



Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries “Calling Hopebuilders Into Holy Actions”

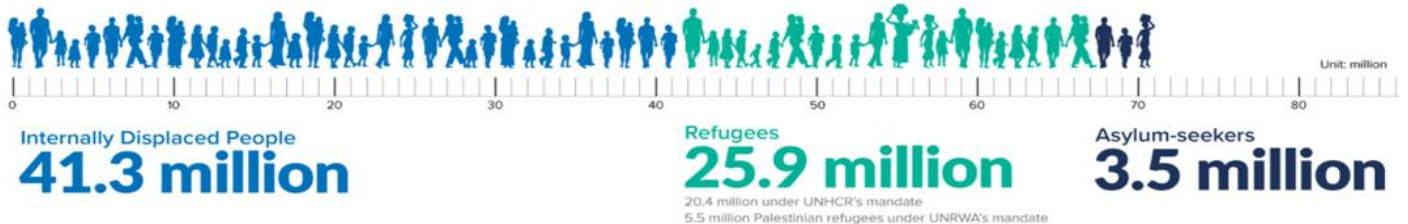
(RIM Report to WOC Board, April thru September 2019)

As policies reducing refugee admissions, blocking asylum access, growing immigrant detention, supporting religious bans, promoting raids, and limiting entrance for families and children seeking protections have consistently expanded, Disciples Refugee & Immigration Ministries, a ministry of Disciples Home Missions in partnership with Week of Compassion, has worked with congregations and communities to build hope and hospitality for refugees and immigrants. **Highlights during this reporting period included calling hopebuilders into holy actions to:**

Building Hope to Help Refugees & Save the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program

With drastic U.S. reductions in refugee resettlement numbers despite over two million more forcibly displaced persons, half a million more refugees, and 400 thousand more asylum seekers globally than one year ago, RIM built hope by encouraging Disciples to protect the U.S. heritage of welcoming refugees.

70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide



Seeing U.S. refugee resettlement goal numbers dwindle from an annual average of 95,000 since the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980, down to 50,000 in 2018, to only 30,000 in 2019, and to the just-announced 2020 goal of only 18,000 on Sept. 26; meaning in 2019 that 90% less Muslim refugees and many less persecuted Christian refugees have arrived into the U.S., RIM responded as it:

- Supported congregations through [resources like these](#) to share benefits of refugees with their legislative leaders and in supporting a strong resettlement number of 95,000 refugees for FY2020. When refugee numbers were drastically cut to only 18,000, encouraged congregations to raise their voices publicly to seek the administration change this damaging decision.

- Helped train and accompany refugee and community leaders on legislative visits during “Refugee Advocacy Days” on May 8-9 in Washington, D.C.; encouraging rebuilding of refugee numbers and sharing faith voices to grow bi-partisan champions for refugees;
- [Shared faith voices](#) for Congressional sponsorship of the “[GRACE Act](#)”/Guaranteed Refugee Admissions Ceiling Enhancement Act” (S. 1088 & H.R. 2146) to set a minimum Presidential Determination of 95,000 each fiscal year, and for the “NO BAN/National Origin-Based Antidiscrimination for Nonimmigrants Act” (S. 1123 & H.R. 2214) which aims to repeal the executive orders that ceased refugee admissions, banned many Muslim-majority country persons from entering, and stopped asylum seekers from making claims between ports of entry. Supporting these bills closely aligns with our national Disciples Refugee Emergency Resolution, [GA-1739](#). sharing faith voices to grow bi-partisan champions for refugees;
- Developed and promoted worship materials for our Disciples “[Refugee and Immigrant Welcome Sunday](#)” on June 16th, the Sunday before World Refugee Day;
- Emceed World Refugee Day Interfaith Press Conference on June 20th at the Senate Russell Building, including Senate, Congressional, refugee, ambassador, and faith leaders;
- Drafted and supported, in partnership with Week of Compassion, our [General Assembly Resolution addressing steep reductions in refugee numbers](#) in Des Moines;
- Published multiple Refugee Alerts through the [RIM WRAP](#) electronic newsletter, [provided advocacy information](#), and sent state specific alerts to Regional Ministers and faith partners from states of key leaders engaged in making the U.S. refugee resettlement decisions;
- Encouraged our General Minister and President to contact the Office of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, to urge for U.S. resettlement of 95,000 refugees in FY 2020;
- Partnered regularly with Church World Service to speak against refugee office closures due to reductions in U.S. refugee arrivals;



