



Written by Ana Espinoza. Published on February 7, 2017

As I wait for Christian Cruz Godoy on a low couch, using the sleeve of my sweatshirt to wipe raindrops from my glasses, I note that it hasn't been bright outside since the inauguration. And today's weather is especially cheerless. I feel bad for asking Cruz to come out for an interview on such a stormy night. He's a few minutes late—maybe he'll ask to reschedule.

But then I see him coming toward me, walking beside someone I don't recognize.

I haven't seen Cruz since my freshman year—we lived on the same floor for two semesters without engaging once in conversation. Yet both he and his friend, whom he introduces to me as Pablo Calderon Galaviz, greet me with a hug and a smile.

Calderon and Cruz are both undocumented. Dark-haired sophomores in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, both of them arrived in the United States from Mexico at a young age, growing up in Houston, Texas and southern California, respectively. They became good friends this year because they live on the same floor in East Campus.



Pablo Calderon Galaviz and Christian Cruz Godoy, both undocumented sophomores in the School of Engineering and Applied Science (Jared Orellana / Staff Photographer)

During the interview, one nods along as the other tells his story, as if revisiting a familiar place. Calderon tells me twice how grateful he is that Cruz introduced him to the Undocumented Student Initiative, a new student group on campus that has, in essence, mobilized because of the rise of Trumpian anti-immigrant bombast.



For Cruz, Calderon, and the three other Columbia students I speak with, being undocumented has made their lives at college more difficult than necessary, especially in light of Trump's presidential ascent.

But as the new president continues to target immigrants in this country. Undocumented students are facing a new level of urgency to push back against the sentiments fostered by the new administration and organize in new ways, asking their Ivy League university to provide them with sanctuary and advocate for them.

They have raised questions—albeit caught in a mess of politics and legality—about what Columbia can (and will) do to protect and support them, both on campus and in the public eye.

Unpacking DACA

On a sunny day in June of 2012, Barack Obama got behind the presidential podium in the White House Rose Garden and announced the implementation of an immigration reform program called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

"Put yourself in their shoes. Imagine you've done everything right your entire life," he said, "studied hard, worked hard, maybe even graduated at the top of your class—only to suddenly face the threat of deportation to a country that you know nothing about, with a language that you may not even speak."

DACA is an executive order, enacted after four years of Republican stonewalling of more ambitious pro-immigrant legislation, like the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, and its introduction elicited immediate pushback from the American right.

There are eight qualifications that undocumented people living in the United States must meet in order to be eligible for DACA. The main condition is that they must have arrived in the country as children, and they must have been under the age of 31 on June 15, 2012, the day which Obama announced the creation of the program in the Rose Garden.

Once an undocumented person is granted deferred action, they have a legal status. By granting that legal status, the program has enabled hundreds of thousands of undocumented students to pursue their education without fear of being deported. This has allowed students with DACA to "come out" as undocumented and drive more open conversations about what it's like to be young and undocumented in the United States.

Undocumented people who have been granted deferred action are also able to apply for a Social Security number, which allows them to work, and—in most states—get a driver's license. In other words, DACA frees recipients from under-the-table deals that let employers pay them too little. It lets them drive to the supermarket without worrying about being detained and deported for missing a stop sign.

For Calderon, receiving DACA status meant that he could work at a pizzeria for minimum wage. While this might not seem like anything of note—suburban kids work in pizzerias for extra money, like in *Mystic Pizza*— Calderon describes how crucial that job was for him and his family.

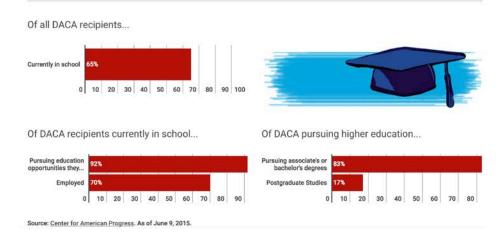
He'd been working in a mechanic shop since he was 13 to support his family after his father lost his job during the Great Recession. The loss hit his family especially hard, since undocumented immigrants are ineligible for government welfare: food stamps, Section 8 vouchers, all of it.

