

Natalie Teague, Esq.
Immigration Legal Counsel
Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel

Brief Description of Ministry:

Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel strives to provide reliable and responsible legal advice, services, and information in English and Spanish to Disciples pastors, immigrants, congregations, and communities throughout the United States (Counsel is not licensed to practice law in Canada). We do this through diligent, ethical, and zealous full representation of Disciples pastors and seminarians, advice only consultations and referrals to any Disciples member in the US, and timely legal updates and self-help legal materials. For more information, see www.disciplesimmigration.org.

Impact between 10/2021 – 10/2022:

✓ Case Numbers:

- 53 Open full service legal representation matters
- 58 Brief services and/or advice-only legal consultations provided
- Immigrants assisted from 19 countries of origin: Mexico, United States, Canada, South Korea, Guatemala, India, China, Afghanistan, Liberia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Israel, Ukraine, Brazil, Micronesia, Honduras, Syria, Dominica, Colombia
- 16 Disciples Regions assisted

✓ Select Case Victories:

- Longest pending I-360 Special Immigrant Religious Worker Immigrant Visa petitions approved after 23.5 months and 19 months of waiting. Now the permanent residence (green card) processes will pend for >1 yr min.
- Green card approved for Youth Minister who had waited 20 months – see Snapshot in Challenges below for details.
- Extension of Status approved for R-1 visa, which enabled the pastor to renew driver's license (after USCIS processing delays caused it to expire). Pastor can now drive the church van and resume outreach again!

✓ Client Gratitude:

- ❖ *“During my immigrant journey, it was a huge blessing for me to have Natalie as my legal representative who is professional, passionate, and compassionate. Unlike the other Attorney that I had before, Natalie fully knows and understands how hard this journey is for an immigrant. Natalie is always pro-active, leading my congregation and me not to have any issues. And Natalie is always accessible, allowing me to have unlimited Q&A sessions via e-mail, Zoom, or even phone-call which is my true benefit while my other immigration attorney used to charge for each time to have legal counsel. Again, I am blessed to have Natalie as my legal representative as well as my counselor for my hard and rocky journey.”*
- ❖ *“I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for all the care and kindness you have shown me, and for working tirelessly to ensure every detail of my case. I am so thankful for your legal help, especially taking up my case in the midst of a pandemic, so that I can focus in serving God and the people during the most difficult time. Your legal expertise and professionalism are true gifts to our church and our community.”*

✓ **Additional Metrics:**

- In Fall 2021, provided short term legal assistance for Afghan refugees via Human Rights First call for pro bono attorneys in day long virtual clinics.
- Integrated use of Docketwise, an immigration specific practice management software, to increase collaboration, security, and efficiency.
- In the longest pending cases for 6 pastors, ILC has provided the equivalent of \$39,543.75 in *pro bono* legal services in 2022 alone (hourly rates calculated from the [2019 AILA national marketplace survey](#)).
- In the 58 brief services provided, at an average of 2 hours of time at the national mean hourly rate of \$300/hour, ILC provided the equivalent of \$34,800 worth of *pro bono* advice-only legal services to DOC members.

Collaboration (w/other ministries of DHM, other ministries of the church):

- ✓ Lead organizer and coauthor of chapter “Walking in Liminal Space with Migrants and Refugees” for forthcoming second edition of [Injustice and the Care of Souls: Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care](#) with Rev. Bere Gil Soto of Indianapolis and Rev. Pedro Ramos Goyocolea of Tucson (both with NBA)
- ✓ Assisted in facilitating monthly Zooms with other religious worker attorneys (in house, nonprofit, and private) to brainstorm case strategy in religious worker immigration cases as processing times continue to challenge (see below).
- ✓ Participated in Disciples Justice Ministries’ 2022 half day planning retreat, 10/21/21, and monthly meetings when possible.
- ✓ Recorded interview with Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea & Global Ministries, 11/21
- ✓ Attended DHM PRAR Day Long Training, 11/17/21
- ✓ Half day presentations for DHM Disciples Peace Fellows: 5/23/22 & 8/1/22
- ✓ Recorded short piece with Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea of DHM RIM and other DJM partners for GA23 Migration Workshop Proposal, 08/22
- ✓ Connected with Week of Compassion new staff working on refugee response
- ✓ Participated in Stanford University research interview on immigration advocate perspectives and attorney burnout prevention
- ✓ Weekly CLE’s attended to stay current on ever-evolving immigration law & policy

