From Eva:

In establishing a sanctuary congregation we need to be clear about the scope and goals of what we are doing. We are offering our church's physical space as a home for immigrants facing deportation, who will not be leaving the church at any time, potentially for months at a time. For it to work, individuals in sanctuary (and their families, who may not be facing deportation) must be able to use this space to meet all the basic needs that a home provides, including comfort and privacy.

In most cases this means a church can realistically only accommodate one individual and their family at a time. I don't know the ins and outs of UCM (maybe there's a subterranean mansion in the church basement no one has shown me yet), but my guess is our space would only adequately accommodate one or two folks in such a situation.

What this means is that the point of declaring a sanctuary church is not to harbor lots of people in a terrible situation; it is to publicly harbor and advocate for one or two "poster children" in this terrible situation, ideally individuals who are willing and able to become high-profile symbols, and therefore raise awareness about the larger plight of immigrants. Thus, we need to focus both on having a space where an individual or family can meet all their basic household needs, AND an effective media/PR strategy to publicize what we are doing and why.

Legally, it seems to me that churches and church members and leaders have not generally faced legal consequences for harboring individuals in sanctuary. A few pastors did face criminal charges but none were convicted. Even so I think it would be worth consulting with a lawyer or other legal professional to get a clear sense of what the potential legal consequences might be.

It seems to me another critical aspect of declaring sanctuary is being embedded in local, regional, and national immigrant movements. If we can only accommodate a limited number of immigrants in crisis, we must know where to refer other immigrants who come looking to us for refuge (for example, an undocumented immigrant activist friend of mine told me Middlebury College is somewhere in the process of declaring sanctuary).