It would have been illegal for Calderon to earn as little as he did at the mechanic shop if he were a citizen. But once he received working papers through DACA, he was able to earn a legal wage at the pizzeria. In less than two months, Calderon became the shop's general manager. Now, Calderon runs his own company, providing engineering consulting services and developing new product ideas for other businesses.



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Nationwide survey shows DACA recipients gaining education



Still, DACA is by no means perfect. It costs almost \$500 to apply, and it does not provide a path to citizenship for undocumented people, like the stymied DREAM Act. It doesn't protect DACA recipients' parents, either.

But given that Trump threatened to repeal DACA during his campaign, recipients like Calderon await in an anxious state of limbo. A DACA repeal could happen abruptly, like the <u>immigration ban</u>, which was passed late the night of Jan. 27 while people soon to be barred from entering the United States were still in the air.

While Trump has not yet removed the act, a <u>draft executive order leaked to Vox</u> indicates that there are already plans in the works to stop granting DACA statuses—existing work permits will remain in place, but people with DACA will begin to lose their protections as they expire over the next two years, one by one.

Miguel Colin, a sophomore in Columbia College, anticipates this. Described as being "Facebook famous," he often posts frank statuses on social media about being undocumented. In the past few weeks, the statuses have anticipated the repeal of DACA and its consequences.

When we meet, he speaks plainly about his life as an undocumented person.

We have to get up and move twice as we speak—a janitor asks us to relocate to different rooms in Barnard's Diana Center so he can move furniture—but Colin is unfazed, intent on telling his story.

It's an alarming prospect for all DACA recipients. On Wednesday, Jan. 25, one of Colin's statuses read: "I never deleted Trump supporters from my friend list because I wanted to make sure I was able to @ them the day all my rights were stripped away."

Students Mobilize

I'm told that there couldn't have been more than 10 students at the first USI meeting in September of last year, Colin and Cruz among them. A few of them weren't yet willing to disclose their legal status, or lack thereof. Nonetheless, for many of the attendees, it was the first time they'd been in a room with other undocumented Columbia students, talking about being undocumented.

USI is one of the first examples of undocumented students coming together at Columbia. In an <u>Eye article</u> from 2013, an undocumented student in the School of International and Public Affairs named Eder, who was granted anonymity due to fears for his safety, claimed that the undocumented scene was "nonexistent," especially compared to the one at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he studied as an undergraduate. The writer notes that Eder's "I'm Undocumented" shirt was met with smiles and conversations at UCLA. At Columbia, it elicited confusion or no response at all.



But since the beginning of the presidential campaign cycle, renewed attacks on undocumented immigrants have encouraged many to adopt a higher profile, organize, and become advocates for the undocumented community.

Ximena Ospina Vargas is an undocumented sophomore in the School of General Studies. She's from Elizabeth, New Jersey— "the hood," as she puts it. Ospina tells me that Jessica Bennett, a senior in the School of General Studies, was instrumental in putting together the USI. But she's not the group's official president, as they don't have an internal hierarchy. (Unfortunately, Bennett declined to speak to me for this article.)

Prior to the meeting in September, Bennett created a Google Form to gauge interest in a group for undocumented students, and she shared it on Facebook. I remember seeing a link to the form in the Latin@s at Columbia group of which I am a member—an unassuming invitation to solidarity.

Now, the USI meets in the Intercultural Resource Center on 114th Street, in the center's upstairs event space. It's a small room with wooden floors, near the brownstone's residential area, which is mostly reserved for students of color. The meetings are a good opportunity for members to meet peers trying to focus on their studies at Columbia as their identities become increasingly politicized. Once dispersed around campus, they now communicate through a group chat.

When I meet Ospina, she kisses me on the cheek, like my family does at home. Later in the conversation she apologizes for not being able to give me the "juicy diatribe" she originally intended to. She's tired, as anyone in her position would be. She's undocumented, homeless, and a trans woman. She has a scholarship from the General Studies that pays for her tuition but not her housing costs. Because of this, Ospina doesn't have "official housing"—she moves between friends' rooms. It also doesn't help that her parents don't support her financially, because she's transgender.

I can't really imagine what that's like. But there's a better chance that other students in the USI can.



"I can definitely say that without this group, I don't know what I would be right now," she says. "Because there's a difference between having allies and having undocumented friends. They'll really know where certain kinds of reactions and certain kinds of trauma come from."