- Consistently encouraged Disciples congregations to resettle refugees in areas near them, and consistently worked to share information between local resettlement offices and congregations;
- Invited and supported Disciples clergy and layleaders from Kansas and Oklahoma to participate in a targeted “Refugee Fly In,” in Washington, D.C. with funding support from Week of Compassion; and
- Educated Disciples about growing deportations of groups of Cambodians who entered the U.S. as refugees.
- Taught refugee workshops at General Assembly, and assisted in guiding participants through the “Refugee Simulation Experience” offered at the Assembly.

Building Hope with Persons & Families Seeking Asylum, in U.S. & at the Border

Longstanding international and U.S. laws have guaranteed the right to asylum for decades to persons seeking protections in the U.S. from persecution deemed well founded in their home country and based upon grounds of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or particular social group. During this report period, U.S. asylum practices have shifted consistently, and fees and bars to protections have multiplied. “Migrant Protection Protocols,” generally called “Remain in Mexico” practices (first implemented in Tijuana during January) expanded to El Paso in March, and have continued to spread along the border. It was announced on 9/23 that the U.S. will begin next week to return families with credible fears who arrive at the Southern Border back to Mexico as their immigration cases are processed.



Earlier this month, the Supreme Court allowed the administration to proceed with practices to deny asylum claims in the U.S. unless migrants first tried to claim asylum in countries en route of their journey. Further, the administration continued during this period to seek and sign “Safe Third Country” agreements with Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and most recently (9/26) with Honduras; barring tens of thousands of migrants who have felt unsafe in those nations from protections in the U.S. and forcing them to claim asylum in those countries from and through which they are fleeing violence. RIM helped restore hope in this context as it:

- Supported congregations by providing information and guidance for local engagement on [“Understanding Asylum and How We Can Help Asylum Seekers.”](#)
- Encouraged congregations to assist asylum seeking migrants in transit to/through bus stations their areas.
- Counseled congregations to provide accompaniment to ICE Check Ins, to offer support for qualified legal assistance, and to provide family and spiritual support to asylum seeking families.
- Provided supportive advocacy and alerts [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) upon the request of an asylum seeking family being offered assistance through National City Christian Church and the area Congregation Action Network in the D.C./Md./Va. area.



- RIM Director invested time during staff sabbatical (March-May of 2019) to travel to Honduras and to El Salvador, in order to build deeper understanding of root causes of Central American asylum seekers, meet directly with families and communities experiencing threats that have led many neighbors to seek asylum, and to meet with denominational and other faith partners seeking to remedy root causes of persecution.

In Honduras, the RIM Director joined with faith partners led by the SHARE Foundation, the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, and others in the “Interfaith Root Causes Pilgrimage to Honduras” to meet with grassroots and religious partners in Honduras to more deeply understand the personal experiences of migrants and regional root causes of migration as they relate to economic, drug, military, border and immigration policies.



In El Salvador, the RIM Director studied with international faith and community leaders at The Global School of Cristosal organization regarding causes of migration and forced displacement, human rights and migration frameworks related to protection for migrants, links between violence, human rights, and migration in El Salvador, and direct experiences of displaced persons and returned deportees sent back from the U.S. to El Salvador.



• RIM Director, together with GMP Hord Owens and multiple Disciples clergy, joined the HOPE Border Institute and the Poor Peoples Campaign in El Paso on August 27-30 to raise faith voices in opposition to growing immigrant detention. Also toured with faith leaders to Clint and Tornillo detention centers within an hour from El Paso.

- Following the shootings in El Paso on August 3, RIM authored [Prayer Vigil resources](#) for use by congregations to honor those killed by anti-immigrant motivated violence. The resources included reflections on recent time in El Paso, and on immigrant family separation from Disciples Immigration Response Specialist, Valeria Bejar.
- Produced 8 part congregational devotion resources, in partnership with Interfaith Immigration Coalition partners, entitled [“Turning Walls Into Welcome,”](#) and related to border wall construction and impacts.



