

Protocols for Staff and Volunteers Engaged in Mission and Ministry

January 2025

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Training your team on how to respond to immigration-related inquiries, especially given new laws permitting ICE and Homeland Security access to churches, requires intentional preparation and clear communication.

Before proceeding with these steps, if you suspect ICE or Homeland Security is at the door, immediately contact Pastor _____ to determine the appropriate course of action, including identifying who will contact legal counsel.

Here's how to conduct this training to prioritize safety and well-being:

1. Understand the Legal Context

1. Educate on the Law: Provide a summary of the new laws, focusing on what ICE and Homeland Security are allowed to do and what their limitations are within church settings.
2. See Step-by-Step Guide to Verify the Validity of a Judicial Warrant.
 - a. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wuho4oKqMXHiO8Cz4Fdoaej4k751Nr2R5N6CHhPB0s/edit?tab=t.0>

2. Clear Entry Protocols

Develop a general policy for all visitors to ensure consistency and fairness:

1. Have volunteers or staff greet all visitors at the door in a warm, non-confrontational manner.
2. Politely ask, "How can we assist you today?" or "What brings you to our ministry today?" This allows you to determine the purpose of their visit naturally.

3. Train Staff and Volunteers

1. Be Friendly but Observant: Volunteers should be trained to identify any visitors acting in an official capacity (e.g., wearing badges, uniforms, or requesting to speak to someone specific).
2. Know Your Rights: Ensure volunteers and greeters understand that:
 - a. ICE agents and Homeland Security need a judicial warrant to enter private, non-public areas of the church.
 - b. Without a valid warrant, they cannot compel entry or access to private areas.
3. **Role-Playing Scenarios:** Practice how to greet someone who might be an agent calmly and confidently.

4. Volunteers and Staff Must Protect the Privacy of Others

1. DO NOT PROVIDE any information about individuals who use our ministry services.
2. DO NOT PROVIDE any information about individuals unless your legal counsel is present.
3. Never ask visitors about their immigration status, as this could create fear and violate trust.
4. Respond to any individual inquiring **“I can’t answer that. I need my legal counsel present.”**

4. Volunteers and Staff Must Protect the Privacy of Others

5. NOTE: Moving forward, do not share any information about any individual with anyone. These are types of questions someone seeking information may ask. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “Is [name] here right now?”
 - b. “Do you know where [name] lives or works?”
 - c. “When is [name] likely to be at this location?”
 - d. “Oh, I haven’t see [so and so] - when were they here last”
 - e. **Say, “I’m sorry I cannot help you with that.”**

6. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “What services do you provide here?”
 - b. “Who usually comes to this ministry?”
 - c. “Do you keep records of the people you assist?”
 - d. **Say, “We welcome everyone to participate in our ministry without discrimination. I’d be happy to share general information about our programs.”**
7. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “We’re just here to make sure everything is safe. Can you help us out?”
 - b. “You’re doing great work here—mind if we come in and take a look around?”
 - c. “We want to ensure everyone is protected. Do you know of anyone here who might need our help?”
 - d. **Say, “Thank you for your concern. I’ll need to check with our point person before proceeding. Please wait here.”** Contact Pastor and legal counsel immediately.
8. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “What would you do if you found out someone here was undocumented?”
 - b. “Do you think there are any undocumented people using your services?”
 - c. “How do you handle people who don’t have the proper paperwork?”
 - d. **Say, “We focus on providing services to all without discrimination. We don’t ask about or track immigration status.”**
9. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “Can you confirm this name on our list is part of your ministry?”
 - b. “We have information that [name] might be here. Do you recognize them?”
 - c. “Do you know who drives the [specific car] parked outside?”
 - d. **Say, “I’m sorry, I can’t share any personal information. You’ll need to speak with our legal advisor.”**
10. If ANY person asks:
 - a. “Can you give us a list of people who attended your event?”
 - b. “We’d like to see your visitor log to check something.”
 - c. “Do you have any records we can review quickly?”
 - d. **Say, “Our records are private, and I’m unable to share them without proper authorization.”**

Tips for Handling Tricky Questions

1. Stay Calm and Polite: Maintain a neutral tone to avoid escalating the situation.
2. Refer to Policies: Use statements like, ***“It’s our policy not to share that information without authorization.”***
3. Do Not Guess or Speculate: If you’re unsure, say, ***“I’m not able to answer that. Let me refer you to someone who can help.”***
4. Do not volunteer information
5. Direct to Legal Counsel: If pressured, say, ***“I’m not authorized to provide that information. Please wait while I contact our legal counsel.”***

5. Communicate Boundaries Clearly

1. If the individual does not have a valid judicial warrant, kindly explain:
2. ***“We welcome all visitors to our public spaces. However, access to other areas of our church requires proper authorization. If you need further assistance, I can connect you with our legal advisor.”***

6. Verify Official Capacity

1. If someone identifies as an ICE agent or another government official:
2. Ask for Identification: Politely request to see their badge and credentials.
3. Say something like: ***“May I see your identification and credentials so I can verify your visit?”*** Immediately inform them ***“Please remain outside as this is private property. I will contact our legal advisor to connect with you.”***