

Guidance for Churches & Schools

Supporting Our Communities in Times of Fear and Uncertainty

Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Minnesota is comprised of people representing a wide variety of nations, ethnicities, cultures, languages, professions, and political beliefs. As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we believe that “we are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation” (Fundamental Belief No. 14). Scripture affirms that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither bond nor free, neither male nor female—for all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

At one point or another, each of us has experienced fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. As followers of Christ, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and to care for one another as if we are caring for Christ Himself (Matthew 25:40).

In response to the fear currently being experienced by some within our faith community and the broader communities we serve, the Minnesota Conference is sharing the following information as a resource. Our intent is to provide spiritual encouragement, clarity, and practical guidance, while remaining faithful to our mission and mindful of legal boundaries.

Legal Preparation and General Guidance

The Minnesota Conference has sought legal guidance regarding how individuals, churches, and schools can prepare and respond should Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) come to homes, workplaces, churches, or schools. The information below is intended for general awareness and preparation.

Guidance for Individuals

- If you are an immigrant, always carry legal documents, including:
 - Work permit
 - Photocopy of your I-94 document
 - Evidence of your status or receipts of pending status applications
 - Passport with visa inside (if safe to do so)
- Find a qualified immigration attorney before any issue arises.
- Prepare a written response plan and practice what to say and do ([Know-Your-Rights Toolkit](#)).
- Create a family emergency plan ([Emergency Plan Guide](#)).

Guidance for Churches and Schools

- The Conference has attorneys available to provide guidance in the event of an immigration action. If you need legal assistance, please contact Conference leadership rather than reaching out directly to the attorneys.
- If an ICE agent contacts a church or school, notify [Gayln Bowers](#) immediately.
- **Preparation steps for churches and schools include:**
 - Designating an authorized individual to review warrants or subpoenas
 - Clearly identifying public versus private areas of the facility and adjusting signage if necessary
 - Providing “Know Your Rights” training for leadership teams ([Trainer Toolkit](#))

If ICE Arrives at Your School or Church

- ICE agents may only access public areas (such as parking lots, lobbies, or sanctuaries during public services).
- If they attempt to enter a private area, respond: “This is a private area. You cannot enter without a judicial warrant signed by a judge. May I see it?”
- Do not attempt to hide individuals or facilitate their escape from ICE, as this could have legal consequences for both the individual and the church community. Instead, focus on providing emotional and legal support through appropriate channels.
- You and your church/school community have the right to remain silent and request legal representation. If approached by ICE, you are not required to answer questions and can ask to speak with an attorney before providing any information.
- After the agents leave, document everything that occurred.

Legal Resources

Pastors and church leaders may direct interested individuals to publicly available resources.

Please note: The Minnesota Conference has not fully vetted and does not formally endorse the organizations listed below.

- Volunteer Lawyers Network: Low-cost immigration referrals – (612) 752-6655
- Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services: Free legal help for low-income individuals – smrls.org
- Minnesota Immigrant Freedom Network: Statewide immigrant advocacy – [Immigrant Freedom Network](http://ImmigrantFreedomNetwork.org)
- National Immigration Law Center: General immigration resources – nilc.org
- Immigrant Legal Resource Center: Comprehensive immigration guidance – ilrc.org

Closing Thoughts

As a faith community, we are called to extend love and support to all who seek refuge among us. In these uncertain times, let us continue to pray for wisdom, strength, and compassion. May we be reminded of God's promise in 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.”

If you have any questions or need further guidance, please feel free to reach out to Conference leadership at 763.424.8923. May we find courage in our faith and in each other.

Addendum: Community Outreach and Pastoral Care Considerations

Guidance for Church Leadership: Providing Community Support in Times of Need

In light of current events and the needs of some of our immigrant communities, churches may wish to explore additional ways to offer compassionate, Christ-centered support. The guidance below is intended to help pastors and church leaders consider outreach efforts that align with our faith values while remaining thoughtful and prudent.

Emphasize Humanitarian and Spiritual Support

Encourage congregations to focus on the humanitarian and spiritual aspects of our calling. Churches may serve as welcoming spaces where individuals gather for prayer, encouragement, and community connection, and where general information about available resources can be shared. If your church already has a community outreach program, you could choose to add a space that allows visitors and members alike to discuss legal matters.

Collaborate with Trusted Partners

If a church is considering hosting informational sessions or connecting individuals with legal resources, partner only with reputable organizations that provide qualified legal services. **Any legal guidance must be offered by licensed professionals, not by church staff or volunteers.**

Churches should not engage legal advisors or host legal resource events without first coordinating with the Conference office. In some cases, formal agreements or additional guidance may be required.

Know and Communicate Your Role

Clearly communicate that the church's role is to provide spiritual care, hospitality, and connection—not legal advice. Any legal information should come directly from qualified partners, with the church serving solely as a facilitator or host. If you do choose to host or facilitate a legal service, consider very carefully how or whether you wish to advertise the meeting(s), as this could put the church on ICE radar. This does not mean you cannot do it, but if you do, have a plan in place in case ICE does make an appearance.

Safety in a Changed Legal Landscape

Leaders should be aware that prior federal guidance designating churches and schools as “sensitive locations” has changed. Schools and churches are no longer automatically considered off-limits for enforcement actions.

Thoughtful preparation and transparent communication are essential. (See the section on “If ICE arrives at your school or church”)

Offer Spiritual Reassurance

Above all, continue to proclaim the hope of the gospel. Remind congregants that they are not alone, that God is present in uncertainty, and that the church remains a place of prayer, compassion, and community support.