In the weeks after its first meeting in September, the USI began to plan a panel event of undocumented students and students from mixed-status families, which was to be followed by remarks from Columbia history professor Mae Ngai, who studies immigration, citizenship, and nationalism. The group scheduled the panel for Nov. 16.

COLUMBIA S SPECTATOR

On the morning of Nov. 9, Nara Milanich, a history professor at Barnard, was taking her kids to school in a taxi, at about eight in the morning. They don't normally take a taxi to school, but they had stayed up late to watch the election results the night before, and morale was low. Milanich checked her phone and found an email from Ngai, addressed to Milanich and several administrators. "This is bad," was the crux of her message. "We need to do something ASAP to protect our students."

Milanich and Ngai came together to write a petition on Google Forms, with Milanich figuring out the interface as she went along.

This wasn't the first time Milanich had worked to advocate for undocumented students. Six to nine months before DACA's implementation, in 2011, she co-founded the DREAM Act Faculty Alliance with Lehman College professor Alyshia Gálvez, an informal group of college faculty across 14 campuses in the New York Metropolitan Area that hoped to provide resources for their undocumented students, like a website that would help undocumented students apply to college. That sort of information was less readily available before DACA, Milanich tells me.

"Then DACA happened, and it didn't solve everything, but it certainly helped," she says. The group met a few more times over the years, but she explains that the implementation of DACA created a "consciousness" about the undocumented community. "I always kind of felt like we didn't *do* anything. But in a way, DACA happened, and it felt less pressing."

Everything changed on Nov. 8. As Milanich sat in the taxi, stupefied over the election results, she was impressed with Ngai's swift call to action, mere hours after the <u>Associated Press called the 2016 election for Donald Trump</u>.

"President-elect Trump has promised to cancel DACA on his first day in office," she and Ngai write in the <u>petition</u>. "Even if he does not cancel DACA immediately, we can expect that he will let it expire. Either way, our students are imperiled. They are speaking to us in our classes and in our offices with anxiety and fear."

They called on Columbia to ensure that undocumented students would continue to receive financial aid, even if DACA was revoked. They also suggested that the University provide stipends in exchange for former DACA students' participation in research or other educational projects, to supplement their inability to work. More than 3,000 students and faculty members added their names.



Genesis Garfio, a senior at Columbia College (Jared Orellana / Staff Photographer)



Like Milanich and Ngai, the USI circulated its own petition after the election. It urged the University to ban immigration enforcement officials from campus, withhold student information from immigration enforcement officials, and publicly declare its support for the protection of undocumented students and the provision of a path to permanent status by the federal government. The petition made rounds on Facebook, just like the group's first interest form.

And on Nov. 16, the same day as the panel it had originally planned before Trump's victory, the group participated in a walkout hosted by the Barnard Columbia Solidarity Network. <u>More than 400 students walked out of their classes</u> on a Wednesday afternoon to cluster on Low Steps in a thick crowd and demand that Columbia declare itself a "sanctuary campus."

It's important to note that protests like this can be dangerous for undocumented students, because arrests can be cause for deportation. Uniformed police officers standing away from the crowd were a disquieting presence at a rally in support of undocumented students.

"Being arrested has a different type of meaning for me and consequences for me," Genesis Garfio, a senior at Columbia College, says. "It's not just a one-night-in-jail thing. I could potentially be deported."

Despite these risks, members of the USI were at the front of the crowd, speaking into a megaphone. Cruz and Calderon stood next to each other, holding a banner with the group's name, followed by "#SANCTUARYCAMPUS." Their steely faces hovered over the word "UNDOCUMENTED," in big, bold letters.

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Five days after the walkout and the panel, Provost John Coatsworth sent an email to the Columbia student body expressing the University's support for undocumented students.

Before Nov. 8

Trump's rise was a watershed moment for undocumented Columbia students, as it pushed them to organize. They are newly concerned with their physical safety under a president who threatens to deport millions of people. But the prospect of the new presidency also made the existing problems facing undocumented students more salient.



There's a moment at the end of the USI panel, which Ospina broadcasts to Facebook Live, when she passes the phone she has been filming with to someone else in the audience. She gets up and goes to stand at the front of the room, transferring her weight from one heel to the other.

