



## ***Disciples of Christ Immigration Response Specialist***

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

Program Report Date Period: January – March 2020

**Background of Program:** Three Disciples organizational entities of the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, and 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 all 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, and initially funded by Week of Compassion for 18 months. Valeria Bejar was hired to fill the position, and began work in late June of 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 now 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. 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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.

A full “Planning Retreat” with Valeria, attended by CPOHM’s Lori Tapia, RIM’s Sharon Stanley-Rea, and CCCA’s Allen Harris (remotely attended) was held in Phoenix on January 9-11, in order to envision and plan key work for the quarter. In this retreat, we reviewed with Valeria her work through the past quarter, discussed challenges encountered, planned focus actions and congregational priorities in Valeria’s future work, and determined additional planning dates.

The team continued serious conversations, carried forward from previous discussions, where we 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. Throughout the coming months of the grant, Valeria will continue congregational engagements that seek transformed relationships, that 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 approximately monthly. A next Planning Retreat with Valeria with CPOHM/CCCA/RIM will be held as pandemic travel allows, in the months ahead. Next reports will cover the time periods of Apr-June 2020, July-Sept 2020, and Oct-Dec 2020, and will continue to reflect upon the three main goals of the grant. 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.

- 
- Launched campaign in partnership with Refugee & Immigration Ministries in support of the ICE arrest of Arizona faith Leader, Ramon Bejar. A total of 536 signatures were collected, representing D.O.C congregations from 30 different states including Iglesia Todas las Naciones from Mexico. [Ramon Bejar Support Letter](#) (January)
  - Released a series of RIM Wraps (in partnership with Refugee & Immigration Ministries) with updates on Ramon Bejar's case, informing congregations of status of his case and potential outcomes. [RIM WRAP Re: Ramon Bejar](#)
  - Attended the CC(DOC)'s General Board & Administrative Committee Meeting. During my participation in certain workshops and activities, I shared the ministry's work with multiple different Regional Ministers.
  - While at the General Board meeting, I also reconnected with Rev. Nadine Burton, Regional Minister of the Great River Region. She updated me on actions her region took during the Mississippi Raids, following our IRS encouragement and support: [The Great River Region: Letter to U.S Senetaros in AR, MS, LA](#) [The Great River Region: Congregational Letter](#) (Feb. 21 – 25<sup>th</sup>)
  - Co-Facilitated the very first Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation training in Spanish, alongside Rev. Bob Howard, Rev. Pedro Ramos-Goycela and Regional Minister, Jay Hartley. During this training the region of Arizona and its Convencion pastors, were able to look at racism and systems that directly affects the immigrant, Latinx communities. Through this training the community also engaged discerning scripture, and how the word calls us to dismantle systems and institutions of oppression. (Feb. 29<sup>th</sup>)
  - Participated in the creation of the IIC #Faith4DACA Lent Devotions. Here I was able to share how my family, church, and community would be impacted if DACA protections were removed. This Lent Devotional Toolkit also highlighted other DACA recipient stories, resources, calls to action, and uplifted scripture that calls for us to care for the immigrant community. <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/IIC-Lenten-FULL-DEVOTIONS-DACA2020-FINAL-updated.pdf>
  - Worked alongside the IIC, and the United we Dream Organization, to present a webinar informing the community of where DACA stands now, how to engage as a faith community, calls to action, and resources. [Webinar Recording Re: #Faith4DACA](#) March 10<sup>th</sup>)
  - Collaborated with the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, as a panelist for their national gathering of Catholic religious justice and peace leaders. As a panelist, I shared alongside Linda Green, Professor Arizona Univ., and Alyshia Galvez, professor at The New School in NYC. We all discussed the effects of economic justice and how this influences immigration issues. [Economic Migration Webinar Recording Conference Statement Letter](#) (March 17<sup>th</sup>)
  - Initiated development of an Immigrant-based workshop for the Wild Woman of the West Conference Scheduled for June 12<sup>th</sup>- 14<sup>th</sup>. (changes TBD based on COVID-19)
  - Developed an immigration Workshop for the annual Hispanic Regional Texas Women's Conference. This workshop focused on the story of Ruth and its Immigration footprint. (Conference was subsequently postponed due to COVID-19.)
  - Developed IWOBS (Immigrant-led weekly Online Bible Study) an online study that will share and deepen the understanding of scriptures through an immigrant-based Lens. IWOBS will have two different focuses: Inner Study: which will focus on providing a safe space for directly affected community members to dive into scripture with courage and vulnerability Outer Study: Which will focus on providing a brave space to non-affected community members and those who want to discern scripture from an immigrant-based lens. (IWOBS will launch April 2, 2020) [IWOBS Description](#) [IWOBS Promotional Flyer](#)
  - Connected with the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the gathering of Catholic Religious Justice and peace leaders. Established partnership to continue to seek how communities of faith can work to seek justice for the Immigrant community. <https://cmsm.org/>

