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## ENGAGING IN THE WORK OF REPAIR: RESPONSIBILITY ETHICS AS A GUIDING MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO MIGRATION

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### **Abstract**

As the world faces climate change, war, and other violence, migration has become an ever present reality. Conflicts over how to respond abound, yet too rarely have we sufficiently considered the history of how we got here and how that history might shape a just response. Building on the work of theologians who have focused on a more relational understanding of migration ethics, this paper offers a responsibility ethics framework, paired with reparative justice, as a way forward. This framework is offered especially to Churches and other Christian groups as a tool for considering how to respond to migrants in their midst. Through this framework, Churches are encouraged to follow the lead of migrants, to take on a posture of learning in order to more fully understand the history and present reality of migration, and to aim for radical solidarity through which more just relationships might be built. The U.S. Sanctuary Movement of

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the 1970s and 80s is offered as an example for how Churches might go about putting this framework into practice in their own contexts.

**Keywords:** Migration; Migration Ethics; Migration Policy; Reparative Justice; Responsibility Ethics; Sanctuary Movement; Solidarity

In the late summer of 2021, the world is once again facing sharp conflict over how to handle the mass migration of people, this time refugees seeking to flee Afghanistan in the wake of the United States' decision to withdraw from the country after 20 years of war. This situation draws clear attention to a topic that is often at the heart of immigration discourse and debate: responsibility. That the U.S. decision to withdraw has so directly caused the current wave of attempted migration creates fairly straightforward questions about what responsibility the nation might have to take in Afghan refugees. Beyond this, however, reflecting over the last 20 years of conflict in the region, as well as the decades that lead to that conflict, we are prompted at this time to consider a broader understanding of U.S. responsibility. How have U.S. actions in Afghanistan contributed to the reasons people are migrating around and out of the region? What impact, if any, should this have on the way we understand migration and what ethical immigration policy might look like?

Conversation and debates about immigration are commonly dominated by certain narrative frameworks; predominantly communitarianism and cosmopolitanism. In the field on immigration ethics, communitarianism is characterized by the defence of state sovereignty and law and order. Often this is perceived as the best way to protect human rights. Cosmopolitanism prioritizes a sense of global community and common human dignity. Proponents of cosmopolitanism are likely to be in favour of more open immigration policies in an effort to protect the human rights of all people. In recent scholarship, however, there have been shifts, placing a sharper focus on relationality and responsibility. Sometimes referred to as the "third way," these approaches move us beyond the communitarian and cosmopolitan frameworks. Without ignoring the important values and concerns the communitarian and cosmopolitan frameworks draw attention too, they are concerned instead with the ways we are in relationship with one another, as citizens and migrants.<sup>1</sup> Understanding these relationships better gives rise to a

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<sup>1</sup>See for example, Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Cosmopolitan Patriots," in *For Love of Country?*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Joshua Cohen, Boston: Beacon Press, 2002; William O'Neill, "Rights of Passage: The Ethics of Forced Migration," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, 1 (Spring/Summer 2007); David Hollenbach, *Driven from*

different set of questions and allows us to consider migration ethics from a different angle. In line with this shift, my own work in migration ethics proposes responsibility ethics as a helpful framework for taking seriously the relationships between migrants and the nations to which they migrate. Such a framework provides tools for considering the history of how these relationships have developed, how that history impacts migration patterns today, and what that means for creating more ethical responses to immigration.

A particular strength of this framework is that it lends itself to the practical. It takes the practical realities of relationships and considers what responding ethically to those realities might entail. This can be a helpful tool for nations considering policy, but also for groups and individuals considering their own roles on a smaller scale. Therefore, this paper offers a responsibility ethics approach to migration, rooted in biblical notions of reparative justice, as a framework Churches, Christian organizations, and all people of faith may use when considering how to properly respond to migration. It does so by briefly outlining the contours of a responsibility ethics framework for immigration, demonstrating why this approach is helpful for considering migration from the standpoint of relationships and history. Next, it grounds the responsibility framework in a biblical understanding of justice as relational, considering the vital question of how relationships might begin to be repaired in the aftermath of wrongdoing and arguing that the work of repair is the proper work of the Christian Church. Finally, it considers how Christians might engage in concrete action that moves the world toward accountability and mutuality, outlining four guiding principles for this work and using the sanctuary movement in the United States as an example for how this framework may be applied in the concrete. In doing so, the paper utilizes examples from the U.S. context in order to make the ideas proposed more concrete. The framework presented below, however, intends to be applicable beyond North America and the western world.

