FAQs for Congregational Sponsorship for Asylum Seekers  
August 2019

How is Asylum Sponsorship related to Eliot Chapel being a Sanctuary Congregation?

When Eliot Chapel voted to become a Sanctuary Congregation, we signed a Declaration of Sacred Resistance, in which we pledged to:

- Resist policies that target and deport millions of undocumented immigrants and discriminate against marginalized communities.
- Work alongside our friends, families, and neighbors to ensure the dignity and human rights of all people are honored and respected.
- Educate and activate our congregations, organizations and affiliate groups, to listen, amplify and respond to the voices of immigrant leaders, and to speak out against the discrimination of any and all marginalized people.
- Accompany our community members, congregants and neighbors facing deportation, and those impacted by detention, deportation, and family separation.
- Collectively be prepared to provide sanctuary to an immigrant and their family, providing them with a means to continue to resist their deportation while hosted in a safe space for their body and spirit, the ability to remain with their family and community, and a public platform to proclaim their prophetic message regarding just and humane immigration policy. Many of our congregations will participate in a supportive ministry to those able to offer sanctuary directly, and we firmly resolve to DO SOMETHING.

Supporting asylum seekers is one way we can work towards fulfilling our pledge.

What is the difference between Sanctuary and Asylum?

Both involve stepping up to act as advocates for immigrant friends wishing to gain the right to remain in this country — but there are crucial differences.

- Sanctuary is a last-ditch effort for an immigrant without legal status to stay in the U.S and allow for their legal team to continue the legal process to overturn their deportation order. Offering sanctuary is not in itself unlawful but it obviously involves some level of risk to the congregation and is an extreme hardship for the person in sanctuary and their family.
- Sponsoring an asylum seeker, on the other hand, is precisely complying with the law. If a person in a foreign country has credible fear for their safety in their home country, they are permitted to enter the U.S. and make a plea for asylum. While authorities are reviewing that claim (which might also take many months), the asylee needs a sponsor who is a U.S. citizen (or legal permanent resident) to help them get through the initial stages of the process and to help them learn life in this country.
Can Eliot Chapel sponsor an asylum seeker?

No, Immigration services requires that an individual person sponsors an asylum seeker.

If not, why are we discussing this as a congregation?

Because we know it takes a village to acclimate asylees to life here. We would seek one person among us to be the official sponsor, representing the congregation as a whole. Our community would create a team of people working in concert to provide all the support needed. Besides housing, support needs include meals, health care, legal assistance, education, shopping, interpretation etc. Before we commit to congregational support and ask for an asylee, we need to see demonstration of support.

Who are the asylum seekers?

Asylum seekers for the sponsorship program are all over 18 years old. They may be a single female or male, a single parent with children, a couple, a family with children, or an LGBTQIA+ person. They typically are from Mexico or Central American countries, but can also be from Haiti, Cuba, African countries or others. Asylum seekers have passed a credible fear interview at the border and been granted lawful, temporary status until their story can be heard by an immigration court.

What are the requirements to sponsor for an asylum seeker?

- Sponsor must have current legal immigration status in the US (citizen, permanent resident)
- Sponsor must provide proof of housing and income
- Sponsor must be able to provide asylum seeker with safe housing and basic necessities
- Sponsor needs to understand and support that asylum seeker is required to attend ICE/ISAP check-ins and scheduled court dates

What is the time commitment for asylum sponsorship?

6 months to a year or more (an asylum seeker is not eligible to apply for a work permit for 150 days after the asylum petition has been filed, and not allowed to work for 180 days after.)

Is the sponsor financially responsible for the asylum seeker?

The sponsor is not *legally* financially responsible for the asylum seeker, but the congregation SHOULD take responsibility for the asylum seeker’s basic necessities (food, clothing, transportation, etc.). Note: No Eliot budget money is allocated to support asylum seeker support ministry, financial support will be dependent on donations, grants (if available), and fundraising.

