

Disciples Volunteering Fall 2020

Disciples Volunteering connects, supports, and equips Disciples serving in mission. This work is carried out in three ways: Sending Teams in Mission; Shaping Servant Leaders; and Supporting Local Missions. At the core of this work are three faith-values: learning, serving, and growing relationships. As DISCIPLES, we are students, learning through action and reflection, striving to deepen our faith by living it with others. In SERVING, we model ourselves after the one who came not to be served but to serve, giving and receiving in humility, and respecting the gifts of each one. Through COMMUNITY, we connect our faith and our lives with others, with deference for those with whom we serve, growing together in faith. Disciples Serving Community move from volunteer to servant to neighbor to friend as we get dirty for Jesus together.

In my spring report, I wrote that after a disaster life does not simply return to normal: “The world changes in small and large ways; to move through recovery and gain a sense of wholeness requires reaching a ‘new normal,’ an adaptation to these changes.” Five months later, we are stuck in a liminal space, waiting and praying for a vaccine that will lift all precautions, working incrementally toward adaptations (in nearly every area of our lives) that could allow us to achieve a new sense of normalcy regardless of the success of a vaccine.

Disciples Volunteering has focused on adaptations for enabling a resumption of regular (if not “normal”) mission opportunities. Early work with ecumenical partners and other nonprofits focused on developing safety standards and protocols. Within the Long-term Recovery Group Committee at National VOAD, which I chair, I led a working group in developing guidance for adapting the full spectrum of recovery activities to mitigate against the spread of the coronavirus. Ongoing collaborations with Disciples Volunteering’s network of disaster mission stations, congregational mission inns, DHM-affiliated Mission Centers and other hosting partners aim for mission groups to serve effectively with protections in place. While that work proceeds, calls to mission emphasize local mission engagement. Avoiding, for now, the unique logistics (including shared travel and overnight lodging) of mission trips remains prudent.

And innovation continues. Connect: Forth Worth at Ridglea Christian Church, supported with a mission intern, recently announced their expansion into two new locations. As the lack of affordable housing has increasingly been an issue following disaster, Disciples Volunteering, Week of Compassion, and disaster ministry partners at the United Church of Christ and Church of the Brethren decided it was time to do something about this. Soon, a communitywide collaboration in Dayton, Ohio, will launch a first of its kind recovery program for renters who experienced significant loss in disaster. Another community-centered approach to affordable housing began this summer in Jefferson City, Missouri, as First Christian Church brought resources to bear on the same disaster-exacerbated need. Ongoing support is also being provided in North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and Oklahoma. New engagements include Iowa in response to the summer derecho. Responses to wildfires in the west and hurricanes in the south are being explored. Also of note, the nearly \$30,000 Lowe’s / National VOAD grant that Disciples Volunteering received on behalf of Pamlico County Disaster Recovery Coalition (NC) was completed: 12 households encompassing 21 individuals benefitted from materials and services accessed through the grant. We have applied for and are awaiting word on a new grant of \$50,000 to continue serving the people of Pamlico County.

I am forever grateful to the Board of Disciples Home Missions and the Week of Compassion Board of Stewards for your support,



Josh Baird

Director, Disciples Volunteering



Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries

“Learn to do good. Seek justice. Rescue the oppressed. Plead the cause for the orphan.”
 (Isaiah 1:17)

RIM Report to WOC Board, May thru Sept. 2020 by Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, RIM Director

In this report period, refugee admissions numbers have plummeted to historic lows, asylum opportunities have been substantially constrained, family separation has re-surfaced, immigrant detention and deportation have grown, and employment challenges—even for essential workers—have continued to grow during COVID. In the midst, the partnership of Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, with support from Week of Compassion, has continued to offer education, spiritual resources, and active engagement opportunities for congregations, and has provided hope and support for refugee and immigrant children, families, and communities.

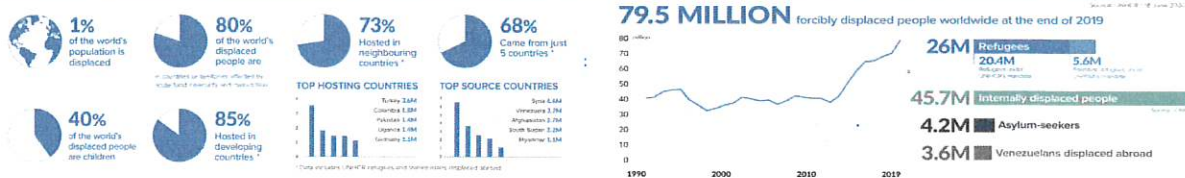
In each endeavor, RIM has seeks to follow Isaiah's call, and invites Disciples to “do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, and plead the cause” for refugee and immigrant populations, such as:

Living Isaiah's Call by: Learning to Do Good for Refugees

With 26 million refugees—more than ever before—in the world, United States leadership in resettlement remains critical. The United States has resettled an average of 95,000 refugees per year since the modern U.S. refugee resettlement program was established through the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980; now forty years ago! In 2018, the resettlement goal number was reduced to 50,000. In 2019, the number diminished to 30,000, which resulted in 90% less Muslim refugees and many less persecuted Christian refugees arriving into the U.S. For fiscal year 2020, the U.S. resettlement goal number—called the “Presidential Determination” number—was set on September 26, 2019 at only 18,000. The actual number resettled by the end of the 2020 fiscal year was merely 66% of that low goal; at 11,814 refugees.

Though law requires the U.S. President to consult with Congress (through the House and Senate Judiciary Committees) ahead of the end of the U.S. fiscal year on September 30th, and before setting the “Presidential Determination” goal number, this consultation—as of October 7th—has still not been held. In the final hours of September 30, the President released an announcement of his resettlement goal number for October 1, 2020–September 29, 2021 of even less than last year's goal; 15,000. In the midst of this, **RIM has celebrated Disciples' vibrant work with refugees, and encouraged Disciples to support refugees by:**

Figures at a Glance



- Holding World Refugee Day (on June 20) and Refugee Welcome Sunday (on June 21) events. To assist congregations, RIM provided opportunities for churches to [Learn more here](#) about current refugee realities around the globe from UNHCR, provided a [2020 Disciples Refugee Welcome Sunday planning toolkit](#) and other planning resources to assist congregations in planning their worship, and offered this [2020 "World Refugee Day Toolkit."](#)
- Engaging and preparing our Disciples General Minister & President to speak about Disciples' faith commitment to refugee resettlement, as part of a national Concordia Leadership Refugee Panel, held June 19 in honor of World Refugee Day.
- Recruiting 11 Disciples leaders from five key states of NC, IA, UT, TX, CO, and OH whose legislators serve on Judiciary Committees which are to consult with the President regarding refugee resettlement.



These leaders included 1 Regional Minister, an immigration lawyer, and 9 Disciples clergy who participated in the National Virtual Refugee Advocacy Days, held on Sept. 1-3.

- Researching, preparing, and posting Disciples stories and images as part of a #40for40 campaign. A Disciples Peace Fellowship intern gratefully partnered in some of the posts. The patterning of posts includes: **“Story Mondays” & “Story Fridays”**—Stories of Disciples work with refugees; **“Action Tuesdays”**—Actions you & your congregation can take NOW to support and engage with refugees; **“Worship Wednesdays”**—Prayers, Litanies, Songs, and Testimonies about and from refugees; and **“Tribute Thursdays”**—Tales of refugees who are essential workers and healers during the COVID-19 crisis. Also, [GO HERE](#) to see the Facebook postings from each day!

- Participating in this Presidential Determination numbers faith [press release](#) and this [press release](#).
- Encouraging Disciples to consider signing onto [this pledge](#) in support of refugees & asylum seekers.
- Educating Disciples about ways they can support the restoration of U.S. Refugee Resettlement, through alerts such as these: <https://conta.cc/3jJ9FrQ> and <https://conta.cc/2N9ivkG>.

Some of the images that accompanied stories from the #40for40 campaign are below. All posts are [HERE](#).



Living Isaiah’s Call by: Seeking Justice for DACA & TPS Recipients

The time period of this report was deeply consequential for both DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status) recipients. The nearly 700,000+ DACA recipients and their 200,000 U.S. born children, in this time, have been on a roller coaster of emotions. They have dealt with uncertainties approaching the Supreme Court’s decision (which was released on June 18), briefly celebrated the [SCOTUS decision](#) as it overturned the President’s termination of DACA, and next mourned a subsequently released [DHS memo](#) on July 28th which made changes to DACA, vowed to not accept new applications for those who’d not previously been given DACA, limited its protections to only 1 year (effectively doubling the \$495 cost of renewal, as it is now due annually instead of every two years), urged the denial of requests for advance parole except in extreme cases, and put in motion efforts to fully end the program.