### **Responsibility Ethics**

Many scholars have documented the ways in which the actions of “host” nations have often contributed to the why and where of global

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*Home: Protecting the Rights of Forced Migrants*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010; Kristin E. Heyer, *Kinship Across Borders*, Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012; Tisha Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2017.

migration. For example, Saskia Sassen details the complex, cross-border dynamics of exclusion and expulsion that drive global migration patterns.<sup>2</sup> Juan Gonzalez has detailed the history of U.S. action in Latin and Central America, showing how the nation has protected its own interests at the cost of stability in many countries. This then contributes to the migration of Central and Latin American migrants to the United States.<sup>3</sup> David Bacon and Jaime Suchlicki have written specifically about how U.S. policy has driven migration from Mexico into the United States.<sup>4</sup> Marianne Heimbach-Steins considers the European context, noting the neo-colonial dynamics at play in migration into Europe. Colonialism, she argues, “[shaped] long term international relationships and lasting unequal opportunities” and access to resources.<sup>5</sup> Kristin Heyer identifies how neoliberal capitalist systems have produced massive global inequality, both within and between nations, often making migration necessary for those globalization has left behind or exploited.<sup>6</sup> A pattern emerges in which nations that have historically behaved in colonial or imperialist manners now see a high demand for immigration. The question, then, is what to do with this reality. How might knowing the ways the foreign policies of nations, like the United States, have contributed to the creation of migration patterns shape the ways we understand migration and, vitally, the ways we respond? A Responsibility ethics framework offers one path towards answering these vital questions.

Responsibility ethics considers the networks of specific relationships we participate in as human beings living in social and historical contexts to be important data that can and should inform ethical decision making. To that end, H. Richard Niebuhr maps out four pillars that together make up a responsibility ethics framework. First, all human moral action is a response to some other action or set of actions we have experienced. Our actions and choices do not exist

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<sup>2</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*, New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> David Bacon, *The Right to Stay Home: How US Policy Drives Mexican Migration*, Boston, Beacon Press, 2013; Jaime Suchlicki, *Mexico: from Montezuma to NAFTA, and Beyond*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Marianne Heimbach-Steins, “Migration in a Post-Colonial World,” in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, ed. Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014, 93.

<sup>6</sup> Kristin Heyer, *Kinship across Borders: A Christian Ethic of Immigration*, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012, 100–104.

in a vacuum, but rather take place within the context of multiple actions and reactions that are always informing our decisions and to which we are always responding.<sup>7</sup> Second, our responses are always shaped by interpretation, specifically our interpretation of that to which we are responding. We respond primarily based on how we understand actions upon us, whether or not that interpretation matches the intent of the actor(s). These interpretations are most often informed by the communities in which we take part.<sup>8</sup> Third, responsible actions must be accountable. This means we ought to consider the ways others might interpret and respond to our actions before we act. Moreover, after we have acted, we remain accountable. Responsibility, Niebuhr insists, “lies in the agent who stays with [their] action, who accepts the consequences in the form of reactions and looks forward in a present deed to the continued interaction.”<sup>9</sup> To stay with our actions in this sense does not mean passively accepting any response to them, but instead connotes a commitment to participating responsibility in the ongoing conversation in which our actions are situated. Finally, responsible action includes a sense of social solidarity. By this, Niebuhr means that all of our actions take place in the context of a vast and interlocking network of relationships.<sup>10</sup> We act responsibly when we take this seriously, and consider the broader impact our actions have on our direct and indirect relationships. In other words, we ought to have a grounded understanding of ourselves as part of a global community, and we ought to act out of a sense of responsibility to that community.

