



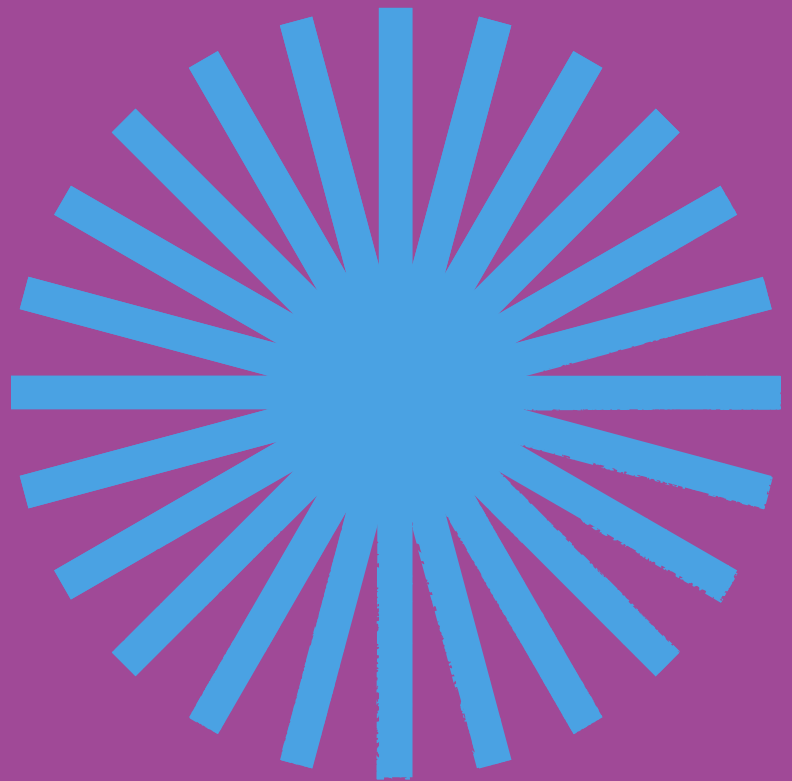
interfaith
**WELCOME
COALITION**



Celebrating
10 YEARS
of Service



WELCOME
IS OUR
MIDDLE
NAME.





