

On October 19, 2019 Kehilla held a dedication ceremony for our new sanctuary living space and bathroom, which will be used for immigrants seeking sanctuary or for temporary shelter for immigrant families who we are part of our accompaniment program. These are the remarks made by Julie Litwin at the event.

Welcome!

My name is Julie Litwin, and I'm a member of Kehilla's Immigration Committee and Sanctuary Task Force. I am grateful to be here with you today celebrating and blessing our almost-completed sanctuary living space and bathroom.

I was asked to speak briefly about how this sanctuary space came to be.

Kehilla first declared sanctuary during the 1980's within a year of our founding, when faith communities around the country were offering sanctuary to Central Americans fleeing US backed dictators and death squads in their home countries.

In this more recent iteration, a group of Kehilla members interested in working on issues of immigration justice formed a committee in 2016, and one of our first actions was to ask the Kehilla Board of Trustees to reaffirm Kehilla's commitment to sanctuary. The board unanimously approved an updated sanctuary resolution in November of 2016, which outlined various ways to provide support and welcome to immigrants in our community. At that time the board authorized the Sanctuary Task Force, under the auspices of the Immigration Committee, to explore the feasibility of offering sanctuary at Kehilla to immigrants facing deportation who need time and a safer place to be while fighting their immigration cases. After an in-depth process of research and discussion between the board, the spiritual leaders, Kehilla's executive director and the Sanctuary Task Force, the board passed a motion in March of 2018 in support of providing physical sanctuary in our building. Since that time, the Sanctuary Task Force and the Kehilla community have been working towards that goal, one aspect of which has been to create this lovely living space and bathroom for a sanctuary guest.

During these several years while we have worked on the logistics of providing sanctuary and creating a sanctuary space in our building, the Kehilla community has participated in other aspects of sanctuary work. Examples include our accompaniment, housing and sponsorship program, courtroom accompaniment, traveling to the border to volunteer in shelters and with legal groups, and organizing and participating in many political protests, actions and lobbying efforts. These experiences have helped us to learn much more about the profound traumas and challenges that many immigrants have experienced in their countries, on their journeys here, in detention centers, in immigration courts and in our communities. And, at the same time, we have had the opportunity to see the incredible love and courage and resilience that make immigrants such an asset to our country. Through this work, our commitment to sanctuary has increased.

The completion of this sanctuary space at Kehilla is a moment that has been a long time in coming. I am so happy and proud of what we've accomplished together. And yet,

even though I feel thrilled to bless and dedicate this beautiful space, I also feel sad and angry that there is a need for it and that now, more than ever, immigrants in our country who have come here seeking safety for themselves and their children are subject to hatred, criminalization, incarceration, separation from their family members, deportation and even death.

As I look at these new rooms, I am very aware that the completion of this sanctuary space is not the end of a process but only the very beginning of what may be a rewarding AND difficult AND complicated journey ahead of us. And I am aware that we are taking on a great responsibility. Having just experienced the introspection and collective soul-searching of the High Holy Days, I have been thinking about how to best approach that responsibility.

The blessing that I want to offer for this new space is that it will truly be a sanctuary and a place of comfort for our guests who make it their temporary home. I hope that our Kehilla community will be blessed with wisdom and patience and courage as we take the next steps and face whatever challenges arise. And I hope that our sanctuary work will continue to bring us closer together as a community and also bring us closer together with our friends, allies and partners in the greater community, who are also on this path with us working for a more just world.