In summary, responsible moral action requires us to be conscious of the world around us and how we interpret and understand it. Responsibility ethics calls us to take seriously the various relationships in which we take part and consider how our actions have affected or will affect those with whom we interact. We are best equipped to make morally good decisions when we consider how our choices might be responded to, and when we act with awareness of the many networks of relationships within which we make choices.

Niebuhr’s four pillars are helpful for considering the moral adequacy of a nation’s responses to migration as they manifest in policy and discourse. As a citizen of the United States, for example, I

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<sup>7</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, New York: Harper and Row, 1963, 60–63.

<sup>8</sup>Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 63–90.

<sup>9</sup>Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 64.

<sup>10</sup>Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 62–65.

might consider the degree to which U.S. policy and discourse provide adequate understandings of and responses to the history of migration into the United States. If we view U.S. history in light of Niebuhr's framework, we can see that the nation has, through its actions at home and abroad, participated in an ongoing conversation, a series of actions and reactions that have contributed to many of the reasons people migrate as well as to the specific paths they take. According to Sassen, Gonzalez, and others, the United States has repeatedly failed, by Niebuhr's standards, to adequately consider the ramifications of its actions, and it has failed to be accountable for those ramifications. At its worst, this takes the form of exclusionist policies and draconian border enforcement, viewing most if not all migration as an attack or a threat. Even some of our most well intended responses, however, also often fail to grapple fully with U.S. culpability. Calls to protect human dignity or to welcome the stranger name important values to which humanity ought to strive, but miss the specific role the United States has played in creating the situation we now find ourselves in and the direct responsibility the nation therefore has, separate from how we ought to treat all people.

By shifting focus towards these dynamics, responsibility ethics provides a framework for considering migration from the standpoint of human relationships and the relationships between nations and people. Highlighting U.S. responsibility for the creation of migration patterns moves the conversation forward. Moreover, this approach is consistent with a thickly Christian articulation of justice. Tisha Rajendra's approach to biblical immigration ethics can illuminate this more fully. Rajendra shows that in the Bible, justice is rooted in specific relationships, especially Israel's relationship to God. Therefore, biblical justice is understood best as concrete fidelity to the demands of specific relationships. It is about being accountable to those with whom we are in relationship, and about fostering good relationships with them based on the concrete needs of those specific relationships. Furthermore, God's will for Israel includes a specific relationship of responsibility between themselves and migrants because of their common experience of being foreigners. Israel is to treat the foreigners among them well so that they do not become like Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Their specific history dictates the contours of their relationship to migrants going forward. Biblically speaking then, justice, and specifically justice to migrants, entails fidelity to specific histories and the concrete details of specific relationships. Rajendra

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<sup>11</sup>Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens*, 94–109.

calls attention to a dynamic we see throughout the Bible. A major preoccupation for biblical writers is how we are to live in right relationship with one another, and how we are to live in right relationship with God. And, crucially, these writers are often concerned with what happens when these relationships are broken, when we have not related well or justly. How might we repair our relationships with God and with one another when we have neglected or abused those relationships? If we take seriously the ways in which migration is part of an ongoing conversation, a response to U.S. actions, then we must understand that our responses to migration either perpetuate unjust relationships or move toward justice.

In this vein, philosopher Margaret Urban Walker argues for what she calls “reparative justice.” Reparative justice can be understood as a specific part of the process of transitional or restorative justice. Walker contrasts it with Aristotelian corrective justice, which holds that people who have been wronged may demand some sort of restitution from those by whom they were wronged. While not disagreeing with the principle, she argues that on its own corrective justice fails to adequately address the lack of mutuality and accountability that often exist in relationships between wrongdoers and those they harm. The problem is not only the harm itself, but also an inability to access adequate channels through which one might be compensated or otherwise gain redress. Too often, this lack of access has been systematic, part and parcel of systems of law and order that benefit some at the expense of others.<sup>12</sup>

