



Disciples of Christ Immigration Response Specialist

Fulfilling God's Call to Welcome, Support, and Advocate for Immigrant Communities

Program Report Date Period: July - September 2020

Background of Program: Three Disciples organizational entities, including the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries (CPOHM), Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries (RIM), and Regional Ministries—represented through the Christian Church Capital Area—joined together to develop, hire, train, and support an **“Immigration Response Specialist”** (IRS) for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Leaders from the three organizations to the partnership include Rev. Lori Tapia, Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, and Rev. Allen Harris. The IRS works to increase the capacity within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to fulfill God’s call to walk alongside, support, and advocate with affected immigrant communities against growing anxieties, family separations, and injustices which, if not addressed, can continue to negatively impact generations to come. The position is full-time, funded an initial 18 months by Week of Compassion. Valeria Bejar was hired to fill the position and began work in June, 2019.

The Immigration Response Specialist position provides intensive, intentional direct action with congregations and immigrant led community partners which aims to increase awareness, equip congregations and individuals, and increase outreach to immigrants; creating long-term change for addressing critical and emergent needs for refugee/immigrant families and individuals. It also helps to prepare and grow congregations to be *“Immigrant Welcoming Congregations,”* as approved at the Disciples General Assembly 2017 through GA-1723. The Specialist provides intensive outreach to congregations to increase the number of congregations and individuals who are actively engaged in accompanying, supporting, and advocating with families and individuals negatively impacted by the immigration crisis and facing potential family separations and deportation. The Specialist has knowledge, through both information and personal experience, of current immigration policies and challenges. The specialist has deep experience working with immigrant and refugee communities, is competent in advocacy/community outreach/organizing, and is fully bilingual (English/Spanish) with the ability to read, write and communicate verbally.

In the program MOU among partner agencies, key responsibilities are assigned as follows:

+Refugee and Immigration Ministries: Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Director of RIM, will be the direct supervisor for the Immigration Response Specialist, working consistently with the Specialist to provide policy updates, develop action resources, and generate and support congregational strategies for response.

+CPOHM: Obra Hispana will serve as the fiscal agent for the program, maintaining financial records through Treasury Services and will also serve as the formal employer of the Immigration Response Specialist.

+Capital Area Region: The CCCA will serve as liaison to the College of Regional Ministers, informing the Regions and Regional Ministers of the work of the Immigration Crisis Response Specialist and promoting support for refugee/immigrant families and individuals across the Regions of the CC(DOC).

+Week of Compassion: Week of Compassion will provide funding for the program through December 2020 via reimbursement to CPOHM, based on monthly invoices submitted to Week of Compassion through Treasury Services by 15th of each month.

+RIM, Obra Hispana, and the CCCA will maintain regular communication for the coordination, promotion, and evaluation of the work of the Immigration Response Specialist. **+All partner ministries** will promote the work of the Immigration Response Specialist through their networks and encourage participation among congregations and individuals.

The team, early in its partnership, determined that the language of “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” was itself non-inclusive, and communicates paternalism in ways unhelpful and unintended. Some immigrants have likewise shared with the Immigrant Response Specialist that they are not interested in having a structure that “labels” any congregation as “welcoming.” Rather, they expressed a hope for a deeper transformation and partnership. Therefore, Valeria has continued congregational engagements that seek transformed relationships which are deeply committed to elevating immigrant experiences, and that will intentionally listen with other immigrants for a vision and characteristics of types of transformation desired by, and led by, immigrants.

RIM continues to provide regular supervision with the IRS. A check in with all three partners will be held monthly. The next report will cover the time period of Oct-Dec 2020 and will continue to reflect upon the three main goals of the grant. July-Sept. updates for each goal are below:

Goal 1: Increase Awareness that prepares our congregations to build the spiritual practices, healing, knowledge, and partnerships necessary to grow the “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” movement, and to strengthen our collective voices and commitments to relationships and work for justice with immigrants.



- **Continued to host IWOBS studies.** During this report period we held total of 9 weekly studies. We have held a total of 21 weekly studies since the inception of IWOBS. We have continued the original format study that shares and deepens the understanding of scriptures through an immigrant-based lens, using two different IWOBS formats. These include an Inner Study (which focuses on providing a safe space for directly affected immigrant community members to dive into scripture with courage and vulnerability) and an Outer Study (which focuses on providing a brave space to non-affected community members and those who want to discern scripture from an immigrant-based lens.)

