



National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Manual for Pastors & Church Leaders
in Response to Executive Orders on
Immigration

The New DHS Policy and Purpose of This Manual

As of January 21, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) updated its policies with a new directive around “sensitive locations”:

The “directive rescinds...the [prior] Administration’s guidelines for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) enforcement actions that thwart law enforcement in or near so-called “sensitive” areas.”

The directive continues,

*“This action empowers the brave men and women in CBP and ICE to enforce our immigration laws and catch criminal aliens—including murder[er]s and rapists—who have illegally come into our country. Criminals will no longer be able to hide in America’s **schools and churches to avoid arrest.**”*

Source: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/01/21/statement-dhs-spokesperson-directives-expanding-law-enforcement-and-ending-abuse>.

For a church pastor or leader, this policy could be interpreted in a few ways, especially regarding the role of the church in serving immigrant communities:

1. **Impact on Vulnerable Individuals:** The mention that criminals will no longer be able to hide in places like churches could raise concerns for pastors about the safety of undocumented individuals who may seek refuge in the church. It may create a sense of fear among immigrants who are not criminals but who are living in the U.S. without legal status, fearing that they might be arrested if they attend church or seek help.
2. **Moral and Ethical Questions:** As a pastor or leader, there might be a question about balancing the call to protect and care for those in need, including immigrants, and the call to obey government policies. Pastors might need to navigate difficult decisions about how to respond if immigration enforcement focuses on sensitive spaces like churches.
3. **Community Support:** This could lead to discussions in the congregation about how to balance the safety of individuals with the need to comply with the law. Pastors might be called upon to offer counsel, support, and prayer for immigrants in their community who may feel unsafe.
4. **Advocacy and Pastoral Care:** Some pastors might feel compelled to speak out on behalf of their congregants, advocating for protection for those who may be affected by stricter immigration enforcement. This could include organizing efforts to honor religious freedom in worship service encouraging dialogue about the treatment of immigrants in the community.

This manual provides pastors and church leaders with recommendations on how to respond if immigration enforcement actions occurs in your congregation. It outlines general steps to take to ensure the safety and well-being of those affected, as well as guidance on how to handle potential legal issues related to church spaces. However, it is important to note that these are **pastoral recommendations** and not legal advice. Every situation is unique, and laws may vary depending on your location. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to consult with your own legal counsel

to understand the specific legal implications and protections that may apply to your church and congregation. Nothing in this document should be considered legal counsel.

A Word on a Frequently Asked Question about Warrants:

Churches as Public Spaces:

Churches are generally considered "public spaces" in the sense that they are open to anyone who wishes to attend services, participate in events, or seek spiritual guidance. Since churches invite the general public to engage in their activities, they may not be afforded the same protections from law enforcement as private property would be. In legal terms, if the space is open to the public, law enforcement does not need a warrant to enter or conduct activities like enforcement of immigration laws.

Private Offices or Restricted Areas:

On the other hand, certain areas within the church, such as private offices, classrooms, or areas that are only accessible to members or by invitation, may be considered more "private." In these spaces, law enforcement would typically require a warrant or explicit permission from the church authorities to enter or conduct any type of investigation. These private areas are protected by privacy rights, and unless there are specific circumstances (such as a valid emergency), law enforcement generally cannot enter without consent or a warrant.

Given the nuances of this issue, and the potential for variations based on local laws and the specific legal framework, it is always a good idea for pastors and church leaders to consult with their attorney. An attorney can provide guidance on how to navigate these legal questions and ensure that the church's rights, as well as the rights of those attending, are upheld in accordance with the law.

Practical Steps

1. Proactive Steps: Defining the Church's Practices and Preparing for Potential Enforcement Actions

A. Define the Church's Stance

- **Action:** Establish a clear, written policy on how the church will respond to immigration enforcement actions.
- **Why:** A clear policy helps align leaders and the congregation and creates consistency in response.
- **Communication:** Share the church's stance with leadership, staff, and congregation members to ensure everyone is informed.