For example, Gonzalez outlines the ways in which U.S. efforts to protect and promote its own economic and political interests in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala created chaos and violence that eventually led to massive immigration to the United States. The 1970s and 1980s saw a huge increase in Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants fleeing to the United States, a direct result of U.S. actions that destabilized the region.<sup>13</sup> The United States responded not by taking responsibility for its role in creating the conditions under which so many people felt migration was their best option, but instead by denying the overwhelming majority of Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees the asylum they sought.<sup>14</sup> By 1980, 500–1,000

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<sup>12</sup>Margaret Urban Walker, “Making Reparations Possible: Theorizing Reparative Justice,” in *Theorizing Transitional Justice*, ed. Claudio Corra de i, Nir Eisikovits and Jack Volpe Rotondi, London: Ashgate, 2015, 217–219.

<sup>13</sup>Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 75–76, 135–138.

<sup>14</sup>Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 131.

asylum seekers from Guatemala and El Salvador were being deported each month.<sup>15</sup> A power imbalance existed between the United States and the people of El Salvador and Guatemala, allowing the United States to act in its own interests while leaving the people it harmed with few ways to hold the nation accountable for its actions. In response to this, many Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants made the decision that it was better to avoid border patrol and bypass legal forms of entry they had largely been barred from, instead entering the country undocumented. In response, the United States adopted harsher border enforcement policies aimed at curbing the increase in undocumented migration.<sup>16</sup> In the language of responsibility ethics, the United States acted irresponsibly at a number of stages. First, by promoting its own interests in Central America with little regard for the impact this would have on local economies, politics, and ways of life, the United States failed to be in a mutual relationship with nations and people beyond its borders. It further failed to adequately anticipate the consequences of its actions or the responses those actions were likely to create. The instability and violence fostered by U.S. decisions eventually led to a wave of migration, to which the United States again failed to respond in a responsible manner. Instead of taking accountability for its role in the situation, the nation tightened its borders and denied migrants pathways to safety and security.

This is one example of the United States' failure to live in just, reciprocal relationship with other countries, a reality that can be seen throughout the nation's history and into today. It becomes clear that U.S. action has created concrete, structural inequalities. Certainly, though, the United States is not alone in this. This pattern has been repeated across the globe, with migration often following on the heels of foreign policy that fails to adequately consider or take responsibility for its potential consequences. With Walker, then, we can begin to see that tangible reparations that establish accountability must be a non-negotiable component of justice for migrants. Walker argues that reparations can signal a commitment to developing accountability and reciprocity where these have previously been absent or neglected. The goal is to begin rearranging the material and structural conditions of society so that those who have lacked

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<sup>15</sup>Rachel Ida Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," *Radical History Review* 2019, 135 (2019) 14–42, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-7607809>, 27.

<sup>16</sup>Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire*, 139.



adequate access to redress when wronged have real reason to believe their situation will be different moving forward.<sup>17</sup>

Moving forward after harm has been caused, then, is not only about addressing the harm itself, but about establishing some form of tangible accountability. In the wake of U.S. actions in their home countries, Salvadoran and Guatemalan migrants were owed compensation, but more pressingly were in need of a way to hold the United States accountable for the harm it had caused them. This is the point of reparative justice. Reparation can be monetary, if establishing some sort of economic equity helps establish mutuality and makes accountability more accessible. Reparations can also, however, come in the form of changes to policy or other moves that might ensure greater mutuality moving forward. In the wake of the violence and unrest perpetuated by its own actions, the United States might have offered reparations in the form of more open migration policies. Clear, reliable paths through which migrants unsettled by U.S. actions might enter the United States would offer a step in the direction of mutuality and accountability.

