

“Sanctuary,” Christ and the rule of law

No one can accurately predict what the various campaign promises of president-elect Donald Trump will look like in the actuality of new laws, regulations and executive orders initiated by his administration. Very predictably, that uncertainty has produced correspondingly great and very real fears in those who feel most vulnerable to what could be sudden and catastrophic life changes.

One such group of frightened people are the students in our public and private colleges and universities studying under the presidential executive order commonly referred to as DACA, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Issued in 2012, DACA allows certain undocumented immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as minors to apply for a two-year program that defers deportation, provides eligibility for a work permit and allows them to attend universities and colleges. The DACA program does not provide a path to citizenship.

Several thousand students in our Central Valley are part of more than 230,000 DACA students in California, and an estimated 700,000 across the nation.

During his campaign, Trump vowed to end DACA on his first day in office. However, in his recent *Time* magazine Person of the Year interview, Trump indicated he had changed his thinking. Trump said, “We’re going to work something out. On a humanitarian basis, it’s a very tough situation. We’re going to work something out that’s going to make people happy and proud.” Despite such reassurances, various proposals and petitions have been drafted and signed.

One such petition led by a Fresno Pacific University professor is in process and has gathered over 700 signatures. Its intended to raise awareness and encourage the FPU administration to resist federal actions targeting DACA students. Among other goals, the petition calls for the FPU president to “declare Fresno Pacific a sanctuary campus,” a strategy that has gained attention nationally, despite the fact that the term has no clear meaning and the concept has no basis in law.

Princeton University President Christopher Eisgruber says his university will protect its undocumented immigrant students “to the maximum extent that the law allows.” We concur, as the rule of law is essential to an orderly society, the kind of society we need in order to do the work God has given us. We must model the principles that we teach, which for us are based in biblical principles that require us to respect the legitimate authority of the government.

Supporting and reassuring our students is the kind of thing a Christ-centered university like Fresno Pacific does every day. But declaring us a “sanctuary campus” would likely actually be counterproductive. According to Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust, “designating Harvard as a sanctuary campus might only serve to put undocumented students at greater risk . . . and could put their status in greater jeopardy.” That would not be wise for Fresno Pacific any more than it would be for Harvard.

For the rule of law to effectively protect everyone, it must have limits. If the government seeks to impose laws that contradict core religious beliefs or sincerely and deeply held

values, an individual person or an organization such as Fresno Pacific University must carefully but courageously exercise the right and responsibility of civil disobedience. This must be done in a way that seeks to do what is morally right and encourages wise public policy that moves toward true social justice under God with maximum freedom to live wisely and well in healthy community.

As followers of Jesus, we at Fresno Pacific are guided by his two most fundamental and comprehensive teachings. "Love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength." We seek to think and act like Christ in everything we do, from basketball to biology. Jesus taught a companion principle. "Love your neighbor as yourself." And in responding to the question, "who is my neighbor?" he told the famous story of the good Samaritan.

To live according to these two principles as a Christ-centered university, we must respond to the needy persons that God presents to us. We do not bring people into our country illegally. Bad public policy and practice have accomplished that. But we are committed to serve those God brings to us, and we support wise public policy that helps us correct the effects of bad public policy in a society in which everyone benefits by respect for the rule of law that promotes liberty and justice for all.

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