



Guest at Your Table

**NEXT DOOR, ACROSS BORDERS,
& WORLDWIDE!**



— **STORIES of HOPE** —

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**Watch videos featuring
our guests**



**Support our guests in
their human rights work**



**Connect your
congregation with GAYT**

Dear friends,

Justice movements are born out of and sustained by community connections — neighbors who claim each other across differences to offer solidarity in the midst of crisis. While we may primarily think of our neighbors as those who live in close proximity to us, there have always been those who extend this vital human connection to all who share this wonderful planet.

Who do you claim as your neighbor?

At UUSC, we have worked to strengthen our global community of neighbors since 1940. Through our work with grassroots partners in more than 20 countries, including the United States, UUSC centers the needs and solutions developed by communities most impacted by injustice. Our collaborative partner relationships are only made possible by the support of congregations and people like you.

UUSC's Guest at Your Table program has been both a beloved tradition and a timely call to action for 50 years. By participating in Guest at Your Table, you are joining with thousands of other Unitarian Universalists to put our values into action. This opportunity to learn from UUSC's partners invites you to expand the borders of our compassion.

Thank you for sharing in this important tradition and for spreading the word about UUSC's partners and our collaborative work for human rights.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L Randall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "L" being large and prominent.

Rev. Laura Randall
Director of Congregation Relations

NEXT DOOR, ACROSS BORDERS, AND WORLDWIDE!

What does it mean to be a neighbor?

Dear fellow justice-seekers,

GAYT presents stories from four of UUSC's partner organizations and programs. We are excited to introduce you to them!

You will hear from journalist Widlore Mérancourt, working for government accountability and community care in Haiti.

You will meet Alejandro and Martha, who are creating a place that feels like home in Mexico for people in migration.

You will be introduced to Yulia Kondur, advocating for gender equity and human rights for the Roma community in Ukraine.

Finally, you will learn about Unitarian Universalists in the United States who are building communities of welcome through the Community Accompaniment Program with Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS).

Thank you for joining UUSC and Unitarian Universalists from around the world for this annual tradition of learning and generosity. We invite you to help advance community-led change and support neighbors like Widlore, Alejandro, Martha, Yulia, and so many others with a gift at uusc.org/givetoguest. Together, we can nurture strong connections with our neighbors next door, across borders, and worldwide.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jay Pacitti', with a stylized, flowing script.

Jay Pacitti

Senior Congregation Relations Associate



STORY 1

AyiboPost

Widlore Mérancourt

When you watch or read the local news, what do you learn about your neighborhood? Are your neighbors accurately represented? How can you tell?

Widlore Mérancourt grew up asking these exact questions. A reserved teenager, he frequented the library, poring over newspapers. At 15, he started working at the local radio station. Whether in the papers or on the radio, however, Mérancourt never got news from his neighborhood. He grew up in the city of Jérémie of the Grand'Anse department in Haiti. All the news stories were about that nation's capital, Port-au-Prince.

"It's not just the fact that Port-au-Prince media would not be interested in the local stories," says Mérancourt "They would not be interested in the deeper reasons as to why they are covering what they are covering...The root causes of [the country's issues] are

not reflected in broadcast radio, on TV, or in the columns of the newspapers.” Mérancourt decided that if he were to continue to pursue news media, he was determined to produce accountability journalism: elevating local, frontline voices, exposing human rights abuses, and capturing stories left untold.

In 2019, Mérancourt became the Editor in Chief of AyiboPost. This independent news organization was founded in 2014 with a mission to become the primary online media reference for investigation and explanatory content in Haiti. Under Mérancourt’s leadership, AyiboPost became a UUSC partner.

“We break stories that are picked up on a regular basis by credible news organizations. I’m talking about the Washington Post, the New York Times, the BBC, NPR,” says Mérancourt. “And we are invited on a regular basis to tell the story of Haiti from the inside...We are telling the Haitian story to a Haitian audience with a Haitian team. These are not people who came to the country for a week to write briefly about what they saw...These are people writing about themselves.”

