



# MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL of CHURCHES

Friday January 24, 2025

For more information, contact:

[Council@masscouncilofchurches.org](mailto:Council@masscouncilofchurches.org)

## "Houses of Prayer for All People:" Churches Free from Intimidation or Fear

*6 And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant—  
7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” ~ Isaiah 56: 6-7*

Churches are, and have always been, places of prayer, solace, and safety since the time of Jesus Christ; this does not change with any new emperor, king, or president.

Churches are houses of prayer for all people, as the Prophet Isaiah proclaims. These houses of prayer for all people are, and must remain, places where all people can gather without fear, intimidation, or threat of violence. All who gather in houses of worship must be able to do so freely, based on our American values and the free exercise of religion.

We oppose [the Trump administration’s policy change to allow Immigration and Customs enforcement \(ICE\) and Customs and Border Patrol \(CPB\) to enter houses of worship, among other “sensitive spaces” like schools, hospitals, libraries, and domestic violence shelters,](#) rescinding [longstanding Department of Homeland and Security policy.](#)

Churches are, by definition, sanctuaries.

We resist this policy change as Americans on the First Amendment principle of our right to gather freely and exercise our right to worship. We also resist this policy change as Christian leaders, claiming our baptismal covenant to resist evil. Finally, we invite all people of good will to resist this policy change as it sews chaos and uncertainty in the lives of many people as they simply desire to gather in prayer, free from intimidation and fear.

As Church leaders across Massachusetts, we invite each and every one of our pastors and congregational leaders who wishes to [attend trainings](#) to [know their rights](#) and protect their people.

We vow to stand with the sanctity of our churches and the dignity of God’s people.

Signed,

Massachusetts Council of Churches Executive Board (Rev. Catharine Cummings, Mr. Thatcher Freeborn, Rev. Aileen E. DiBenedetto, Mr. Leonardo Espinosa, Ms. Laura B. Purutyan, Rev. Dr. Jay Williams, Rev. George Woodruff, and Rev. Kyungmoon Yoon)

Rev. Thomas J. Bickerton, Resident Bishop, New Hope Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church

Rev. Jean Marie Clerveau, President of the Fellowship of Haitian Evangelical Pastors of New England

Rev. Evin Carvill Ziemer, Regional Lead, New England Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association

Rev. Laura Everett, Executive Director, Massachusetts Council of Churches

Rt. Reverend Douglas Fisher, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts

Rev. Dr. SanDawna Gaulman Ashley, Synod Leader, Synod of the Northeast Presbyterian Church (USA)

Reverend Dr. Gregory G. Groover, Sr., President, Black Ministerial Alliance Ten Point of Greater Boston; Pastor, Historic Charles Street AME Church

Rev. Darrell Goodwin, Executive Minister, Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Mary Day Hamel, Executive Minister, The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts

Rev. Jocelyn Lovelace, Presiding Elder Boston Hartford District, African Methodist Episcopal Church

Bishop Nathan Pipho, Bishop, New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Noah Merrill, Yearly Meeting Secretary, New England Yearly Meeting of Friends (Quakers)

Bishop Talbert W. Swan, II, President, Greater Springfield NAACP, Prelate, Greater Vermont Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction, Church Of God In Christ

Rt. Reverend Julia E. Whitworth, Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts

Rev. David Wright, Executive Director, Black Ministerial Alliance Ten Point of Greater Boston

Rev. Jean Marie Clerveau, President of the Fellowship of Haitian Evangelical Pastors of New England

Massachusetts religious leaders are encouraged to attend a “Know Your Rights” online training on **Tuesday January 28, 2025 from 3:30pm-4:30pm**, presented by the Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office and the Office of Immigrants and Refugees, hosted by the [Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston](#) and the [Massachusetts Council of Churches](#).

**You must [register](#) to attend this training.** “Know Your Rights for Massachusetts Religious Leaders” will be recorded. This session will be recorded, and your attendance will be anonymous. If you cannot attend, please sign up to receive a recording. Participants will receive a webinar link by noon on the date of the training. Register [here](#).

The current federal administration recently [rescinded long established Department of Homeland Security policy that named houses of worship as “protected places”](#) where Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) would not enter. This change has created much fear and uncertainty in our churches, synagogues and houses of worship. Come learn about what your rights and what you need to know to keep your community safe.

We invite congregational leaders who wishes to attend trainings to [know your rights](#) and protect your people. Later trainings will be offered specifically for congregants.

The [Massachusetts Attorney General’s Office offers a dedicated page with regularly updated information about immigration rights](#). The Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition has [Know Your Rights handouts in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Kreyol](#).