During this report period we have had the leadership of Nadia Tavera Medina, DOC Seminarian Student at Pacific School of Religion, Rev. Bere Gil-Soto, Pastor of Iglesia Hermandad IN, Nancy Cordova-Molina, Independent Artist/Member of Casa de Oracion Church CA, Ramon Bejar, former Obra Hispana Moderator for the Region of AZ and myself. Here you can find the link to our [IWOBS Schedule](#). The Inner study attendance has included approximately 10 participants every study, from 9 different congregations around the nation, such as Eden UCC, Iglesia Cristiana Biblica Ebene-Zer, Comunidad Limen Christian Church, Springfield Christian Church, Iglesia Nueva Vida, Iglesia Nueva Esperanza, and Templo Cristiano Central. Here you can view the [Inner Study Participation Spreadsheet](#). Here, you can view some of the Inner Study recordings, [Valeria Bejar Inner Study Recording 07.09.20](#), [Nadia Tavera Medina Inner Study Recording 07.23.20](#), [Nancy Cordova-Molina Inner Study Recording 08.20.20](#). The Outer Study attendance has remained around 7-12 participants each study, from 47 different congregations around the nation. Here you can view the [Outer Study Participant Spreadsheet](#). See also sample Outer Study recordings: [Nadia Tavera Medina Outer Study recording 07.16.20](#), [Rev. Bere Gil-Soto Outer Study Recording 07.30.20](#), [Nancy Cordova-Molina Outer Study Recording 08.27.20](#). IWOBS has proven to be an amazing space for folks to dive into scripture through an immigrant-based lens.

In efforts to continue the growth and effect of IWOBS, we have released a short assessment to gage the engagement and learning process of the participants. View responses of some of the participants [Outer Study IWOBS Assessment](#), [Inner Study IWOBS Assessment](#). We are still in the process of collecting all participants responses, with hope to have a fully completed assessment by the next grant period report.

- **Continued partnership with RIM and the Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC) in leading Monday DACA/TPS Prayers.** During July-August, and following the SCOTUS decision on DACA released on June 18th, our focus expanded to include prayers and updates re: Temporary Protected Status (TPS) matters, affecting an additional 300,000+ persons and their families. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) affects over 600,000+ DACA holders and their families. Our prayer zoom gathering supports the DACA community, and trains faith communities nationally on the DACA Decision as well as the support for the TPS community. Monday DACA/TPS Prayers convenes a space where interfaith community members join in prayer, learn about the stories of DACA Recipients and TPS holders, and learn about faith actions to take to help protect and support communities.

A particularly significant development related to DACA during this report period was a memo released on July 28th from the Department of Homeland Security which stated it could consider fully rescinding the program. In the interim, it stated it would continue “to address serious concerns with the policy,” by making “the following changes to DACA immediately: --Reject all initial requests for DACA and associated applications for Employment Authorization Documents; --Reject new and pending requests for advanced parole absent exceptional circumstances; and --Limit the period of renewed deferred action granted pursuant to the DACA policy after the issuance of this memorandum to one year.” Consequences of these announcements mean that no new persons can apply to receive protections under DACA, and all those currently with DACA are experiencing a doubling of the cost to retain their protections (since they are still required to pay \$495 each time DACA is renewed, and now must pay that every year instead of the previously required every two year time period.)

Through this platform, we continue to broaden the stories of CC(DOC) DACA recipients and others. We are also able to highlight and broaden stories that were shared and published by partners in the national “Home Is Here” network, such as United We Dream, NAKASEK,

and multi-faith partners. Director Jung Woo Kim participated on one of the calls, we also had the participation of Jose Arnulfo who works for the IIC. We continue to dive into diverse intersections such as Black Lives Matter within the DACA and TPS spectrum. Now that our call is once a month, we continue to average a total of 60- 80 participants from across the nation and different faith communities. Here you can view some of the Monday DACA Prayer recordings [RIM immigrants/dreamersdream/actdaca](#), [Zoom MMDP recordings](#).

