

St. John's United Church of Christ
500 W. Main Street
Lansdale, Pennsylvania 19446

ICE RESPONSE POLICY

Adopted April 13, 2026 by action of the Church Council of St. John's United Church of Christ

I. Introduction

This Policy provides action steps St. John's United Church of Christ (the "Church") will take to prepare for any encounters with Immigration & Customs Enforcement ("ICE") on the Church's property, including the Lansdale Montessori School.

* This is a fluid situation, often changing daily, as federal agencies change the way immigration laws are enforced. This Policy may need to be amended to reflect changes in guidance on immigration enforcement issues as events unfold.

* This Policy does not cover ICE conducting an "I-9 Audit" or arrests and/or searches outside the confines of a church or a church school setting (for example, ICE raids at an employer or private residence).

* This Policy does not constitute legal advice. This Policy provides guidance so the Church, its clergy, its congregation, and all persons who attend Church services or visit Church to receive services (pastoral care, food pantry, fellowship, etc.) can make educated decisions and plan accordingly based on the particular needs and situation of the Church.

II. Background Information

A. Rescission of the "Sensitive Locations Memorandum"

In January 2025, the incoming presidential administration rescinded 30+ year guidance from the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS") that generally prohibited ICE immigration enforcement activity in or near churches, schools, and hospitals, unless such activity was necessary to protect lives or prevent harm or injury to people. The rescission of this so-called "Sensitive Locations Memorandum" has now empowered ICE with the ability to conduct ICE raids in church settings, leading to the arrest, detention, and deportation of undocumented immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers ("Vulnerable Populations") who are present on the Church's property at the time of the ICE encounter.

B. "Public Spaces" and "Private Spaces"

Under federal law, ICE may enter any "Public spaces" to engage in immigration enforcement activities. However, they cannot enter "Private spaces" freely. A Public space in the context of a general business would include a parking lot, lobby, designated

waiting areas, and restrooms. A Private space in the same context would include warehouses, manufacturing areas, offices, and similar operational areas. The church context is different from a general business and presents open / unanswered legal questions.

Note: Absent a valid “Judicial Warrant” (discussed below), or an emergency involving potential immediate harm to a person, ICE may not enter a Private spaces without prior consent from the Church or the Church’s “Point Person” (discussed below).

For churches with associated private schools or preschools on their campuses, some churches have treated the entire building and campus as Private space(s). This is a reasonable approach due to the heightened security concerns of schools.

Note: Because this guidance may change as events unfold, Churches must make a facts and circumstances determination according to their particular situation and circumstances when designating Public spaces and Private spaces. It follows that clear, understandable, and language-specific signage is one of the strongest protections against legal and illegal ICE immigration enforcement activity.

III. Written Plan for Churches to Respond to ICE Raids

The Church’s written ICE Response Policy includes:

A. How this Church will respond during an ICE Raid

The Church will prepare its clergy, staff, congregants, and all users (including students, visitors, and non-church members) through training sessions to prepare for the possibility that ICE agents might arrive at the Church to arrest a vulnerable person or search for evidence about a particular vulnerable person. The Church’s response to an ICE raid, visit or audit, consists of four parts: (1) the trained “Point Person(s)” who will be on site during all times when vulnerable persons may be present, (2) clear, understandable, and language-specific signage, (3) a Notification Plan for all persons (including all vulnerable persons) present at the Church at the time of the ICE arrival, and (4) Document Retention practices.

Note: No one has to speak with ICE, answer any questions or produce identifying documents, even if told by ICE agents that they have to. Persons may refuse to interact with ICE. They can also say that they will not talk to ICE without an attorney present. These responses are protected by the U.S. Constitution for all individuals and will be discussed below.

B. Roles and Responsibilities of Point Person(s) for Church

The Church will train one or more “Point Persons” who will be the main spokesperson for the Church, who meets ICE at the Church door, and is authorized by this Policy to speak

on behalf of all who are present at the Church at the time of ICE's arrival, including all vulnerable persons. The Point Person is responsible for the following actions:

1. The Point Person will not allow ICE agents to enter the door of the Church unless the following information is determined:
 - a. The Point Person will ask any ICE agent, as well as any other federal, state, or local officials who accompany them, for their identification (What agency are they from?) and their badge numbers, if applicable.
 - b. The Point Person will determine why ICE is on site, who they are looking for (if for a specific vulnerable person), where they are authorized to search, and under what authority ICE is operating — whether under an “Administrative (Arrest or Search) Warrant,” or under a “Judicial (Arrest or Search) Warrant.” **Examples of an Administrative Warrant and a Judicial Warrant are attached to this Policy as Exhibit A and Exhibit B, respectively. Exhibit C contains more information about distinguishing between an Administrative Warrant and a Judicial Warrant.**
 - c. The Point Person will examine the official paperwork presented by ICE to determine:
 - i. Whether the warrant is an Administrative Warrant or a Judicial Warrant;
 - ii. Whether the warrant specifies a particular person to be arrested or questioned;
 - iii. Whether the warrant specifies the address (of the Church) as the location where the person is to be found. (A warrant that specifies the home address of the person sought is not valid to conduct a search on Church property), and;
 - iv. Whether the warrant contains a date by which the warrant must be executed, and whether that date has passed (i.e., the warrant is “stale”).