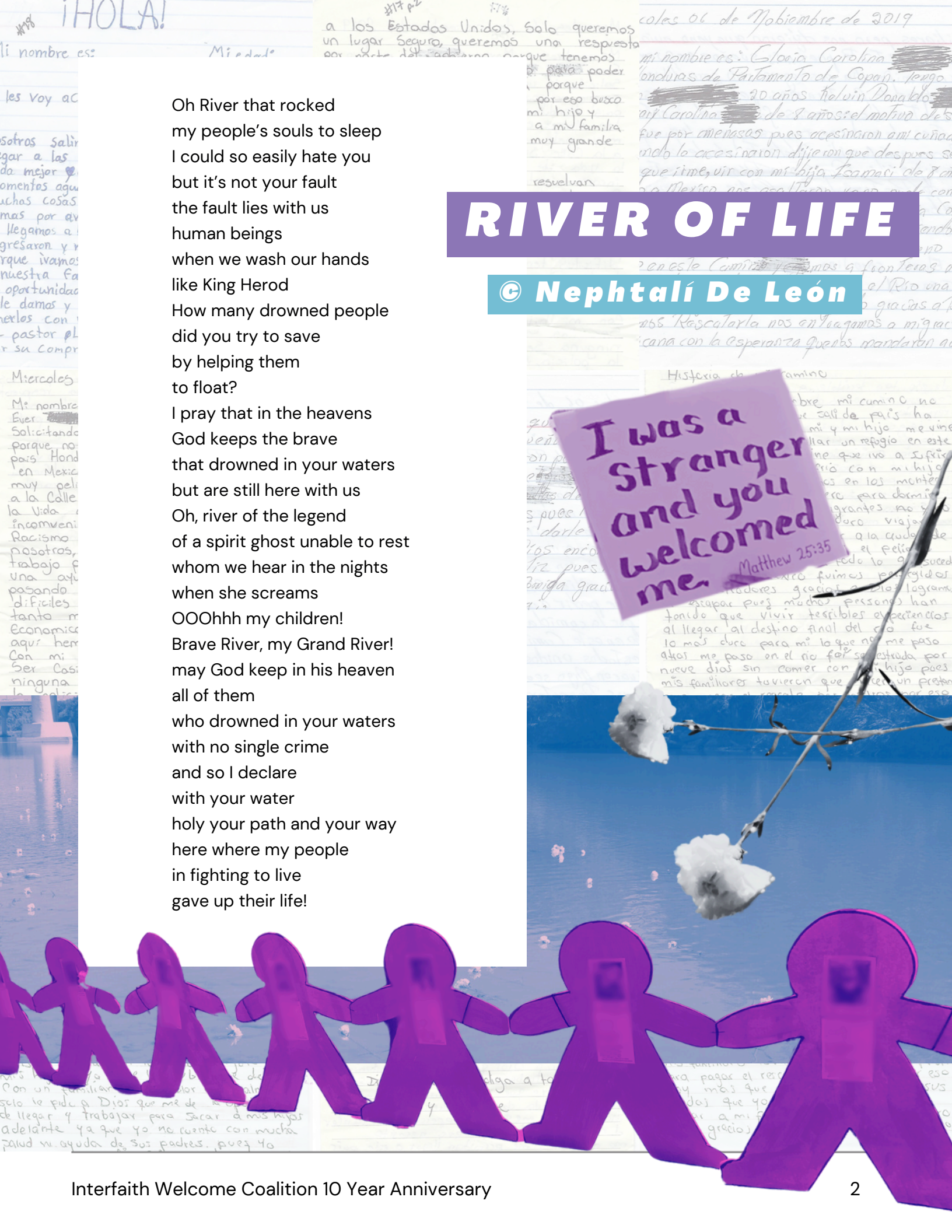
interfaith
**WELCOME
COALITION**

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Art by Nephtalí De León



Oh River that rocked
 my people's souls to sleep
 I could so easily hate you
 but it's not your fault
 the fault lies with us
 human beings
 when we wash our hands
 like King Herod
 How many drowned people
 did you try to save
 by helping them
 to float?
 I pray that in the heavens
 God keeps the brave
 that drowned in your waters
 but are still here with us
 Oh, river of the legend
 of a spirit ghost unable to rest
 whom we hear in the nights
 when she screams
 OOOhhh my children!
 Brave River, my Grand River!
 may God keep in his heaven
 all of them
 who drowned in your waters
 with no single crime
 and so I declare
 with your water
 holy your path and your way
 here where my people
 in fighting to live
 gave up their life!

RIVER OF LIFE

© **Nephtalí De León**

*I was a
 stranger
 and you
 welcomed
 me. Matthew 25:35*





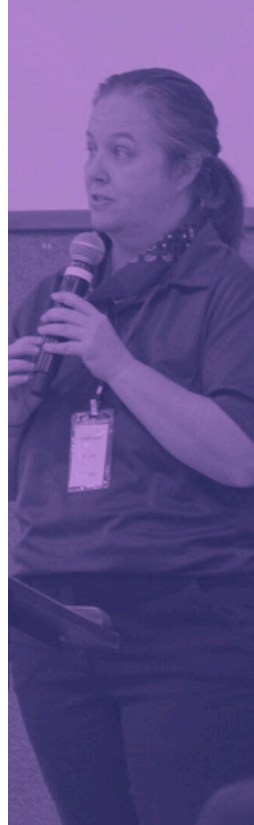
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BY KATIE MYERS, CHAIR OF THE BOARD, 2024

A 10th Anniversary is an important milestone – especially for a small nonprofit. It is appropriate that the [Interfaith Welcome Coalition](#) pause to celebrate all that we have accomplished. So many people whose hard work and dedication have brought us to this point are owed our thanks and gratitude! It is also a moment to remind ourselves who we are. Let's use this moment to celebrate ourselves and anticipate, imagine, and dream of what might be accomplished together in the next ten years!

IWC has shown remarkable resilience, especially in the face of challenges. We have significantly benefited from leaders like the late, beloved Kelly Allen, who cast a vision of what can be accomplished when people of faith and conscience stand together to welcome the stranger in our midst. We would not be here without the countless dedicated volunteers who gave of their time and treasure, week in and week out, in big ways and small ways. We are indebted to the volunteer leaders who saw the need to become a 501c(3) and begin hiring staff, which has equipped us to increase our resilience and capacity. We have been blessed by donors – private individuals and foundations – who have believed in our mission and trusted us to be good stewards of the funds they gifted us.

In the summer of 2014, a group of religious and non-profit leaders gathered to share their concerns about the welfare of a growing number of unaccompanied migrant children being housed at military bases in San Antonio. From that meeting grew the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, a grassroots organization dedicated to *meeting the changing needs of asylum seekers, refugees, and at-risk immigrants in collaboration with others*. Over the past decade, dedicated volunteers and staff have touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of individuals and transformed the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) into the strong and growing non-profit it is today. Although the specifics of our services have changed over the years, our mission and core values have remained the same.



