



A Hunger Justice Journal

PHP POST

Summer 2024 | Presbyterian Hunger Program | www.pcusa.org/hunger

Young Adult Changemakers



In this Issue

Page 2: Finding Hope | **Page 3:** Mark Your Calendars! | **Page 4:** My Beloved City | **Page 5:** Muchas Gracias, Mi Familia
Page 6-7: Planting Seeds | **Page 8-9:** 2023 Snapshot | **Page 10:** Intersections of Climate Advocacy
Page 11: My Journey of Leadership | **Page 12-13:** Confronting Violence | **Page 14:** Haiti | **Page 15:** Seeking Asylum





Finding Hope, Inspiration and Healing

By Rebecca Barnes, coordinator for PHP

I don't know about you, but this year so far, I'm having to constantly lean on faith that God is with us and that God's beloved community is being created even in the midst of horrors. All around, violence, war, infuriating political maneuvering, climate change and human sin threaten all that I hold dear — from my own children's future to beloved partners in Palestine and Haiti to the future of our democracy. God have mercy!

One way I believe God is with us is by teaching us through other life companions. The young adult change-makers who have written this PHP Post have brought me hope, inspiration and healing. The wisdom, commitment, and love embodied in their writing and in the lives they are living offer us solace in a world that feels like it's on fire. They demonstrate the qualities we all need to emulate as we engage in undoing long-standing systemic and structural injustices.

Salma Al Ashi writes honestly of pain, the shattering destruction of war in Palestine, and the desperate struggles of diminished dreams even while working to support others who are suffering by providing humanitarian aid in myriad forms. May we listen!

Yadira Paz-Martinez writes about how crucial it is to form real relationships, to eat with one another, to laugh and build bridges, and to give joy even in the face of really hard, long battles for a better future. May we listen!

Kristen Young writes of the awakenings that the institutions that are supposed to protect us don't always do that, and corporate decisions don't always lean toward the right thing without a lot of pressure, and that, in the face of these realities, we each can find our own gifts and skills and place to uproot harmful systems and plant seeds for a hopeful future. May we listen!

Maggie Collins writes of the church's call to enter places to advocate for women and Indigenous voices and the importance of ecumenical community and support for young adults starting out in advocacy work. May we listen!

Matte Wilson writes about claiming one's own power to create change and trusting one's own self and one's longings to get to a place of being able to help create community healing and sovereignty. May we listen!

Damaris Pajar writes how important it is to have participatory places for vulnerable people — especially women — to share their voices and real-life experiences and to name things for what they are in order to transform even church places that might otherwise look away from or worse, normalize violence. May we listen!

Alexandre Iselande writes of the frustrations of knowing solutions but not seeing them enacted, of the lack of opportunities for youth leadership even when they have the education and skills ready to use, and yet a commitment to remain in hard places, to stay and fight rather than to leave, and to help one's community become what it could be. May we listen!

Lucy McDermott writes about using the power of words, Scriptures and one's own passion to help others understand the moral and ethical call to address key social injustices. May we listen!

May we listen and be transformed so that we, with God's help, can inspire others who are struggling to hang on to faith and to keep working for justice. May we, together, create places of healing, wisdom and hope for a better world.

Mark Your Calendars!

Upcoming Dates and Resources



World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation September 1

Join the 2024 Season of Creation and download the latest resource themed "Let Justice and Peace Flow" at seasonofcreation.org.

Food Week of Action October 2024

Join the Global Food Week of Action, which includes World Food Day (Oct. 16), International Day for Rural Women (Oct. 15) and International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (Oct. 17). Visit pcusa.org/foodweek for more information.

Jesus & Justice Advocacy Conference October 18-20

Hosted by the PC(USA), in Charlotte, North Carolina, this conference benefits college students, seminarians and young adults who want to learn effective ways to stand up for causes they believe in, build networks and engage with advocacy topics in meaningful ways. Visit <https://presbyterianmission-22542400.hs-sites.com/advocacy-conference> for more information.

Hunger and Homelessness Sunday November 24

Hunger and Homelessness Sunday is part of Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, recognized in November by the PC(USA) and others across the United States. During this season, we challenge you and your congregation to raise awareness of the housing crisis and consider ways to act. Visit pcusa.org/homelessness for more information

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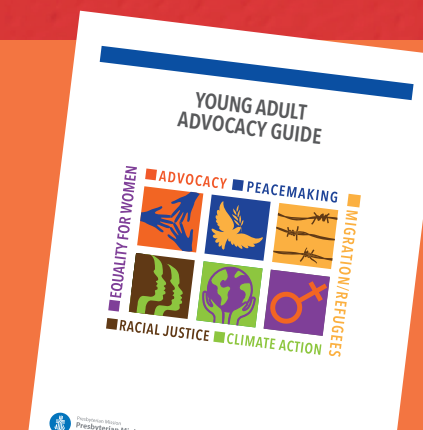
On the Cover: Kristen and friends at Capitol. Photo courtesy of Kristen Young.