Also in these report months, TPS recipients have faced [great anxieties](#). They have been awaiting key court decisions impacting their status following the administration’s ending of TPS protections for the 300,000+ individuals who are from El Salvador, Nicaragua, Nepal, Haiti, Sudan, and Honduras. On September 15th, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling that would clear the way for the administration to move forward with terminations for El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan. See more about the decision [here](#), which means that as early as March 2021, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can begin deporting TPS holders from Sudan, Nicaragua, and Haiti—and as early as November 2021 for beneficiaries from El Salvador. Due to the combining of the Ramos v. Nielsen and Bhattarai v. Nielsen cases, the ruling could trigger the terminations for TPS holders from Honduras and Nepal, as well.

The decision leaves hundreds of thousands of TPS holders—many of whom have lived in the U.S. for decades—vulnerable to family separation and mass deportation. TPS recipients in the U.S. are parents to an estimated 275,000 U.S. born children. TPS is a life-saving immigration program that allows foreign nationals to remain in the U.S. if, while they were in the U.S., something catastrophic happened in their country of origin that prevented their safe return. Examples include war, famine, natural disaster, or epidemic. TPS protects people from deportation and allows them to work legally while they remain in the U.S. The program is a

temporary, humanitarian form of relief that was created by a bipartisan act of Congress in 1990. The act allows the Department of Homeland Security to grant the temporary status when disasters strike. The administration had also previously terminated Deferred Enforced Departure (DED), a similar protection, for Liberia; in a [phase down period](#) that is to end in January of 2021. **RIM supported DACA and TPS communities by:**



- Actively educating and engaging communities of faith to understand the risks faced by DACA recipients, and to help seek permanent solutions. As DACA recipients approached the Supreme Court's decision in summer of 2020, RIM convened 60-115 faith attendees from across the country every Monday morning to hear testimonies, receive policy updates, and also learn of action steps, sign-ons, financial and mental health supports, etc. which could be offered to their community's DACA recipients. Valeria Bejar, Disciples Immigration Response Specialist (and a DACA recipient) co-leads these sessions with RIM's Director.



- Offering Monday prayers since July which are now covering both DACA and TPS updates, and are being held the third Monday of each month at 1 p.m. Eastern Time. RSVP here once to receive a new link for each meeting: <https://bit.ly/DACAPrayersRSVP>.
- Providing ongoing RIM WRAP alerts, such as: <https://conta.cc/35Sh17P>, <https://conta.cc/311SjQn>, and <https://conta.cc/2NklcQB>.
- Interpreting the SCOTUS decision and DHS memo following their release, and sharing updates and human and spiritual support resources.
- Activating congregation members around the country to ring Ring #DACABells4Justice at 12 noon Eastern on the Monday following the SCOTUS decision for 7 minutes (a minute per each of the 100,000 DACA recipients affected by the SCOTUS decision.) Pictures and videos of bell ringing was then posted online.
- Encouraging congregations to continue to support permanent protections for DACA and TPS leaders, such as by signing and sharing this letter with their senators: <http://bit.ly/Faith4DACApetition> to urge the US Senate to pass permanent protections for DACA leaders, and to share mental health resources such as those included [here](#).
- Educating Disciples chaplains, together with our Disciples Immigration Response Specialist, from five Disciples HELM institutions; training and linking them with resources such as from the [President's Alliance on Immigration](#) and [TheDream.us](#) available to support DACA recipients and other undocumented individuals who are among their campus populations.
- Informing Disciples Liberians, such as in our Whosoever Wills Christian Church in Beltsville, Md., about opportunities to apply for [Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness](#) program until December 20, 2020.



Living Isaiah's Call by: Rescuing the Oppressed Detained/At Risk for Deportation

In the midst of this report's extended months of racial justice movements, RIM has engaged in racial reckoning with black led immigrant rights organizations, and with other faith partners. This has been needed especially as stories and the oppressive realities faced by [black immigrants](#) are often under told, and less emphasized. This under-emphasis has existed despite realities that black African and Caribbean immigrants often face lengthier detentions, in often poor conditions, and likewise may have less resources focused upon black immigrant communities. As black immigrants have struggled, likewise deportations of populations such as [Southeast Asians](#) who entered as refugees, and immigrants who entered the U.S. legally, have likewise multiplied.

Under COVID, conditions within detention centers have become particularly risky for immigrants living in frequently sub-standard and crowded conditions. Multiple sources, among them [International Rescue Committee](#) in August, have reported that over 20 percent of the tens of thousands of immigrants detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are testing positive for COVID, and other sources reported a total of over 3,000 total immigrants testing positive for COVID in detention. In the detention center in Farmville, VA., as an example, over 300 detainees—nearly all—[were being treated for COVID](#), and one died.