B. Training and Preparation (Outside Normal Service Hours)

- **Action:** Conduct training for church staff, ministry leaders, and volunteers on how to handle immigration enforcement scenarios. Training should cover:
 - Legal rights of churchgoers and staff during enforcement actions

- How to interact respectfully with law enforcement
- De-escalation techniques (Non-Violent Communication, NVC)
- Responsibilities and actions for the designated spokesperson
- How to support congregants emotionally and spiritually during stressful situations
- **Frequency:** Training should be held regularly, ideally when new policies are introduced. Offer additional ad hoc sessions as needed to keep staff and volunteers up to date.
- **Distribute the “Rights to Know” Document:**
<https://files.constantcontact.com/e3e37fbe201/a622e03c-8666-4b27-a0ad-b5aebd627a1e.pdf>
- **Power of Attorney:** Encourage migrant parents to think about a POA for their children. Here’s a template, however, please consult with your attorney for any legal document:
<https://files.constantcontact.com/e3e37fbe201/03af357c-67c0-4f4e-977e-5e9a825c10db.pdf>

C. Designate a Spokesperson(s)

- **Action:** Identify and train leaders who are U.S. citizens to be the spokesperson(s) for the church in the event of enforcement actions.
- **Why:** The spokesperson(s) should be calm, knowledgeable about the law, and able to respectfully handle interactions with law enforcement.
- **Responsibilities:**
 - Communicate with law enforcement in a respectful manner.
 - Be familiar with the church’s legal rights and those of the congregation.
 - Serve as the main point of contact between law enforcement and the church.

2. Immediate Actions: If Immigration Enforcement Arrives

A. Remain Calm and Respectful

- **Action:** Encourage everyone to stay calm, in place, and respectful.
- **Why:** Remaining calm will help prevent panic and misinterpretation of actions. Walking away or running may be perceived as an attempt to flee, which could unintentionally increase tension.

B. Spokesperson Communicates with Law Enforcement

- **Action:** The spokesperson should approach immigration officers calmly and respectfully.
 - **Spokesperson Dialogue Example:** "Good afternoon, officers. I understand you are here for a reason, and I respectfully ask that you provide your warrant or explain the nature of your visit. I’d also like to inform you that we are a place of worship and refuge engaged in ministry."
- **Why:** This establishes a cooperative, non-confrontational tone and clarifies the church’s position while ensuring legal rights are respected. Remember that ICE has the right of enforcement in public spaces without warrants.

C. Pause the Service if Necessary

- **Action:** If the situation is escalating or a confrontation is occurring, **pause the service** to assess the situation and ensure the safety of all involved. This is especially important if there are potential arrest or detentions.
- **When to Pause:**
 - If law enforcement begins interacting with congregants.
 - If there's an immediate risk of escalation.
 - If the spokesperson needs to have a moment to speak with law enforcement for clarification or negotiation.

D. Address the Congregation

- **Action:** Politely ask the law enforcement agents if you can address the congregation briefly.
 - **Spokesperson Dialogue Example:** "May I take a moment to address our congregation to ensure they understand their rights and the situation?"
- **Why:** Keeping the congregation informed reduces fear and confusion, allowing them to make informed decisions.

E. Remind Congregants of Their Rights

- **Action:** Remind congregants of their constitutional rights (e.g., the right to remain silent, the right to an attorney).
- **Why:** Ensuring that individuals are aware of their rights helps protect them and ensures they respond appropriately to law enforcement.

3. Managing Children's Ministry and Parents During an Immigration Enforcement Action

A. Children's Ministry Leaders

- **Action:** Children's ministry leaders should remain calm and ensure the safety of children in the church.
 - Do not tell children to panic. Keep them calm and wait for clear instructions.
 - Maintain order and reassure children.

B. Parents Wanting to Retrieve Children

- **Action:** It would be best if everyone remains put, but if parents are adamant about wishing to retrieve their children, please inform the agents that parents would like to connect with their children. Follow the agents' instructions. If allowed, please inform people not to run as it could be misinterpreted as attempting to escape. If not allowed, please assure parents that their children are safe with trained leaders.

C. Coordinating Communication Between the Spokesperson and Children's Ministry

- **Action:** Keep the spokesperson informed about the situation in the children's ministry so they can act accordingly. Parents should be calmly escorted to pick up their children.