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CHECK OUT THIS YOUNG ADULT ADVOCACY GUIDE

This curriculum is meant to introduce participants – whether in a group or individually – to the topic of advocacy. Young people will spend some time thinking about what advocacy means, how it can take shape in their own lives, how it fits into a life of faith and ways in which they can get involved in advocacy in the world around them. Download here: presbyterianmission.org/resource/young-adult-advocacy-guide/



My Beloved City

By Salma Al Ashi, Marketing and Fundraising Team, Improvement and Development for Communities



Photo courtesy of IDCO
Destruction from the Israeli military in Gaza

As a recent graduate of Al-Azhar University, I've been working with Improvement and Development for Communities (IDCO). Everything changed when war struck Gaza. Fear and terror gripped me as bombs and explosions rang out. Now, my dreams are replaced by harsh suffering and shortages of food, water and electricity. I sit under heavy rain with freezing hands in a roofless room, dreaming of my childhood memories and aspirations that once filled the corners of my beloved city, Gaza.

On the seventh day of the war, complete chaos began. Calls from unknown numbers plagued our phones amid the madness of phosphorus bombs. The Israeli forces demanded evacuation, and we left behind our old lives, seeking safety in the south. The journey was hard and filled with other displaced people leaving their homes for the unknown.

Arriving in Khan Younis, the initial calm was again shattered by endless explosions. Forced to flee again, the fear, horror and despair

that I felt increased. The destruction, blood-stained streets and agonized screams of the injured drown out the dreams of the youth.

In the calm midnight, I find myself in lonely thoughts that are then disrupted by the sounds of tank explosions. With every shattered dream I left behind, the continued journey of displacement is a tragic odyssey. Every breath feels heavy, with the weight of ongoing explosions piercing the air like sorrowful cries. Nights turn into a never-ending nightmare with the sound of destruction replacing peaceful dreams.

During the heavy thoughts of this difficulty, the world came into my mind — a world seemingly unaware of the struggles my fellow youth and I face. The cruel realities of war have a huge impact on young people. As I realize the loss and the immobility of our futures, the pain in my heart deepens. My home is in ruins, and the world seems indifferent to this hell. It's unbelievable!

Moving to another area offered no solace. My

days are marked by constant displacement and instability. After reaching Rafah, I found people sleeping on the streets in the bitter cold. The cup of coffee I used to drink every day has become such a precious gift. Life is tough, and I'm overwhelmed by the continuous chaos. In this misery, I look hope, praying that somewhere, amid the rubble, light will shine through the gloom.

I planned to obtain a master's degree in translation, however, the harsh realities of war have impeded these dreams. I aspire to live in peace, safety and happiness. But now, being happy and comfortable feels far away. Despite these challenges, my desire to complete my studies remains strong, even though my university has been destroyed. I want to keep studying and using my degree to share the Palestinian experience with people worldwide.

Helping my people during tough times helps me. Being a part of IDCO gives me a sense that there's still life and optimism. We can support people by providing humanitarian aid such as hot meals, essential supplies, clean drinking water, hygiene kits, blankets and winter clothes. IDCO helps displaced families secure shelter, distributes tents and sets up makeshift shelters.

All this crucial aid was sourced locally or brought in by aid trucks via the Rafah border, with support from international partners and donors. It's not just about giving help; it's about making a positive impact, even in incredibly tough situations. By showing up for each other, we build a better future together.

My hope is for the world to awaken to the reality that blankets Gaza. I yearn for shared empathy and kindness that recognizes the urgent need to shield our youthful dreams in the face of the harsh circumstances we endure.

Muchas Gracias, Mi Familia

By Yadira Paz-Martinez, Student Action with Farmworkers '22 Into the Fields Intern

"Theater?!" I questioned. "How is theater supposed to help advance social justice?" I pondered as I stared at the script given to me by my supervisor, Librado.

I thought we needed faster solutions for our community. As he explained the dynamics and purpose of theater, I began to understand the intentions of this task. Soon, I found myself embracing Doña Leticia, one of the leading characters in our play titled "Dichos del Campo." The play was inspired by a Hispanic TV show titled "Como Dice el Dicho" to present something relatable to the farmworkers.

"How exactly would theater make a difference?" I continued to question. "How would we measure this outcome of change?"

After a few days of working at the North Carolina Justice Center on behalf of Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF), the SAF theater gathered to prepare to travel south of Raleigh, North Carolina.