- **Promoted Awareness and Response Regarding the July 6th International Student Policy** from ICE which would require International Students enrolled in U.S colleges and universities to have to take at least one in- person course to remain in the country. [Washington Post ICE ruling on International Students](#). Even though President Trump dropped the decision on July 14th, we were able to have Nadia Tavera Medina, DOC International Seminarian Student, share in our IWOBS Study her context and experience during this week of uncertainty. You can view the recording of this study here [Nadia Tavera Medina Outer Study recording 07.16.20](#). (July 16th)
- **Increased Resources for (CC)DOC HELM Institutions** regarding support for DACA students who are currently enrolled in a DOC affiliated college or university. Held conversations with Jon Barnes, HELM's Director for Higher Education and communication, regarding resources. Through these conversations, Rev. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Rev. Jon Barnes and myself attended a series of webinars led by the [Presidents Alliance](#) on Education and Immigration. After discussing and debriefing the content in the webinars, we developed [HELM Discussion topics and questions](#), followed by an informational conversation with five of our DOC chaplains in our DOC affiliated schools. In this conversation we discussed the reality and current impact of DACA recipients who are also students that are continuously navigating the ever-changing SCOTUS decision and a global pandemic. We were able to create a space for conversation and engagement with chaplains Nancy Brink/Chapman University, Lea McCracken/TCU, David Finnegan-Hosey/Barton College, Stephanie McLemore/University of Lynchburg, and Amanda Sorenson/Culver-Stockton University as they meditated on this set of questions related to their care for undocumented students on their campuses: [DOC affiliate Institutions: Chaplain's Questionnaire](#).
- **Continued to Participate in Matthew 25 Organization's Puentes Leadership Development.** Obtained self-awareness, healing and recharging through continuous engagement with other Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC) leaders and other advocates, organizers, and bridge builders within the immigration community through this network. As I continue my own awareness of healing, I have also promoted these learnings and identity insights through multiple aspects of this ministry. In this reporting period, I was able to attend two Puentes retreats; held in August & September.
- **Brought Immigrant Insights into DOC's two-week Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation Train-the-Trainee Training.** Through this training on September 14-25, I was able to question and discuss my experience as a non-black person of color, and specifically as a brown immigrant woman who has experienced racism. Through this training I was also able to dive deeper into the conversation of anti-blackness among various minority communities, including within the Immigrant community. I was able to reflect on the multifaceted manner of teaching and learning about racism fully understanding the vast intersections that surpass the common "Black and White" racism conversation. This training provided a reflective space for me to think about the intricacies and commonalities within the Immigration Response Specialist Ministry and the work of the Anti- Racism Pro-reconciliation ministry. In the coming months, I will continue to expand my learning and awareness of these matters, and will apply them to every aspect of the ministry moving forward.

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- **Continued Partnership with key leaders in organizations.** Some included Matthew 25 Organization: <https://www.matthew25socal.org/joinus>, the Interfaith Immigration Coalition: <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/> and the United we Dream Organization: <https://unitedwedream.org/>.

Goal 2: Equip individuals and congregations to actively engage in the advocacy, networks, and hands on mission work with immigrants to break the chains that continue to bind immigrant communities to fear, anxiety, family separation and injustice which are creating a negative impact on the quality of life for generations to come.