AyiboPost’s process stands in stark contrast to that of Global North¹ news organizations. Haitians often witness members of international media parachute in to cover only graphic, sensationalist violence. Haiti continues

1 The terms “Global North” and “Global South” are frameworks used to analyze the relative wealth and power of countries worldwide. The Global North typically includes places like the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.

to endure wide-spread instability, gang violence, resource scarcity, and displacement, rooted in France's enslavement of Haitian people and French and U.S. economic exploitation. Media coverage in the Global North tends to focus solely on the crisis without interrogating its causes.

"It's not that [crises] are not happening in the country," says MÉRANCOURT, "but to make us whole, to capture the true humanity of this country, we need a more complete story. We need to talk about not just the struggles, but also the resistance."

AyiboPost's reporting is one such local resource that helps people respond to ongoing crises. Just recently, articles by the news outlet have resulted in the liberation of women who had been victims of human trafficking. AyiboPost also facilitated the recovery of children who had been stolen from their mother and held in the abusive care of their father, an alleged arms trafficker. AyiboPost's public health reporting helps fill gaps left by insufficient medical care, providing Haitians with resources to address common health problems, engage in safe sex practices, and normalize mental health care.



The hard-hitting, diligent journalism of AyiboPost doesn't come without a cost. Independent media around the world has been under attack with the rise of authoritarianism and the associated oppression of free speech. Haiti is no exception, and journalists face further complications of gang violence and a virtually nonexistent justice system. Mérancourt and his peers have been personally threatened by gang leaders.

Still, AyiboPost's commitment does not waver. The attacks on its reporting, however, have amplified the need for comprehensive mental health care. Reporters covering the violence in Haiti carry a phenomenal psychological weight. Mérancourt does his best to ensure the staff's physical, emotional, and mental wellness. "I always say: the draft can wait. Your mental health cannot wait."

Just as Mérancourt's journalism requires both restorative rest and diligent work, the story of Haiti requires a nuanced, balanced lens. "Haiti is not just catastrophe. It's not just gang violence. It's not just corruption," says Mérancourt. "It's also resistance. It's also creativity...It's all part of the larger story of Haiti. We provide, and we are, the living proof."

Support the journalists fighting for accountability and community care in Haiti:

donate.uusc.org/givetoguest



STORY 2

Casa Tochán

Alejandro and Martha

What space do you define as “home”?
Who lives there?

For the collaborators and guests of Casa Tochán, “home” belongs to anyone committed to care that transcends borders. “Tochán” is a word of indigenous Náhuatl origin meaning “our home.”

“The term perfectly embodies the organization’s philosophy of work,” says Alejandro, Tochán’s paralegal, “In the way that collaborators and guests come together for a shared project.” Alejandro started working with Casa Tochán as a volunteer and is now a formal staff member. “This is where I have applied both my knowledge and my calling,” he says.

Casa Tochán is a UUSC partner protecting and serving men in migration. Located in Mexico City, they provide comprehensive and personalized

assistance. They offer medical care, legal support, food, and social services.

“Tochán serves male migrants, addressing a demographic that has long lacked attention [in migration justice organizations],” says Martha, Tochán’s psychologist and coordinator. “Our workshops, programs, and services are tailored to men, making the organization a key part of the lives of those who use it—empowering, informing, and encouraging them to express their masculinity through an approach that differs from the prevailing norm.”

Casa Tochán offers art programs that support guests’ self-expression. Their workshops strengthen both psychological health and practical skill building. Recently, they held a popular series on screen printing that they’re looking to expand upon. “I would like the screen-printing workshop to be more consistent and to serve as a source of income for Tochán,” says Alejandro. “The idea of it becoming an option for Tochán’s [financial] sustainability really motivates me.”

While the organization offers essential services like healthy meals and legal consultation, they emphasize the value of a holistic approach. “Casa Tochán is more than a shelter; it’s a home,” they say.

“I believe that Tochán is a point of reference in the field of migration; its involvement in advocacy and its openness to the academic community



have made it a space respected by authorities, the media, institutions, and the public alike,” says Martha. Tochán models that true care tends to people’s creative, psychological, and social wellness. While food, medical care, and legal services are essential, practical support alone does not make people feel at home.