As we drove down the rural roads of Benson, North Carolina, I rushed to memorize my lines. Outside the car windows, I could see the vast tobacco field as we entered the dirt road toward the migrant housing. The rural side of North Carolina was nothing new to me. The fields, migrant housing and quietness of the evening were normal in my upbringing. It was comforting to be in a place that influenced my desire to go to college.

We settled in, conversing with the farmworkers over a dinner of pupusas. Stories from living in Mexico to working in the tobacco fields filled the atmosphere. Soon, it was time for the grand presentation.

Our theater group prepared by setting up the stage. A table, some cardboard props and funny costumes were our platform, and the tobacco fields were our background.

Ready. Set. Action! I stood there. Frozen. I forgot my first line!

Mortified, I scrambled to find my script. I could hear my theater cohort and the farmworkers laughing. Levity and happiness filled the air. Despite the hours of "studying" our script, it turns out that we never really memorized the exact lines. Our improvisations and errors created an organic performance, one where the farmworkers laughed at our sporadic adoptions.



Photo courtesy of SAF
The SAF '22 ITF theater cohort includes Yadira Paz-Martinez, Brenda Lopez, Hector Guerrero, Maria Juarez, a farmworker from the camp, Grace Calus and Grace May

We performed four skits designed to share information about Covid, tobacco poisoning, Conéctate Carolina (an online directory of services and organizations available to farmworkers) and other topics!

But as I stood there performing, I could see the farmworkers' faces and bodies. Despite the fatigue of working all day, their bodies relaxed, and their faces filled with happiness. Maybe I did not change their lives entirely, but I gave them happiness, at

least for a few minutes.

These acts of joy and laughter are as valuable as policies. I had never had that feeling before. I thought, "What if my father were in the audience?" The laughter and smiles on their faces alleviated the hopelessness I often felt in the farmworker movement. While they remember me as "Doña Leticia," someone who taught them how to access resources, I will remember our audience as the ones who taught me to embrace the small

moments in a movement, to humanize an experience, and most importantly, to love.

They are a reminder of why I am doing this work. Their faces are engraved in my heart. For this, I say: Muchas gracias, mi familia.

I write this in memory of the SAF Into the Fields 2022 cohort, to the parents of each student who made this experience possible, to our community partners, to the SAF staff, and to each and every farmworker I had the immense privilege of meeting. Thank you.

Fueling Change, Pulling Weeds, Planting Seeds

By Kristen Young, Honolulu; Young Adult Volunteer (Peru 2016–17)

Photo courtesy of Kristen Young



Shut Down Red Hill rally at Capitol

“Ola i ka wai!” (“Water is life!”) This well-known truth in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i is the cry, call and chant of water protectors in the Hawaiian Kingdom where I live, the land of Kānaka Maoli. I am an Asian settler, born, raised and residing on the island of O‘ahu, where we are in the midst of an unfolding crisis — one symptom of the illegal occupation and militarization of these islands.

During World War II, the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility was constructed to support U.S. military operations in the

Pacific. The Navy’s facility, built in a mountain on O‘ahu, consists of 20 tanks that can store a total of 250 million gallons of fuel and are connected to Pearl Harbor through underground pipelines. The aging facility sits just 100 feet above an aquifer that supplies 77% of our island’s water.

Despite years of community concerns about the risk to our water, and even a history of leaks from the facility, nothing was addressed, and in 2021, the water that supplied many residents’ homes was tainted

from leaked fuel, sickening thousands, including many military residents. The Navy tried to convince the public that the water was safe and has continually shown little to no accountability. Our municipal water provider had to shut down nearby wells to prevent fuel spread, affecting water conservation and cost indefinitely. Community groups continue to hold water distributions for residents whose water is still contaminated over two years later.

As people sustained by water and baptized

by water, I know I don’t need to convince you that this vital, sacred resource is worthy of our utmost protection. Surely the military knows this as well, so it’s been a wake-up call to realize they just might not care, that we are among their sacrifices. I grew up thinking the military’s purpose was to keep us safe, but what does it say about “national security” if the military’s nearly trillion-dollar budget does not even afford us clean water, a basic necessity for life?

It took the community coming together and demanding that the Navy #ShutDownRedHill. The land and water that sustain us have always been best stewarded by those who have lived in harmony with these very lands and waters for generations. I am grateful for the calls to action that invited me to send letters and emails, submit testimony, and attend meetings and protests to protect water for us and future generations. What should’ve been a quick decision to prioritize public health required immense community pressure. The defueling process finally began in October 2023 and is expected to be completed by July 2024, but we must continue to be vigilant and hold those responsible accountable.

Through my involvement with Red Hill, I connected with someone who introduced me to a small, family farm dedicated to perpetuating Hawaiian culture and values and cultivating community sustenance. (I’ve become a regular at this farm, which is located not far from the Red Hill fuel tanks, and we are praying that the fuel never reaches it.) My farming skills are still subpar (I can barely keep my Easyplant at home alive), but I have enjoyed growing my relationship with these people and ‘āina (land).