Frequent transfers of immigrants between detention centers has led to further spread of the virus, and deportations have resulted in the spread of COVID internationally. In early August, IRC reported “over 450 deportation flights have taken place in 2020, with nearly a dozen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean confirming deportees returned with the virus.” [Deportations to African nations](#) have likewise taken place during the pandemic; notably from March 1 through June 20 including returns to: Democratic Republic of Congo (20), Liberia (20), Nigeria (20), Egypt (17), Ghana, (16), and Senegal (13). While Caribbean and Latin American flights are generally chartered, African migrants are often placed on circuitous commercial flights that travel through multiple nations before the destination. **RIM has assisted migrants facing oppressive detention and deportation conditions by:**



- Inviting congregations to join in the [July webinar](#), “Dismantling Racism in the Fight for Family Immigration,” and helping co-sponsor, plan, and support the African webinar “[Black Africans Confront the U.S. Asylum System](#)” held Sept. 30 in honor of African Immigrant Heritage Month. Shared these additional resources re: race and immigration through these RIM WRAPS: “Black Immigrants & Dismantling Racism,” July <https://conta.cc/2VRksHk>, and “African Immigrants and Detention,” Sept., <https://conta.cc/3cyrUy6>.
- Urging Disciples to join their voices with leaders across a spectrum of views, who collectively are asking for release of non-violent immigrants from detention due to public health concerns, and a halt to deportations during COVID. See representative statements from [evangelicals](#), refugee organizations such as [IRC](#), and the [CWS joining](#) of campaigns such as #AllOfUS that emphasize the contributions of immigrants as essential workers.
- Serving (and this season, recently finishing) 6 years of service on the Board of SEARAC (Southeast Asian Resource Action Center); a premiere organization working on multiple issues affecting Southeast Asian communities; including detentions and deportation defense.
- Responding actively to the [DACA](#) and [TPS](#) decisions, and joining with and educating about partnership with faith and community advocates such as the [National TPS Alliance](#) for permanent solutions.
- Conducting weekly faith vigils for confronting racism in Washington, D.C. during June, and participating in a Christian Conference Capital Area Region book study of How to Be an Anti-Racist by Ibram Kendi.
 - Helping to expose poor detention conditions in detention centers and reports from various locations, and support for the exposing of atrocities such as the unwanted gynecological surgeries at Irwin Detention Center. See “Exposing Unwanted Surgeries & Poor Detention Conditions/Irwin”: <https://conta.cc/35MFdcX>. RIM has likewise been in conversation with Georgia’s regional minister regarding these cases and partnerships for action.
- Encouraging Disciples faith partners to become involved in supporting deportation defense cases for Pastor Steven Tendo (see Sept. 4 RIM WRAP: <https://conta.cc/3jO3Byo> and image at right below), Kenneth’s freedom from detention while awaiting an appeal by the BIA in northern Va. (see image at left below), and Binsar Siahaan—who was taken from church property at the Glenmont United Methodist Church in Maryland, in opposition to ICE’s own “sensitive locations” memo (see center image below, and Oct. 2 RIM WRAP: <https://conta.cc/30nVPnV>.) Helping lead in actions in front of the national ICE and DHS offices, as well as at the Baltimore ICE office, in support of freeing Binsar.
- Developing World Communion and immigration themed “[Holy Welcome Weekend](#)” resources here.
- Chairing the “DC Congregational Cluster” of churches engaged in local immigration organizing work through the [Congregation Action Network](#) of the national [Faith in Action](#) organization.



Living Isaiah’s Call by: Pleading For At Risk Immigrants/Asylees & Farmworkers

During the time of COVID-19, the U.S. is [reported](#) to have sped up the deportations of more than 900 of the most vulnerable migrant children in its care to countries back to home countries, leaving some subject to the same dangers from which they'd come to the U.S. to escape and seek asylum. [Reports](#) have indicated some children have been deported in as few as several hours after arrival, with real risks during [COVID](#); and reportedly at times without notifying the parents ahead of time. [Reported attempts](#) at removal of children are at odds with long held due process and protection considerations, and with ICE's own [modified enforcement guidelines](#) in response to the coronavirus pandemic, announced March 18, which stated that ICE will focus on removing "public-safety risks and individuals subject to mandatory detention based on criminal grounds."



