

WINTER
2017

Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH



**A Sanctuary
Is More
Than a
Building**

A LIGHT ACROSS THE RIVER

A moonless night.

A rowboat ride, about a mile, across an icy current toward the glow of a lantern on the far side of the river. Someone waiting there will be your next conductor. They'll guide you to a safe house as the Underground Railroad carries you north.



The river crossing from Kentucky, a slave state, to Ohio, a free state, was a risk that many hundreds of black fathers, mothers, and children took in the decades before the Civil

War. The people who ferried them across shared in their danger and their courage. One of these was Arthur Gragston.

When he was a young man, enslaved to a Kentucky family named Tabb, Gragston heeded a call to help others flee to freedom. The first time he took someone across the Ohio River was

probably the most frightening. Gragston told an interviewer many years afterward that when he reached the Ohio shore, two men sprang out of the night and seized the young woman who was his passenger. Then one of the men grabbed his arm. But the man was an ally. He wanted to know if Gragston would like something to eat. "If he hadn't been holding me, I think I would have fell backward into the river," Gragston recalled.

For a slave running to freedom, the escape plan had to go just right and you could not do it all on your own. You

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Illustration from a painting by Allen Schwartz, courtesy of the John P. Parker Historical Society.

The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

uua.org/tapestry

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would need to sneak away and find the riverbank meeting place. Your boat driver would need to be very, very sure where and with whom to leave you on the Ohio side, because the journey was not over yet. Anyone who escaped from a Kentucky slave owner still faced peril in Ohio. As a fugitive, you might be pursued, captured, punished, and possibly killed by white people.

Another Underground Railroad conductor was John Parker, born into slavery in Kentucky. Trained as an ironworker, as a young man he worked for wages to purchase his own freedom. Then, he settled across the river in Ripley, Ohio and built a home and an iron foundry that supported his family. Now Parker was in a position to offer sanctuary to others. Many times, he made the boat trip Arthur Gragston had made, but in reverse, leaving Ohio to pick up passengers in Kentucky and give them temporary shelter with his family.

Thousands of black Americans escaped slavery in the care of Underground Railroad conductors. To keep escape routes and safe houses secret, the passengers and conductors kept few written records of their dire adventures. While some conductors and some dramatic escapes are well known, we may never know the scope of this story, nor the names of everyone involved.

Sticker Shock!

A Safe Space, Ally, or Safe Zone Sticker is a way to announce that you are willing to be “home base” for someone who feels threatened. Many organizations make stickers you can put on your notebook, your locker, or outside your house.



Create a sticker.

Who could you provide safety to?

What will your safe sticker look like?

EXPLORING TOGETHER



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Sanc-tu-ar-y: Many of our congregations have a room we call a sanctuary. When we gather there for worship, we feel peaceful inside ourselves and connected with others. The word “sanctuary” comes from “sanctus,” a Latin word for “holy.” Over time, “sanctuary” has come to mean a safe place where someone can go to avoid being bothered or harmed.

A Blessing Can Make It So

The All Souls congregation in New London, Connecticut, bought a house next door to their church. It is a place for refugee families to live when they first arrive in the U.S.

The Rev. Caitlin O’Brien, the Associate Minister, led children of the congregation to find out what the house needed to welcome a family. The answer: everyday cleaning supplies. The congregation’s members pitched in to buy paper towels, brooms, baskets, and more.

A group of middle-schoolers brought the items to the house. They took the time to bless the rooms. Forming a circle, they said:

May the family that gathers here find rest, safety, good food, love, and laughter at this table.

May we be good neighbors as they find their way.

Then they moved silently through the rooms, touching doorways and chairs with a blessing for the family that was about to move in. The blessings made the house a sacred invitation, from people to people.



Middle-schoolers used their minds, hearts, and hands to ready a safe living space for a refugee family; photos by Sean Elliot.

Make us aware we are
a sanctuary
Each made holy and
loved right through.
With thanksgiving,
we are a living
Sanctuary anew.

— lyrics by the Rev. David Ruffin to “Sanctuary,” a hymn by Randy Scruggs and John W. Thompson

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How Does It Feel?

Safety is like food and sleep: a basic need for all humans (and animals!). We may not notice safety when we have it. But when we’re not safe, we notice! Our bodies have ways of acting out fear. We might feel a rush of anger that makes us want to fight. We might move fast, without even thinking of where to go.