Policy changes, however, will not and cannot be the whole solution, and are unlikely to happen without broader, more grass roots societal shifts. Tejana theologian Neomi De Anda argues that undergirding the types of imperialist foreign policy that sow chaos and create the conditions for mass migration is “the logic of domination.”<sup>18</sup> This pattern of thinking about and relating to other people goes beyond specific policy and actions and permeates every facet of society. This is a deep-seated, habitual way of relating to one another ingrained in us throughout our lives, often without our being aware of it. It perpetuates unjust relationships in which we seek to dominate and control each other. Niebuhr would say that these types of ingrained ways of thinking and behaving influence our interpretation of actions to which we are responding as well as what we conceive to be possible responses available to us. As moral agents, he argues, our responses “are guided largely by the remembered *a priori* patterns” through which we seek “to interpret each new occasion by assimilating it to an old encounter,” meaning that we tend to interpret and to respond in the ways we always have, the

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<sup>17</sup>Walker, “Making Reparations Possible...,” 218.

<sup>18</sup>“El Paso: One Year Later,” The Commonweal Podcast (podcast), July 31, 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, [https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/podcast/el-paso-one-year-later-part-1?utm\\_source=Main+Reader+List&utm\\_campaign=30516b100a-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_03\\_16\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_407bf353a2-30516b100a-91248421](https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/podcast/el-paso-one-year-later-part-1?utm_source=Main+Reader+List&utm_campaign=30516b100a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_03_16_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_407bf353a2-30516b100a-91248421).

ways we have learned to respond from our own past and from the history of our community.<sup>19</sup>

For De Anda, the logic of domination ought to be of particular concern for Christians as it is originally rooted in a particular interpretation of Genesis.<sup>20</sup> Christians therefore have a particular responsibility to create a more just situation for migrants by actively working to dismantle the patterns of domination that so often characterize our relationships. In other words, the work of repairing relationships is the proper work of the church. Jesus, after all, encouraged his followers to repair the broken relationship in their lives before offering gifts at the altar (Mt 25:23-24). Reconciliation and repair are deeply tied to worship, and to what it means to follow Jesus. Moving forward, then, we must consider what Christians might do to engage in this work.

### **The Work of the Church**

Responsibility ethics, grounded in reparative justice, offers both a call for Christians to engage in this work, and a toolbox for the work itself. This framework lends itself to being fleshed out in a variety of contexts, but a few basic principles should be consistent. First, and perhaps most crucially, all efforts to offer care and support for migrants and to build more just relationships should follow the lead of those migrants. No one knows the experiences and needs of migrants better than migrants themselves. Migrants have been working to carve out liveable spaces for themselves in the midst of global imperialism for decades. They are independent moral agents fully capable of dictating the terms of their own liberation. Those of us who are not migrants but who wish to offer support do well to remember that this struggle is not new, and that our participation is by invitation only. Churches and Christians may walk with migrants in this fight, but we must remember our place in it is not, primarily, as leaders.

Second, responsibility ethics highlights and takes seriously the role interpretation plays in moral decision making. As moral agents, we act based on how we understand the world around us. Acting responsibly, then, entails deepening our understanding of that world, especially that to which we are specifically responding. For migration, then, Christians ought to take on a posture of learning in order to understand the situation to which they want to respond.

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<sup>19</sup>Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 96.

<sup>20</sup>De Anda. Please give the bibliographical details.

Christian communities may ask themselves questions such as these: What is the history of our nation's foreign policy? How has that foreign policy impacted people beyond our borders, intentionally or not? Who are the migrants in our midst and at our borders, and what has the relationship between them and our nation looked like? Has it been just or unjust? What specific role has Christianity played in the past and what role is it currently playing?

Vitally, answering these sorts of questions will entail not only the perspectives of the potential host country, but also the perspectives of migrants themselves. How do they talk about and understand this history and the relationship between themselves and the host nation? How do they articulate the reasons they are migrating? Gaining a fuller understanding of the situation in this way will allow churches and Christians to act in a more responsible manner, driven not only by the narratives of our own communities and the ways we are used to responding, but instead by a more clear view of the full situation.

