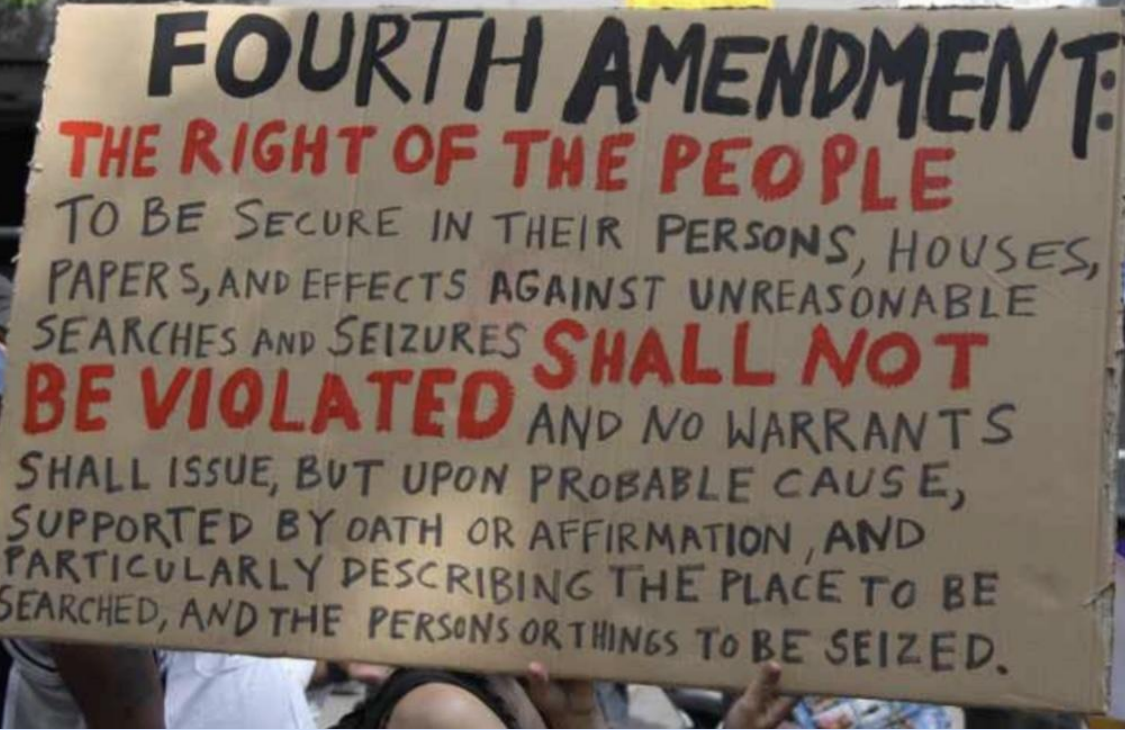
Especially important if....

- Your congregation includes immigrants or people of color.
- You have ministries that bring immigrants or people of color into your space.
- You share your space with immigrant churches/congregations.
 - Lydia Munoz (Director, El Plan for Hispanic/Latine Ministry UMC) on white churches hosting immigrant community churches: “If you are not prepared to protect them and work to make them safe, don’t host them.”
- Your church hosts any training preparing people to respond to immigration enforcement.



Immigration Enforcement and “Sensitive Locations”

- After 2011, ICE recognized churches, hospitals, schools, demonstrations, and social services as “sensitive locations” where enforcement was limited.
- That was a matter of policy and not law.
- THE POLICY ENDED IN JANUARY OF 2025
- Still, churches like everyone else have 4th Amendment Rights.



1. Prohibits searches and seizures without probable cause.
2. Requires a warrant. (Judicial, not administrative.)
3. Warrant must be specific-naming places, materials, and/or persons.

LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS
CAN LEGALLY SEARCH A
BUSINESS, OR CHURCH, OR
OTHER INSTITUTIONS

IF YOU GIVE THEM
PERMISSION!!!!