Building Hope for Children, Families, and Individuals in Detention



Protections specifically for child migrants have been under threat by administrative demands to Congress since January 4, 2019 seeking to end long protections available through the Flores Agreement of 1997, and amend the Trafficking Victims Protection/Reauthorization Act/TVPRA (originally passed in 2000). In this environment, RIM offered hope as it:

- Joined a [Faith Leader Press Release](#) on August 28th when the administration tried to nullify Flores protections, saying it will “certainly lead to indefinite and prolonged family detention and to erosion of important standards for the medical, housing, nutritional, and educational treatment of unaccompanied migrant children.”

- Authored the [“Children & Families in Detention and at the Border: A Word to the Church”](#) Letter, signed by over 900 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) leaders.

- Sought to educate Disciples, through resources like [these](#), about the importance of protections for children in The Flores Settlement and in the TVPRA, and about harms of family and child detention.
- Helped congregations prepare for announced large scale immigration raids by offering [these community resources](#). Likewise, [supported the Great River Region of the Christian Church and other congregations](#) during massive workplace immigration raids in Mississippi in August.
- Supported congregations in [learning about and offering deportation defense](#) for families in their churches and communities.
- Led a White House faith vigil of 600+ persons for children who died while in detention a “Lights for Liberty” event.
- Provided vigil resources [here](#) and [here](#) to help congregations understand more about children who have died while in U.S. detention, and to pray for their families.



Building Hope with Farmworkers, DACA/TPS/DED Recipients, Refugees at Risk, Legal Immigrants

Protections have been systematically removed since our last report for 300,000+ persons with Temporary Protected Status (TPS) 4,000 Liberians with Deferred Enforced Departure (DED). Farmworkers, Dreamers, and some refugees have been detained remain at risk and are seeking protections. Amid these, RIM:



- Continued work with TPS groups & churches and offer [resources like these](#) for national solutions for TPS recipient country/numbers here: Sudan/1,040; Nicaragua/2,550; Nepal/8,950; Haiti/46,000; El Salvador/195,000; Honduras/57,000.
- Assisted our Disciples Liberian church in Md. to strengthen their national leadership and [share resources](#) to develop a solution for 4,000 Liberians whose DED status is at risk.
- Joined, through WOC support, in a three way partnership of RIM, with the Central Pastoral Office of Hispanic Ministries and the Capital Area Region, to [recruit and hire a Disciples “Immigrant Response Specialist.”](#) The team hired Ms. Valeria Bejar, a DACA recipient whose parents have experienced deportations (see some of [Valeria’s story here](#)).

Valeria is supervised by RIM’s Director. Valeria is leading Disciples in engaging further around support for dreamers, and is helping further develop our Disciples “Immigrant Welcoming Congregations” program. See more about becoming an Immigrant Welcoming Congregation [here](#).

- Partnered with dreamer led organizations to support legislative protections for dreamers, and supported congregations [here](#) and [here](#) to build relationships of support with dreamers in their areas; through resources such as [these](#). RIM also offers support for NAKASEC (Korean dreamers) in advocacy actions, who RIM invited to speak at NAPAD’s last conference.
- Educated Disciples about how to protect legal immigration policies under threat, by joining with [Protecting Immigrant Families](#) to try to reverse recent Public Charge rules (to start Oct. 15) that favor wealthy immigrants, and to deepen our Disciples partnerships with the [Value Our Families campaign](#).
- Supported the 16,000 Southeast Asians who came to the U.S. as refugees but are being targeted for deportation, including dozens of Cambodian refugees who’ve grown up in the U.S. recently deported. RIM’s Director serves on a national board of SEARAC to help support protections for these populations.



- Led Disciples in connecting with farmworkers, through our partnerships with National Farm Worker Ministries, where RIM’s Director serves on NFWM’s board. Key opportunities for congregational engagement can be found [here](#), and include 1) our ongoing [boycott of Wendy’s](#) until it signs the Fair Food Program (to support tomato farmworkers with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers), 2) sharing of [Managers’ Letters with Starbucks](#) to urge awareness of their milk (sold as “Lucerne”) purchased from 400 Darigold dairy farms in the Northwest

where farmworkers have died and experienced worker abuses, and 3) requests to WAWA and 7-11 store managers to [remove “VUSE” electronic cigarettes](#) from their shelves, as sales support Reynolds related tobacco farms where workers are not allowed to organize for better wages and safety. Go [here](#) for more information.

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, sstanley@dhm.disciples.org, 202-957-7826, @StanleyRea on Twitter & <http://bit.ly/RIMFacebook>