Third, responsible responses to migration must be forward thinking. Niebuhr calls us to act with a consideration of the potential impact of our actions, and to commit to seeing the ongoing conversation through. We act responsibly when we consider the type of world our actions are contributing to. We ought to act, then, with an understanding of what we should be building toward. First and foremost, of course, this vision must be driven by migrants themselves. We owe migrants the space to dictate their own futures and the terms of their own liberation, and we ought to follow their lead. In broader terms, though, Christianity contains a multitude of resources for considering the type of world we ought to aim towards and especially the types of relationships we are meant to create. If repair is the proper work of the church, we need to understand what, specifically, has been broken and what it might look like for the relationship to be better, more just. This requires a concrete vision of how the world ought to be.

Finally, responsibility entails radical solidarity. Niebuhr situates responsible moral action in the context of a global network of relationships. While we of course cannot act with a detailed awareness of every person on the planet, we can act with an understanding that the decisions we make and the ways we relate to one another ripple beyond our own immediate context.

Below, we will consider an example of how some people of faith responded to migration in ways that foreground these principles. This is offered not as a model to be replicated but as an exemplar

through which others might gain a more concrete understanding of what it can look like to take responsibility and engage in the work of repair. Though this specific example takes place in North America, it offers lessons intended to be helpful beyond that context.

### **Sanctuary: An Exemplar**

Above, we briefly considered how the United States contributed to a situation of violence and instability in Central America, prompting migration for which the nation largely failed to take responsibility. In the absence of national accountability, smaller grassroots responses rose up in which Churches played a vital role. In the 1970s and 80s, as awareness of the violence in Central America grew among the U.S. public, Church communities in the United States and Central America partnered together to found the Sanctuary Movement. Christians from the United States travelled to countries like El Salvador to observe and record the conditions of refugee camps and to learn more about the situations driving migration. Some also began crossing the border to help migrants safely enter the United States undocumented.<sup>21</sup> A network of more than 160 churches and community organizers facilitated the movement of several thousand undocumented asylum seekers around the United States. Some congregations offered their church spaces as homes to those denied asylum. Some aided migrants in gaining a platform from which to raise awareness of their situation.<sup>22</sup>

The sanctuary movement clearly demonstrates how the principles of responsible, reparative justice based action might take shape. By traveling to Central America to learn and observe, and by partnering with local Churches there, U.S. Churches demonstrated concrete ways in which migrants might be given the space to lead, as well as ways in which we can prioritize gaining a fuller understanding of the situation to which we wish to respond. Churches learned about the situation from migrants and others in Central America, and they partnered with communities on the ground in order to provide assistance that was needed and asked for, not their own notions of what would be most helpful. Furthermore, by working to provide platforms from which migrants might tell their stories, they allowed those most impacted to control the narrative rather than attempting to speak for them. Without a doubt, these efforts were imperfect, but they represent conscious efforts to forge more mutual relationships

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<sup>21</sup> Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," 27.

<sup>22</sup> Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," 27–28.

with Central Americans than the United States has historically been creating. They are steps in the right direction.

Sanctuary efforts also strove to build a community that was intentional in its border crossing, a rejection of the logic of domination exhibited by the United States. Citizens of the United States and of Central American countries worked together to establish open lines of communication, to spread information about abuses taking place in Central America, and to create safe ways to get migrants into the United States and in contact with the legal counsel they need.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the movement can be seen as an attempt to manifest a particular vision of how the world could be, if we honoured our relationships of responsibility and prioritized mutuality rather than exerting power and dominance. This is a vision explicitly grounded in Christian values, an effort to live out the vision of justice offered in the Bible, in which it is important to take responsibility for the specific relationships in which we find ourselves. Moreover, it was a vision for the future that worked to take seriously the needs and desires of migrants themselves. By creating cross-border relationships and establishing lines of communication, this movement strove to build towards a world in which Central Americans might have their voices heard and taken seriously in the United States, if not by the government, at least by a growing portion of the population. Again, this is not a perfect, final solution. A perfect world would likely be one in which people did not need to migrate, in which their right to stay was respected and nations worked towards truly shared interests rather than shoring up their own interests at the expense of others. But as individuals and communities, we can begin to take steps toward that world in the hopes that such a movement will grow.