What is an estimate of how much we should count on budgeting for this?

Initially, there will be the cost of transportation from the detention center to St. Louis and possibly bond fees. The bond cost can range from about $1,500 to several thousands.

Ongoing expenses include meals/groceries, toiletries, clothing, transportation, health care, phone, entertainment and miscellaneous other costs plus possibly rent. These may amount up to $800-1,000 per month. The asylum seekers can become eligible for a work permit in 6 months which would allow them gradually to start covering their own costs.
Does the asylum seeker have to live with the named sponsor?

No, an asylum seeker may reside with the sponsor or in a separate residence, so long as governmental paperwork accurately reflects where they live.

What options for housing the asylum seeker can Eliot congregation potentially offer?

The best option initially would be for the asylum seeker to be housed in someone's home. This would help in their integration to the new country, new customs and new circumstances. Another option is to provide them with a rented apartment. Also, housing them at the sanctuary space we created at Eliot is an option provided that we create a vecino accompaniment program that supports them. (Note: Eliot's other property at 222 Argonne is inhabitable and not available for use.)

What if the asylum seeker moves, is it the sponsor's responsibility to inform ICE?

No. The asylum seeker has the right to move at any time for any reason. It is their responsibility to inform the immigration authorities if they move, not the responsibility of the sponsor.

What if the asylum seeker doesn't show up to their ICE/ISAP appointments or court?

It is the responsibility of the asylum seeker to show up at their ICE/ISAP appointments and in court. There is no legal repercussion for the sponsor if the asylum seeker does not show up. However, it is a best practice for the sponsor to be well aware of all ICE/ISAP appointments and court hearings and make plans with the asylum seeker and support teams to be able to attend them.

What about health insurance? If they get hurt, what do we do?

Asylum seekers do not have health insurance. If they get hurt they should seek appropriate medical services within the collective means of the sponsor, congregation, and asylum seeker.

Is the sponsor required to provide transportation?

Some asylum seekers can get a driver's license, as determined by legal counsel. Otherwise, volunteers will be recruited to provide transportation as needed.

What if the sponsor changes their mind after a few months?

The sponsor may ask the asylum seeker to move out at any point

Is the named sponsor responsible for meeting all the asylum seeker's needs?

Teams will be formed to support the sponsorship program. The leader of each team will coordinate the activities and report to a core team as needed. Examples of teams:

- Core team for steering the program and making/supporting decisions
- Housing team to include backups for the sponsor and for the initial housing provider, to set up the residence, and to coordinate a vecino accompaniment program at Eliot if needed
- Finance team to arrange fundraising and coordinate expenses
- Daily needs teams to provide meals, groceries, transportation, clothing etc.
- Health team to coordinate medical, dental, psychological etc resources and help
- Legal team
- Interpretation team
What kind of support will be offered to Eliot for participating in this process?

Asylum Seeker Sponsorship Project team lead by Rev. Dottie Mathews helps match sponsors with asylum seekers and is eager to continue to support for successful outcomes. They can help troubleshoot legal questions and point us in the right direction for community resources. They have set up an online network (a Google Group) for current sponsors and those beginning the process, so that we can learn from and support each other. And there is also a monthly sponsor support phone call to discuss and learn from each other’s experiences. Showing Up For Racial Justice will also facilitate connections between local SURJ chapters and sponsors.

Further Questions:

Contact Eliot Immigration Justice Team at immigration@eliotchapel.org

Additional Information:

- [asylumsponsorshipproject.org](http://asylumsponsorshipproject.org)
- [www.uuworld.org/articles/uus-sponsor-asylum-seekers](http://www.uuworld.org/articles/uus-sponsor-asylum-seekers)
- SURJ: [www.showingupforracialjustice.org](http://www.showingupforracialjustice.org)
- FFI: [www.freedomforimmigrants.org](http://www.freedomforimmigrants.org)
- ILL: [Innovationlawlab.org](http://Innovationlawlab.org)