

A Small Enclosure for a Big Life

Adjusting to the reality of a life in Sanctuary

by The Rev. Canon Nancy Ross

IT'S A sunny June afternoon in Seattle, and Saint Mark's Cathedral is jumpin'! DJ Nando is blasting the salsa music and the wonderful dancers are circling Jaime Rubio Sulficio with rhythmic clapping and taking turns dancing with him in the center. But this dance circle, a birthday party staple, is not for his birthday. It's a circle of support, love, and energy—a place for Jaime to do what he loves to do—DANCE!—with the friends who share that passion and who have come to stand for him and beside him, as he navigates being in Sanctuary while seeking a legal pathway to keep his family together.

“Sanctuary” is a warm word, redolent of sacredness and safety. But in these troubled times, it has also become a loaded word, as Sanctuary churches and cities stand up for the rights and dignity of all—a basis of our American values and the greatest commandment of our Christian values—while some revile that dedicated stance in favor of blatant xenophobia and Pharisee-like rhetoric.

But Sanctuary is more than a political or even moral stance for Jaime. He LIVES in Sanctuary at Saint Mark's Cathedral, and while that may sound warm and safe and sacred, the on-the-ground reality is that it is a small enclosure for a man's life. It's not an easy road to be stuck in Sanctuary. Ask Jaime how he's doing, and he'll tell you, “I'm doing fine. I understand how this has to be. Some days are harder, but I have things I'm working on. I'm grateful.”

“Grateful” is one of the key words he uses, but it is the community that is truly grateful—for his courage to take this step not just for himself, but for all who are facing the impossible and unjust system targeting them for deportation, and for his trust in all of us to stand with him and see it through. And “community” is not just the Saint Mark's Cathedral parish, not even just the greater “For Such a Time as This” Sanctuary network of the Church Council of Greater Seattle. It is his family's school community, the volunteer community where Jaime gave so much of his time, and the salsa and

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Jaime Rubio Sulficio and his wife Keiko Maruyama at the *Keep Jaime Home* dance party in Bloedel Hall at Saint Mark's Cathedral. Photos by Stefanie Felix.

bachata dance community where he is a beloved teacher, performer, and friend.

Where the rubber hits the road, “Sanctuary” is not a movement; *Sanctuary is the people who are stuck in Sanctuary*. It was a grand day, having the dance party in support of Jaime, so he actually could be with a crowd of people who are his friends and be his exuberant self. He can't be with his family and friends like that all the rest of the time, and he misses them! He misses his home, his busy working and volunteering life, his dancing, his freedom to come and go—and the community misses him and is diminished by his absence.

In the meantime, Sanctuary becomes home. Strangers become friends and community members become a team working to live out their faith and speak up, show up, and act up for the sake of one man whose one life matters—and who also represents thousands of others whose individual lives matter.

Michael Ramos, Executive Director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle, spoke at a rallying service for another impacted member of the community, Jose Robles, who had been living in Sanctuary at Seattle's Gethsemane Lutheran Church for more than a year—and then was immediately detained in July when he met with ICE to seek a stay of removal. Ramos said, “A system that makes it necessary for a person to seek Sanctuary this way...it is one that is cruel; it is shameful; it is illegal.”

Our communities are diminished when our neighbors are taken from us, when our system offers no recourse or due process, when human rights are ignored and the sacredness of the human person denied. Sanctuary matters because Jaime matters, and Jose matters—because every individual matters. This is Beloved Community! And it is their courage and spirit, more than their plight, that rallies people of faith and conscience to action on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are “stuck in Sanctuary.” ♦