The original sanctuary movement largely faded in the 1990s as the specific needs to which it responded began to fade. The vision of the movement, however, lived on. In 2007, in response to post-9/11 changes to immigration enforcement, a New Sanctuary Movement emerged. Drawing on the lessons and strategies of the original movement, Sanctuary in the 21st century is centred around the same basic practice of providing safe spaces for migrants under threat of deportation. In some cases, this has again meant housing migrants in church buildings. As of 2018, at least 50 different houses of worship were providing physical sanctuary to migrants facing deportation, with broader networks of churches and other organizations often

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<sup>23</sup>Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," 27-28.

supporting this effort.<sup>24</sup> Still, this new incarnation of sanctuary looks different. Volunteers are no longer crossing the border to help migrants enter the United States. Rather, they are offering housing, legal aid, and other support to undocumented migrants who are already in the country, responding to the threat of deportation that has grown steadily since the latter years of the Obama administration.<sup>25</sup> But the movement continues the legacy, moving the vision of the original movement into a new world and continuing efforts to build healthier, more just patterns of relationships. In the words of catholic theologian Leo Guardado “sanctuary actions are a positive force that begins to imaging and enflsh a more human community in the present.”<sup>26</sup> That is, sanctuary is one way of living into the belief that we can and ought to create more just patterns of relationship, and the development of the original Sanctuary Movement into the New Sanctuary Movement shows how this sort of forward thinking can continue to build towards a more just future, even as circumstances and needs change.

Finally, sanctuary efforts begin to create radical solidarity. Whether they travelled to Central America to learn about the situations, aided migrants in crossing the border undetected, housed migrants in their buildings, or otherwise supported their efforts, sanctuary volunteers entered into a space of shared vulnerability with undocumented migrants, placing themselves in direct, concrete opposition to U.S. policy and actions. Because of this, the movement was surveilled by the FBI, and in 1985-1986, eleven sanctuary workers were put on trial for their efforts. What this demonstrates is that true solidarity with migrants requires a willingness to become vulnerable in some concrete way. To a degree, sanctuary workers put themselves at risk by opposing the systems of law and order in the United States that they saw as harming migrants. Their vulnerability will never be the same as the migrants they accompanied, but it does represent a conscious choice to enter into the reality of another person in a meaningful way. We are better able to forge just relationships with

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<sup>24</sup>Buff, “Sanctuary Everywhere,” 30.

<sup>25</sup>Buff, “Sanctuary Everywhere,” 30; Arelis R. Hernández, “She was Supposed to be Deported, Leaving Three Children. Instead, she Hid in a Church,” *The Washington Post*, December 12, 2018, accessed December 12, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigration/she-was-supposed-to-be-deported-leaving-3-children-instead-she-hid-in-a-church/2018/12/12/7ecc4d06-fdc9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigration/she-was-supposed-to-be-deported-leaving-3-children-instead-she-hid-in-a-church/2018/12/12/7ecc4d06-fdc9-11e8-83c0-b06139e540e5_story.html).

<sup>26</sup>Leo Guardado, “Just Peace, Just Sanctuary,” in *A Just Peace Ethic Primer: Building Sustainable Peace and Breaking Cycles of Violence* ed., Eli Sasaran McCarthy, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020, 87.

those with whom we are in solidarity. Furthermore, concrete solidarity helps us take seriously the networks of relationships in which we act and the ripple of impact our choices can have. Churches that wish to respond well to migration in their own contexts might consider ways in which they can helpfully embody some of the risk faced by migrants in order to more fully build community with them.

### **Conclusion**

The development of the U.S. sanctuary movement offers an example of what it might look like, in a specific context, to respond justly to migration and to begin to repair the harm that global imperialism has caused. As the world continues to face conflicts over how to respond to migration, sanctuary movements may not always be the most fitting answer. Considering the ways in which sanctuary efforts worked, however imperfectly, as well as the principles it aimed to live out, presents a path forward for churches and Christians. Responsibility requires responding to the ways in which some nations, like the United States, have so often failed to create positive, just relationships with people and nations beyond their borders. Christianity has a role to play in this work, and examples like the Sanctuary Movement help show us how this work might be undertaken.