News



Brian Straw holds hands with his wife, Shannon Craig Straw, while leaving the Everett McKinley Dirksen federal courthouse after his arraignment, Nov. 12, 2025, in Chicago. (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

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Like his five fellow defendants, Brian Straw was flanked by supporters as he entered the courtroom at the Everett Dirksen federal courthouse on Wednesday (Nov. 12) for his arraignment on charges related to protests that have taken place for weeks outside an immigrant processing facility in Broadview.

But unlike Straw's fellow "Broadview Six" defendants, who include Democratic congressional candidate Kat Abughazaleh and Cook County Board candidate Catherine "Cat" Sharp, his supporters wore clerical collars — because most were United Methodist pastors.

"He's one of ours," said the Rev. Lindsey Long Joyce, a pastor at Grace Church of Logan Square, who was among the clergy who showed up at the courtroom, clearly visible among the dozens of supporters of all six defendants.

"In the United Methodist tradition, we have something called connectionalism, which, in this moment, we are saying means: If you come for one United Methodist, you have come for all of us," said Joyce, who also serves the Northern Illinois UMC conference as a cooperative parish strategist, helping congregations work together to increase their local impact.

Straw, 38, an attorney and trustee of the Village of Oak Park, a Chicago suburb, is the husband of Shannon Craig Straw, who has long worked with liberal-leaning religious groups as a communications adviser and who also accompanied him on Wednesday.

The Broadview Six case is focused on confrontations between federal agents and protesters at a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Broadview, just west of Chicago. After President Donald Trump's administration launched "Operation Midway Blitz," a mass deportation effort, in the city, religious leaders joined the resistance, gathering at the Broadview ICE detention center on a daily basis.

Straw and his fellow defendants were arraigned Wednesday on charges that stem from a Sept. 26 protest outside Broadview. According to the indictment, defendants surrounded an ICE vehicle attempting to leave the facility, banged on the hood and damaged it in various ways. The driver was then forced to drive slowly, the indictment alleges.

Straw, like all of the defendants, pleaded not guilty.

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At one point during the proceeding, Straw's lawyer challenged a request that his client turn over his passport, insisting that Straw, a "boring suburban dad" by Straw's own description, wasn't "going anywhere." He noted that part of the reason he participated in protests outside the Broadview facility was because he opposed the government demanding "papers" from immigrants.

Straw's lawyer said that while immigrants detained by ICE can't "stand up to the government," Straw can.

After the judge explained she would not require defendants to turn over their passports, the overflow room burst into applause.

The Rev. Betty Jo Birkhahn-Rommelfanger, a retired UMC pastor who felt strongly that the case should be dropped, said she had come in part to register her own objection to the alleged mistreatment of immigrants in the Broadview facility. "These are God's people that are in that detention center, and they won't even let religious leaders come in and pray with them, or offer Communion, or in any way give pastoral care," Birkhahn-Rommelfanger said. "It is just wrong."

A separate class action lawsuit on behalf of Broadview detainees has been filed, arguing that they are being denied access to religious rites such as Communion.

The clergy who came to support Straw included leaders from other faith traditions, but Joyce said a group of UMC pastors is dedicated to showing support for other Chicago-area Methodists who are facing legal battles amid the administration's ongoing mass deportation effort. Joyce said she and others would show up for immigrant families, as well as for the Rev. Hannah Kardon, a fellow UMC pastor who

also showed up to support Straw. Kardon faces an impending court date on state-level charges stemming from her arrest while protesting at the Broadview facility last month.

"Any United Methodist, any of my people who are deported, detained and arrested for standing up to this — I'm going to show up for them, because that's what faith means to me right now," Joyce said.

Straw did not comment as he left the courtroom, but he pulled from his pocket a copy of the U.S. Constitution and a New Testament. He opened the latter to a bookmarked passage in the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus preaches the Beatitudes.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.