4. Advocacy and Spiritual Support

A. Congregational Advocacy:

- **Action:** Reaffirm the church's stance on providing ministry and support for all people, regardless of their immigration status.
 - Encourage the congregation to speak out on behalf of those who may be vulnerable or unjustly targeted.
 - Engage with local advocacy groups to provide resources or support for those impacted by enforcement actions.

B. Provide Spiritual Support to Families Affected

- **Action:** If individuals are detained, offer ongoing pastoral care and connect families with legal and social resources.
 - **Dialogue Example:** "We are here to support you spiritually during this time. We will pray with you and help connect you with legal assistance."
- **Why:** Emotional and spiritual support is essential to help families cope with fear, uncertainty, and stress.

5. Legal Considerations and Practical Steps

A. Right to Record

- **Action:** If the law allows, record the enforcement action with a phone or other device for documentation purposes.
 - **Why:** Recording helps protect congregants and the church by creating a record of the interaction.

B. Continue Live Streaming if Applicable

- **Action:** If the church is live-streaming services, continue the stream during the enforcement action.
 - **Why:** This ensures transparency, provides documentation, and can offer protection to those involved in case of legal complications.

C. Review Insurance Policies

- **Action:** Ensure the church's insurance policies are up to date, including Directors & Officers (D&O) Insurance and other relevant coverage.
 - **Why:** Insurance protects leaders from legal action, while general liability and property insurance protect the church and its assets.

6. Biblical Encouragement and Final Reminders

A. Offer Spiritual Comfort

- **Action:** Remind the congregation of God's presence, love, and justice. Offer prayers and support for those affected.

B. Advocate

- **Action:** Advocate for just immigration policies and stand with vulnerable communities.
- **Bible Verses for Advocacy:**
 - Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

A Word on Non-Violent Communication: A Key Tool for De-escalation

Non-violent communication (NVC) is an approach that fosters empathy, understanding, and respectful dialogue, especially during high-stress situations. In the context of a law enforcement raid at your church, using non-violent communication techniques can help maintain calm, ensure that individuals feel respected, and create an environment conducive to de-escalation. It's essential for church leaders to be well-trained in these methods so they can guide the congregation and engage with law enforcement effectively and respectfully, even in tense or emotional moments.

Key Principles of Non-Violent Communication (NVC)

1. Observations vs. Evaluations

- **Observation:** Focus on observing the facts without judgment or interpretation. This helps avoid misunderstandings or accusations, which can escalate tension.
- **Example:** Instead of saying, "The police are being aggressive," say, "Law enforcement has arrived and is entering the building."
- **Why it's important:** It allows you to describe the situation in neutral terms, reducing the likelihood of defensive responses from law enforcement or congregants.

2. Expressing Feelings vs. Making Blame Statements

- **Feeling:** Use "I feel" statements to express your emotions in response to a situation. This centers the conversation around personal feelings, not accusations.
- **Example:** "I feel concerned about the safety of our children," rather than, "You're putting our children at risk."
- **Why it's important:** It prevents placing blame and promotes open, honest communication, helping to maintain calm and understanding.

3. Needs vs. Strategies

- **Need:** Identify the needs behind feelings, which are often unmet in tense situations. This helps move from reactionary statements to constructive dialogue.

