



**SEEKING REFUGE:  
FAITH-BASED APPROACHES  
TO FORCED MIGRATION**

Poverty and Peacemaking II  
March 3–4, 2017 at Princeton University

## Creating Sanctuary Space: A Workshop

Linda Rabben, University of Maryland (Moderator)  
David Sulewski, Community of Sant'Egidio  
Peter Pedemonti, New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia  
Fr. Daniel Groody, University of Notre Dame  
Luisa Banchoff, Princeton University (Student Rapporteur)

This afternoon session offered conference participants an opportunity to collectively explore the concept of sanctuary spaces using the language of faith and spirituality. At the same time, the session's workshop-style framework oriented the discussion toward practical ways of creating and sustaining such spaces, and participants were able to exchange their own on-the-ground experiences and strategies of doing so. The questions and discussion that emerged centered around the nature of sanctuary, what sorts of demands are made of those who seek to build sanctuary, and how we can transform our visions of sanctuary space into action steps.

We gathered in a sunlit, wood-paneled room in East Pyne, each of us taking a seat in a circle of chairs. The session began with words of welcome from the moderator, Professor Linda Rabben, who then led the group in an opening moment of silence. Next, each of the three featured speakers shed light on the ways in which notions of sanctuary emerge from their engagement, and each posed several questions for the group's consideration.

David Sulewski, a member of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Boston, offered a reflection on how the theme of sanctuary manifests itself in Sant'Egidio's focus on life, friendship, peace, and prayer. In its efforts to take care of the elderly until the last moments of life, for example, the Community creates a sanctuary around the vulnerable, heeding Pope Francis's call to oppose a culture of "throwing away" people. Sulewski emphasized how the spiritual orientation of Sant'Egidio "welcomes newcomers in a spirit of friendship rather than seeing them as mere beneficiaries of aid."

This theme of welcoming was expanded upon by Peter Pedemonti. In his remarks, Pedemonti highlighted the ways in which his organization, the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia, is taking to the streets of the city to create sanctuaries for some of Philadelphia's most vulnerable residents. The "Sanctuary in the Streets" initiative holds interfaith prayer services outside homes during Immigrants Customs and Enforcement (ICE) raids as a way of "answering a call for solidarity."

Fr. Daniel Groody, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame, opened his reflection by sharing an anecdote about Pope Francis's first papal visit to pray with refugees in Lampedusa, the Mediterranean Island off whose coast thousands of refugees have drowned in the hopes of



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reaching Italy. Fr. Groody passed around a wooden chalice that, just like a cross that Pope Francis had commissioned while in Lampedusa, was carved out of the wreckage of boats found on the beaches of the island. He discussed how extremely marginalized people as refugees struggle with the fear of being “nobodies” in a society that appears largely indifferent to their suffering and death. Yet religious and spiritual traditions recognize each person as a “somebody” who is an integral part of the community of humankind. In Catholic terms, “the ‘nobodies’ are connected to the Body of Christ.”

After these three reflections, the second half of the session began. Drawing on the Quaker tradition of Worship Sharing, Rabben led the group in another silence, inviting participants to speak when they felt so moved. Participants shared insights and questions on the meaning of sanctuary and responded to the remarks and questions of the speakers. Tracy K. Smith offered her thoughts on the way in which the “large-scale love” of God can be challenging to live out in our lives, especially when love is so often “broken down into something comfortable.” Yet the constructive initiatives of many people, including some attending the session, demonstrates how love can be instrumental in enacting real change.

At other points in the session, participants wrestled with the tension that can arise between the demands of love and those of the law. If we consider sanctuary a “moral obligation,” Rabben noted, then those who seek to create sanctuary may at times be doing so in violation of secular laws. For those writing and shaping laws, it is important to recognize the larger context in which they laws are implemented, especially with regards to the urgent needs of displaced people in the world today. In another instance, a participant talked about the flaws of restrictive immigration laws that do not take into account the underlying reasons why people are forced to flee their home countries.

At the end of the session, participants were encouraged to share their closing thoughts. One remark brought to mind the image of the Statue of Liberty that Rabben had evoked earlier in the session when she read several lines from Emma Lazarus’s *The New Colossus*. “In dark times,” a participant said, “people of faith hold up the light.”