What happens in your body when you are afraid?

What happens when you are NOT afraid?

■ Make a blanket fort under a table or behind a chair. If a worry or an argument upsets you, go to your blanket fort for a little while. Take a deep breath to cool down and chill out in a safe place.

■ Play a game of tag. On “home base,” players are safe. Recharge yourself to get back in the game.

■ Go to an outdoor sanctuary. It can be a bird or wildlife sanctuary that protects animals. It can be simply a cozy spot under or in a tree. You make it a sanctuary by coming for peace, quiet, and safety. Being in nature can feel very holy indeed.

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The Ultimate Sanctuary: A Church

Many Americans are immigrants to our country. If you aren’t an immigrant, surely you know one. That person may be worried about whether they will be allowed to stay in the U.S.

Perhaps someone’s mother or dad is an immigrant who lacks the paperwork to legally live in this country. At their job, even at home, that person could be stopped by police, arrested, and sent away. But, a religious congregation is a safe zone, like “home base” in a game of tag. A person at risk can take refuge in a church.

Who lives in a church to gain sanctuary? A person with COURAGE and PATIENCE. They must stay on the congregation’s property until a court of law declares they can stay in the U.S. They cannot go home or to work. Sometimes children stay with their parent in sanctuary. More often, children sleep and



eat at home and attend school as usual, and only visit their parent.

A church can give more than physical protection. Volunteers may prepare meals, do laundry, or take care of a pet so the congregation’s guest can have as normal a life as possible. People donate money and speak publicly to help the guest’s

immigration become legal.

When a church offers sanctuary, some members may find it inconvenient. A guest now sleeps in a room that is usually a classroom or uses the kitchen and bathroom that everyone shares. It’s important to remember that it is not just our buildings that provide sanctuary, but also our hearts.

We believe that everyone must be treated with dignity. We believe in justice. Being UU means using our actions to show love.

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All Beings Need Safety to Thrive

By Mandy Neff

First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is part of an interfaith group offering sanctuary to a family facing deportation. Our congregation provides round-the-clock volunteers every Wednesday at a neighboring church where the family is staying.

It can be challenging to explain to children what we are doing, and why. We might start a conversation about sanctuary by helping them imagine what it would feel like to be safe all the time.

A few years ago, at an Audubon wildlife sanctuary, I went for a hike into the woods with a tour guide who taught us how to feed the birds. She gave us a little bit of birdseed and had us lift it up, hands out flat. A chickadee came and landed right in my hand! The bird was amazingly light. Its feet were a bit tickly. It stayed longer than I expected, eating and then seeming to enjoy sitting with me, in light filtering down through the leaves of tall oak trees.

The birds there had been protected from hunting and other dangers. They had always been fed from people's outstretched hands. They weren't afraid of us at all. They had learned to come close to people for gentleness and food.

Though my own yard has many bird visitors, I'd never experienced anything like this. The birds I had seen eating crumbs on city streets seemed jumpy, flying away at little disturbances. It got me thinking about how differently we can feel and behave—how we can relax, be calm, connect with others, and thrive—when the right conditions of safety are met.

This can be just as true for people as for birds, and it is something children can understand.

It was a real gift to have that chickadee sit on my hand.

Mandy Neff is the Director of Religious Education for First Parish in Cambridge, Mass., in Harvard Square.



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Talk about how love and goodness can come to us when we are safe.



Help children identify ways other people make them safe, maybe by buckling a car seat or speaking gently to them.



Brainstorm actions your child can take to help others feel safe.



FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

- First-hand accounts from John Parker and Arthur Gragston can be found online. Also, access *The Underground Rail Road* (1872) by William Still. A free black man who personally led people north and coordinated routes and networks to help others, Still describes many dramatic escapes.
- Organizations that promote “safe zone” allyship to support LGBT youth include GLSEN, Human Rights Campaign, and Teaching Tolerance. See their websites for information.
- The Love Resists pages on uua.org promote an expanded Unitarian Universalist concept of “sanctuary” for the times we live in. Many congregations, often with interfaith partners, house immigrants resisting deportation. Many use Black Lives Matter banners and public vigils to lift public awareness that all are not equally safe. More than 250 commit to environmentally sustainable practices through the UUA Green Sanctuary program.