- Established relationship with Professor Linda Green from the Arizona Univ., who focuses on CAFTA studies and research. Also, Professor Alyshia Galvez, from The New School in NYC whose research focuses on NAFTA. [Linda Green's CV/resume](#), [Alyshia Galvez's CV/resume](#)
- Connected DACA Recipient, Merida Acosta (DOC Kansas) and Tania Diaz (DOC California) with resources and organizations that can assist them with their DACA Renewals. <https://unitedwedream.org/>, [Mexican Consulates in California](#), [Mexican Consulate in Kansas State](#).
- Continued Partnership with Alexia Salvatierra, and the Matthew 25 Organization. Attended virtual Encounter, reconnected with other Puente participants. (March 7<sup>th</sup>) <https://www.matthew25ocal.org/joinus>,
- Continued partnership with the Interfaith Immigration Coalition. <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>
- Continued partnership with the United we Dream Organization. <https://unitedwedream.org/>
- Connected the General church with resources and Knowledge of Immigration issues through these RIM WRAP's: [Sign on Support letter for Ramon Bejar \(Jan 20th\)](#), [Lent Devotions #Faith4DACA \(Jan 26th\)](#), [Sign on Support Letter for Ramon Bejar Round #2 \(March 7th\)](#), [#Faith4DACA IIC Webinar and Asylum Call In \(March 7th\)](#),

**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, by engaging the church in the case of Ramon Bejar (AZ regional Moderator for the Hispanic Convention.) The church and the community were able to demonstrate their support for justice, by signing a letter supporting Ramon Bejar's good character and outstanding leadership in the region of Arizona. (Jan)
- Environments of reconciliation were created in the Region of AZ. By hosting the very first Spanish Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation training. As a co-facilitator alongside Rev. Jay Hartley, Rev. Bob Howard, and Rev. Pedro Ramos- Goycela, we were able to dive into scripture and reality acknowledging that racism and reconciliation are two important factors in the progression of the church and a key educational component for the Hispanic/Latinx community.
- Continue to expand Network with the IIC by participating in their #Faith4DACA Webinar. [#faith4DACA Webinar](#)
- Hope to promote environments of network and reconciliation with the launch of IWOBS. [IWOBS Promotional Flyer](#), [IWOBS Description](#).
- Attempt to cultivate environments of justice by inviting Rev. Hector Hernandez, and Rev. Bere Gil-Soto to participate in the second IIC, #Faith4DACA Webinar (03/31/20) [#Faith4DACA Webinar RSVP](#)
- Cultivated environments of justice, by engaging the church in the case of Ramon Bejar (AZ regional Moderator for the Hispanic Convection.) The church and the community were able to demonstrate their support for justice, by signing a letter supporting Ramon Bejar's good character and outstanding leadership in the region of Arizona. (Jan)
- Environments of reconciliation were created in the Region of AZ. By hosting the very first Spanish Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation training. As a co-facilitator alongside Rev. Jay Hartley, Rev. Bob Howard, and Rev. Pedro Ramos- Goycela, we were able to dive into scripture and

---

reality acknowledging that racism and reconciliation are two important factors in the progression of the church and a key educational component for the Hispanic/Latinx community.