- **Example:** "I need assurance that our community will be treated with dignity," rather than, "You need to stop being so aggressive."
 - **Why it's important:** Expressing needs, rather than strategies or demands, shifts the conversation toward solutions that can meet everyone's needs and prevent conflict.
4. **Making Requests vs. Demands**
- **Request:** Frame your communication as a request for action, rather than a demand. Requests are non-coercive and give the other party the freedom to respond in a way that aligns with their own needs and limitations.
 - **Example:** "Could you please show us the warrant you have for this action?" instead of, "Show me the warrant!"
 - **Why it's important:** This fosters cooperation and reduces the likelihood of defensiveness or aggression from law enforcement or others involved.
5. **Stay Present and Calm**
- **Action:** Take a few deep breaths to stay grounded. If you feel yourself becoming tense or upset, pause for a moment. Speak slowly and intentionally to avoid escalating the situation.
 - **How this helps:** Staying calm sets the tone for the entire interaction, allowing others—whether they are law enforcement or members of the congregation—to mirror your calmness.
6. **Use "I" Statements to Express Feelings**
- **Action:** When speaking to law enforcement or to your congregation, use phrases like, "I feel," "I am concerned," or "I am asking for."
 - **Example:** "I feel worried for the well-being of my congregation and ask that you be respectful of their space," instead of, "You are making everyone scared and upset."
 - **How this helps:** By owning your feelings, you avoid blaming others, which reduces defensiveness and opens space for dialogue.
7. **Acknowledge Needs and Limitations**
- **Action:** Acknowledge the needs of both the church and law enforcement. This may include the church's need for safety and respect, and law enforcement's need to perform their duties within the law.
 - **Example:** "I understand that you have a job to do and need to ensure security, but we also have a responsibility to serve our community."
 - **How this helps:** This shows empathy for the other party's position, creating a foundation for cooperation while asserting your own needs.
8. **Making Requests for Cooperation**
- **Action:** Frame your communication as a request for collaboration, not a demand for compliance. For example, you might ask law enforcement to speak with a designated spokesperson or allow a moment to address the congregation.
 - **Example:** "I request that you allow us to speak with you one-on-one to explain what is happening before we proceed."
 - **How this helps:** It signals to law enforcement that you are willing to engage in dialogue, which may reduce their sense of pressure or urgency.

9. Listen Actively

- **Action:** Practice active listening, which means giving full attention to what law enforcement or congregants are saying and responding with empathy. Reflect back what you hear to ensure understanding.
- **Example:** "I hear that you need to conduct this operation. Can you clarify what the next steps will be?" or "I understand that you're feeling anxious about the situation."
- **How this helps:** Listening actively creates an environment of mutual respect and understanding, making it easier to de-escalate conflict and find common ground.

10. Stay Focused on Solutions, Not Blame

- **Action:** Shift the conversation toward finding solutions that meet the needs of both the congregation and law enforcement. Avoid getting caught up in past actions or assigning blame.
- **Example:** "How can we work together to ensure the safety and dignity of everyone present?" rather than, "Why are you doing this here, in front of everyone?"
- **How this helps:** Focusing on solutions keeps the dialogue productive and helps both sides move forward in a positive direction, rather than becoming entrenched in negative emotions.

Conclusion

Our prayer is that this manual is never needed, but if the time comes when it must be used, we pray that it serves as a reasonable resource to guide our church leaders in making decisions that protect the dignity, rights, and safety of all our congregants.

In times of uncertainty and challenge, our call as church leaders is to be calm, steadfast, and compassionate. We hope that the guidance within this manual equips you to face such situations with grace, maintaining the peace and safety of our congregation while standing firm in our beliefs and rights.

- **Isaiah 41:10** – *“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*
 - This verse reminds us that, regardless of the challenges we face, God is with us, offering His strength and guidance. It calls us to stand firm in our faith, knowing He upholds us.
- **Philippians 4:6-7** – *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*
 - In moments of uncertainty, this scripture encourages us to rely on prayer and trust in God’s peace to guard us, knowing He will calm our hearts in the midst of crisis.
- **Psalms 46:1** – *“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*
 - This verse reassures us that God is our refuge in times of trouble, offering strength and comfort when we face difficulties, including moments of crisis and fear.

- **Psalm 34:18** – *“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*
 - For those who are vulnerable or in fear, this verse offers comfort, reminding us that God is especially near to the brokenhearted and offers salvation and protection to those in need.
- **Matthew 25:35-36** – *“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”*
 - Jesus teaches us the importance of welcoming the stranger and protecting those in need, showing compassion for the vulnerable as an expression of faith.
- **Proverbs 31:8-9** – *“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*
 - This verse calls us to speak up for the vulnerable and to act justly, particularly in defense of those who are powerless or at risk of exploitation.
- **Isaiah 1:17** – *“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”*
 - God calls us to seek justice and to defend the oppressed, demonstrating His heart for the vulnerable, especially those in difficult or precarious situations.

May this document not only be a tool in moments of crisis but also a reminder of our collective strength, unity, and the responsibility to care for the most vulnerable among us. Through faith, wisdom, and courage, we trust that God will guide us through whatever challenges may arise. As His people, we are called to be a church for those in need, a light in the darkness, and a voice with those who need pastoral support.

May we always seek His guidance and find peace in knowing that He is our refuge and strength.

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