Ospina explains that she's not on the panel because she's been too anxious. This is something that undocumented undergraduates across the U.S. have <u>reported</u>, experiencing levels of anxiety four times greater than the rate of the norm population, according to a study created by the Institute for Immigration, Globalization and Education at UCLA.

She starts to cry as she tells the audience what has happened to her over the past few weeks: She's been harassed by Columbia students online, pushing her to seek psychological help at the emergency room. Later she'll tell me that, when she spoke to her adviser about the harassment, the adviser told her to "get offline."

This gets at another issue that undocumented Columbia students face, one of several that existed even before Nov. 8. They have difficulty describing and explaining their legal status and what it entails to administrators, taking time out of short appointments to explain information readily available on the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services website. Ospina tells me that she's "tired of having to go into every single office and having to explain the stipulations placed on [her] by the government."

"It gets to a point where you wish that they did their own homework and that they were better trained to deal with this," Garfio says.

Academic advisers are, of course, tasked with dealing with students' academics. But choosing classes and programs of study can be an even more stressful process for undocumented students given the uncertainty of career or graduate school options after graduation. Administrators from the Center for Student Advising were not immediately available to comment.



This stress has only gotten worse since the election, augmenting the problems that undocumented students faced before and prompting them to call for a "sanctuary campus." I think it's worth asking what that phrase means.

Dissecting "Sanctuary"



I first meet Milanich in the coffee shop below Avery Library. As a history professor, she studies Latin America, along with the histories of family and reproduction. When I ask her what she thinks of the word "sanctuary," her response reflects her discipline.

She explains that the word "sanctuary" recalls a history of protecting people at risk in the United States. For instance, escaped felons who entered churchyards in medieval England were entitled to 40 days of protection. The Underground Railroad was a wide network of people providing sanctuary in direct contravention of the law for escaped slaves persecuted under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

At the height of the Sanctuary Movement, in the mid-1980s, over 150 religious congregations defied the Immigration and Naturalization Service to support Central American refugees fleeing the United States' proxy wars in their home countries.

Later, mostly in the 2000s and 2010s, some municipalities—like Newark, New Jersey, New York City, and Los Angeles—began calling themselves "sanctuary cities," adopting policies to protect undocumented people by refusing to prosecute them for violating federal immigration laws.

Recently, Trump <u>threatened</u> to withhold federal funds from these sanctuary cities, consistent with his anti-immigrant policy proposals. However, Rose Cuison Villazor, a visiting professor of immigration law at Columbia Law School, tells me over the phone that cities and states cannot be mandated by the federal government to enforce immigration law.

"If the federal government forces state and local governments to enforce immigration law—then that would violate the Constitution under what's called the anti-commandeering principle," she explains.

Many so-called "sanctuary campuses" have mirrored the policies of sanctuary cities, refusing to allow campus police to enforce immigration law or barring Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officers from their grounds without warrants. Other campuses, like the University of Miami, have pledged to provide tuition support and legal services.

Movements in favor of "sanctuary campus" declarations, usually led by groups of undocumented students like the USI, have dotted the country since Nov. 8. Petitions calling for the adoption of the term "sanctuary," along with protective measures, have circulated at more than 100 colleges and universities.

The USI has talked to groups from other schools in New York and schools in California. Garfio spoke about the value of this burgeoning network of undocumented organization.

"It's a movement that we want to keep alive over the next four years, because what happens will have consequences for a while," Garfio says as we discuss the few fringe benefits of this new world that we've entered into, since the election. "It gives us a point of contact with other student groups that are dealing with the same problems."

But in many ways, the movement has produced more questions than answers. One of the more existential, but still pressing ones, I think, is: What is a "sanctuary *campus*," exactly?

There's no common definition or designated set of policies that characterize a sanctuary campus, or a sanctuary city, for that matter. Although it recalls that history of providing asylum, that word "sanctuary," Villazor confirms, has no legal meaning.

In fact, only Portland State University, Reed College, and a few other institutions have actually described themselves as "sanctuaries." Right now, the University of Pennsylvania is the only Ivy League school to have done so.