We like to say that **“welcome”** is our middle name, and welcoming is at the heart of our work. We strive to treat everyone with dignity and respect for their fundamental humanity. In a time of stress and challenge for individuals who are strangers in our midst, we create spaces of welcome, of calm, and of safety that allow them to gather themselves for the next step in their journey. Our work, particularly in public spaces, allows us to model the community we wish to build in our country – one where everyone is welcomed and appreciated.

We believe that we cannot do this work alone – nor do we want to! **Collaboration** is in our DNA. Our programs are built on working as a team, benefiting from the varied experiences, backgrounds, and skills of each person. As an organization, we are part of larger networks and teams of nonprofits and entities providing complementary services. We have taken leading roles in fostering these local, regional, and national collaborations. Your involvement and support are crucial to our success, and we are committed to fostering a sense of community and cooperation among all our stakeholders.

Migration is an inherently dynamic process. Factor in changing political environments and funding streams, and IWC has learned to embody **Adaptability**. Over the years, we have retooled and sometimes reinvented our programs and services to respond to changes in the volume, location, and type of needs in our community. Our adaptability is a testament to our commitment to serving our community effectively and efficiently.

Standing at the doorway of the next ten years, I challenge us to embrace our heritage and core values and cast our eyes around our community for the new needs that arise. For the past 10 years, we have seen ourselves primarily serving those traveling through San Antonio to somewhere else. I believe that the work of the next ten years will increasingly involve working to foster welcome for those communities that make their home in San Antonio. That work involves more than just meeting basic humanitarian needs. It is the work of building a place of belonging!

WHAT MIGHT WE DREAM OF TOGETHER?



San Antonio is the southernmost transportation hub in Texas, and the city sees hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers and other immigrants pass through its airport and bus station each year on their way to relatives or shelters in different parts of the country. They are welcomed and assisted in their journey by people wearing the blue vests.

How did it all begin?

2014

Over 68,000 unaccompanied minors were apprehended at the border, leading to the establishment of a shelter at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio for 1,000 children aged 5-17. The shelter provided accommodation and meals while officials assessed their circumstances and requirements.

Rev. Kelly Allen mobilized volunteers from her congregation and other clergy to provide backpacks filled with toiletries, food, and stuffed animals for children at the bus station, disrupting the station's operations and causing tension with the management and staff.



A HISTORY OF HELPING

2015

Reverend Kelly organized the use of a Mennonite Church-owned home, [La Casa de Maria y Marta](#), as a respite center and shelter for people awaiting bus departures. The **Interfaith Welcome Coalition** (IWC) was formed, with volunteers providing meals, laundry, and comfort for individuals brought by ICE. Volunteers maintained the home managed by [RAICES](#) and assisted asylum seekers at the bus station. Fiscally supported by the congregation at [University Presbyterian Church](#) to extend resources and support asylum seekers in need.

Members joined with other coalition organizations to visit the Karnes and Dilley Detention Centers when rumors of women and children being detained for longer than the 21 days required by the [Flores Agreement](#).

2016

The sudden death of IWC founder Rev. Kelly Allen shocked the congregation and volunteers. She was known for her courage, compassion, and dedication. December 2016, the [Mennonite Church](#) welcomed around 500 moms and children from a detention center overflowing to Casa de Maria y Marta. Volunteers provided care and essentials, and the community supported the families. **Burt and Janice Clayton** among the first to welcome people in their home.



"La Casa de María y Marta" Photo by Wendi Poole

2017-2018

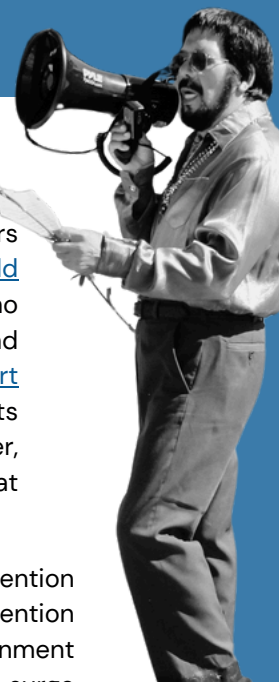
We began seeing more asylum seekers—men, women, and families—who crossed the Rio Grande and requested asylum from Border Patrol. The new administration continued using punitive strategies to discourage arrivals, including separating children from their parents. IWC raised the alarm, attended rallies at the Texas State Capitol, and gathered stories, advocating to end child separation, extended detention, and uphold the Flores Agreement.