One memorable lesson from my time at the farm was learned during the construction of a rock wall. Some rocks are better suited to be in front, but the rocks behind, propping others up, are just as important. This goes for us as well. I’m not the one leading campaigns or speaking at demonstrations, but I know I have a significant role in



Kristen and friends at Capitol with signs

the work of justice. Each of us is needed to show up as we are, whenever we can, with whatever gifts, skills, connections and influence we have, to create the critical mass needed to generate change in the face of injustice.

Of the different tasks we do at the farm, pulling weeds isn’t my favorite, but I will admit I find great satisfaction in uprooting an unwanted plant. It always reminds me of the importance of addressing issues by their root causes. We have systems and institutions with roots that choke out life; simply pruning them is not always enough. While it’s easy to let our rightful anger guide us toward the total destruction of harmful systems in place, we must also be working to create the world we want to live

in when these systems are gone. We must be pulling weeds and planting seeds, tending to the new life that’s springing forth.

Indigenous wisdom teaches that we are part of nature — people, ‘āina and wai are intertwined. In Hawaiian, the word kuleana speaks of reciprocal responsibility. As a person of faith, it is a similar sense of calling that urges me to actively love my kin in Creation. This love is what fuels change.

» **LEARN MORE**
Continue to learn more at oahuwaterprotectors.org
Pray with us: bit.ly/redhillpule

Photo courtesy of Kristen Young

2023 IMPACT SNAPSHOT

In 2023, you helped PHP give **84 grants totaling \$1.1 million**, impacting **19 countries and a territory**, including the U.S. and Puerto Rico. PHP also partnered with **12 Presbytery Hunger Action Advocates, 80 Hunger Action Congregations** and **304 Earth Care Congregations** across the U.S.

Our work resourcing Presbyterians and the work of our partners is difficult to quantify within a year; long-term sustainable development, community empowerment and policy change take many years. This snapshot offers just a few examples of work funded in 2023 and how your gifts contribute to a more just world and well-being for all God's people and Creation. We are grateful for the scope of work the One Great Hour of Sharing ministries are able to accomplish together through your generous gifts (OG300000). For more about our grant partners and resources, go to pcusa.org/hunger. Thank you for your financial contributions, time, energy and prayers!

These projects are a few examples of work supported by the Presbyterian Hunger Program in 2023.



Photo courtesy of Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW)

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program, launched in the tomato fields of Florida, today prevents the very worst human rights abuses — modern-day slavery, sexual assault, child labor and physical violence — not just in tomatoes and not just in Florida, but in a multiplicity of new crops, 10 new states and even three new countries!

CIW has also been working in Scotland and Northern Ireland in collaboration with the International Transport Workers Federation to launch a “Fair Fish Program” pilot in the UK fishing industry — an industry with extremely dangerous working conditions for immigrant fishers from Ghana, the Philippines and Indonesia, many of whom toil at risk of modern-day slavery and other harsh abuses.



Photo courtesy of ACREST

ACREST in the Bamboutos Mountains of Cameroon distributed **250 improved stoves and 50 water filters**, bettering health in 26 villages. The stoves consume less wood, reducing deforestation, and the water filters increase access to clean water for drinking, cooking and bathing, reducing the incidence of waterborne illnesses.



Photo courtesy of Tewa Women United

Tewa Women United in Santa Cruz, New Mexico, engages in protecting the health and safety of Indigenous and other vulnerable communities residing near extractive projects. Their efforts have led to work with youth, Pueblo Women Farmers and other local community members. Tewa developed a curriculum focused on native plants, which was then taught to third- and fifth-grade kids from Santa Clara Pueblo. As part of the curriculum, students were instructed to cultivate tomatoes, corn, beans and squash in the spiral garden located at the Espanola Healing Foods Oasis. Additionally, Tewa engaged in discussions with young residents of the Española Valley and attentively considered their apprehensions about the catastrophic ecological consequences of Los Alamos National Laboratory and the ongoing nuclear colonialism that deeply impacts the soil and air in communities downwind of Los Alamos.



Photo courtesy of BOLD Justice

BOLD Justice in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, prioritized expanding the tree canopy in low-income neighborhoods that lack trees. The community felt this work was important because low-income neighborhoods have the lowest rate of tree canopy, making them the most susceptible to heat-related problems like heat stroke and high cooling bills. BOLD Justice was able to get a commitment from the county to provide funding for 500 trees to be given away. The tree giveaways are being hosted at BOLD Justice congregations.