In this same time period, family detention has re-surfaced in newly concerning ways. The three U.S. family detention centers in Dilley and Karnes City, Texas, and in Berks County, PA. continue to hold detained families. Primary populations in the centers now, include significant numbers of Haitians and other Caribbean populations, Africans, and Central Americans. Judge Dolly Gee, who for years has overseen Flores Settlement protections for detained children, [has called](#) repeatedly for release of the children and families during the summer, saying the "centers are 'on fire'." ICE has, however, [refused to release](#) the children; instead posing the option to parents that they sign to separate from the children and release them to sponsors, or be indefinitely detained.

Additionally, relatives of long term Montagnard refugees in the U.S.—such as those in our Disciples congregations in Charlotte and High Point, N.C.—continue to experience [long-term persecution](#) due to their religious faith in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Montagnards have again requested human rights assistance from RIM to fight for protections against religious persecution for their relatives. And, rural [farmworkers](#) and [meatpackers](#), who are comprised of especially high percentages of immigrants and refugees, and whose companies rely on them as [employees](#), have remained in recent months at great vulnerability of contracting [COVID](#). Health and employment challenges affecting [farmworkers](#) likewise impact the food supply for us all. [Farmworkers](#) additionally have experienced the double consequence from [fires](#) in Western states.

RIM has helped faith communities plead for at risk immigrants, asylees, and farmworkers by:

- Educating Disciples about dangers immigrant children are facing due to changing immigrant and asylee policies See RIM's May 21st alert at: <https://conta.cc/2XggZSv>.
- Continuing to represent the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on the Board of, and as Vice-President and Fundraising Chair for, the [National Farm Worker Ministry](#); an organization founded by the CC(DOC) and four other partner denominations. The NFWM met virtually for three days July 29th-31st.



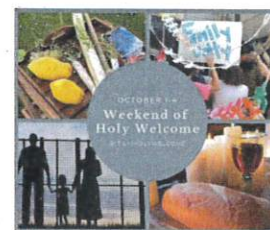
- Creating Pentecost resources focused on farmworker and meatpacking worker themes, highlighted [here](#). Also, inviting Disciples to related actions, such as reading [this letter](#) from the United Food and Commercial Workers union outlining essential worker protections for meatpacking workers & [this letter](#) of support for farmworkers during COVID-19, calling your U.S. legislators to support these priorities at: (202) 224-3121, and inviting faith partners to [SIGN this letter](#) to ensure benefits for farm workers.
- Lifting up the concerns of, and connecting Disciples with, our key farmworker led partners—and their support campaigns—throughout the U.S. See our key partners [here](#).
- Educating Disciples, and inviting them to join webinars, such as our faith led June 3rd webinar on "Asylum and Detentions Under COVID." See [here](#).
- Supporting Montagnard goals to diminish religious persecution in their homelands, by requesting meetings with all of their legislators, and with human rights organizations working on issues of religious persecution.

- Leading actions, together with other faith partners, against family detention in front of the national ICE office in Washington twice, on July 17 and 27—as ICE refused to release children per Judge Dolly Gee’s order, and encouraging Disciples to encourage release of the children and their parents through alerts here: <https://conta.cc/3fniE4t> and here: <https://conta.cc/2COJDDY>.
- Inviting and helping lead ten Disciples leaders to participate in national Virtual Advocacy Days, on July 14-16. See [here](#). Also, serving as the Team Accompanier for the group from Florida.
- Continuing to urge the Senate to include excluded immigrants, and DACA/TPS recipients in future COVID relief packages. See [here](#).



- Building direct partnerships with Berks, PA. [Interfaith Witness](#), seeking to Shut Down Berks family detention center. Supporting our Disciples leader in AZ. who is helping plan these efforts, and speaking and traveling to participate in the direct action held on October 4, 2020. See video [here](#).
- Developed faith resources related to World Communion Sunday, linked with Berks and other immigration campaigns. Find toolkit [here](#).
- Strengthening partnerships with Church World

Service’s three new locations offering assistance to asylum seekers. The three locations include: Houston, Texas; Jersey City, New Jersey; and Miami, Florida. The Houston, Texas location has likewise received funding through Brite Divinity School’s immigration project. Each site is serving approximately 150 asylum seekers annually. Next steps will include congregational outreach and recruitment in each area.



- Developed [Disciples Justice Toolkit](#) and [shorter](#) and [longer](#) Disciples advocacy videos with partners, and recorded a RIM [“Summer of Justice” video](#) with Disciples Legal Immigration Counsel and Disciples Immigration Response Specialist. Developed Virtual VBS Refugee/Immigration/DACA/TPS “Virtual VBS Missions” resources with Ministries Across Generations.
- Consistently supervise Valeria Bejar, Disciples Immigration Response Specialist.
- Keynoted Saturday with Disciples Women of the Upper Midwest Regional gathering.
- Provided Offering Message for Indiana Regional Assembly.
- Testified regarding faith values to DC City Council to regarding COVID protections for excluded immigrants, and the Sanctuary Values Act.

