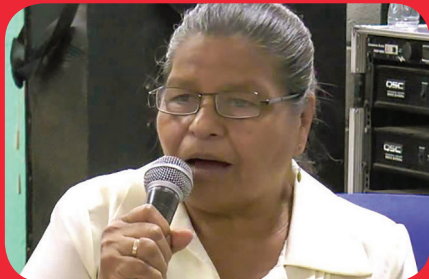


Stories of Hope

2018-2019



Advancing human rights for 78 years



Contents

Introduction

Story 1: Ely Rosales..... 1

Story 2: Clementina Flores 4

Story 3: Valentina Mejía 7

Story 4: Argelia Barajas..... 11

Introduction

Dear friends,

For decades, Guest at Your Table has been introducing Unitarian Universalists to real people impacted by human rights issues – and to grassroots leaders making a difference around the globe. Whether you use our simple cardboard box or simply share these powerful stories around your table, thank you for being a part of this UU tradition!

This year, our Guest at Your Table theme is Justice Across Borders. In particular, we are turning our attention to the thousands of Central Americans fleeing violence in their home countries and making the perilous journey north in hopes of finding refuge in the United States.

The stories included here from UUSC partners provide a personal glimpse into some of the root causes leading Central Americans to flee their homes, the experiences many have along the way, and the common barriers migrants face when they reach the United States.

I am delighted to introduce you to this year’s “guests”: Ely, Clementina, Valentina, and Argelia. Their lives have been changed because of the generosity of people like you. In turn, I hope their stories will be an inspiration to you.

I encourage you to support this year’s “guests” and thousands of others impacted by UUSC by making a donation online at uusc.org/guest or by using the reply form at the back of this booklet.

Thank you for inviting these inspiring individuals into your congregation, your home, and your heart.

In fellowship,



Rev. Mary Katherine Morn

Visit uusc.org/guest to learn more.



Photo by Mark Coplan

Story 1

Ely Rosales

“We want to rebuild our country in the interests of the people.”

In Honduras, speaking out against injustice is an enormous risk. Human rights workers, activists, and journalists face sabotage, property damage, death threats, beatings, and worse.

Ely Rosales knows the dangers of working for human rights in Honduras, but he chooses to do it anyway. Ely works for one of UUSC’s partners in Honduras, a radio station called Radio Progreso, which provides a rare independent media space amid waves of propaganda in favor of President Juan Orlando Hernández.

Ever since the November 2017 re-election of Hernández, the reasons to speak out have increased – and so have the dangers. Although the Honduran Constitution clearly states that presidential reelection is prohibited and cannot be amended (and amendments are to be made by the Congress), Hernández made his way onto the ballot after a controversial Supreme Court ruling during his first term.

On top of this ruling, Hernández’s victory on election day – marred by suspiciously timed black-outs of polling stations – was widely viewed as fraudulent. Since then, protests in the streets have been met with deadly military crackdowns. Over 30 people have been killed by police.

Reaching over 700,000 listeners daily, Radio Progreso covers a wide range of topics, from politics to environmental issues, as well as a weekly feminist talk show. Ely explains, “We open the media space to the people in order for them to express their ideas and opinions about what is happening in our country.”

Due to their candid reporting on the election and police repression, Ely

explains, “We suffer many threats from the government.” In one recent and costly case of sabotage, one of Radio Progreso’s transmission towers was knocked down in the middle of the night.

In the face of such immense challenges, Radio Progreso has not been deterred and has even increased their outreach efforts since the election. With UUSC’s support, they continue to broadcast daily and share news about the political unrest in Honduras with U.S. media outlets. In addition, Ely and Padre Melo, the founder and director of Radio Progreso, recently testified before the U.S. House of Representatives’ Tom Lantos Commission on Human Rights.

Buoyed by the presence of others working for human rights – whom he calls “social fighters” – Ely maintains a strong feeling of promise for the future. He explains, “We are full of hope. We are in this because we believe we can find some way to get better conditions in our country for the majority.”



Photo by Radio Progreso

Story 2

Clementina Flores

“He was taken alive; alive I want him.”

Along their journey from Honduras to the United States, Clementina Flores¹ two sons went missing in Mexico. One day, she stopped hearing from them, and there was no clear way to report their disappearance across country lines.