Photo courtesy of ASOFENIX

ASOFENIX in Nicaragua implemented a solar refrigeration initiative for fish production and was welcomed by the entire community. The solar refrigeration system allows people like Mercedes del Socorro Mora Ruiz, a 31-year-old fisherwoman and mother, to have access to ice in the community to keep the fish fresh. “It was definitely tiring and tedious having to travel to Menco to look for ice. The entire morning was lost, and sometimes even the entire day, because sometimes due to blackouts we could not find ice,” said Ruiz. In addition to fishing, Ruiz can now preserve fresh fish for longer and market it at a better price due to the quality of the product. This project allows many to increase fish production and economic income to ensure the well-being of families.



Photo courtesy of RELUFA

RELUFA mobilized communities in Batouri, Eastern Cameroon, to stand up for their rights in the face of the failure of mining companies to safely close mining operations and reclaim lands that have been mined. Communities are literally hanging over the edge of open pits, and every year, children, families and animals fall into the pits and die. There are also detrimental public health impacts from the contamination.

Intersections of Climate Advocacy

By Maggie Collins, Young Adult Volunteer for the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations



Maggie Collins

The effects of climate change are becoming even more stark in the world today. As advocacy efforts for climate change ramp up, not all voices get the same amount of attention. We, as the Church, have a responsibility to make sure that everyone inside and outside of the Church is equally empowered to speak up. Something that I believe the PC(USA) does well is the way women are brought together for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) at U.N. Headquarters each year. This year, we have almost 50 representatives in our delegation. At CSW, there is consistently a strong focus on young girls and the unique issues that they face. There are also many events that emphasize the ways that climate and gender intersect and how climate change has an acute effect on global gender inequality. In many parts of the world, women work primarily in the agricultural sector. Environmental changes add stress on agriculture, increase conflicts across cultures, and increase the risk of gender-based and sexual violence for women in these roles. So, we cannot

talk about climate advocacy without highlighting the heightened effects that are felt by women. I think that bringing Presbyterians to the CSW allows them to make these connections and engage with the issues further.

The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII) is taking place from April 15–26. The priority theme for this year's PFII is "Enhancing Indigenous Peoples' Right to Self-determination in the Context of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Emphasizing the Voices of Indigenous Youth." This year, the U.N. will put at the forefront the voices of Indigenous youth, a group that has been historically marginalized. I think it is really important for our church to recognize the important role that we could play at the PFII. Indigenous issues and climate advocacy often intersect in many ways as conversations are had about land rights and conservation. Climate change has a significant impact on Indigenous traditional practices and sacred lands. Indigenous youth are the future of advocacy efforts for these communities. As we look forward to this year's PFII, I hope that the voices of Indigenous youth are heard by

all in attendance so that the PC(USA) can work to increase our advocacy for these communities and the issues that affect them, like climate change.

One of the things that has been most important to me as a young person starting in the professional world at the U.N. is the value of community. Our ecumenical community at the U.N. is very supportive and robust, which allows us to share ideas and gain more knowledge on advocacy across faith traditions. If I was not working in person in this position, I would not have been able to build these strong bonds. I think that it is essential that young people are able to find supportive individuals around them, especially when they are starting out in advocacy work. It can be intimidating to enter advocacy spaces, especially one as well-established as the U.N. I believe the Presbyterian Ministry at the U.N. can be a way to connect members of the church who are interested in climate advocacy by bringing groups to participate in the many events that the U.N. offers. This will allow Presbyterians to see the ways in which climate change have an impact on many social issues, making the Church's advocacy that much richer.

My Journey of Leadership and Food Sovereignty

By Matte Wilson, Food Sovereignty Director for Sicangu Co

Food has always been an important aspect of the Lakota culture; it's how we show our love and care for one another and ourselves. For me, food has been a way for me to connect with my culture, and it has helped me grow into a leader.

When I think back on the foods that I grew up eating — frozen pizza, packaged ramen, commodity cheese, canned meat, canned pears — it never seemed strange to me. I thought that everyone ate this way. I was never taught what traditional Lakota foods were. I knew that Lakota people ate buffalo, but I didn't grow up eating it. Buffalo wasn't available at our grocery stores. I was 11 when I tasted buffalo for the first time.

When I first took a bite of buffalo stew, I felt conflicted. I felt good knowing that buffalo was something that my ancestors consumed, and, in that moment, I felt connected to them. However, I also didn't like the taste; I had developed a flavor palette that preferred beef over bison.

Jumping ahead to my college years, this conflicted feeling evolved into a feeling of longing. My college hosted a cultural expo where the various student organizations were asked to share a cultural or traditional dish. I took it upon myself to make the food dish for my Native American student group. I struggled. I loved to cook, but I did not know what to make. The one food I did know how to make was fry bread. I decided to make Indian tacos, which consist of Tex-Mex-style taco ingredients and toppings on a flat piece of fried dough. I think back on this moment and remember feeling ashamed of myself. I was ashamed that I couldn't make something that was traditional. I was ashamed that I had to resort to making fry bread — a food that has a painful history and is often viewed as a symbol of colonization. This moment pushed me to start learning what Lakota

foods are and to understand where this longing feeling stemmed from.