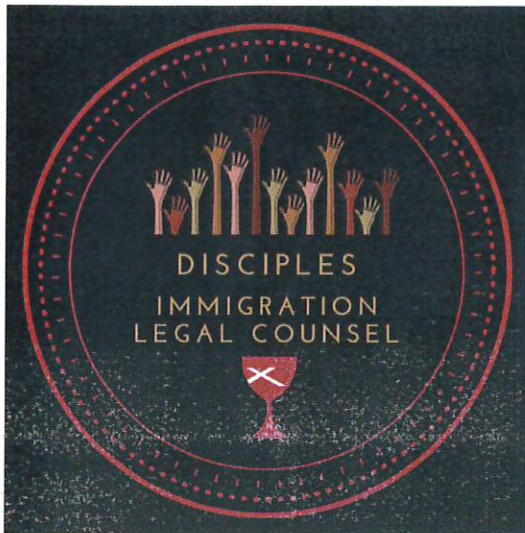


Week of Compassion's support helps RIM ensure refugees and immigrants at risk will never be forgotten.

THANK YOU!!

RIM produces “Holy Days & Holidays” resources, & compiles other resources, at: <http://bit.ly/RIMHolyResources>, <http://bit.ly/RIMVideoList>, and: <http://bit.ly/IICHolyDays>. Contact Rev. Dr. Sharon Stanley-Rea, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, ssstanley@dhm.disciples.org, 202-957-7826, [@StanleyRea on Twitter](#) & <http://bit.ly/RIMFacebook>

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October 7, 2020

RE: Report for the Board of Directors of Week of Compassion

Dear Board:

In taking the time to stop and reflect on the past six months, the changes and disruptions are overwhelming. 206 days and counting of lockdown (or some version of it). 210,000 unsuspecting people in the U.S. have passed – and counting. There are 28 days until an election that will inevitably redefine our realities even more, no matter which candidates are chosen on all levels of government.

My “veteran” immigration attorney colleagues report that the past six months have been both the most challenging procedurally and the very worst in terms of anti-immigrant sentiment – even over 9/11. I lived in New York before, during, and after 9/11, and I can attest that the most difficult aspect of today’s divisiveness is the lack of unity and the ever-increasing polarization of society because of it. We are all trying to change the (*many!*) things that we cannot accept, but it seems to be a Sisyphean exercise as the world crumbles. I take solace in the Disciples community and am so grateful to be among those who cherish social justice, racial equity, and truth.

Six months into this position, I have many more numbers to share with you regarding my actual work. But honestly, the numbers do not reflect the hardship that my clients and the immigrant community have faced. I have worked with families who have been separated by the COVID19 Presidential Proclamations – and will be through at least early 2021. I was asked by one client: “*Ms. Natalie, is the United States full?*” which crushed me.

Over the summer, there were monumental changes in immigration law and policy that came (and went) by arbitrary agency action, litigation, and/or tweet – sometimes on a daily basis. Changes in law historically move slowly because it is (or should be) a deliberative process to ensure consistency and accountability. Unfortunately, I have now witnessed how devastating and abusive it can be for those impacted by capricious changes in the law when such changes arbitrarily occur day to day, week to week. People, and systems, need time to adjust. Misinformation spreads like a virus when there is no predictability in the law. Good governance is steady and slow. Oh, how I wish to return to the days of monotonous frustration brought about by prolonged law making because at least then, our representatives were haphazardly upending, entire lives, families, and our world.

It now takes a year – and longer with a growing backlog – to petition for an immigrant pastor’s visa. In other words, a congregation would have to plan and commit to a new hire at least a year in advance, which is simply not practical in the new, unpredictable world of COVID19. As a result, no new immigrant pastor clients came into CC(DOC) in the past six months. (My “full representation” cases primarily consist of current pastors continuing their immigration journey through work or family.) While this cessation of hiring may self-correct if and when

things improve, this lack of “new blood” will have enormous repercussions for the Disciples community, its congregations, and its commitment to diversity and racial equity. I have no answers; I am simply reporting an alarming trend.

