

**SANCTUARY TESTIMONY FOR VERONICA: “BEING SPEAKING STONES FOR JUSTICE”**

***On the Occasion of Veronica Castro’s ICE Check-In Appointment***

*During a Press Conference Outside the Baltimore ICE Office,*

*with Sanctuary DMV Congregation Partners*

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That collection of texts my faith tradition calls the Bible—and which some call “the ultimate immigration handbook”—is filled with family stories, character journeys, community responses impossible to separate from the challenges and inspiration of immigrant families like Veronica’s—marginalized into hiding and disenfranchised thru chiding every day.

Moses’ family reached for the basket to find new hope on a journey beyond the bulrushes. Veronica’s son’s medical condition led her to take a chance on a risky journey too.

In Ruth, Naomi had always provided for her family. But when grief struck and her sons died, she depended on her immigrant daughter in law to help her. In Veronica’s story, her husband Ricardo always worked, and gave service to his nation—but now needs her care as a disabled veteran.

Abraham and Sarah in Genesis chapter 20, had taken incredible chances—even posing before king Abimelech as brother and sister—to find true stability for their family. God rewarded their courage with land and finances. Veronica and Ricardo have made sacrifice after sacrifice for their other children, to seek to keep their family together today. We pray God may reward them in this moment of her ICE appointment with the opportunity to stay together.

For these connections with faith—and until immigration is reformed in a way that provides a path to citizenship for many immigrants who have contributed years to our society, congregations, synagogues, mosques, temples, and ethical communities—we are called upon to lay the stepping stones of hope for families like Veronica’s. We seek to build a “hospitality highway” because our ancient faith history calls us to. And, we endeavor to show hospitality because of how our “near heritage” in the 1980’s assisted migrants seeking protection from Central America.

We seek to construct a pathway with purpose not to make some “partisan political statement,” but also because we crave to join in prophetic partnership with faith leaders in our earlier history who dared to receive Jews cast out by Nazi Germany, who cared for farms and properties when Japanese were unjustly interred, who helped slaves at risk find freedom through underground railroads not far away from where we plant our feet today here in Maryland.

And we pray to work, side by side, as a beloved community where Dr. King envisioned “bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood” because it models the behavior of God’s spirit that insisted cities of refuge were provided in ancient days, as in Numbers 35, as a response for unjust punishments.

In today’s sanctuary movement, we seek to lay down stones for a path that leads away from our nation’s grossly expensive, family destroying deportation and wall-building machine. And, we invite you to join us to create it, as well.

My own faith tradition describes how, when Jesus entered Jerusalem as a leader in the week before his death, he proclaimed justice, because if he did not do so, **EVEN THE VERY STONES WOULD CRY OUT THEMSELVES.**

More than 60 faith communities from over 19 different faith traditions in the in the DC, Maryland, and VA. region have said **WE WILL BE THOSE SPEAKING STONES.** We will **NOT** stay silent while families like Veronica’s are suffering.

We will offer a loud voice and meaningful presence in many ways, because the “sanctuary movement” of today is shown in many forms:

- in accompaniment with immigrants, showing solidarity as they go to appointments like today’s previously routine ICE check in and to legal hearings, which have become traps for detention and family separation in this time;
- in rapid response, where faith communities show up during raids, and to minister to families following such trauma;
- by offering Know Your Rights trainings, and helping communities practice for protection;
- by helping to seek legal aid and raise up community testimony to free individuals from detention;
- perhaps by hosting families at risk of deportation in our faith facilities

And, by standing with Veronica now today, we all are laying the path stones of sanctuary protection. May we continue, ever louder, to cry out against injustice, remembering as we do the courageous voice of Sister Darlene Nicgorski, who in the 80’s said in the “Sanctuary Trials,” “(In light of) the conditions I have seen and heard....what could I have done, knowing what I knew...but to stop the deportations?”

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