



Being a Sanctuary Meeting

Questions and answers

The UK can be a hostile place for immigrants. Our aim is to change this, creating a culture of welcoming hospitality that answers that of God in every person. To help achieve this, your meeting is invited to become a Sanctuary Meeting, part of a national network offering solidarity with all people new to Britain.



What does being a Sanctuary Meeting mean?

Being a Sanctuary Meeting means a commitment to building a culture of welcome, challenging racism in all of its forms and helping change the laws on destitution, detention and deportation.

Where did the idea come from?

Quakers across Britain are working in different ways to welcome newcomers to the country, including by supporting and establishing City of Sanctuary groups, lobbying local councils, visiting detention centres and campaigning with the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN).

Friends expressed a desire for greater support with current work and developing new projects. They also wanted a more coordinated way of working together for political change.

Sanctuary Meetings forms part of a wider Quaker Peace & Social Witness Sanctuary Everywhere Programme, working towards a manifesto that includes abolition of immigration detention centres and the right for asylum seekers to work.

What support do Sanctuary Meetings get?

Sanctuary Meetings will be supported with regular teleconferences identifying political opportunities for change, publicity materials, an annual retreat, and pamphlets exploring the issues around destitution, detention and deportation. Those signing up will have access to training to help build alliances with migrant and migrant-led groups, and will be linked to other like-minded meetings for sharing ideas and supporting one another.

What kinds of thing would we do as a Sanctuary Meeting?

The form a Sanctuary Meeting takes could vary depending on a meeting's resources, location and the local organisations it links with. But all will be connected in their desire to provide a safe and welcoming space. Here are some ideas based on things that are already happening:

- holding at least one public meeting a year with migrant-led or anti-racist groups in your area
- lobbying local politicians on issues of destitution, detention and deportation

- assisting in campaigns to resist deportations
- affiliating with a local City of Sanctuary group or, if there isn't one near you, finding other ways of befriending and accompanying people seeking sanctuary
- providing holidays or short breaks for asylum seekers, particularly if your meeting is in the countryside (you could link to an urban group).
- working on projects to assist asylum-seeking children, particularly if your meeting is close to a Quaker school
- joining a visiting group to an immigration detention centre, if there is one within travelling distance of your meeting. People on the group could be upheld by, and report back to, the meeting. You might also consider taking part in the project to observe immigration bail hearings (see <https://bailobs.org/>)
- making your (or your members') property into a House of Hospitality, where longer term residents and destitute asylum seekers live together.
- giving 'room grants' to migrant-led groups in your meeting house.

What is the relationship between Sanctuary Meetings and City of Sanctuary?

Quakers were among the founders of City of Sanctuary, and many meetings support local City of Sanctuary groups (local networks that welcome people seeking sanctuary). Sanctuary Meetings are encouraged to be part of local City of Sanctuary/Town of Sanctuary networks.

What is the relationship between Sanctuary Meetings and the Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network (QARN)?

The Sanctuary Meetings Project has been developed with Quakers across Britain including many members of QARN. The regular advocacy teleconference will also be co-hosted by QARN.

Our meeting is already welcoming people seeking sanctuary.

What difference would it make to be a Sanctuary Meeting?

Part of the rationale for the Sanctuary Meetings Project is to provide a way for Quakers and Quaker meetings already active in the movement to welcome people seeking sanctuary. We want a coordinated political voice for change. It also meets the request for infrastructural support such as training, retreats and networking.

Our meeting doesn't do anything to welcome people seeking sanctuary yet. Can we still become a Sanctuary Meeting?

Absolutely yes. Through the training and discussions in your meeting, we hope you will find the actions that are right for your community.

My meeting doesn't feel able to do anything to welcome people seeking Sanctuary, but I do. What can I do?

You can still join the lobbying teleconferences as an individual. Email your name, telephone number and address to sanctuary@quaker.org.uk.

What does 'Sanctuary' mean in this context?

Adapted from the definition offered by the Quaker Jim Corbett (who co-founded the Sanctuary Churches Movement in the US), we understand a Sanctuary Meeting as a protective community for people whose human rights are being violated. The public practice of sanctuary also holds the state accountable for its violation of human rights.

How do we become a Sanctuary Meeting?

Being a Sanctuary Meeting is a whole-meeting commitment. To become a Sanctuary Meeting, take the idea (perhaps with this Q and A) to your local meeting for worship for business. You don't need to decide what activities you will engage in straight away. The starting point is simply to identify one or two people willing to act as a link with the Programme Coordinator for one or two years, then to email their name and telephone number to sanctuary@quaker.org.uk.

How long will the project last?

Sanctuary Meetings is funded to the end of 2019. There will be a review in mid-2019 to which all participating meetings can contribute. The end of the project will not mark the end of Friends' commitment to those forced to flee. Rather, we hope that the processes put in place will enable Friends to continue to work together for justice and peace.

Find out more at www.quaker.org.uk/migration.

Contact sanctuary@quaker.org.uk.

COVER IMAGE: KATE DECICCIO FOR AFSC