



## Standing Together and Standing Up January 2026/Shevat 5786 | Rachel Galanter

I am a Jewish woman changed by foster care. In my late twenties, almost three decades ago, I chose to be a foster parent. As the only Spanish speaking foster parent in my county, child welfare placed a teenaged unaccompanied minor with me. We were less than 15 years apart in age, but I had been volunteering and working in human services for several years, including three years of crisis case management with street youth, so I believed I was prepared. Seven years later, my younger daughter, also Latina, came to me as a 6 month old. I have continued to work in human services, and currently work at a mental health agency providing training and consultation to ensure culturally responsive and linguistically accessible services are available to Latino communities. I am also an engaged lay leader at my synagogue: as a service leader, an educator, and as a past President on the Board. Currently, I'm a *shaliachat tzibur*, I oversee b' mitzvah tutoring, and I serve on the Racial Justice Committee.

Not only are my two now adult daughters Latina, my son-in-law is Latino. My four grandchildren came to shul with me regularly when they were little. Now that they are teens, the older ones don't join me anymore. The youngest, my granddaughter and namesake, still comes and loves to be there. There have been moments at shul that hurt my heart, like when one of the staff asked me to "look at this picture of your granddaughter" that was actually the other Latina girl in her Sunday school class who looks nothing like her. I went back to the staff person later and talked about how good they are with learning the kids' names and helping the kids feel seen, and how this misidentification felt to me. They were able to acknowledge the racial element in their mistake and apologized. This staff person is one of my granddaughter's favorite people at shul; they never fail to acknowledge her by name and make her feel welcome.

The week ICE arrived in North Carolina, I received a call from one of our rabbis to check in on how my family and I were doing. He didn't ask about documentation status; just how I was coping. I felt so held—given a moment to be needy instead of strong. Regardless of documentation status, my family members are all living with risk due to profiling based on skin color, accents, being Spanish speakers, last names, and types of jobs. A Latino high school student who was a US citizen was picked up from his part time job doing yard work. I worry about my son-in-law who works as a house painter and my grandsons who sometimes help.

In our conversation, when I was asked if I needed anything, I asked the rabbi if we could host a training with a space to process how we as Jews feel as we read about and witness Latino immigrants being profiled. We talked about how what helped me feel better was feeling like I was doing something.

Pastoral calls were not the only step our rabbis took. They sent out an email encouraging our congregation to take action. The suggestions ranged from asking our whole community to reach out to check in on people impacted, to donating or delivering food, to getting trained to be part of safety patrols to monitor ICE and Border Patrol activity.

When I went to volunteer, I felt so moved to see so many fellow congregants stepping up in so many ways. To know that my Jewish friends and communities recognized the need and showed up.

In the end, it didn't make sense to host our own training, but we did hold a space to process how our historic and intergenerational trauma was being activated. The people who came together talked about how people hiding in their homes or people being packed into trucks pressed on our wounds from our own pasts. One person talked about the clear opportunities to act, helping them feel less anxious. Another spoke of difficulty paying their bills when they volunteered instead of working. We shared and studied text and concluded by singing together to help us breathe deeply and energize ourselves.

I worry about my family. I worry that people will not be able to keep showing up because this will be a marathon, not a sprint. I worry that I am not doing enough. I worry that I am spending my time on the wrong things. I worry that I didn't take a picture of my family together celebrating Channukah on the first night, because what if we don't get to all be together celebrating again. I worry that there will be a time when my family members won't be safe at shul. I worry in some dark recess of my mind that Jews will be targeted next. I try to focus on the ways people are showing up now and the thoughtful words of my rabbis to our congregation: "We remain steadfast in our commitment to protect, support, and uphold the dignity of every member of our community. May we meet this moment with courage, solidarity, and love."