

A Narrative History of the Immigrant Justice Action Group

Before becoming the Immigrant Justice Action Group, several of us became active with the UU Service Committee (UUSC) after we joined a First Unitarian delegation to Guatemala with then director Charlie Clements and Rev. Marilyn Sewell around 2005. While there we witnessed the painstaking work of recovery of human remains and identification and reunification with family members for proper burial. We listened to the stories of those



present during the massacres. We learned how UUSC partners with local groups doing the work of justice and supports them in their goals. We shared these stories with our congregation and continued to work for a just resolution to the issues we learned about in Guatemala.

At that time, First Unitarian's UUSC group participated in UUSC programs, such as Guest at Your Table, and sold Equal Exchange coffee and chocolates to fund work with Cuba Ayuuda, which fostered friendship through cultural exchanges with groups in Cuba.

The UUSC group underwent two or three changes in leadership. Rev. Wendy Fish was asked to join us to invigorate our efforts in social justice. We continued our interest in human rights issues and causes. We joined with the forerunner of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMIrJ), then known as the Oregon New Sanctuary Movement.

In 2014 members of our UUSC group worked on passage of Oregon ballot measure 88. Measure 88 was a ballot measure in Oregon to determine whether or not to refer a "law creating a four-year driver's card, shorter than the usual eight years for a driver's license, for those who meet all other qualifications other than proof of legal presence in the United States"-The measure was rejected.

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With UUSC's emphasis on the protection of human rights, our core group of ten discerned our calling to focus on immigrant and refugee justice issues, under UUSC's umbrella focus of Rights at Risk. We met monthly to discuss and plan quarterly educational events for the congregation. As UUSC changed their congregational model of engagement, in November of 2014 we mutually agreed to end our official affiliation with UUSC and became the Immigrant Justice Action Group (IJAG).

Many of us attended the IMIrJ meetings, joining with them on local issues and actions. We stayed active with UUSC individually and through programs of the UU College of Social Justice, which organizes congregational journeys for education and action.

In 2015 several from our congregation traveled to the southern border to participate in a UU College of Social Justice sponsored program with Borderlinks to study and witness issues associated with the expanding militarization of the border and criminalization of migrants.



Key IJAG accomplishments over the next years up until the present include inviting DACA recipients to speak at First Unitarian Church, participating and periodically leading vigils at the Immigrant and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) in Portland, writing letters on behalf of immigrants who were trying to avoid deportation, attending the IMIrJ Mother's Day vigils at the Tacoma Detention center, standing as witness to immigration hearings of undocumented individuals, accompanying a targeted immigrant living in sanctuary at Augustana Lutheran Church. IJAG also organized a trip to field workers at agricultural camps in Woodburn.

In 2017 IJAG had a presence at the one-year anniversary of the Protest at the Detention Center in the Dalles, Oregon where we carried the IJAG banner.

In 2018 First Unitarian Church under the leadership of IJAG provided sanctuary at our church for about 30 men who had been released from Sheridan Federal prison. We also then arranged for transportation to their sponsors.

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We advocated and protested outside the Washington County Courthouse where undocumented individuals were being arrested. IJAG members collaborated with IMIrJ to interview local county sheriffs in Oregon for collaboration/communication to the Immigration and Customs about immigrants with local police and sheriff's departments. We also collaborated with Bienestar in their efforts to educate and support farmworker housing.

At UUA General Assembly in Kansas City in 2018, we heard the call for committed activists to join the Faith Floods the Desert action in Ajo, AZ, sponsored by Love Resists and No More Deaths, No Mas Muertes (a partner of UUSC). Four of us joined that effort to bring attention to the cruel practices of our government's border control and leave water in the desert for migrants.

In recent years IJAG endorsed the 8th principle and rewrote our IJAG mission statement to include it. We participated with IMIRJ as a sacred circle and discussed intersectionality of immigrant, racial and climate justice and anti-Asian hate. IJAG contributed to the Immigrant Mutual Aid Coalition (IMAC) to help those affected by the 2019 Oregon fires. To this day, volunteers from IJAG assemble hygiene kits and food for immigrants. IJAG members supported Oregon Legislative Agendas and in concert with IMIrJ, supported HB 3265, Sanctuary Promise Act; making 500 phone calls and providing 100 written testimonies presented by IMIrJ participants. In 2021 IJAG members participated in phone banking to support passage of several bills ---HB: 2475, 2842, Oregon Just Transition to Clean Energy, During the pandemic we provided masks to Bienestar and IJAG participated with Western Farm Workers in a food drive for farm workers also providing blankets for Christmas presents. Members have also supported refugees by assembling kits of basic necessities. We continue to support various service efforts for immigrants and refugees through multiple organizations, including IMIrJ, IMAC, Refugee Care Collective and Western Farm Workers Association.

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IJAG Mission Statement

In keeping with our eight principles and as social justice allies, our mission is to support and support and enhance the rights of refugees, migrants and immigrants in our community. We provide information; promote understanding and engagement of our fellow UU congregants to these ends.

IJAG Goals

- The Immigrant Justice Action Group will work to:
- Take action to demonstrate and support immigrants as they express their needs.
- Educate fellow congregants on issues facing immigrants in our community.
- Support congregants in becoming allies to immigrants.
- Interface with other organizations and faith groups in Portland working on immigration issues and actively participate in the Interfaith Movement for immigrant Justice (IMIrJ).
- Partner with action groups within the Social Justice Council recognizing the impact of white supremacy culture on all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and the power of collaboration.

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