What to do (the basics)

- **Develop a plan together**
- **Designate “private” space and post appropriate signage.**
- **Designate and prepare leadership for interaction with immigration enforcement agents (and documenting/filming).**
- **Inform and educate your congregation.**

Which Space?

- **Offices, classrooms, and fellowship halls.**
- **Your entire building.**
- **Your entire building AND your parking lot.**

Signage

ATTENTION LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENTS

**NO WARRANT
NO ENTRY**

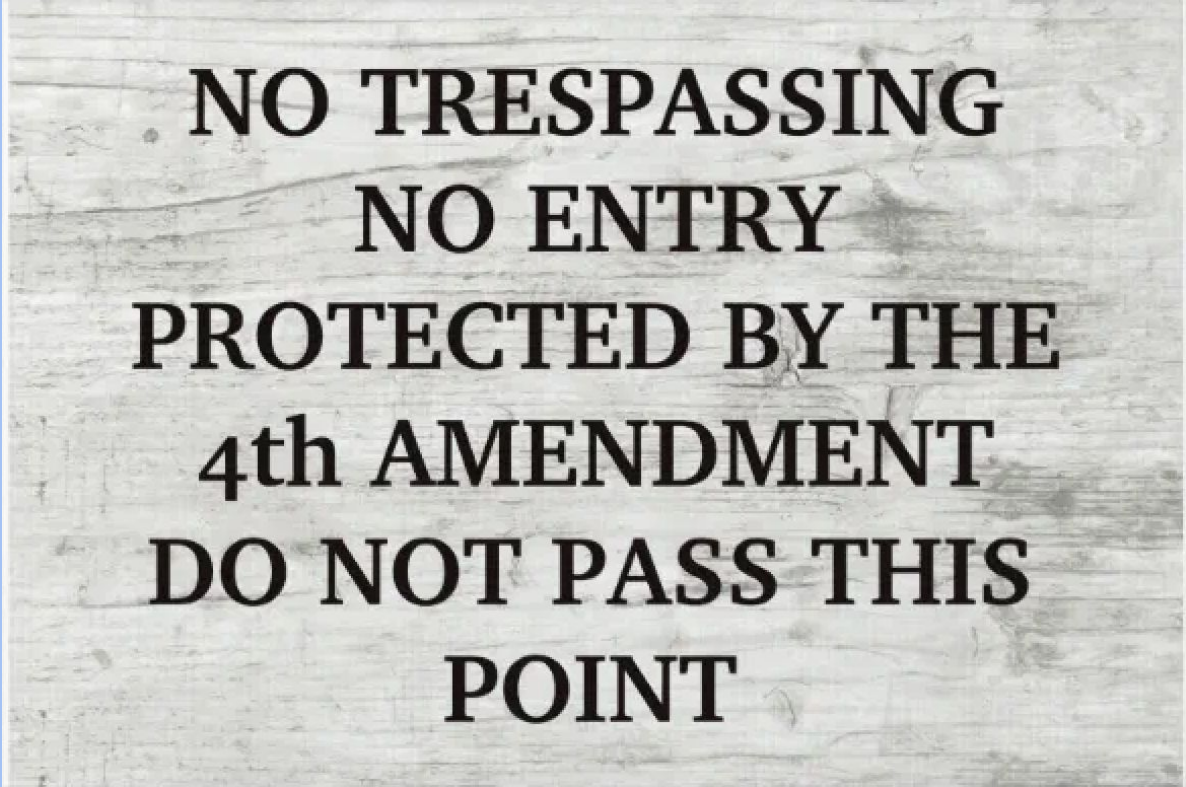
**THIS IS A
4TH AMENDMENT WORKPLACE**



**DEFEND &
RECRUIT**



Signage

A rectangular wooden sign with a weathered, light brown surface. The text is written in a bold, black, serif font, centered on the sign. The sign is set against a solid light blue background.

**NO TRESPASSING
NO ENTRY
PROTECTED BY THE
4th AMENDMENT
DO NOT PASS THIS
POINT**

Space and Signage: The Arch Street UMC example

- Identifies itself as a “A justice-seeking, reconciling, sanctuary congregation.”
- Believes that signs (like their rainbow ones) do pastoral work by announcing its space as safe.
- Regards their entire property as “private.”
- “This is a place of peace; ICE may not enter here without a judicial warrant.”