The legal ambiguity of the "sanctuary campus" label has driven some institutions to publicly reject the label. In a <u>statement</u> <u>about DACA</u>, Princeton University President Christopher Eisgruber explained that immigration lawyers told him that the term "has no basis in law." Likewise, President Drew Faust of Harvard University <u>wrote</u>, "Sanctuary campus status has no legal significance or even clear definition. It offers no actual protection to our students. I worry that in fact it offers false and misleading assurance."



Days after Faust's evasion of the word "sanctuary," students in a group called Protect Undocumented Students at Harvard <u>published</u> an op-ed in the Harvard Crimson, calling on her to use the word as a "denouncement of a heightened culture of xenophobia and violence."

Though Coatsworth's email detailing Columbia's protections for undocumented students did not explicitly state that Columbia was a "sanctuary campus"—just that Columbia was located in a "sanctuary city"— undocumented students called for the use of this term, and the ones I interviewed thought the term was comforting.

The word "sanctuary" evokes a history of people protecting those at risk, and defying the law to do so, Gálvez explains in an <u>article</u> she published in early January.

"While the value of declarations of sanctuary, whether mild or more far-reaching, will not be known until a test comes in the form of an assertion of sanctuary and a legal challenge to it," she writes, "it is important for institutions of higher education to consider some of the historical precedents in the conceptualization of sanctuary and to be imaginative in terms of assessing the possible actions that can be conscientiously taken both within and in violation of the law."

Still, choosing to draw upon this history of radical support by using the word "sanctuary" is only meaningful if universities pair it with specific policies to protect undocumented students.

What is Columbia doing?

Despite ambiguity surrounding the "sanctuary campus" terminology, Columbia has slowly begun to take unambiguous steps toward protecting undocumented students on campus.

In his initial announcement, Coatsworth assured students that the University would not allow immigration officials on campus without a warrant nor share information on the immigration status of students without a subpoena. He also wrote that the University would "expand the financial aid and other support" that it makes available to students, in case DACA is repealed.

Coatsworth's letter also promised "small group, private information sessions specifically for undocumented students in our community."

There has been one of these sessions so far, on Dec. 19, led by Ixchel Rosal, the associate vice president for student life in the Office of University Life. Since Coatsworth's announcement, Rosal has been designated as Columbia's special adviser for undocumented students. Her responsibilities include working with undocumented students directly, liaising with other offices on campus to help them navigate Columbia's sprawling bureaucracy, and ensuring that students don't have to repeatedly describe their situations with each administrator they deal with.

"I'm really focused on the student experience, and making it as good as possible is really important to me," she tells me. "So I appreciate the fact that students are experiencing some relief by being able to talk to me in this position.

"I think some of the things that were true before and remain true with greater urgency are that DACA and undocumented students felt like they were getting sent all over the place," she adds. "That's a hard place to be in under the best of circumstances."

Rosal is also set to host a working group of undocumented students to help identify and address their concerns and will also be meeting with undocumented students individually.

I first met Rosal at a University Life panel about the immigration ban, where I sat in the back. During the question and answer session at the end, audience members lined up behind a microphone near my seat to ask questions. Executive Vice President of University Life Suzanne Goldberg explained that they would take all queries at the beginning and then answer them in succession. Students asked the legal experts on stage about the power of states to sue the president and the power of the president to suspend new parts of the Immigration and Nationality Act. Then a Columbia College junior from Sudan walked



up next to me and leaned into the microphone. They asked what Columbia was doing to respond to the demands of protesters.

Goldberg did not pose the Sudanese student's question to the panel. The student left as panelists were speaking, perhaps in response to the omission.

After the panel, I walked up to Rosal to introduce myself. Rosal was initially distracted, though—she was looking for that student from Sudan, hoping to speak with them.

Students hope that she'll be a committed resource for them, someone that will understand them when other administrators can't, like with the student at the panel.

In addition to designating Rosal as the point person for undocumented students, the University has also begun to offer pro bono law services to undocumented students.

In many respects, what Columbia has done already demonstrates substantial support for undocumented students.

Still, there are undocumented students at Columbia who would benefit from added support: General Studies students, who aren't already eligible for financial aid that covers all demonstrated need, like Columbia College and SEAS students are, and students who would lose the ability to work if DACA is repealed.

Ospina, who is already homeless, will likely lose the ability to work. Coatsworth's letter didn't include any specific provisions that would help her if she ends up in this situation.

