

# Faith in Action: Spiritual Responses to Authoritarianism

## INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS, SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES, AND MINISTERS & SPIRITUAL LEADERS

By weaving all these elements together—spiritual depth, nonviolent strategy, legal support, and ritual—you create a living, liberative response to authoritarianism that embodies your highest spiritual values.

*I spent many, many hours compiling, organizing, creating and editing this list of action steps for faith communities. By no means is it complete, certainly contribute your own action steps. As faith leaders we are called to respond to authoritarianism, soft words combined with no action is a response all its own – complicity. I would appreciate citing this if you choose to use it.*

– Rev. Kelly Isola

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### ◆ INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

#### Live Your Values Out Loud

- Direct prayer to affirm that all people are inherently free, worthy, and beloved—free to live without fear, discrimination, or oppression.
- Embody nonviolence and compassion: refuse to mirror the tactics of fear, hatred, or domination.
- Become active in the ways you can—through prayer, donations, volunteering, advocacy, and bold truth-telling.

#### Stay Informed and Engaged, Activate Your Vote

- Communicate regularly with elected and appointed officials about human rights, civil liberties, and justice.
- Educate yourself about authoritarianism—its signs, history, and how it functions in subtle and overt ways.
- Vote in every election and encourage others to do the same. Organize or participate in *Souls to the Polls* efforts. Organize “Souls to the Polls” rideshares in your neighborhoods.
- Partner with local faith hubs to distribute nonpartisan guides, pledge cards, or host GOTV phone banks.

#### Protect and Uplift Others

- Speak up in your circles of influence when you witness injustice.
- Volunteer with or donate to organizations working for democracy, equity, and human rights (e.g., [Indivisible.org](https://www.indivisible.org)).
- Train in nonviolent resistance, bystander intervention, or accompaniment to support those being targeted.

## Live Nonviolence Daily

- **Practice "Nonviolence Is a Way of Life"** (King Center) – study principles like voluntary suffering, resisting evil not people, and loving over hate. [ncronline.org](http://ncronline.org), [ignatiansolidarity.net](http://ignatiansolidarity.net), [unitedwedream.org](http://unitedwedream.org), [thekingcenter.org](http://thekingcenter.org)
- Join or lead trainings using Gene Sharp's *198 Methods of Nonviolent Action*. Host a visioning exercise (20–120 min) in your community or home. [boundlessloveproject.org](http://boundlessloveproject.org), [commonslibrary.org](http://commonslibrary.org), [activisthandbook.org](http://activisthandbook.org)

## Advocate with Officials

- Write/email elected officials weekly with specific asks—e.g., support sanctuary protections or limit local cooperation with ICE. Include HB-321 (NC Trust Act) or Raleigh sanctuary resolutions.
- Use scripts from Indivisible ([indivisible.org](http://indivisible.org)) and NC Council of Churches immigrant-rights toolkit. [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), [ncchurches.org](http://ncchurches.org)

## Support Rapid-Response Networks

- Sign up for local ICE Rapid-Response teams (e.g., O.C. Rapid Response) [newyorker.com](http://newyorker.com), [allure.com](http://allure.com) — receive alerts and volunteer to accompany or document.
- Download “Know Your Rights” materials from ICNY or Chicago OCAD [hias.org](http://hias.org), [virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://virginiainterfaithcenter.org), [unitedwedream.org](http://unitedwedream.org), [hias.org](http://hias.org), [interfaithcenter.org](http://interfaithcenter.org), [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com)

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## ◆ SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

### Educate and Empower

- Offer classes and workshops on:
  - How authoritarian systems work—historically and in current times.
  - Spiritual resistance rooted in the teachings of Gandhi, King, Jesus, and others.
  - Civil liberties, human rights, and democratic engagement.
- Invite guest speakers—faith leaders, activists, lawyers, and historians—to connect spiritual values with civic responsibility.
- Host a 4–8 week book/study series on:
  - The 198 Methods of Nonviolent Action (free PDF) [interfaithcenter.org](http://interfaithcenter.org), [ncronline.org](http://ncronline.org), [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), [brandeis.edu](http://brandeis.edu), [commonslibrary.org](http://commonslibrary.org)
  - Stride Toward Freedom (MLK) or Waging Nonviolent Struggle (Sharp), [ncronline.org](http://ncronline.org), [boundlessloveproject.org](http://boundlessloveproject.org), [thekingcenter.org](http://thekingcenter.org)
  - Arrange guest panels with lawyers (e.g., Catholic Legal Immigration Network/CLINIC [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)), activists, and historians.

## **Create Safe and Brave Spaces**

- Host healing circles or support groups for those impacted by authoritarian policies (LGBTQ+ folks, immigrants, BIPOC, etc.).
- Offer monthly support circles integrating prayer, trauma-informed care, and witness sharing.
- Partner with Refugee Immigration Ministry to equip volunteers in spiritual accompaniment [ncronline.org.en.wikipedia.org](https://ncronline.org/en.wikipedia.org)
- Equip your space as affirming, inclusive, and protective.
- Offer spiritual and emotional care to those living through trauma or marginalization.