As Alejandro says, at Casa Tochán, “collaborators and guests come together for a shared project.” Staff members, volunteers, and guests have an equal, cooperative relationship. The organization demonstrates that just as neighboring can mean reaching out to others, it also means inviting people into a shared, nourishing space.

Executive Director Gabriela de Lourdes Hernández Chalte once said, “Love is not reflected in the individual, but in the collective.” Casa Tochán reminds us that, ultimately, communal love is our shared project.

Support Alejandro and Martha as they create a space where everyone is home:

donate.uusc.org/givetoguest



STORY 3

Chiricli

Yulia Kondur

What does it mean to be a neighbor when a community is defined by culture, rather than borders? Yulia Kondur sought to answer this question when she founded Chiricli, UUSC's partner supporting Roma women and children in Ukraine. "Chiricli" means "bird" in Romany.

"Birds are very free; they fly wherever they wish, and it's the same for Roma people, because we don't have any territory, no country," says Kondur. "We have cultural customs, traditions, language, and dances. Our inner culture and rules are similar to the birds. They fly everywhere; they're lively and happy. The same is true for Roma people; we want to be free and not isolated." Roma people have been violently socially isolated and discriminated against for hundreds of years. This prejudice is largely rooted in xenophobia and racism, as Roma culture is distinctive, and Roma people have rightfully resisted assimilation. Public institutions often refuse to meaningfully recognize Roma history. Roma people

faced centuries of enslavement, cultural erasure, and genocide during the Holocaust.

This lack of cultural awareness paired with ongoing discrimination leads to continued persecution of Roma people. They face major barriers in accessing medical treatment, employment, education, and social mobility.

Kondur and her husband, Anatolii Fedorovych Kondur, believe that a better world is possible for their Roma community. They had a vision of both supportive Ukrainian neighbors and change within Roma culture. Founded in 1997, Chiricli has advocated for the protection of Roma people for nearly three decades. Now, they continue that work with a focus on women who have suffered violence as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Our most successful project was the creation of a mediation system. We have 75 mediators, or representatives of our foundation, who are working in 15 regions of Ukraine," says Kondur. These mediators are both Roma and non-Roma people, trained in cultural competency by Chiricli.

Trained representatives are essential as they advocate for the Roma people on a policy level and intervene in real-time conflicts with police, Ukrainians, and others. "Because of the system of mediators, we can communicate with state administrations and with the local authorities of every region, city, and village."

Chiricli has also worked with the Ombudsman Secretariat, training judges, police officers, and other public officials. Their educational efforts help non-Roma authority figures and civilians to identify and root out discrimination. Chiricli directly confronts unjust power structures and social bias, strengthening communities and connecting neighbors.

While these initiatives impact all Roma people, Chiricli is focused on serving women and children. Kondur founded the organization because she recognized that in addition to facing violent discrimination in the broader world, Roma women are often unprotected in their own families. As is the often case for women around the world, there is no reprieve from the impacts of patriarchy.

Many Roma families have traditional gender roles, so Kondur strategically invited husbands to the educational trainings they offered Roma women. All human rights struggles are connected, and Chiricli's projects often address feminist issues alongside political advocacy, community development, and ecological concerns. With this intersectional lens, Roma men were extremely receptive, and many began to volunteer.

Chiricli continues to use education to mobilize communities. They're currently running an ecological campaign about poor water quality that disproportionately impacts Roma women and children, advocating

for cities to provide water filters to residents. They've recently restored a local playground thanks to Roma volunteers, and they're working to establish a free taxi service for people with disabilities.

Roma people know that being a good neighbor is not confined to maps, territories, or borders. Chiricli's work shows us what's possible when folks prioritize community care over cultural norms. UUSC is proud to support Kondur and her organization as they build a new model of care, equity, and accountability.

As Kondur said in an interview with ZMINA Human Rights Center, "Together we will build and rebuild our country."