The “happy” stories in this six month period include three case approvals, two of which had been pending for well over a year and required extensive advocacy and time against burdensome (and, mind you, unnecessary) Requests For Evidence (i.e. “RFE”). Please see my addendum at the end of this piece for more information about RFE’s. Also, DACA was temporarily given a reprieve by the Supreme Court in June, but the Administration then properly rescinded it for new applicants in August. Finally, international students were almost kicked out of the U.S. less than two weeks prior to the start of classes – until ICE rescinded its (ridiculous, hasty, and unworkable) policy on how to account for virtual classes. (Maybe silver linings would be a more appropriate characterization?)

In writing this as fall descends, I share the anxiety of the upcoming election. Please know that I am “off” (and not working for DHM) on Tuesdays throughout October to volunteer as a legal monitor for absentee ballot processing here in Western North Carolina. By the time our paths next cross, we will have yet another entirely new world. May it be one where this virus is controlled and the sick are recovering. May it be one where there is greater compassion and reconciliation regarding our vast racial inequities and disparities. May it be one where our borders are welcoming and fewer human beings are locked up for seeking refuge. May it be one where our Earth is healing from too many fires, hurricanes, and effects of climate change. May we all find and live in peace and grace.

Yours in the light,



Reporting “By the Numbers:” May – October, 2020

Advice-only Consultations / “Brief service”: 30

Full Representation Cases / “Full service”: 15

Cases Approved: 3 – YES! (2 after grueling RFE’s...what are those? See page 4.)

Presentations:

- 5/20 College of Regional Ministers – “Immigration 101” twenty minute [presentation](#)
- 5/30 “Contigo” guest appearance with Lori Tapia & Valeria Bejar on Facebook Live (en español)
- 6/11 Summer of Justice RIM, IRS, ILC [presentation](#) recorded
- 6/22 One hour legal overview of DACA SCOTUS decision live [presentation](#) on Zoom
- 7/17 International Student ICE Policy Change seminar scheduled and prepared, then cancelled (and memo to HELM and Disciples Seminaries sent) when ICE rescinded its policy eight days after announcement
- 8/17 Co-presentation with RIM re DACA rescission memo & TPS litigation updates
- 10/1 New Church Ministry – “Building a Bigger Table: Welcoming Immigrants” one hour [presentation](#) at Leadership Academy

Collaboration:

- Brainstorming and assistance in providing materials, recorded video presentation, etc. with Ministry Across the Generations & RIM re virtual mission trips in Summer 2020 for CC(DOC)-SW
- International student advising and information prepared and disseminated to Disciples institutions re ICE international student policy issues
- Full attendance at New Church Ministry 2020 Online Summit in August 2020
- Participated in Refugee and Asylum Advocacy Virtual Legislative Visits with RIM in July and August 2020
- Submitted article on international student fiasco to Week of Compassion for consideration in 2021 Offering
- Partial attendance at NBA SENT Seminar in September 2020
- Presentation and partial attendance at NCM Leadership Academy in October 2020
- Started reaching out, as time allows, for one-on-one virtual "coffee/tea" hours with regional ministers and other colleagues (as travel will resume who knows when!?)

Disciples Events Attended:

- DACA prayer online vigil by RIM: weekly until decision on 6/18; presented after vigil on 6/22
- IWOBS (Immigrant led Weekly Online Bible Studies): biweekly for immigrant allies
- June 20 Poor People's Campaign online
- Sheila Spencer Q&A Welcome Webinar on June 30
- DJAN monthly meetings when possible
- North Carolina Clergy Check-in after conference time with my Reg. Min. Bishop Valerie Melvin
- Regional Assemblies in: Indiana, Arizona, Illinois/Wisconsin, Kentucky, Nebraska, Pacific Southwest, Southwest (TX), Tennessee, and Virginia

Regulatory Comments Submitted on Proposed Rulemaking Changes:

- Asylum regulation: 21 pages submitted July 15 (within a 30 day notice and comment period)
- Department of Education funding restrictions under the CARES Act: 10 pages submitted July 17 (within a 30 day notice and comment period)

Select Immigration Legal Changes:

- USCIS closed mid-March to June 3 (closure extended twice), thus preexisting backlogs grew
- CDC rule used COVID19 to exclude arriving noncitizens by land
- USCIS reopened slowly starting 6/4; immigration courts remained closed until September (for non-detained cases)
- DACA SCOTUS decision – June 18
- Asylum regulations proposed (sweeping changes that will change the entire system) for notice and comment rulemaking – 6/15-7/15
- International Student Changes were implemented and then rescinded entirely within 8 days – July
- DACA partial rescission memo 7/28 – confirms no "new," initial DACA applications
- More presidential proclamations that continued to restrict immigration and our borders
- [Continued increase \(by 60%\) in RFE's](#) – including, most notably on cases previously approved in other postures (see also page 4)