After graduating college, I returned home to Rosebud and joined the Food Sovereignty Initiative as a volunteer. The term "food sovereignty" was new to me. During my first few months, I learned that the U.S. government had spent billions of dollars to create systems and policies designed to eradicate Indigenous people. I used to think that the systems that exist were just broken; however, I learned that the systems are working exactly the way they were intended to. The conditions and disparities that exist in my community did not simply happen by accident — they were and are intentionally designed. A revelation in my journey with food sovereignty was that if policies and systems were the weapons used to create these injustices, then they could also be transformed into tools for change.

Since coming back home, I've been able to develop relationships with the plant relatives here. I've learned how to identify, harvest and cook with them. One of my most profound moments has been harvesting timsila, or wild prairie turnips. I'd seen timsila plenty of times, however, I'd never seen or tasted the actual plant before. During my first harvest, I learned that timsila plants have beautiful, light purple flowers and leaves that look like hands. Their leaf-hands reveal where other timsila plants are by pointing in the direction of the next closest plant. As I dug up the tap root where the timsila tuber was located, I couldn't help but feel a sense of anxiousness. It felt like I was about to see a family member I hadn't seen in a long time.

Once I removed the tuber and taproot from the base of the plant, I carefully buried the plant. We do this so that the seeds in the flowers can grow new timsila in the future. With the tuber in my hand, I started peeling



Matte Wilson

off the brown bark to reveal the tender, milky white timsila. I took my first bite. Goosebumps. Although I'd never tasted it before, it was so familiar. Sweet, starchy and earthy. My spirit recognized this food even though my body didn't. I felt like I was finally arriving home, in a way.

After two years, I was asked if I was willing to step into the director role of the entire Food Sovereignty program. At first, I declined. I was scared. Not scared of what the role required, but scared to let my people down. There's a Lakota concept: *Nake Nula Waun*. It means to be prepared for anything, anytime, anywhere. I've come to learn that this concept isn't just about being prepared. It is also about knowing that we have everything we need inside of us.

I accepted the position, and it has been one of the best decisions I've made. This work is so dynamic and, at times, can be very challenging. There are times when I think I need external validation or permission to enact change. However, the validation I need most is my own. To permit myself to have an audacious, yet simple, vision for my people. I envision a future in which we have the power to transform systems — a world where Lakota people are once again happy, healthy and safe. This is what food sovereignty means to me.

Confronting Violence in and from Churches in Peru

By Damaris Pajar, Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) Program Volunteer



I started my YAV work in Peru in August 2023. I really liked the training I received in the program because it helped me reflect on topics such as discrimination, migration and colonialism, topics of vital importance to respond assertively in the contexts with which I work. I am supporting the Evangelical Theological Educational Association (AETE), an ecumenical theological training institution with 25 years of educational work.

What caught my attention was the volunteer opportunity that AETE was proposing around “Gender Equality.” The opportunity was going to allow me to coordinate and develop workshops and courses linked to the Prevention of Violence Against Women, a necessary theme in Peruvian contexts that are full of injustices toward vulnerable populations. I made the decision to be a YAV volunteer because, upon knowing the principles and guidelines of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), it

seemed to me that they responded very accurately to the social and cultural needs of my environment.

In my case, I have grown up in an evangelical church in Peru, and due to my parents’ work, I have known different churches in Lima and in the provinces. In these churches, spaces are not normally developed for dialogue based on principles such as inclusion, justice and diversity; therefore, it seemed like a special opportunity for my learning, growth and service to participate in this project.

I am a graduate of Psychology and an artist, and having the possibility of serving with my abilities and tools is something that motivates me a lot. I am even more glad that it can be with AETE, which has been sharing spaces so necessary for the affirmation of justice and human dignity. AETE works both with organizations such as the World March of Women Movement as well as with religious institutions of other

faiths. From AETE, new knowledge and methods are contributed to theology to understand the kingdom of God in or from the reality of Latin America, recognizing the challenges and needs, especially of impoverished people.

One of the main spaces that I have been working in is with the Church of God “Luz y Vida,” located in the populous district of Villa el Salvador, south of Lima. My work is especially linked to the group of women who belong to the soup kitchen (a space to assist families living in poverty) that was created based on the needs of the neighborhood itself. The women in the dining room are part of the church and organize themselves autonomously to provide lunches to families in the neighborhood.

With the women’s group, we have facilitated a “Workshop on Prevention of Violence Against Women” based on a community

approach. A participatory diagnosis was carried out, which was an incredible experience, because the workshop could be developed from the realities and felt needs of the community of women. In this workshop, subtopics were discussed, such as the types of violence that they go through daily, and I was able to observe how the participants were reflecting and de-normalizing the most subtle types of violence, such as manipulation, symbolic or sexist violence.

