



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Senator James Sanders Jr. hosts community discussion on sanctuary in churches

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 10, 2025



A diverse assembly of faith leaders, legal experts, and community members convened at the Greater Allen Cathedral AME Church for the “**No Sanctuary in Our Churches**” panel discussion. Hosted by **Senator James Sanders Jr.** and with a welcome from **Rev. Stephen Green**, the event addressed the Trump administration’s policies on sanctuary spaces, emphasizing the dual role of churches in providing spiritual refuge and upholding constitutional protections.

The panel featured **Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood** of Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, **attorney Marlon Kirton** of Kirton Law Firm, **Rev. Paul A. Fleck**, executive director of Immigration Law and Justice New York and chair of the New York State Council of Churches, **Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer**, executive director of the Interfaith Center of New York, **Jasmine Gripper** of the Working Families Party, **Rev. Phillip Falayi**, pastor at Hosanna City of Refuge Church, and **Assemblymember Clyde Vanel**, who brought a legislative perspective to the discussion.

Also in attendance was **Assemblymember Khaleel Anderson**, who joined community members in supporting the conversation on faith-based sanctuary spaces.

The event was both informative and spiritually uplifting, highlighting the synergy between legal rights and faith-based responsibilities. **Rev. Paul Fleck** reflected on the powerful energy in the room, noting, *"The community present demonstrated folks willing to fight back with love. I was both pleased and gratified to be in the midst of ardent prayer warriors committed to living the Gospel mandate to welcome immigrants in our midst."*

Throughout the evening, panelists and attendees engaged in a passionate discussion on the necessity of churches remaining safe havens. **Attorney Marlon Kirton** underscored the legal protections afforded to religious institutions, stating, *"Churches are not only empowered by the Word of God but also protected by the Constitution. I hope that last night's event gave pastors and other church leaders tools to pursue their goals and protect themselves from government overreach."*

As the conversation continued, panelists reinforced the importance of standing firm in the face of government policies that threaten sanctuary spaces. **Senator James Sanders Jr.** emphasized the crucial role of faith communities in advocacy, declaring, *"In times of uncertainty, we must hold firm to our moral and legal responsibilities. Our churches have long been places of refuge for the vulnerable, and we will not allow fear-mongering policies to undermine that legacy. Faith and justice must walk hand in hand."*

The evening concluded with a renewed commitment from both faith leaders and legal advocates to uphold the sanctity of churches as safe spaces. The discussion reinforced the

importance of blending legal acumen with spiritual conviction to counteract policies that threaten core values of protection and compassion.