- Limited releases from immigrant detention facilities despite COVID19 – prompting litigation
- Both the Acting Secretaries of DHS and USCIS were found by the Government Accountability Office to have been illegally appointed (the legal effect of this finding is still unknown) - August
- USCIS Policy Manual was updated to allow discretion for more denials in otherwise bona fide cases - August
- USCIS was set to furlough 70% of workforce on 8/1, then 8/31, then furlough cancelled by tweet on 8/25
- Public charge rule (enacted in February 2020) was stopped by federal injunction – August
- Proposed rule announced to collect extensive biometric data – including DNA and retinal scans from immigrants and/or their US Citizen sponsors – comment period closing 10/13
- Ramos case preliminary injunction lifted by the 9th Circuit for TPS (litigation ongoing) – 9/15
- Revelation of medical abuse and forced hysterectomies in immigrant detention centers: Sept
- USCIS Fee increases were to start 10/2; court injunction stopped increase on 9/30.
 - o For example, citizenship fees were to increase from \$725 to \$1,200, or 83%, with little to no fee waiver availability.
- Regulation to restrict H-1B nonimmigrant visas for specialty workers (which many Disciples pastors hold) was announced and then enjoined in federal court – 10/2
- So, so many nuanced proposed regulations have been announced to try to “re-legislate” by executive action prior to the election...

P.S. – About Requests for Evidence...

- Requests For Evidence occur after an affirmative immigration filing when the government thinks it needs more information to adjudicate the case. These requests used to be relatively uncommon; now, they happen in nearly every employment-based case – and especially in religious worker cases. In fact, there has been a [60% increase in RFE's from 2017 to now](#).
- 2 RFE's in 2 cases required 5.5 hours & 18 hours of work respectively:
 - o One case for Disciples pastor's extension of current nonimmigrant status = 5.5 hours
 - o One case for Disciples pastor's immigrant visa petition = 18 hours
- Note that most private immigration attorneys bill hourly to respond to RFE's (in addition to legal fees to advise, prepare, and file the initial case). An average market rate would be a minimum of \$250 per hour for a practitioner with my years of experience. Some (likely 1/3) of this time would be billed as “paralegal time,” or typically ~\$50 per hour, but these are legally intensive inquiries and primarily require actual attorney time.
- Assuming these numbers, DHM saved CC(DOC) pastors and churches the following “hypothetical” legal fees:
 - o 5.5 hour RFE: 3.5 hours attorney time * \$250/hr = \$875
 - + 2 hours paralegal time * \$50/hr = \$100
 - Total = \$975
 - o 18 hour RFE: 12 hours attorney time * \$250/hr = \$3,000
 - + 6 hours paralegal time * \$50/hr = \$300
 - Total = \$3,300
 - o Essentially, in just two cases, DHM saved \$4,275 in legal fees by having ILC on staff (!!)
 - o *Thank you so much for allowing me to be of service!*

Some good news!

- I received the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) Carolinas Chapter "Attracta Kelly" Scholarship to cover annual virtual conference registration fees in July 2020.

Ongoing Projects:

- Logo developed – premiering here!
- Rebranding starting in October 2020
- New website still under construction – to be released ASAP – stay tuned!

Want to know more?

- [Immigration Nation](#) was released by Netflix in August and is a difficult, but eye-opening and necessary, glimpse into our current immigration system from behind the scenes.
- Follow @DisciplesImmigration on Facebook & @DOCIImmigration on Twitter

Concluding with some poetry (written in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder):

Love thy possibility

Neighbor, I want to love you.
I so desperately want to see past
what you think, feel, believe
Can you hear what I think, feel, believe?
No. No?

How do we overcome this wall –
Is it by any means necessary?
or as a dream from the mountaintop?

Love, love, love is all you need,
but what if love is not enough?

Should we agree to disagree?
Unfriend or snooze the feed?
Comment, react, reply, deny,
when will we hear our own lie?

Here we arrived by
the many failures
of systems,
of power,
of heart.

How to open the heart
so we all may be well,
so we all may be happy,
so we all may be safe,
so we all may live in peace?

Neighbor, please love me
by trying to see what I see,
by trying to feel what I feel,
by trying to imagine life in my skin.

Neighbor, I will love you
by considering what you see,
by considering what you feel,
by trying to imagine life in your skin.

Here we hold hands, space, because we are all human beings.
We hold hope and honor for the love between us that may come to be.