- Continue to expand Network with the IIC by participating in their #Faith4DACA Webinar. [#faith4DACA Webinar](#)
- Hope to promote environments of network and reconciliation with the launch of IWOBS. [IWOBS Promotional Flyer](#), [IWOBS Description](#).
- Attempt to cultivate environments of justice by inviting Rev. Hector Hernandez, and Rev. Bere Gil-Soto to participate in the second IIC, #Faith4DACA Webinar (03/31/20) [#Faith4DACA Webinar RSVP](#)
- Continue support and encouragement of **Organization Matthew 25** <https://www.matthew25social.org/joinus> , led by **Rev. Alexia Salvatierra**, who has cordially been invited to participate as an IWOBS presenter.
- Continue to support and encourage partnership with **Organization Director, Jung Woo Kim** from **NAKASEC** <https://nakasec.org/>.
- Continue to support and encourage partnership with the **Executive Director, Alaide Ilchis-Ibarra** from the **Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice** <http://imirj.org/>.
- Continue to support and encourage partnership with **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>.
- Continuing support and encouragement of partnership with **Policy Associate, Diana Pliego** who works for the **National Immigration Law Center** <https://www.nilc.org/>
- Continue to support and encourage **Rev. Katie Sexton** from the **Arizona Faith Network** <https://www.arizonafaitnetwork.org/>
- Continue to support and encourage **Immigrant and Refugee Accompaniment Organizer, Briana Brannan** from the **Church Council of Greater Seattle**. <https://www.thechurchcouncil.org/>
- Continue support and encouragement of **Co- Director, Chrissy Stonebreaker- Martinez** from the **Interreligious Task Force on Central America and Colombia**. <https://www.irtfcleveland.org/>
- Cultivated environments of justice, by engaging the church in the case of Ramon Bejar (AZ regional Moderator for the Hispanic Convection.) The church and the community were able to demonstrate their support for justice, by signing a letter supporting Ramon Bejar's good character and outstanding leadership in the region of Arizona. (Jan)
- Environments of reconciliation were created in the Region of AZ. By hosting the very first Spanish Anti-Racism Pro-Reconciliation training. As a co-facilitator alongside Rev. Jay Hartley, Rev. Bob Howard, and Rev. Pedro Ramos- Goycela, we were able to dive into scripture and reality acknowledging that racism and reconciliation are two important factors in the progression of the church and a key
- Assisted RIM with these releases: [Sign on Support letter for Ramon Bejar \(Jan 20th\)](#), [Lent Devotions #Faith4DACA \(Jan 26th\)](#), [Sign on Support Letter for Ramon Bejar Round #2 \(March 7th\)](#), [#Faith4DACA IIC Webinar and Asylum Call In \(March 7th\)](#)

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

- 
- Congregations were informed through the #Faith4DACA Webinar about ways in which we can all financially support DACA recipients with their renewals. [United We Dream Renewal Fund](#).
  - Congregations were encouraged to utilize the IIC #Faith4DACA [Lent Devotion](#) to equip themselves with scriptural context and resources to assist DACA recipients in this time of uncertainty.
  - Due to the transition of Disciples Immigration Counsel, no one new was previously referred during this grant period.
  - Attempting to provide resources to the children of Ramon Bejar (AZ Hispanic convention, Regional Moderator,) during this time of separation.
  - Increasing support to all DACA Recipients awaiting SCOTUS decision. By promoting a Mental Health/ Self-Care segment in the upcoming [#Faith4DACA Webinar RSVP](#). This segment will be led by Rev. Hector Hernandez, and Rev. Bere Gil-Soto.

### Upcoming endeavors and Projects:

- April 3<sup>rd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup>: Texas Women's Conference Retreat "Mujer con Cristo Nunca Pierde/ The women with God never fail"- Conference has been postponed until further notice due to COVID-19.
- IWOBS Launch: April 2<sup>nd</sup> Inner Study.
- Monday Morning DACA Prayers, in partnership with Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries: Every Monday at 9:30 AM EST – Until SCOTUS announces its decision.
- Re-thinking and re-imagining what it means to live in solidarity and accompaniment with the immigrant community in circumstances such as COVID-19.
- Increasing awareness by developing innovative ways to story tell.
- Continued work with the IIC (Interfaith Immigration Coalition) regarding DACA support.
- As of now, all travel and scheduled appearances will be postponed due to COVID-19.

### Program Report Submitted By:

Ms. Valeria Bejar, Immigration Response Specialist, with  
Rev. 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