2019

In October, IWC and border partners held a vigil in Laredo, Texas, [Bold Border Action](#) honored those who died crossing the Rio Grande and victims of the [El Paso Walmart shooting](#). Mourners and activists tossed white carnations into the river, and poet Nephtali shared a poem at the event.

["Never Again is Now"](#) visited the detention centers in South Texas and called attention to the history of the Japanese internment camps during WWII. In the summer, a surge of immigrants arrived legally to seek asylum.

The city established a [Migrant Resource Center](#) to help them contact relatives and coordinate with organizations like [Travis Park Church](#), [Catholic Charities](#), and IWC for shelter, tickets, volunteers, and transportation assistance.



2020

National immigration policy changes and the COVID-19 pandemic significantly limited IWC's in-person operations. General meetings shifted to Zoom, and on January 1, IWC officially became a Texas 501(c)(3), thanks to pro bono assistance from a law firm. This move was essential to protect volunteers and address the organization's growing need for resources. Sister Denise LaRock, from the [Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul](#), played a key leadership role until her responsibilities changed later that year. Her efforts were instrumental in establishing IWC's presence at the Greyhound Bus Station and fostering collaborations with the city. The decision to become a 501(c)(3) became vital as it opened the door to larger grants, particularly after [United Way](#) invited IWC to be a [EFSP](#) recipient.

2021

In January our first hire for the IWC, **Victoria Salas**, Coordinating Director, began coordinating with community groups, working with bus station volunteers, and working on funding proposals. Tori helped secure funding from [Save the Children](#) hire Molly Hardwick Smith, for the first Volunteer Coordinator position. This funding helped increase our eligibility for EFSP funding.

Bus, airport, backpack, and hospitality programs continued to rebound. [Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints](#) started to assist IWC with funding and providing supplies such as water, shelf stable kits, backpacks and volunteers with their youth ministry to respond to a steadily growing number of asylum seekers arriving in San Antonio. The City of San Antonio, and Catholic Charities partnered to use hotel rooms to shelter the growing number of asylum seekers who were not prepared to travel on quickly.



2022

Large numbers of asylum seekers were being dropped off daily in downtown San Antonio on charter buses from border shelters that did not have the capacity to keep them until their travel plans were arranged. For about 4 months in the spring and summer of 2022, IWC provided services outdoors in Travis Park to hundreds of primarily Venezuelan and Cuban asylum seekers. In July, in response to the volume of arrivals, the City opened the Migrant Resource Center on San Pedro Avenue. Also that summer, IWC hired its first [part-time direct service staff](#) to support operations at the bus station. We also developed a strategic plan for IWC.

2023

The Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) developed its **Hospitality Program** and hired **Mushiya M K Bamuamba** as Hospitality Coordinator to assist migrants who are falling through the gaps in available services in San Antonio and the surrounding area. IWC was also selected to receive federal funding through the [Shelter and Services Program \(SSP\)](#), which allowed for hiring **Bekah Shinkle**, a Data Specialist, to manage required data collection for migrants, including A-numbers, release dates, and service dates. Additionally, IWC hired a **Communications Director** to support the Communication Ministry. IWC was one of the nonprofits that was part of the [Texas Giving Machine](#), sponsored by the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-day Saints, located at the Pearl Brewery. IWC distributed backpacks for youth to keep entertained as their parent(s) managed their travel plans.



2024

IWC fully implemented the **Hospitality Program** by hiring full-time staff to support migrants, many of whom were referred by local hospitals and other programs that fall between the gaps. A new **Volunteer Coordinator, Dre Rodriguez**, developed a **Volunteer Orientation curriculum** and was nominated for the [HE Butt Foundation Story Telling Cohort](#). We also began to hire former asylum seekers as Welcome Associates. Significant milestones were also achieved, including creating an **Employee Handbook** and completing key components of IWC's strategic plan. The Airport Program was restructured and expanded with new **Welcome Associates and Lead** to better assist the growing number of migrants traveling by plane rather than bus.

Thanks to [Rebecca Flores](#) who organized and raised funds for the IWC **10th Anniversary Conference**, which was co-hosted along with [Texas Impact](#), focusing on training attendees on current laws and faith-based advocacy for vulnerable populations. To celebrate its volunteers, IWC will also hold a **10th Anniversary Volunteer Appreciation Concert and Dinner** at Laurel Heights United Methodist Church, featuring a performance by the [South Texas Symphonic Orchestra](#).