Support Yulia and Roma women in their campaign for human rights for the Roma community: donate.uusc.org/givetoguest





STORY 4

CAPAS

UU Congregants & Leaders

Who counts as your neighbor? How do you decide?

Unitarian Universalist minister Dottie Mathews always knew that asylum-seekers are our neighbors. When she volunteered at the United States-Mexico border, she was called to address the urgent responsibility of U.S. faith communities to do active, engaged neighboring.

She founded the Community Accompaniment Program with Asylum-Seekers (CAPAS) in 2019. The program was designed to pair congregations with people in migration, accompanying asylum-seekers by offering housing and holistic community support. Rev. Mathews contacted UUSC to see if CAPAS could become part of our programming, and it was a perfect fit.

While the state of migration justice was already bleak in 2019, xenophobic policies and attitudes have only become more severe. "We've seen a dramatic

reduction in the number of people crossing the border,” says CAPAS’ Program Coordinator.¹

The reduction of people in migration entering the United States reflects the bleak state of migration justice. While CAPAS’ focus has pivoted slightly, the program hasn’t seen any reduction in need. “A lot of what we’re doing now is [serving] people who have already been in the United States for some time, but given the increased pressure, now face greater danger.”

CAPAS congregations offer their guests an accessible place to stay, meals, and ongoing responsive support. Congregations connect guests to legal aid, arrange ESL and job training classes, and offer mental health resources. Hosts provide holistic social support, throwing birthday parties for kids of families in migration and helping to mark holidays. One congregation quickly pulled together a quinceañera celebration for a child turning 15 after she told her mom that she didn’t want a party because it would cost her family too much.

While CAPAS congregations commit themselves to this responsive, engaged neighboring, the program ensures that participating congregants get community care too. The CAPAS team hosts a monthly support group where UUSC staff and representatives from the migration justice field offer strategies and insight. CAPAS congregations receive training that is regularly updated to reflect new laws and circumstances.

1 Anonymized for safety

With that training, CAPAS congregations are ready to fully tend to their guests' needs. "We coach people through everything, from how to set up a power of attorney so that if you're detained and deported someone can sell your car and get you those funds," says the Coordinator. "Or what happens to your U.S. citizen children if you're detained and deported. Families are having to make these horrible decisions... Our congregations are navigating it with them."

One congregation hosting someone from Haiti was rightfully nervous about his routine ICE check-in. They brought their concerns to the CAPAS support group and were advised to recruit a group of congregants to wait for him outside the field office, demonstrating their support. At the appointment, officers zip tied the man's wrists and attempted to force him to sign "voluntary" deportation papers. When he was able to get his lawyer on the phone, his counsel told the ICE officers to look outside and see the community that had shown up to support him. 40 UU congregants stood together, nervously awaiting the return of their CAPAS friend. The officers released him!

In another instance, a young woman seeking asylum was detained and brutalized while in detention. The violence was so severe that when she left detention, she required a wheelchair. She was severely traumatized.

A longtime CAPAS congregation came

forward to offer solidarity on short notice when we learned that her lawyers had won her release. Through their local, interfaith immigrant justice network, they identified a couple who had recently cared for an elder with mobility complications who had recently passed away. They had installed a variety of mobility aids in their home, so the couple eagerly volunteered to accompany this young woman. In addition to accessible housing, the CAPAS team connected her with jobs, legal resources, physical therapy, and mental health support. After living with the couple for more than a year, this guest now lives independently and no longer uses a wheelchair. Both the guest and her hosts describe the experience as deeply healing.

Extraordinary things are possible when a group of committed neighbors decides to create communities of welcome. While the state of migration justice in the United States continues to devastate and demoralize, may the work of CAPAS remind us of the healing power of neighboring.

**Support CAPAS building
welcoming communities:
donate.uusc.org/givetoguest**

**Become a CAPAS community:
uusc.org/capas**





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As a member of UUSC, you join a community of over 20,000 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 help the arc of the universe bend toward justice.

Join us and know that your gift directly furthers the work of equity, justice, and community care.

For more information about UUSC, visit uusc.org.



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