

# THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF OLD LYME

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## **BELOVED NEW BRITAIN COUPLE TO LEAVE SANCTUARY**

### **Malik Naveed bin Rehman and Zahida Altaf Leave Sanctuary, Return to Home, Work & Life in New Britain**

OLD LYME, CT, OCTOBER 16, 2018 – The First Congregational Church of Old Lyme (FCCOL) announced at a press conference today that Malik Naveed bin Rehman and his wife Zahida Altaf are ending their time in sanctuary at FCCOL. They do so because ICE recently announced it is not opposing the couple’s stay request, which is currently pending at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals. Based on that information, Malik and Zahida, together with their attorney, Glenn Formica, and the ministers at FCCOL, feel it is time to end their time in sanctuary, return to their lives, and await a ruling from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals. They now make plans for two futures. Only one of those futures will allow them to fulfill their dreams, residing permanently in the United States. Malik and Zahida are relieved and appreciative that the Government has not opposed their Stay filed with the Court of Appeals and would like to express their appreciation to the individual ICE officers involved in that decision.

During their stay of deportation, the couple’s legal counsel will continue to help them pursue their efforts to obtain legal status in the United States. Malik and Zahida had pursued legal status on their own for years prior to being targeted for deportation, but were misled by two different immigration attorneys, both of whom ended up being jailed for fraud. The couple, together with their five-year-old daughter Roniya – who is a U.S. citizen – left sanctuary immediately following the press conference to return to their friends and family in New Britain, and resume operation of their popular Broad Street restaurant, the Pizza Corner.

The family sought sanctuary at FCCOL on March 19, 2018, the date originally set for their deportation. At the time, a stay with ICE was pending, but undecided. In desperation and confusion, they sought sanctuary to prevent being removed to Pakistan. FCCOL offered them sanctuary to give the legal process a chance to work and give the couple an opportunity to plead the injustices of their case to the Courts. While in sanctuary, the couple has been monitored by an electronic bracelet and regular telephone calls.

In announcing word of the unopposed stay request, FCCOL Senior Minister Steve Jungkeit said, “I would like to express my gratitude to all who have been involved in this ministry of hospitality: to Malik, Zahida and Roniya, for showing us the meaning of perseverance and of peace in the midst of enormous personal turmoil; to the many parishoners and volunteers

from the community who supported and sustained Malik and Zahida during their ordeal; to ICE, for respecting the sanctity of churches and for granting us the ability to minister to those who are desperate, afraid and in need; but also to those members of our community who may have been quietly reluctant about this form of hospitality and care but have chosen to support Malik and Zahida all the same. We're utterly grateful for the unopposed stay request. But more than that, we're grateful for all we have experienced and learned as a result of this experiment in compassion."

Malik and Zahida said, "We sought sanctuary not to protest or defy ICE. We only wanted more time for our case to be heard. We are very appreciative of the kindness we have been given by the church, the community and now ICE. It reaffirms our faith in the United States, and our determination to make this our home."

Attorney Glenn Formica, who has represented the couple during the appeals process, said, "This is a relief, but not a victory. For a little longer, America will remain the hope in Malik and Zahida's dreams."

Connecticut Senators Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy, Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty, Attorney General Candidate William Tong, New Britain Mayor Erin Stewart, the New Britain city council, the New Britain Democratic Town Committee and assorted human rights organizations and faith communities have been among the groups and individuals who called for federal authorities to grant the couple a stay of deportation. The suffering and pain caused by the family's deportation has received high-profile attention in the "New Yorker," "The Opposition with Jordan Klepper" and many other national, state and local media and programs.

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