As for providing more funding to undocumented students at General Studies, there are few clear options. And special funding for undocumented students might not be an option at all. General Studies has less scholarship funding than Columbia College and SEAS, and students at the school have long had problems funding their education and <u>finding housing</u>, sleeping too few hours a night in libraries and student lounges.

But as we deal with the uncertain possibility of a DACA repeal, some argue that there are new and enterprising measures that the school could take. "We can talk a good talk about how we support undocumented students," Milanich tells me. "But at the end of the day, if people can't pay their rent or tuition, then we're really not undocumented-friendly."

An example of this type of visionary thinking might be a dedicated scholarship for undocumented students at General Studies, Milanich says.

It's not unprecedented—Milanich tells me that CUNY schools have provided funds like this. She then directs me to Alyshia Gálvez, the CUNY professor that she started the DREAM Act Faculty Alliance with.

I find Gálvez in a coffee shop during a morning rush, and she pulls apart a croissant as we talk. Gálvez is an anthropology professor and Columbia College graduate who studies Mexican migration.

Gálvez has worked closely with undocumented students at CUNY, pushing university administration to provide more resources. She tells me that CUNY schools have partnered with TheDREAM.US, a program that provides financial support to DREAMers at their partner colleges. Gálvez also directs the Mexican Studies Institute at CUNY, which provides grants to help DACA recipients reapply for DACA status.

Of course, funding an in-state CUNY student's \$3,000 semesterly tuition is more feasible than funding the \$28,764 of General Studies tuition, not to mention housing costs. CUNY students <u>usually commute</u>, so this isn't an issue. And since Columbia has not publicly disclosed the number of undocumented students currently enrolled, it's also possible that there are more undocumented students in the CUNY system than at Columbia, perhaps lending the matter more urgency at the public institution.



As liberal outrage swells in the first weeks of the Trump presidency and activist groups like the USI grow, Milanich suspects that there are plenty of donors who would give money to a fund for undocumented students at General Studies. For Milanich, the unprecedented hardship that undocumented students are facing calls for innovative approaches to policy from the University.

"There needs to be some kind of visionary leadership, thinking beyond the boxes that the University is made into, and thinking about how to help these kids," says Milanich.

It follows that Columbia's relative financial security, along with its clout as an Ivy League university, should empower the University to take more steps to support undocumented students, both financially and symbolically. When institutions like Columbia move to protect these students, they make headlines.

Last November, University President Lee Bollinger signed a letter in support of DACA, along with Barnard President Debora Spar and over 70 other college presidents. Although the letter did not discuss paths to citizenship or permanent residency for undocumented students or use the word "sanctuary," it described the upholding of the act as a "moral imperative and a national necessity."

"Private institutions have such an incredible amount of leeway to make principled stances against laws that they think are inhibiting their mission, which is educating students," Gálvez says.

Before coming to Columbia, Ospina worked in landscaping—<u>24 percent of workers</u> in the landscaping industry are undocumented, as it's one of the easiest jobs to get without a work permit. Colin grew up in a small apartment, and prostitutes would linger at the entrance to his apartment building. Garfio's DACA is set to expire soon, and she might not be able to renew it. As these students continue to attend classes, the risk of deportation still exists.

But when I ask Calderon and Cruz about the challenges of being undocumented Columbia students, they don't want to focus on the bad parts for very long. Instead, they talk a lot about how happy they are to be at this school. Cruz talks about how lucky he is to be here, and Calderon nods intently as his friend speaks.

"It's an amazing opportunity to have a voice where people actually give a shit about you because you go to this elite school," he says. "Because of that, it should be a responsibility for any undocumented student in this position of privilege and protection to speak out."

The students I talked to wanted to use their privileges as Columbia students to advocate for other undocumented people. Columbia, as a university, is also uniquely positioned to be a powerful advocate for them. "It's the same as in any social movement, where the most privileged really have to put their neck out there and put themselves a little bit more on the line," Gálvez says.

Columbia's undocumented students have demonstrated compassion and perseverance in the face of a newly antagonistic political climate. And as undocumented students have increasingly mobilized to advocate for increased protections, they hope that Columbia as an institution will also continue to offer concrete support and draw upon the tradition of moral civil disobedience that sanctuary declarations evoke.