Signage: A Deeply Theological Proposal

Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

All who seek peace with God and their neighbors are welcome here without regard to race, culture, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic level, or immigration status.

**AS A PLACE OF PEACE, ICE MAY NOT ENTER
HERE WITHOUT A JUDICIAL WARRANT.**

Interaction with immigration enforcement agents.

- Decide who will be authorized to interact with ICE agents.
 - Definitely, should include senior pastors
 - Others from your leadership team. (Laity? Ushers? Greeters?)
- Those who will interact should train and prepare for interaction.
 - A prepared speech that reflects the churches' and the leaders' values and theology.
 - It should be strong, and clear in stating boundaries, but not confrontational.
 - It should be rehearsed and role-played: Preparation gives confidence and composure to avoid compliance.
 - Preparation is pastoral care.
- Those who document/film should be trained.



Inform and educate your congregation.

- The theological, legal, and practical basis for your plan of action.
- Their right to “remain silent” and the importance of limiting interaction with enforcement agents.
- Suggest that ALL members avoid contact with ICE, or even declare their citizenship
- What those designated for interaction will say and do.

Advice to Churches from the Mennonite Central Committee

PLAN POSADA



- ❑ If any law enforcement agents arrive, the entire congregation commits to NOT answer ANY question from agents.
- ❑ On cue, we commit to start with hymns to God during the ENTIRE time they are present.
- ❑ This creates the dilemma of who will get tired first, us of singing and worshipping God or them harassing the congregation.
- ❑ Sandra will ask agents to exit the premises and to show a WARRANT SIGNED BY A JUDGE. She will also mention that because of our faith and beliefs, we do not accept firearms in the premises.
- ❑ We commit that if we have to do a lot of hymns/songs, we will sing each hymn louder and louder.

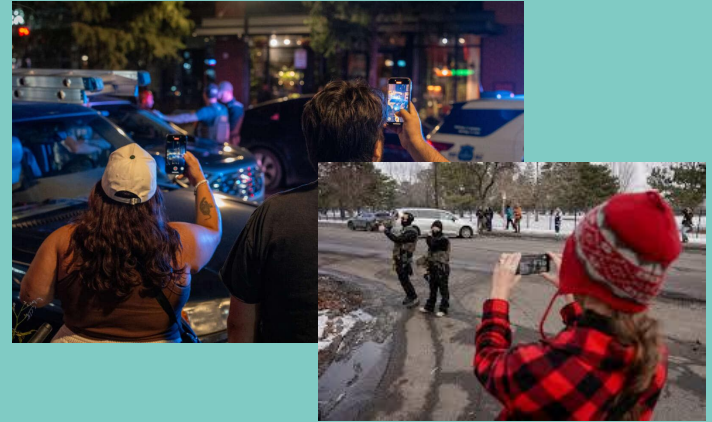
Witnessing and filming enforcement activity

- Help your congregants to do it safely and effectively.
 - In the streets and at your church



Some background

- It has become a key aspect of resistance to immigration enforcement.
- Many, including in your congregations, are feeling called to it.
- It can be dangerous (both legal and physical jeopardy) though training helps.
- It may be most useful as part of a rapid response network connected to immigrant communities. (Verifiers)
- Find out if networks exist among the immigrant communities with which you are connected.

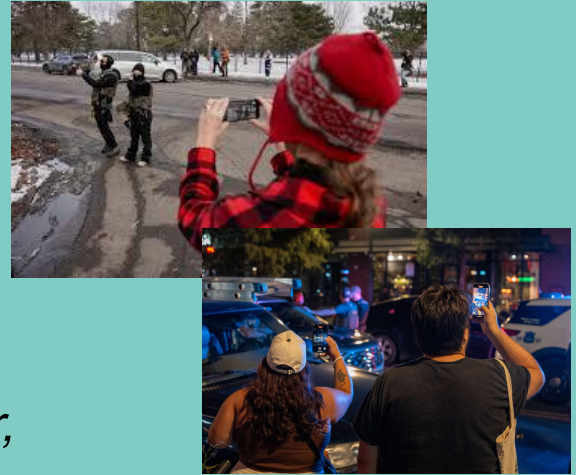


It's value even in the absence of a developed RRN.