The specificity of the warrant determines whether or not it is a “valid” warrant. If the warrant specifies a person not on site at the time of ICE's arrival, or specifies a person on site but at an incorrect address, or if the warrant is stale, the Point Person must state that the warrant, whether an Administrative Warrant or a Judicial Warrant, cannot be enforced and so entry should not be permitted.

Note: The difference between a valid Administrative Warrant and a valid Judicial Warrant is crucial. If the warrant is an Administrative Warrant, signed by an ICE officer or DHS officer, even if otherwise valid, the Point Person has the legal right to deny ICE entry into the Church. However, if the warrant is a valid Judicial Warrant, signed by a federal judge or magistrate, the Point Person has no power to exclude ICE and must allow ICE to enter both the Church's public spaces AND private spaces to execute the search or arrest authorized by the Judicial Warrant.

Exhibit C contains more information about distinguishing between an Administrative Warrant and a Judicial Warrant.

2. Despite the best efforts of the Point Person(s) to prevent ICE entry in cases where ICE may present an Administrative Warrant, or an invalid Administrative or Judicial Warrant, ICE may enter without proper authorization anyway. In such cases, ICE is acting without legal authority and the Point Person must state to the ICE agents that the Church does NOT consent to ICE's entry, that the ICE entry is illegal.
 - a. Once ICE enters the Church building, the Point Person should then state that, on behalf of the Church, the Point Person, and all persons (including all vulnerable persons) within the Church building will exercise the rights under the U.S. Constitution, including the right to remain silent, the right to speak with an attorney, and the right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures. These Constitutional rights are discussed in more detail below.
 - b. When ICE enters the Church building, efforts must be made by the Point Person and others present to record (via cell phone or doorbell camera) the incident to document ICE's illegal entry. These recordings may be used at a future date to challenge any arrest or to challenge any evidence obtained illegally during an illegal search or arrest. **Note: If ICE ignores the Point Person and enters the Church anyway, DO NOT IMPEDE THEM OR INTERFERE WITH THEM. The Point Person should continue to tell the ICE agents that they are entering the Church illegally and that the Church does not consent to their entry, and that the Church and persons in it are exercising their Constitutional rights. Physically impeding ICE operations is a federal crime even if they are wrongfully entering the property.**

C. Church Signage

The Church will designate the building as private space through clear, understandable signage.

This is a private space. St. John's UCC, the Lansdale Montessori School, and all persons herein do not consent to the entry of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security into this Private Space without a valid Judicial Warrant. NO HANDGUNS OR WEAPONS ARE PERMITTED.

D. Notification Plan for Congregants and Community members

When ICE agents enter the Church, whether under valid legal authority or entering illegally, the Point Person must inform all persons (including all vulnerable persons) within the Church building or property that ICE is on site, whether the ICE agents are armed or unarmed, and a plan for all persons to move inside private spaces if possible

and if safe. How this information is communicated to persons in the Church will depend on the size of the church, whether the Church has an intercom or other communication system, and whether call trees or call lists can be established using personal cell phones.

After an ICE raid it will be important for the Church to notify all members of the Church community, including clergy, congregation, staff, and persons who visit the Church to receive Church services, about the ICE raid to protect others. This includes:

1. Informing all vulnerable persons about the ICE raid, especially if the ICE raid was done without a valid warrant.
2. Whether any vulnerable persons were arrested and detained, especially if this results in family separation.
3. Whether any documents, computers, or electronic devices were seized.
4. Information about how to locate a person arrested and detained by ICE. See discussion of ICE Detainee Locator System below.

E. Document Retention Practices

1. Prior to any ICE activity, it is advisable for the Church to protect important records and to segregate sensitive personal information, including the following:
 - a. Separate federal I-9 forms from other employment records.

In the event that ICE arrives for a federal “I-9 Audit,” then the Church can provide its I-9 forms without divulging other sensitive personal information in Church files.

- b. Backups of important Church files and electronic records.

If ICE seizes computers or other electronic devices from the Church, it is important for the Church to have backups of operating files, financial records, and personal information because once seized, it is very difficult to get those computers and electronic devices back from the government.

2. After an ICE raid, especially if ICE enters the Church illegally and without a valid Judicial Warrant, then it is important to record information from persons who were present during such ICE raid. This includes:
 - a. All persons who witnessed the encounter should provide their narrative of what they witnessed.
 - b. If any persons were detained or arrested, make lists of the persons and where they were taken, if known, to notify such person’s family.
 - c. Immediately inventory documents, computers, and files that were subject to a search or seizure.
 - d. If there is a security camera or doorbell camera footage of events, secure the video to ensure that it is not erased.

IV. Exercise of Constitutional Rights

Individuals — whether clergy, staff, church members, visitors, vulnerable persons, or persons seeking church services and programs — each have protected rights under the 4th, 5th, and 6th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These constitutional rights apply to a person regardless whether the person is a U.S. citizen or an undocumented or vulnerable person. Everyone in the U.S. is free to state to any ICE agent or other governmental authority that they are specifically exercising one or all of these enumerated Constitutional rights.

