

ment has received most of its publicity in the recent trial of 12 men and women arrested in January 1985 for their involvement with sanctuary in and around Tucson, Ariz.

Among the eight who subsequently were convicted of participating in a conspiracy to transport and conceal illegal immigrants was the Rev. John Fife of the Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson. Along with Arizona rancher Jim Corbett, Fife is credited as being one of the pioneers in the movement, and his congregation was the first in the nation to declare public sanctuary on March 24, 1982.

"Everyone is still active," she says. "There is nothing that is shut down."

Indeed, the most significant effect of the government's decision to arrest and prosecute sanctuary workers has been a rallying of support for the movement. This was evident in a national sanctuary conference that took place shortly after the arrests. The conference was attended by 1,800 people — including author Elie Wiesel and the Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr. of New York's Riverside Church.

On the financial side of the picture, the National Sanctuary Defense Fund has received generous support from several national church denominations in its effort to help pay legal costs for both the Tucson defendants and other refugees and sanctuary workers in need of legal assistance, Hemmingsen says.

Musicians such as Jackson Browne, Joan Baez and Bruce Cockburn also have performed benefit concerts in support of the movement.

All of this, plus the fact that the number of sanctuary churches has more than doubled since the time of the arrests, does not surprise Fife.

"Whenever the church has been persecuted throughout history, it has strengthened the church, not weakened it," Fife says.

An estimated 350,000 to 800,000 Salvadorans have sought safety in the United States since 1979, and at least 50,000 unarmed civilians have been killed in El Salvador's current civil war. Yet the U.S. State Department contends that the majority of Salvadoran refugees were motivated to come to the United States for economic reasons.

"They're here for economic reasons, period," says David Elkert, head of the Northern California Immigration and Naturalization Service.

"Their basic ground, in most instances, is that there is a war going on down there. People are being killed, they can't find jobs, and they say for economic reasons they just don't want to live in El Salvador, or they can't make a living. Well, you will not find the word 'economics' mentioned in the definition of a refugee contained in the Refugee Act of 1980," Elkert says.

But Dolores Ferguson, a Central



Photo by John Giustina

America Refugee Program worker, disagrees.

"We hear many times the Salvadoran refugees characterized as 'economic' refugees, and I think that should be examined real closely. We have interviewed in depth thousands and thousands of newly arrived Salvadoran refugees, and over and over again we are hearing instances of persecution — many times the most horrible types of persecution. Some of our clients have been victims of torture, and their very bodies are witness to the fact that they have been persecuted. That is not an economic reason to come to the United States," Ferguson says.

That belief, along with concern for what would happen to the refugees if they were deported

to their native countries, is the crux of the movement.

But despite his convictions, Karen Hemmingsen of the Eugene Friends Meeting and a board member for the National Sanctuary Defense Fund says all of the defendants are currently free pending an appeal — a process that could seemingly "take forever."

She also notes the court's decision has not adversely affected the involvement of churches such as Southside Presbyterian.

Many recent arrivals from Guatemala and El Salvador tell accounts of deportees being murdered by the infamous *escuadrones de muerte*, or death squads. These right-wing, paramilitary organizations are notorious for dismembering their vic-

tims or torturing them beyond recognition.

Because the bodies can't be identified it is difficult to disprove U.S. State Department claims that people deported to Guatemala and El Salvador are not in any danger, Hemmingsen says.

"The way they (U.S. officials) have tried to document it has been by taking a roster of folks who have been sent back, and then trying to find out how many have been assassinated or tortured," she says. "Well, the first problem is that families aren't notified when their sons and daughters are sent back, so they wouldn't know how to look in the body dumps for them. Another problem is that there is a long stretch between the airport where the people are being sent and the nearest

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