- **Cultivated environments of justice**, through Monday DACA & TPS Prayers. Through this platform we continue to educate and encourage interfaith leaders to engage and participate in DACA and TPS actions as well as ways to support these communities (July- September).
- **Cultivated an environment of engagement** through a conversation held with Disciples such as Katie Thompson, a member of First Christian Church of Scottsdale, AZ. She reached out to Regional Minister, Jay Hartley regarding obtaining information on immigration actions and places where she could engage. Through this connection I was able to have a conversation with her on August 18th where we discussed possible ways in which she could connect with the work the ministry is doing. I suggested our monthly DACA & TPS Prayer call as well as the bi-weekly IWOBS Outer Study.
- **Promoted a space of engagement regarding racism, immigration reality, COVID reality and the current state of the church** through a message shared virtually with Hiram Christian Church, Ohio's Rev. Chris McCreight and Rev. Chad Delaney, Mantua Center Christian Church—who invited three NBA XPLOR Alumni to be a part of their Augusts 23 worship services. Together we shared a message using the lectionary text of Matthew 16 to prompt the question of “Who is Jesus?” and consider the now and future of the church. I invited the congregation to reflect on who we are as the church and whom we are with, and to reflect on the current state of the nation regarding racism, immigration's harmful policies, inequality, inequity, and the way in we can revision the path of the church and our roles.
- **Continued to Expand Networking with the IIC** by providing continuous support and participation alongside the DACA & TPS working team.
- **Continued Support and Encouragement of the Matthew 25 Organization:** <https://www.matthew25socal.org/joinus>, led by **Rev. Alexia Salvatierra**, Organizing Director, Jung Woo Kim from NAKASEC <https://nakasec.org/>, a Korean led group; **Executive Director, Alaide Ilchis-Ibarra** from the **Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice** <http://imiri.org/> organization in Portland, Oregon; the **Director for Civil and Human Rights, Rev. Jeania Ree V. Moore** who serves for the **Church and Society** of the **United Methodist Church** <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/meet-the-staff/rev-jeania-ree-v-moore>; **Policy Associate, Diana Pliego** who works for the **National Immigration Law Center:** <https://www.nilc.org/>; **Rev. Katie Sexton** from the **Arizona Faith Network:** <https://www.arizonafaithnetwork.org/>; **Immigrant and Refugee Accompaniment Organizer, Briana Brannan** from the **Church Council of Greater Seattle:** <https://www.thechurchcouncil.org/>; **Co-Director, Chrissy Stonebreaker- Martinez** from the **Interreligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia.** <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/>.
- **Assisted RIM with DACA Related PowerPoint presentations and releases**, and connected DOC DACA leaders to present.

Goal 3: Expand the outreach to and accompaniment with affected refugee and immigrant families and individuals experiencing separation due to detention or deportation.

- **Expanded Outreach to International Students facing initial attack on their stay** after ICE memo declaring specifications that would have to be followed to avoid deportation. Included the voice of Nadia Tavera Medina, DOC Seminarian Student PSR in one of the IWOBS studies, as well as discussing possible outcomes and ways in which we could be of support to her if the memo remained active.
- **Continued Support to all DACA Recipients after SCOTUS Decision** was reached through Monday DACA Prayers, IIC #FaithforDACA webinars, post decision resources and webinars. Monday Morning DACA Prayers now also includes a TPS focus during our once a month call. Extended the outreach to our DOC TPS holders.
- **Continued to Expand Outreach through IWOBS**, by encouraging new scriptural interpretations and understanding.
- **Worked on Potential Expansion of Outreach** through conversations with DOC DACA recipients and ways in which their region could continue to be of support to them.

Upcoming Endeavors and Projects:

As we move through the next quarter of October through December's work, we will:

- Continue to Host and Expand IWOBS and pursue further ways to share immigrant insights highlighted through its presentations.
- Compile insights and recommendations on reflections, as an immigrant, on inclusion of intersecting immigrant concerns with future DOC ARPR Training planning.
- Expand upon resources shared with DOC HELM related college and university ministries, to strengthen support for undocumented students and their families.
- Lead a book study that highlights anti-racism concerns, and begins to develop DOC conversations, as related to brown immigrant communities.
- Continue to Host Monday DACA & TPS Prayers, in partnership with Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries: Every 3rd Monday of the month at 1:00PM EST – to continue to encourage and inform the Interfaith community of 680+ participants that has been formed.
- Continue Work with Faith Partners in the IIC (Interfaith Immigration Coalition) regarding DACA/TPS and its next steps of ministry support.
- Continue the search for a new Regional Minister, through the College of Regional Ministers, who could partake in the three-way ministry partnership (considering the departure of Rev. Allen Harris from the Christian Church Capital Area.)
- As of now, all travel and scheduled appearances will be postponed due to COVID-19.
- All partners will be discussing the future of the ministry and where the spirit is leading us in these last few months of the provided grant. We look forward to conversations with WOC regarding both the use of existing and remaining funds to extend the work, and the possibility of further extension funds.

Program Report Submitted By:

Ms. Valeria Bejar, Immigration Response Specialist, with
Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, RIM Director/IRS Supervisor

Financial Report to be Submitted by: Rev. Lori Tapia, CPOHM National Pastor, Human Resources, as provided by Disciples
Treasury Services