Unfortunately, their story is not uncommon. For the hundreds of thousands of Central Americans who are fleeing violence in their home countries, the dangers do not end when they travel through Mexico to reach the United

States. Tens of thousands of Hondurans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans are killed or disappear along their journey north.

As is the case with Clementina, heartbroken loved ones of missing migrants are left without many options, because the channels to report and investigate disappearances are oftentimes unclear or unavailable, and rates of impunity are high. Last year was the most violent year in Mexico over the last two decades — yet only 3.6% out of the reported 37,436 cases of missing migrants are being investigated by federal agencies.

Fortunately, one of UUSC’s partners in Mexico, the Foundation for Justice and the Democratic Rule of Law (FJEDD), is there to help families like Clementina find their loved ones and receive the information and justice they deserve. Through establishing a regional network of civil society organizations, FJEDD formalizes pathways and government mechanisms to track disappearances and share updates with concerned family members. FJEDD also supports forensic research to identify migrants who have been killed, supplies psychosocial aid to families, and provides

court accompaniment during hearings.

Before receiving support from FJEDD, Clementina had been searching for her sons for years. She even traveled from Honduras to Mexico calling her son’s names and sharing their photos in city streets. It was not until 2017 — through FJEDD’s regional network — that Clementina was finally able to find and reunite with one of her sons at a migrant shelter run by another one of UUSC’s partners, FM4 Paso Libre, in Guadalajara.

After a joyful and tearful reunion, Clementina has renewed hope for finding her other son. She also feels that the opportunity to directly communicate with government employees has made her feel stronger, confident, and empowered. With FJEDD’s support, Clementina is now going before the Supreme Court of Mexico. She explains, “My case at the Supreme Court of Mexico is about justice, the rights that I have to know the truth, and the obligations they have to find my son.”



Photo by Veronica Cardenas

Story 3

Valentina Mejía

“We know that unity makes power, and we ask all of you to stand in solidarity with us.”

Facing violent threats against her life, Valentina Mejía¹ fled her home in El Salvador with little money, nowhere to go, and no one to travel with. Approximately 3,000 miles stood between Valentina and her hope of being granted asylum in the United States.

Valentina found comfort in joining a group of over a hundred other Central Americans facing similar threats and holding similar hopes — the Viacrucis Guadalupano

Refugee Caravan. Finding safety in numbers, the Refugee Caravan was making the dangerous journey to the U.S. border together.

Along their journey north through Mexico, Valentina and other members of the Caravan looked out for one another, marched for migrants’ rights, and even took the time to help repair strangers’ homes that were damaged by a recent earthquake. After one month of traveling with the Caravan, Valentina crossed the U.S. border from Tijuana to request asylum on November 12, 2017.

Unfortunately, the end of Valentina’s difficult journey to the U.S. border marked the beginning of new challenges. Valentina was swiftly detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement and placed in an immigration detention center in Orange County, CA.

Equipped with shackles and armed guards, and with limited access to the outside world, the detention center was just like a prison. Additionally, having already endured a long history of violence

and trauma back home, Valentina entered the detention center in urgent need of medical care but was repeatedly told that it was unavailable.

After seven months, an Immigration Judge set Valentina a \$15,000 bond for her release — an unusually high figure, likely due to her association with the Caravan. Valentina did not have this money, and, unlike many asylum-seekers detained in immigration jails, did not have family or friends to help pay for her bond or to stay with after being released. In this time of need, UUSC’s California-based partner, Freedom for Immigrants, stepped in to help.

Freedom for Immigrants supports immigrants in detention centers and works to permanently end the practice of immigration detention. Through a hotline and in-person visits, Freedom for Immigrants gathers stories from those in detention, provides pro bono legal advice, monitors conditions in detention, and documents abuses. As soon as Valentina’s bond was set, Freedom for Immigrants rallied for support. In collaboration with

Pueblo Sin Fronteras, it organized a special fundraiser to raise the \$15,000 that Valentina needed — which was secured by May 19. It also found her a host home, where she has been living ever since her release.

Today, Valentina supports other women who are still detained in the Orange County jail, writing them letters and answering their calls. She explains, “We’re going to keep working to help others who are now in detention.”



