2019 ANNUAL REPORT

IFCLA

The St. Louis Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America
A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What a year it has been; what an impossible task to be working for justice in this era. The sentiments of the prophet Elijah have felt closer than ever: “I have had enough! It is too hard to serve God, too exhausting to work for love, dignity and justice.” My heart feels heavy, my brain exhausted, and my body out of breath.

Yet, I am challenged and inspired by the words of Toni Morrison: “The only grace you will receive is the grace you can imagine; if you can not see it, you will not have it.”

The resilience this movement demands of us comes from a prophetic imagination strong enough to fuel our creativity, persistent enough to outlast the tireless frenzy of the oppressor, and committed enough to pursue hope collectively.

Though we feel tired, we are not defeated; we might feel spent, but we are far from finished.

May we continue to pick each other up, to hold one another closer in compassion, and feed each other’s souls, so that together, we may sustain this struggle until we are all free.

With hope,
Sara John

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THROUGH EDUCATION AND ORGANIZING, WE CONVENE AN INTER-FAITH COMMUNITY TO ACCOMPANY THE PEOPLE OF LATIN AMERICA IN THEIR WORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE.

DIGNITY + INTEGRITY + SOLIDARITY + DIVERSITY + COMMITMENT

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A MESSAGE FROM THE GARCIA FAMILY

After over 2 years of living in sanctuary at Christ Church UCC with no end in sight, we would like to express our deep appreciation for the support you have offered to our family.

Without your support, we know that we would not have been able to stay strong throughout the injustices over the years. We are blessed to be able to fight alongside you today, for the opportunity to show what our family is made of and to show that we will not give up. Your support makes that possible.

We need you to continue supporting our family more than ever, as our fight will get harder and harder the longer we suffer the separation from Alex, unable to provide for our family and create beautiful memories with our children. Thank you so much for all that you do!

With heartfelt appreciation,
Alex & Carly Garcia
collaborative efforts with the National Sanctuary Collective. In March, we welcomed Congressman Wm. Lacy Clay, Jr., to Christ Church for the second time, and requested that he sponsor private legislation that would enable Alex to leave the church and reunite with his family on a pathway to citizenship. Four months later, Representative Clay introduced H.R. 3750 - the fourth private bill this session for individuals living in sanctuary.

Once again, September was a difficult month for the Garcia family. To honor their 2-year sacrifice, more than 50 individuals and a dozen congregations made a 7-mile pilgrimage from the ICE Office in Downtown St. Louis to Christ Church, where Alex and others waited in prayerful meditation to welcome the pilgrims. Two weeks later, a team of volunteers traveled to Washington DC to advocate on Alex’s behalf.

‘Today we pray with our feet. We offer 14,000 steps of joyful resistance.’

We built power for this family’s reunification in many ways: we sent teams to Washington DC three times, questioned Presidential candidates in Iowa, gathered over 1,500 signatures on a national petition for sanctuary liberation, sent over 500 postcards to Congress during August recess, and made financial contributions to eliminate the family’s crippling credit card debt incurred since their sanctuary sacrifice began. Though exhausted, the strategies, relationships and energy invested this year propels us into the work for Alex’s freedom in 2020, together with other families fighting through sanctuary.
continue to fight for justice, transparency or accountability. Through a series of presentations, film discussions and a webinar with student organizer, Omar Garcia Velasquez, IFCLA kept their memory alive and continued the joint struggle to resist the spread of militarization and unchecked state violence everywhere.

PUBLIC THEOLOGY & RACIAL JUSTICE

As IFCLA seeks to equip leaders that will bring about social change, we sent a team of 17 volunteers to the Public Theology and Racial Justice Collaborative’s Summer Institute at the Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee. The team was challenged by this year’s theme: “Policy, Politics, and Privilege: The Prophetic Response to Racist Governance”. The agitational and transformative experience developed deeper relationships among IFCLA leaders and staff as well as offered opportunities for personal growth while we decolonize ourselves, our work, and our world.

IMMIGRATION 101, 201 AND MORE

More than 530 volunteers participated in over 37 educational events IFCLA offered in 2019. We continued to offer the Immigration 101 multi-week course, which discusses sending, transit and receiving community history and details, identifying root causes of immigration in order to imagine how we will build community today. In response to demands from 101 participants, IFCLA designed and launched the first of a series of 201-level courses, exploring details like profit in immigrant incarceration, enforcement in Missouri, and a Honduras case study of US intervention.

AYOTZINAPA: 5 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Five years after the forced disappearance of 43 Mexican students from the town of Ayotzinapa, their families delegation comprised of roughly 20 people from the US and Canada. There, accompanied by many resilient and inspiring Honduran community leaders and activists, we witnessed firsthand the heartbreaking, anxiety-inducing, anger-bubbling realities of life in Honduras. The team of defenders:

- Supported daily marches, protests and strikes in El Progreso;
- Learned from Garifuna leaders about land reclamation projects they lead in Trujillo;
- Visited a community project in San Pedro Sula;
- Honored the continuation of Berta Caceres’s work in La Esperanza with COPINH leaders;
- Witnessed the experiences of political prisoners Edwin Espinal and Raul Alvarez in the US-style military-run “La Tolva” prison;
- Remained present during the boiling point of a two-day national strike led by the Honduran people.