## **Protect the Vulnerable**

- Offer sanctuary/support to people under threat—trans youth, immigrants, protestors, etc.
- Partner with local legal aid, advocacy, and social service organizations.
- Train community members in de-escalation, accompaniment, and trauma-informed care.

## **Model Internal Integrity**

- Audit your own policies, leadership structures, and language for inclusivity, transparency, and shared power.
- Dismantle hierarchical or exclusionary norms within the community.
- Practice radical hospitality, especially toward those who've been historically excluded from spiritual spaces.
- Offer anti-bias trainings and commit to transformative justice leadership models.

## **Take Public, Collective Action**

- Issue public statements rooted in your community's spiritual values: Oneness, Justice, Love, and Wisdom.
- Publish press releases grounded in spiritual values when rights are threatened.
- Regularly show up—physically or virtually—at rallies, school board meetings, and city council sessions, ICE protests as a visible spiritual witness and presence.
- Host letter-writing campaigns, voter registration drives, and teach-ins that integrate civic action with spiritual practice - meditative opening/closing time.
- Share spiritual practices: breath prayer, resilience rites, and ritual before/after activism.
- Organize interfaith coalitions with Faith in Action or PICO networks [en.wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org).

## Sanctuary and Rapid Support

- Offer spiritual and emotional care to those living through trauma or marginalization.
- Use HIAS Action Guide to create sanctuary protocols [nonviolent-conflict.org](http://nonviolent-conflict.org), [boundlessloveproject.org](http://boundlessloveproject.org), [commonslibrary.org](http://commonslibrary.org), [interfaithcenter.org](http://interfaithcenter.org), [hias.org](http://hias.org), [ignatiansolidarity.net](http://ignatiansolidarity.net).
- Set up emergency legal/transportation funds. Virginia toolkit suggests raising bail/fee funds, and organizing rides for undocumented people [virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://virginiainterfaithcenter.org).

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## ◆ MINISTERS & SPIRITUAL LEADERS

### Preach with Clarity and Courage

- Use the pulpit to speak Truth with both power and tenderness.
- Regularly use pulpit sermons to name injustice, tie scripture to civic duties, and call out systemic oppression.
- Connect scripture, metaphysical teachings, and current events.
- Share stories of resistance and resilience from sacred traditions and marginalized communities.
  - Illustrate spiritual resistance with stories—from Jesus to King to current Indigenous and BIPOC leaders.
- Call the privileged into accountability and the marginalized into belovedness.

### Spiritually Ground Resistance

- Model what spiritually grounded activism looks like—centered, compassionate, and unshakably committed to love.
- Connect activism with spiritual practices like prayer, meditation, and ritual.
- Encourage civic engagement as an expression of spiritual responsibility.

### Model Sanctuary and Spiritual Activism

- Publicly designate your congregation as sanctuary (Bay Area model of 100+ churches) [sfchronicle.com](http://sfchronicle.com).
- Build relationships with CLINIC for legal referrals [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).
- Commit to physically accompanying individuals to hearings, check-ins, and court—like Pastor Juan Carlos Ruiz in Brooklyn [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), [sfchronicle.com](http://sfchronicle.com)

## **Lead by Example**

- Challenge your own comfort. Speak boldly even when it risks backlash.
- Show up in public spaces as a spiritual leader who is clear, consistent, and committed to liberation.
- Prioritize those most impacted in your leadership, preaching, and pastoral care.

## **Offer Prophetic Teaching**

- Teach the theology of justice—why love must be active.
- Invite your congregation to see authoritarianism as a spiritual crisis, not a political one.
- Equip people with tools for spiritual discernment, resilience, and sacred action.

## **Lead Nonviolence Training**

- Host workshops on Gene Sharp's Strategic Planning Guide (Path of Most Resistance) [ignatiansolidarity.net](http://ignatiansolidarity.net), [nonviolent-conflict.org](http://nonviolent-conflict.org), [commonslibrary.org](http://commonslibrary.org)
- Connect with Nonviolence International or ICNC for facilitator training and materials [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), [nonviolent-conflict.org](http://nonviolent-conflict.org), [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)

## **Embed Resistance in Faith Rites**

- Introduce spiritual grounding rituals—lighting justice candles, embodiment prayers before actions.
- Integrate monthly communal practices: fast-prayers, vow services, solidarity lament circles.

## **Collaborate Publicly and Interfaith**

- Build coalitions with other denominational and interfaith justice groups (e.g., ICNY, Zen Peacemakers) [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org).
- Co-host civic events—"Sanctuary Sunday," "Resistance Reflection Retreats," and community resilience days.

## **Create Resource Kits**

- Distribute physical packets and online hubs with:
  - HIAS Action Guide, CLINIC info, 198 Methods, ICNC materials.
  - Local legal aid contacts, mental-health referrals, trauma-aware chaplains.
- Offer leadership coaching for community volunteers and lay activists.