Photo from the Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights

Story 4

Argelia Barajas

“GLAHR is an organization that cares with its whole heart.”

In isolated areas of rural Georgia, it is not always easy for immigrants facing rights violations — including police harassment, wage theft, and unfair housing practices — to know where to turn for support. Familiar with this kind of fear and uncertainty, Argelia Barajas, a Georgia resident originally from Mexico, wanted to help other immigrants feel safe and empowered in their new homes.

An opportunity for Argelia to help came when the Georgia Latino Alliance for

Human Rights (GLAHR), UUSC’s grassroots partner supporting low-income Latinx immigrants in Georgia, put out a call for volunteers over the radio. As soon as she could, Argelia began volunteering with GLAHR to help educate immigrants about their rights. Believing that knowledge of the law is key to helping immigrants move from fear toward empowerment, Argelia explains, “The greatest help that GLAHR has given us is knowledge. Knowledge conveys power, security, and strength.”

Volunteering with GLAHR not only allows Argelia to support other immigrants through education about their rights. It also helps her feel safe and empowered herself. She explains, “When I first came to GLAHR, it was with fear because I did not know my rights, and I did not know the laws and their consequences. But the trainings and the weekly meetings gave us more security, in order to be ready for any circumstance that arises — ready with knowledge of what to do, what to say, and how to be prepared with all of one’s documents in order, and in a place decided upon by the whole family. For me, this has made a great difference.”

With support from UUSC and thanks to volunteers like Argelia, GLAHR is able to reach Latinxs in all corners of the state, sharing information about immigration laws, their rights, and defense strategies. GLAHR also advises local policymakers on immigration-related issues, assists in filing lawsuits on behalf of Latinxs who have suffered abuses, and has a hotline that immigrants can call for advice and referrals.

Argelia explains, “GLAHR is an organization that cares with its whole heart for immigrants, for their total well-being, through knowledge of the laws.” Thanks to GLAHR, she adds, “I do not feel myself to be a criminal but a citizen with rights and clear responsibilities to respect the laws and the rules, to pay taxes and honor our authorities.” Through her volunteering, she spreads her knowledge and hope to others.

¹For confidentiality purposes, Clementina and Valentina’s names have been changed.



Please join UUSC in our work on behalf of human rights and social justice — make a contribution to support our efforts.

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you and your family annual UUSC membership benefits. In addition, all individual and family unrestricted contributions of \$125 or more are eligible to be matched by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y. — doubling the impact of your gift!

Complete the form on the other side of this page and mail it to the following address:

**UUSC
PO Box 808
Newark, NJ 07101-0808**

All donations are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law. UUSC’s tax ID is 04-6186012. UUSC’s CFC number is 11685.

UUSC thanks you for your generous gift!

GAYT 18-19

Your donation of \$40 or more earns you annual UUSC membership benefits and a gift of \$125 or more is eligible to be matched — doubling the impact of your gift! Please list all who are included in your gift.

Total gift enclosed Individual Name(s) _____

\$ _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Congregation _____ City _____ State _____

I would like to establish a monthly pledge of \$ _____.

Transfer funds each month from my checking account.

Enclosed is a check for my first monthly contribution to UUSC. I authorize my bank to transfer my pledge from my checking account each month. I understand that a record of each gift will be included on my monthly bank statement.

OR Charge my credit card every month.

Check enclosed (payable to "UUSC")

Charge my credit/debit card:

Mastercard Visa

AmEX Discover

Card # _____

Expiration Date _____

Cardholder signature _____

Print cardholder name _____

UUSC is an independent, nonsectarian 501(c)(3) nonprofit member organization. We are a leading voice for human rights and social justice in the United States and around the world. Please support our work — begin or renew your membership today!

As a member of UUSC, you join a community of over 40,000 supporters who share your principles and passion for justice. You also stay up to date on pressing human rights issues through periodic mailings, action alerts, and our semiannual newsletter, *Rights Now*. And most importantly, you join a coalition of others who put their hands to the moral arc of the universe and help it bend toward justice.

Advancing human rights is the work of many joining hands. Join us — with a gift that earns membership for you and your loved ones this year!

For more information, visit uusc.org.



Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
689 Massachusetts Ave.
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302
617-868-6600 • 617-868-7102/fax
info@uusc.org • uusc.org CFC#11685