Throughout the sessions, it was possible to recognize how the women were applying the learning that we developed collectively, for example, in their interest in developing positive and respectful parenting in order to break the chain of generational violence.

This is something that excites me very much, because this work allows me to accompany and see up close the reflections and changes in women who, despite having difficult stories, are committed to their process of de-normalizing violence. This experience is a tangible example of how processes of change occur in families through training and community workspaces.

Another activity that was carried out within the area of Gender Equality was the “Women and Leadership” diploma program with the Church of the Pilgrims in Chiclayo. This program included an in-person workshop in Chiclayo, so we traveled with Professor Daniel Córdova, who oversaw the classes, and I was in charge of the logistics as well as the dynamic spaces between the classes.

This workshop was very special, since the church where it was held had quite conservative ideas. Observing the courage of the group of women in training as they expressed their questions and feelings was very inspiring. Also, there was the opportunity to fellowship with the leaders of the church and learn a little more about their experiences and learning.

The results of this workshop were very positive. From the problematization of the roles and stereotypes of women in the contexts of family and church, they arrived at concrete actions of unity between women

which is not alien to religious contexts. According to the report “Within the Four Walls: Evangelicals and Domestic Violence in Peru” from the Paz y Esperanza Institute (Lima, Peru), it is estimated that in evangelical families, 4 out of 10 men and 6 out of 10 women suffered some abuse during their childhood. Also, in the manual “Faith Does Not Abuse” from the same institute, it is recognized that there are evangelical spaces with a great conservative tendency that reinforce hierarchical power relations, manifesting an authoritarian approach that is often enforced with forms of violence. From what has been mentioned, the need



Workshop on Prevention of Violence Against Women

to be reached, such as a reading club and Bible study among women. An important aspect of this diploma was the importance of interpreting the biblical text from “a woman’s eyes,” allowing for healing and holistic liberation.

I consider that, in the two cases described, the work carried out in the area of Gender Equality is very necessary, because it allows different types of violence to be denormalized in conservative contexts, strengthening a more united and willing community of women to fight for their rights and freedoms, generating significant changes from the leaders and participants of the churches.

Likewise, this area of work seems relevant to me since, in recent years, the increase in gender violence in Peru has been evident,

for and importance of working on issues such as gender equity, violence prevention and inclusion in these evangelical contexts are evident.

Due to the above, I consider the work carried out to support evangelical churches to be important, especially with the population of women. While fundamentalism that marginalizes and makes women invisible continues to grow in Peruvian contexts, volunteer work allows for small but significant changes and transformations in some churches in Peru.

I appreciate the opportunity that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has given me as a volunteer to continue exercising my profession in the service and accompaniment of women.

Photo courtesy of Damaris Pajar

Food Sovereignty in Haiti is in a State of Emergency

By Alexandre Iselande, Member of Mouvement Paysan Papaye

Haiti is a predominantly agricultural country. Despite its rich agricultural potential, Haiti now imports nearly half of its food and 83% of its rice. Yet, back in 1985, a year before structural reforms in agricultural markets, only 8% of rice was imported, and agricultural exports were substantial. Today, the country no longer produces enough food to feed its population.

The National Food Security Coordination survey in December 2016 found that, 77% of rural households had spent at least one day and one night without eating during the past month, while 51% of urban households were also in this situation. In 2017, according to the UN FAO, Haiti became the nation with the highest prevalence of undernourished people at 46.8%. And, in 2022, Haiti scored 32.7, the 10th highest score, on the Global Hunger Index, indicating severe hunger issues.

Haiti is in the grip of a powerful cycle of food dependency, poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition. The decrease in the availability of local food products on national markets has led to a decrease in the quality and diversity of food consumption. Many local food products used in traditional recipes have been replaced with less nutritious imports, such as rice or wheat.

Civil society organizations are demanding conditions of national food sovereignty that favor the production of and access to local food products.

In Haiti, agriculture is based primarily on peasant farming, or small producer agriculture. However, agricultural land policies favor industrial agriculture. To achieve food sovereignty in Haiti, peasants must have access to land and all the conditions necessary to farm.