Challenges:

- ✓ **USCIS Case Processing Times Continue to Complicate**

<u>Type of Case</u>	<u>Pre-Pandemic</u>	<u>Post-Pandemic</u>	<u>Increase</u>
I-129 Religious Worker Non-Immigrant Visa (R-1)	4 months	12 months	200%
I-360 Special Immigrant Religious Worker Petition (1 st step of green card case for pastors – after R-1)	6 months	23 months	283%
I-485 Application for Adjustment of Status (2 nd step of green card case)	8 months	34 months	325%
Adjustment of Status for US citizens’ spouses, parents, & unmarried children	6 months	20 months	233%
I-765 Work Permit based on I-485 (family or employment based case)	4 months	15.5 months	288%

✓ Snapshot of Recent Approval of Youth Minister Green Card after 20 month wait: Complications included: very long wait (see below), 2 requests for additional evidence – including for evidence initially provided that USCIS lost; the long processing time necessitated 2 work permit applications while the green card was pending (including one issued by USCIS with the incorrect date of birth, prompting further work and wait); client had to share irrelevant personal and financial information as she filed during the Trump administration’s public charge rule (that was later rescinded by the Biden administration); and USCIS lost her medical exam (requiring a duplicate, thus additional delay and expense). In other words, the longer a matter lingers, the greater the number and magnitude of complications, which often necessitate further work, worry, & waiting.

- This case required a total of 51.75 hours of legal services since 03/2020.
- In client’s jurisdiction with a median market rate of \$260/hour, ILC provided \$13,455 worth of *pro bono* legal services for one minister.
- From prior ILC Tana Liu-Beers’ first R-1 Non-immigrant religious worker application in April 2015 through our green card approval, this minister endured 2,688 days of waiting: 7 years, 4 months, and 9 days.
- *How would you live your life if it took 7.25 years to have actual stability that you could continue to reside, work, drive, and live freely in a country?*

✓ Ongoing Agency Issues:

- USCIS is routinely losing evidence, causing more complications & costs.
- USPS, through which all cases are filed via Priority Mail, has repeatedly lost mail or caused delivery delays that added additional time and anxiety.

✓ Difficulty maintaining legal caseload caused less collaboration with Church partners and less generation of legal updates and self-help materials.

2022 has been the heaviest case filing year since I took this position in March 2020. For comparison, ILC had 21 full service cases between 10/20 – 04/21, 35 full service cases between 04/21 – 10/21, and now 53 cases, a 152% increase. The case numbers continue to increase due to USCIS processing delays, which cause additional, foreseeable, and often preventable complications. Cases fester, but client lives must go on. Sadly, a part time position cannot sustainably maintain this caseload, and full service case acceptance is waning. Hopefully USCIS processing times will improve.

Opportunities:

- ❖ Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel offers significant value through in-house legal assistance. For example, one current client hired a private attorney for their initial R-1 visa for \$3,300 in legal fees alone. They were quoted \$8,000 for the green card process, and they also would have had to pay \$3,300 for a renewal visa (both handled *pro bono* by ILC). At one church, for one client, ILC saved at least \$11,300 in legal fees. This work routinely provides peace of mind and quantifiable financial savings.
- ❖ On a personal note, I became a mother when we adopted Chelsea Anne Teague Cochran on February 11, 2022! As licensed foster parents, we became “Instant Parents” when we said yes to a 4 year old (not our original plan). Thank you to Rev. Sheila Spencer and the DHM Board for approving my six weeks of parental leave. Chelsea is pure sunshine and joy; we celebrate her 5th birthday and one year together in October 2022! Given all the challenges that immigrant families face, I have a new level of empathy for my clients in these unprecedented times for immigrants and refugees of all backgrounds, countries of origin, and legal status.