

PRESS RELEASE: Sunday, July 8, 2007

Simi Valley United Church of Christ (UCC)
370 Royal Avenue, Simi Valley
Minister: Rev. Dr. June Goudey

Having been inspired by the story of "Liliana" and her family and the fact that currently no sanctuary site exists in Ventura County to house families such as hers, the congregation of the United Church of Christ in Simi Valley voted to become a "sanctuary church" in cooperation with the New Sanctuary Movement. A sanctuary church provides prophetic hospitality for a person or family that is in danger of being deported but has compelling grounds for remaining in the U.S.

Simi Valley UCC is working together with the Ventura County office of CLUE (Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice). CLUE and legal advisors (not the church) screens the persons who request sanctuary and accepts cases that meet these criteria:

- 1) at risk of deportation
- 2) parents of U.S. citizen children
- 3) good work history and in good moral standing
- 4) have a potential or compelling case

Persons in sanctuary are not "fugitives" or hiding from the law; they are working families who contribute to the community. They are public witnesses to unjust immigration law that divides families. Their location is known to the immigration authorities.

The principle of sanctuary is biblical (Joshua 20). It provides that a person who is guilty of a crime, whose punishment is excessive or cannot get a fair hearing, can take refuge in a holy place. Sanctuary is a sacred space that guarantees compassion, protection and the love of God.

UCC churches covenant with one another to listen to and discern God's wisdom. They are also autonomous, meaning they are free to govern their own lives. Important decisions are made by democratic process within the entire congregation. They are not under any external authority (there is no bishop or higher governing council). UCC churches place a high value on social justice, and many UCC congregations have taken part in anti-war protests and other progressive causes.

WEBSITE: www.uccsimi.org