The country's economy is suffering from high inflation, and most of the population is in a food emergency. And more and more transnational and Haitian corporations are grabbing peasants' land. It is within this context that peasant organizations such as the Mouvement Paysan Papaye, Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif, Tèt Kole Ti Peyizan Ayisyen, Mouvement Paysan Nasyonal Kongrè Papay, the Plateforme 4 Je Kontre, and many other groups are advocating for improved land and agricultural policies in favor of agroecology and food sovereignty. The member organizations of La Via Campesina are leading a struggle for food sovereignty through an awareness education campaign based on the production and consumption of healthy and fresh products and also through the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

As a young person, I am very affected by this crisis. Purchasing power is extremely limited, the price of food is rising, there are no jobs for young people and living



Alexandre farming

conditions are very difficult. Being a young university graduate with a degree in Agricultural Sciences, I am currently unemployed. Sometimes I feel stressed and even indignant, but knowing that this situation can change, I decide to engage in the struggle for a new society, a society where everyone's rights are guaranteed.

Many young people are leaving the country in search of better living conditions, but I am staying in the country to fight for lasting change. I may travel for some reason, either to continue my studies or for other reasons, but I will come back to serve my country. The development of a country depends on its citizens. We must work together to change our living conditions.

This crisis must come to an end because we cannot continue to live in misery, extreme hunger and poverty. I hope that the Haitian people will work for the necessary reforms to improve land access for peasant farmers and ensure food sovereignty.

1. ifpri.org/publication/2017-global-hunger-index-inequalities-hunger

Photo courtesy of Alexandre Iselande

Seeking Asylum

By Lucy McDermott, Interim Mission Specialist for Migration Accompaniment Ministries at Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

Recently, New York politicians held a press conference outside a migrant shelter in Queens, accusing its residents of bringing crime and drugs to their neighborhood. When I heard about it, I couldn't help but think of the people living in the shelter that was chosen as a backdrop. Shelters are stressful places without the chaos of TV cameras outside, and when you add in the speakers' criticism of the residents' moral character, this stunt felt especially cruel.

Most migrants who come to the U.S.-Mexico border seek asylum (protection from persecution in their home country), braving a dangerous journey with the hope of finding safety and a better life.

They are also the targets of growing anti-immigrant sentiment from much of the political spectrum. Alarmist rhetoric about migrants has led to a slew of anti-asylum proposals. President Biden's "Circumvention of Lawful Pathways" rule, which restricts certain migrants from asylum based on the way they entered the U.S., has been in effect since May 2023, and there are other anti-asylum proposals pending in Congress. These policies have the potential to deport people to places where they could be killed, solely because of their inability to navigate a complex immigration system in an unfamiliar country.

There are ways to receive asylum seekers humanely. Congress could allow more immigrants to come legally by increasing the number of people admitted via family-based petitions and creating new humanitarian visas. It could also end the detention of immigrants who pose no threat to public safety and reallocate the money toward migrant processing and case management.

Nonetheless, most immigration proposals are designed to dissuade people from seeking safety in the U.S. by punishing them for



U.S.-Mexico border wall in Campano, CA

trying. The assumption that deterring migration makes us safer is so engrained that we are willing to subject migrants to inhumane and deadly conditions in the name of national security. Texas National Guard members ignore families who drown trying to cross the Rio Grande. A thousand miles away, in California, migrants are detained outdoors, between two border walls, with no shelter from the cold weather at night.

The incessant focus on deterrence is intimately intertwined with the criminalization and dehumanization that reduces migrants to problems to be solved. If we forget that migrants are God-created humans like us, we can pretend that Jesus' commandment to welcome the stranger and visit the prisoner does not apply to them.

In my work on asylum policy for the PC(USA), I have drafted many statements that cite Christian teachings in opposition to unjust anti-asylum proposals. The more statements that I write, the more it seems that they are ignored, even by politicians who say that they follow Christ.

So how should Christians counter this harmful rhetoric? I think we need to promote a narrative of mutual interdependence among all of God's people. I am reminded of this Bible verse: "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free ... for

all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Our churches are made up of immigrants and non-immigrants, migrants and non-migrants. We need to center the voices of people impacted by unjust asylum and border policies, underscoring that they are valued members of our communities who must be protected.

We must also remember that migrants face injustice all along their journeys, not just at the border. U.S. foreign and domestic policies have vast implications for the lives of migrants and people who may become migrants. Many of the conditions that force migrants to leave home are the byproducts of U.S. policy. And once they are in the U.S., many migrants are forced to sleep in the street because there is not enough affordable housing or shelter space. Christians must build solidarity between immigration and housing advocates to counter the scarcity narratives that pit migrants against local homeless populations.

Presbyterians and other people of faith have a long history of countering unjust immigration laws. If we are to truly live out Jesus' call to radical love and hospitality, the only moral option is to follow in their footsteps in pursuit of justice.

1. [cnn.com/2023/12/21/us/rio-grande-migrant-texas-national-guard-help/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/21/us/rio-grande-migrant-texas-national-guard-help/index.html)
2. [theguardian.com/us-news/2023/nov/27/us-mexico-border-asylum-open-air-detention-center-california](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/nov/27/us-mexico-border-asylum-open-air-detention-center-california)

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