

Churches in Canada defend sanctuaries: Call deportation process flawed

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Canadian church leaders have condemned remarks of federal immigration and citizenship minister Judy Sgro, who earlier this summer called on churches to abandon the time-honored practice of providing sanctuary to people under the threat of deportation.

In the wake of several controversial cases in which Christian houses of worship were used as sanctuaries by those dodging the law, a frustrated Sgro told Canadian Press that “frankly, if we start using the churches as the back door to enter Canada, we’re going to have huge problems. . . . People shouldn’t be allowed to hide anywhere.”

About half a dozen individuals, most of them failed refugee claimants, were being sheltered in churches across the country—a practice that goes back to the Middle Ages or perhaps as far back as Old Testament days.

At a joint press conference this month, leaders of several Christian denominations said sanctuary is not the issue Canadian immigration officials need to address.

“Sanctuary is not a solution. We want to stop the need for it,” said Mary Corkery, spokesman for Kairos, an evangelical group committed to justice issues.

Kairos joined the Presbyterian, United, Anglican and Christian Reformed churches as well the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Romero House refugee shelter in calling on Ottawa to revamp its appeal process for refugees.

“Some churches have pointed out that as a Canadian you can appeal a parking ticket . . . yet if someone is at risk of torture, you don’t have a right to say, ‘I think you got it wrong.’ The process is flawed,” said Corkery.

The Canadian Islamic Congress also weighed in on the issue, saying Sgro’s remarks were “in reality targeting Muslim refugee claimants.” *-Religion News Service*