



YEARNING TO BREATHE FREE

A publication of First Friends of NJ/NY Winter 2016-2017

First Friends Volunteers at the recent November gathering see more on page 2



Solidarity & Love from First Friends

Following the recent presidential election of Donald Trump, First Friends program director Sally, sent an email declaring that we "...will not accept xenophobia, bigotry or racism against our communities." This message must be expressed loudly and clearly at every opportunity.

First Friends is buckling down on our mission to uphold the inherent dignity and humanity of detained immigrants and asylum seekers. We are resolved more than ever before to provide compassion and hope through volunteer visitations, resettlement assistance and advocacy. We need you to join us in standing alongside immigrants and detainees with support and love and compassion. We will declare our mission at every possible opportunity and work together with our partners not only to show solidarity with our immigrant brothers and sisters, but also to end unjust immigration and to end mass incarceration.

No one should feel alone during these uncertain times, and united we can resist isolating policies and in our unity even grow stronger in facing upcoming challenges. We are already seeing

signs of this with the burgeoning rebirth of the sanctuary movement (see more on page 4).

Here are some truths that we hold to be self-evident:

- **United we are stronger;**
- **Solidarity and unity are of utmost importance;**
- **The true value of volunteer visits is incalculable.**

Thank you for all that you already do. Your voice joined with others will contribute to the dismantling of the system of oppression. On a daily basis your kindness matters deeply to those around you and we want to support you.

If you can help support first friends mission, please visit our website to learn about all of the ways you can donate your time and resources to end our profit-driven immigration detention system. Also consider helping financially, *donate via PayPal* <http://bit.ly/DonateFF>

www.firstfriendsnjny.org

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Immigrant Community Know your Rights
Dec. 28 6pm
830 Bergen Ave
Suite 4A
Jersey City



Salesian Senior Sisters and Students from Mary Help of Christians Academy put together folders for Stamp Out Despair

A SIMPLE SERVICE

"I thank you so much for thinking about us, because some of us did not have anything. Thanks for making us feel like there are some people out there who care about us. The folders brighten our day"

This note from a detainee refers to a simple service First Friends performs twice a year — **Stamp out Despair (SOD)**. Confined for indeterminate periods of time with severely restricted access to the outside world, detainees often lack the means and the money to contact family and friends. Thus, their contact is minimal if at all.

First Friends has special permission to provide a supply of stationery, envelopes, pens, stamps and greeting cards for the more than 2,000 detainees in the four facilities in New Jersey. Almost all of these supplies are donated and it takes enormous time and energy to collect, organize and assemble the materials into folders for each detainee. Thanks to our volunteers this demanding job becomes a service of love.

Join US!
Stamp out Despair Packing Party!
Sunday, Dec. 11
1:30pm
FF office

The Salesian Senior Sisters from Haledon created 600 folders and were later joined by students from Mary Help of Christians Academy in helping assemble them. While the Salesian Senior Sisters are now older, their desire to volunteer and help others is evident. One sister shared:

"I'm happy to be part of putting together the supplies and folders for the immigrants. It is a way for me to continue to be involved and respond to those in need."

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace have also been extremely supportive of the SOD campaign. Over the past several years, the sisters in Englewood Cliffs, with Sr. Margaret Jane Kling as the coordinator, have assembled hundreds of SOD packets for Bergen County Jail detainees. The sisters also write hundreds of personal notes to put in the folders for other detention centers and several sisters have even become visitors to detainees at Bergen County Jail.

VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

First Friends is powered by volunteers. With a tiny staff but large number of volunteers, we can touch the hearts and ease the minds of hundreds of detained immigrants each year. The Volunteer Support Committee (VSC) was created by FF's board, recognizing the key role that volunteers play in the organization. The goals of the VSC are to promote mutual support, education & information sharing, and celebration!

One way the VSC plans to carry out this mission is by bringing volunteers together several times a year. The first such gathering was held in September with a guest attorney who discussed the basics of immigration law and the rights of detainees. One of the participants reflected on the experience,

"I am grateful for this information which helps me understand what my friend is telling me about her case. Up until now, there was so much I just didn't get."

At two November gatherings, Tauno Bilsted shared his insights gained over many years of working with immigrants and survivors of labor and sex trafficking. Tauno shared the fundamentals of two conversation skills — **open-ended questions** and **active listening**. For example, with active listening, one would reflect back what a detainee expresses by using phrases such as, "so you are worried about" or "it sounds like the experience was frustrating."



Tauno also stressed the importance of using non-judgmental communication and to be mindful of body language. It is helpful to stay relaxed and open, smiling or nodding with encouragement and empathy.

One volunteer visitor, Sam, shared a reflection, "There is always a notable moment of silence between when I have been asking questions and when the immigrant I am visiting begins to ask questions." Silence is an important moment for allowing friends to begin to know each other.

The next volunteer gatherings will be held in February and May of 2017. The VSC is interested in hearing your thoughts & suggestions. Please contact Michaelene Loughlin via email, michaeleneloughlin176@gmail.com

If you would like to become a volunteer visitor, contact Rosa at rsantana@firstfriendsnjny.org



National Migration Week (NMW) will be celebrated by the Catholic Church during the week of January 8-14, 2017. The theme, "Create a Culture of Encounter," will help serve as a reminder that migrants are real people seeking better living conditions. In Pope Francis' words, each immigrant "has a name, a face and a story."