These experiences once again affirm our convictions and renew our commitment to accompany the Honduran people. The US is complicit in the abuse of the Honduran people and peaceful protesters who demand a better life and government for themselves. The US is complicit in the murder of Berta Caceres and countless other human rights defenders. The US had a direct role in the 2009 military coup d’etat that led to the current dictatorship of Juan Orlando Hernandez; the migrant caravans denounced by the US only exist because of this pattern and history of intervention.

The US’s involvement in Honduras is malicious, unjust and immoral. We will not be silent. Honduras, we are with you. ¡Berta vive y la lucha sigue!
Organizing

Building relationships to support partners in Latin America and effect change in US law and policy.

ICE RAPID RESPONSE COLLABORATION

Amid increasing threats for widespread immigration enforcement and an increased ICE presence in communities across the country, IFCLA joined with local partners to create a rapid response network. Led by several Latino/a/x leaders, the 24-hour volunteer-run hotline and team of volunteers came together in order to ensure that all immigrants have access to accurate information and immediate community support.

IFCLA supported this effort through hosting trainings for the rapid response teams, sharing helpful information on social media, and quickly showing up on the streets as needed to evaluate reports of ICE activity.

This community-based collaboration seeks to ensure that unfounded fear isn’t spread and to build powerful long-lasting relationships that can be activated in times of crisis.

FIGHTING RACISM IN MISSOURI

IFCLA joined the MO Immigration Policy Table, a coalition of state-wide organizations and individuals advocating for issues impacting immigrants in Missouri, building a proactive policy platform that works toward cultural and legislative change. This coalition serves as a forum to share information and analysis, to develop and coordinate plans of action, and build further support for immigrant communities in the state.

During the legislative session, IFCLA sent volunteers to Jefferson City to testify against racist legislation like SB 64 and to fight for equal access to higher education. Though the “Show Me Your Papers” bill was defeated, a conversation behind closed doors at the 11th hour reversed the hard work of the Coalition to protect students in Missouri: the legislature voted to continue its decade-long pattern of charging international tuition rates for some Missouri students, regardless of how long they’ve lived in the state.

MOVEMENT LAWYERING FOR JUSTICE

IFCLA continues to deepen relationships with community partners, including the incredible leadership at the MICA Project. This year, Sara John and Nicole Cortes developed a training module on movement lawyering in an effort to build capacity in the region for collaborative efforts between attorneys and organizers, where voices of the directly impacted are centered and skills are pooled for the service of the common good.
Recognizing the importance of and encouraging supportive partnerships that are responsive to the changing goals and needs of immigrants,

**ICE ACCOMPANIMENT PROGRAM**

The ICE Accompaniment Project continues to train teams of allies to be present with immigrants during mandated check-ins with federal authorities. Hundreds are placed into the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) while they await a court date; most are then required to wear GPS ankle monitors for years. IFCLA supports compas’ efforts to have these ankle monitors removed through direct petition to ICE. Last year, 10 monitors were removed; in 2019, 26 monitors were removed!

Due to increasing demand among Latinx neighbors (largely as a result of significant changes in federal asylum policies such as the immoral Migrant Protection Protocols or “Remain in Mexico” policy), this program grew sixfold. In 2018, IFCLA sent accompaniment teams on 80 check-ins; this year, teams were present at over 480!

In collaboration with other members of the Immigrant Service Providers Network (ISPN), we developed a webinar for service providers as well as a workshop for compas on the rights, challenges and potential abuses of the ISAP program. We reached more than 60 individuals in these ways.

**DACA RENewAL CLINIC**

As the Administration continues to attack multiple immigrant populations, those impacted by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program also continue to fight for their right to stay. In November, the Supreme Court of the United States heard oral arguments in a case that will determine the future of this program and the status of the several hundred thousand of DACA recipients. The fight to preserve DACA reminds us that we must remain focused on addressing root causes, which is the only path towards long term liberation.

In light of this and to support local DACA recipients with renewal, we once again partnered with the Scholarship Foundation, MIRA, the MICA Project and St. Francis Community Services to offer a free clinic and offered financial support for renewal filing fees.

**Pro Se Asylum Clinics**

To build community capacity to meet these increasing demands, IFCLA partnered with the MICA Project and St. Francis Community Services to offer a series of free asylum clinics to better equip immigrants to represent themselves in immigration court. Participants complete and file their asylum applications, are taught how the asylum process works, and are connected to accompaniment resources for the duration of their case. Clinics will continue in 2020.

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