1. Creates accountability in moments where it's usually absent.
2. Preserves evidence when rights may be violated.
3. Reduces fear through calm, informed presence
4. Supports community education and preparedness

- This role is quiet but powerful: *memory keeper, witness, translator of reality.*

- (THE MORAL WITNESS: TRIALS AND TESTIMONY AFTER GENOCIDE, CAROLYN DEAN.)



Key ideas about filming.

- It is your right to film, as long as you do not interfere.
- Should be done in pairs: one filming; one documenting.
- Film openly and comply with any instructions while affirming your rights.
- Keep your camera focused on law enforcement not those being questioned or detained.
- Capture details related to documents, weapons, badges, uniforms, context
- Don't stop and start recording. One uninterrupted video file is best.
- If there is violence, remain calm and focus on the violence.
- Don't reveal anything about the person being detained.
 - BUT IT IS IMPORTANT TO LEARN THE IDENTIFY IF DETENTION/ARREST IS CERTAIN.
- ICE may not take your phone or erase what you've recorded, but they may try.
- Use a 6-digit code numerical code which is protected.
- ICE may not respect your rights so assess your own risk.

Basis de-escalation strategies.

- **Stay Calm:** Model calmness with a quiet, steady tone of voice and a neutral facial expression.
- **Respect Personal Space:** Maintain a safe distance from agents.
- **Use Non-Threatening Body Language:**
 - Keep hands visible and open, not clenched or in pockets.
 - Adopt a relaxed, alert stance, potentially off to the side rather than head-on.
 - Avoid sudden or excessive movements, pointing fingers, or folding arms.
- **Avoid Provocations:** Ignore challenging questions or insults.

Do these standard de-escalation strategies also apply?

- **Listen Actively:** Give the agent your full attention and allow them to vent without interruption. Nod and paraphrase.
- **Show Empathy and Validate Feelings:** “I understand this is stressful for you and that you have a difficult job. I’m only trying to document not interfere.”

Personal Risk Assessment

- **Think hard about the risks of serving as a verifier.**
- **Think hard about what risks you are willing to assume.**
- **Reassess your personal willingness as the situation changes and you develop experience.**
- **Think always about how to de-escalate. Remember our commitment to non-violence and safety.**
- **There is no shame in realizing and saying “I can’t do this!”**

Personal “Character” or “Personality” Assessment

- **How do you typically respond in situations of stress or when triggered by violence or confrontational behavior?**
- **Are you able to remain calm in a situation of stress?**
- **Can you avoid the temptation to respond “in kind?”**
- **What emotional, psychological, or spiritual resource do you have help you be a calm de-escalator.**
- **There is no shame in realizing and saying “I can’t do this!”**



The Range of supportive activities

Speaking up: defending the dignity of immigrants in conversations with friends and neighbors.

Preaching Up: on the basis of our biblical and gospel mandate to welcome the stranger and protect the vulnerable.

Advocating for appropriate legislation

Providing concrete service or support to immigrant communities: rental assistance, accompanying children to school, delivering groceries, donating to culturally appropriate food banks, etc.

Volunteering with organizations that serve immigrant communities.

Organizing and/ or Participating in Public Demonstrations demanding an end to indiscriminate enforcement

Distributing “know your rights” information in immigrant communities.

Mustard Seed Grants

WELCOMING THE STRANGER IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE U.S.

Maria Chavalan Sut, a refugee fleeing violence in Guatemala, found sanctuary and was a beneficiary of a Mustard Seed Migration Grant at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Photo: Courtesy of Maria Chavalan Sut

UMCOR's Mustard Seed Migration Grant program encourages U.S.-based United Methodist churches to engage in community-based ministries with migrants and refugees in their midst.