"engage migrants as community members and neighbors"

Though many immigrants are frightened by threats they heard during the presidential campaign, many of those threats already exist — In 2015, the US Department of Homeland Security detained 406,595 immigrants, filling the required 34,000 detention beds each day at a cost

SAVE the Date!
Saturday →
January 14
6pm

of \$164 per person, many beds in for-profit prisons. Furthermore, the vetting processing to admit a refugee currently in place already takes 18 to 24 months.

In this climate of increasing pressure and fear, the U.S. Congress of Catholic Bishops asks us to take the opportunity, especially during National Migration Week, "to engage migrants as community members and neighbors—to fix the broken system that separates families and denies due process," and educate community members about the Catholic Church's position on migration.

St. Lucy Church in Newark will celebrate a Newark Archdiocesan Mass for National Migration Week on **Saturday, January 14th at 6:00 PM**. The mass will be followed by information on immigration issues, folkloric entertainment and refreshments. All are welcome.

PROFILE OF A FIRST FRIEND DETAINED AND RELEASED!

Dony entered the US in December 2015. The 25 year-old had left his home in India to attend a broadcaster's show in Las Vegas. Arriving at JFK, he declared he was seeking asylum and was immediately detained, handcuffed and sent to the Elizabeth Detention Center.

Dony is from southern India near the shore of the Arabian Sea. He is one of a small minority of Roman Catholics living in a Hindu country where Hindu extremists are supported by



Enjoying the view after release from Detention at 9:30pm!

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government. Dony is a devout believer, having attended Mass daily since he was confirmed at the age of 13. In January 2015, Hindu extremists in the village where he was doing missionary work, threw rocks and chased him. This occurred again in September 2015 when he was attacked, beaten with wooden rods, and threatened with death if he ever returned.

Dony went to the police but they would not file a report, likely having been bribed by the Hindu extremists. Even if police had witnessed the attack he suspects they would have done nothing. Dony was fearful of extremists in the village as well as in his home town. And because of the BJP government's support of Hindu extremists, nowhere is safe in India for him. His fear was heightened by the murder of his uncle by Hindu extremists for running a Catholic mission school.

After being taken in to custody in the US, Dony spent 11 months at Elizabeth Detention Center. First Friends's volunteer visitors provided him comfort during his time behind bars. On November 17, 2016, Dony was elated to learn that he had been granted asylum and was to be released from detention. Without any support of family and friends in the US, Dony received post release support from First Friends. First Friends is helping him transition to his new community with housing support and more. He is now free to practice and share his faith, unafraid.

#SanctuaryCampus #SanctuaryEverywhere

During the presidential campaign, Trump promised to block federal funds for sanctuary cities, and while its unclear how likely this threat will manifest, one thing is evident, sanctuary cities are resolute, reaffirming their commitment to remain as safe havens for undocumented people. And now, college campuses and even public spaces are being called on to join the movement. But the movement aims for more than physical refuge, it also seeks to create a welcoming location and environment for all.

Sanctuary is an ancient tradition of offering safe haven to the persecuted. In the US, the immigrant Sanctuary Movement currently seems to be entering a third phase. The first modern chapter began in the 80's in faith communities seeking to protect immigrants fleeing violence in Central America. Ultimately they won the inclusion of Central Americans in US asylum laws. Then, with increasing advocacy for immigration reform, the Sanctuary Movement of the 2000's did not hide immigrants but instead publicized their stories to show the inhumanity of the dysfunctional immigration process.

In Sanctuary Cities, local law enforcement does not turn over undocumented persons to federal authorities or ICE. Mayor Ras Baraka explains why Newark is a Sanctuary City, saying,

"Our efforts are to keep residents of Newark safe and protected from being broken up, from people being attacked, singled out and isolated, & driven back into the shadows."



**11.16.16
Rutgers
University
Sanctuary
Walkout**

Days after the walkouts, Wesleyan University, along with Cal State, Reed and Portland colleges, became some of the first to declare themselves sanctuary campuses.

The current Sanctuary Movement is attempting to go even further, arguing that the only way to stop the threats to immigrants, raids, criminalization, and family separation is through civil resistance and the declaration of sanctuary *everywhere*.

Another new aspect to the Movement is the role of undocumented youth. Even while many face the very real threat of having DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) reversed, they are deeply involved in helping to organize this new phase of the Sanctuary Movement. These undocumented sanctuary activists are not hiding in the shadows but are out front leading the charge for positive change. They are the new face of the resistance, declaring that they are not afraid and are unwilling to let the threat of deportation deter them from what is right and what is moral.

**Find a toolkit on how to create a sanctuary congregation
www.uua.org/immigration/witness/partners/newsanctuary
and even more at www.sanctuarynotdeportation.org**

**To learn more about Movimiento Cosecha, visit
www.movimientocosecha.com**



After the recent election, a new face of the Sanctuary effort appears to be emerging. Harnessing students' disappointment with the election and their energy to want to take action, a new social justice organization, *Movimiento Cosecha*, called for the creation of Sanctuary Campuses and for students and faculty to push colleges to declare themselves as safe places for all students. The call worked: on November 16, students at 100 schools across the country participated in a national walkout demanding their schools become sanctuary campuses.