- A. 4th Amendment - The 4th Amendment guards against unreasonable searches and seizures and requires that warrants presented to the Church are approved by a judge, rather than an ICE officer, and supported by probable cause. The 4th Amendment forms the basis for the Point Person objecting to (not consenting to) to ICE entry without a valid Judicial Warrant. If ICE enters the Church without a valid Judicial Warrant, absent exigent circumstances such as possible injury or harm to a person, that ICE entry would constitute an unreasonable search or seizure.
- B. 5th Amendment - The 5th Amendment protects against self-incrimination and guarantees the right to remain silent and not answer any questions from ICE or any government agent. The 5th Amendment also protects people who do not want to sign any ICE documents that they do not understand.
- C. 6th Amendment - The 6th Amendment ensures that all people have the right to speak with an attorney or DOJ accredited representative. After invoking the right to speak with an attorney, such persons are entitled to remain silent and they do not need to speak with ICE or answer any ICE questions.

Collectively, the aforementioned rights reflect the familiar “Miranda warnings” that must be given to an alleged criminal defendant upon arrest. For individuals, it is advisable to carry a language-specific “Immigration Red Card” which sets forth these important Constitutional rights in both English and the language that the carrier understands.

Examples of “Immigration Red Cards” in English and Spanish are attached as Exhibit F.

Note: In the event of an ICE raid, it is advisable for undocumented persons and other vulnerable persons NOT to run or attempt to flee. It is likely that ICE will have stationed ICE agents around the perimeter of the Church or Church School building. Attempting to flee from an ICE raid may raise the suspicion of ICE that such person has engaged in illegal activity and hence flight might lead to the arrest or detention of a person who might otherwise be protected in the Church setting.

- V. Information for Individuals and Families in Advance of ICE activity

Churches that provide services to vulnerable persons and families should advise all persons to be prepared for an ICE encounter — whether on Church property or not — by carrying with them certain documents. The following approach is strongly recommended:

A. Documents to Carry on Person

1. A valid and current Green Card or Work Permit;
2. Copies of other valid current Immigration Documents (I-589, Notice to Appear, work authorization, or cancellation of removal documents, etc.);
3. State or Local ID;
4. Language-specific Immigration “Red Card” — See Exhibit F;
5. Utility bills older than 2 years (to show residence in U.S.).

B. Documents NOT to Carry on Person

1. Documents identifying country of origin (foreign passport)

Carrying a foreign passport or foreign driver’s license may give ICE the impression that the carrier is a foreign national, possibly leading to further inquiries into the carrier’s immigration status.

2. Any false or fraudulent document (fake IDs, fake Driver’s License)

Note: Many undocumented persons have obtained false or fraudulent documents that may help them to travel by car (especially in Pennsylvania) or otherwise access government benefits. Possession of false or fraudulent documents is a crime and may subject such person to immediate arrest, detention, or deportation, particularly if such person has been in the United States for less than two years. It is very easy for ICE to determine whether a document is false or fraudulent.

3. Documents that might implicate other persons.

It is not advisable to carry any documents that identify other family members, who may have a different immigration status than the carrier (including family photographs). However, if a current valid immigration document (for example, an I-589 or other immigration document) identifies other family members who also have the same current valid immigration status under such document as the carrier, then that document should be carried.

C. Adopt Plan in Case of Family Separation

While all families are different, it is advisable to instruct vulnerable families who attend, visit, or receive services from the Church to adopt a plan in case a family member is arrested and detained by ICE. Such a plan would include:

1. Making sure all information and emergency contacts are up to date, especially if a family member attends a Church School.
2. Creating a file with important documents (U.S. birth certificates, immigration documents, utility bills, etc.) so that they are easily accessible.

3. Obtaining a list of attorneys, DOJ accredited representatives, and local non-profit immigration assistance organizations, who may be contacted when ICE arrives.
4. If available under state law, executing a Caregiver's Authorization Affidavit that allows another designated adult to care for a person's child or children if one or both parents are arrested and detained by ICE.
5. If any children of foreign parents are U.S. citizens (also known as "birthright citizenship,") registering such children with the government of the parent's country of origin, such as a foreign consulate, in the U.S.
6. Maintaining copies of credit or debit cards in case a family provider is arrested or detained.
7. Keeping handy the online address of the Online Detainee Locator System, which assists in determining where an arrested person is detained. The link is:
<https://locator.ice.gov/odls/>

VI. Other Matters

As mentioned at the beginning of this Policy, the present situation involving ICE raids on churches and church schools is a fluid situation that may change over time and there are several unanswered questions. These include:

1. Whether a Church Sanctuary / Worship Space that is open to the public may be designated as a Private space for certain activities and not for others.
2. Whether a Church or a Point Person may be prosecuted for "harboring" or "providing sanctuary to" an vulnerable person.
3. Whether the federal government may revoke the tax-exempt status of any Church that provides services to vulnerable persons.

These questions are outside the scope of this Policy. For any further questions, it is advisable to contact and discuss the Church's specific situation and circumstances with an attorney licensed in your area.