

Bible Study Leader Deported After Police Arrest 27 Churchgoers Who Defended Him

Samuel Oliver-Bruno, an undocumented immigrant, was deported from the United States last night despite the pleas of his fellow church members and local elected officials to allow him to stay.

Last week, Oliver-Bruno was arrested during a supposedly routine visit to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services office in Morrisville, North Carolina. Oliver-Bruno attended the appointment in an attempt to comply with law enforcement and potentially open a pathway to legal residency. He had been living for 11 months prior at the CityWell United Methodist Church in Durham, leading Bible studies on campus, after coming to the U.S. to seek treatment for his sick wife. Members of his church attended the appointment with him, reportedly suspicious that he could be arrested.

Pastor Cleve May told WTVR, "It was presented as a legitimate appointment, but ICE utilized due process as bait. So we went to the appointment with him, to offer protection, knowing that ICE could not be trusted. We were thinking we would be in and out in 30 minutes."

After officers arrested Oliver-Bruno, church members blocked the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) van holding him for three hours, singing "Amazing Grace." Video of the peaceful protest was streamed online. Twenty-seven churchgoers were eventually arrested as well.

U.S. Representatives David Price and G.K. Butterfield have decried the arrests as unfair, saying in a statement: "At best, Mr. Oliver-Bruno was presented with a catch-22 dilemma; at worst, he was entrapped. It's clear that while Mr. Oliver-

Bruno was attempting to follow the law in pursuit of his legal petition, ICE coordinated with USCIS to target him upon his leaving the City Well United Methodist Church. Samuel, his wife Julia, and his 19-year-old son Daniel have been productive and upstanding members of the community for many years, with no serious criminal records and deep ties in the faith community.”

Yesterday, The CityWell released an official statement revealing Oliver-Bruno had been deported.

“Samuel had broken no laws; he was working hard, paying taxes and contributing to his community. Samuel was a model community member. ... Samuel’s family, church community and supporting neighbors are grieved at Samuel being ripped from his family, church and community. Many among family and friends are traumatized by the violence employed by ICE in this detainment and deportation operation. Samuel’s family, church and community supporters are appalled at the flagrant disregard of ICE’s own internal protocols that discourage executing raids in churches and in public assemblies. On Nov. 23, 2018 the public assembly that gathered to surround and support Samuel was a church service in which prayer, Scripture, song and proclamation were centrally present.”