[IWC 10th Anniversary Conference Photo Library](#)

THANK YOU

TO ALL WHO ATTENDED

OUR 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

MIGRANT STORIES

Since its inception, the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) has profoundly impacted the lives of countless migrants passing through San Antonio, Texas. The organization embraces a compassionate approach. IWC staff and volunteers are dedicated to transforming asylum seekers' often harrowing journeys into moments of hope and human connection. IWC's impact is, at times, immeasurable because it is so much more than just the services it provides. Many times, emotional and spiritual support is extended to those in need.

Connections go beyond providing simple necessities to migrants after being processed by CBP or spending time in detention. Many of our volunteers are well-schooled in offering comfort, advice, and a listening ear to those who have endured unimaginable hardships. A recurring theme in the volunteer narratives is the exchange of blessings and gratitude that transcends language barriers. For instance, a volunteer recounts how a Cuban man, after receiving help, asked her to pray for him. Despite her initial hesitation due to language differences, the prayer became a powerful moment of shared faith and hope, illustrating the deep connections forged through these interactions.

Many migrants arrive with little understanding of the American systems they must engage with to continue their journey. Our IWC volunteers and staff bridge this gap, explaining travel logistics at the San Antonio Greyhound Bus Station and San Antonio International Airport, providing essential supplies, and ensuring that migrants feel safe and cared for during their transition. The story of a mother overwhelmed by the realization that her journey to California would take days instead of hours underscores the vital role that IWC volunteers play in offering reassurance and practical assistance. Despite her initial panic, this mother could calm down and manage her situation thanks to the support she received from the volunteers.



IWC Volunteers provide essential services that address the immediate needs of migrants, such as food, shelter, and sometimes medical help. Volunteers often step in to provide these necessities when migrants are most vulnerable. For instance, a volunteer recounts encountering a man and his sick daughter at a bus station. Desperate to care for his daughter, the father was relieved when the volunteer provided medicine and supplies to help them through their journey. These acts of kindness and generosity are not isolated incidents but rather a reflection of the IWC's commitment to supporting migrants in their time of need.

Many migrants have faced severe threats and violence in their home countries and during their journey to the United States. A family from Venezuela, for example, recounted their harrowing trek through the [Darién Gap](#) and the extortion they faced in Mexico. Despite these challenges, they arrived in San Antonio with a positive outlook, in part because of the kindness and support they received from organizations like the IWC.

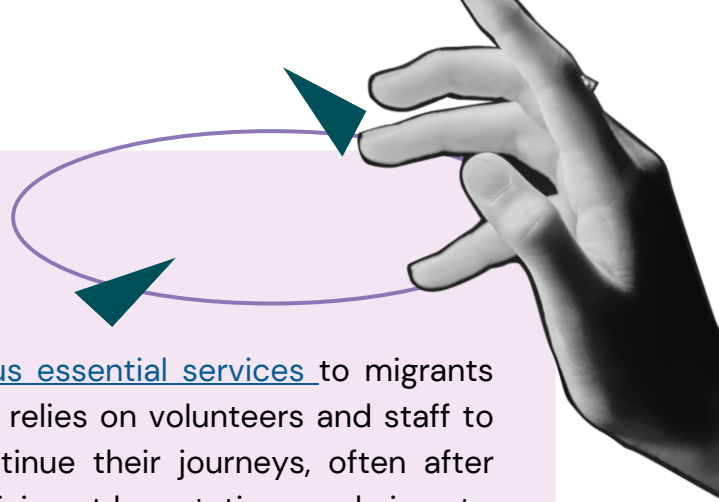
Personal stories shared by volunteers and migrants reveal the deep emotional interactions that go beyond simple assistance; they become moments of shared humanity. For instance, a volunteer recounts a time when she helped a frightened young man from Guatemala who had just been released from detention. She and her husband invited him to their home for the night when they realized he would have to spend the night at the bus station. The young man was initially afraid but later relaxed and even expressed his faith, finding comfort in the volunteers' care and kindness.

Our volunteers are dedicated to comforting and reassuring migrants during stressful times. [Baby "Scarlet"](#) was admitted to the PICU with respiratory failure, severe malnourishment, and multiple complications. She required intensive medical support and her mother's constant presence for care education. Due to the complexity of her medical needs and the hospital equipment, travel became challenging for the family. Our Hospitality Outreach supported them by providing essential travel items and emotional support. Our volunteers were there to assist them in picking up prescriptions and translating with doctors. This support helps families cope with their immediate challenges and gives them hope for the future, reinforcing their resilience and determination to build a new life in a foreign land.

References:

- Volunteer's experience with Cuban Migrant (Page 56, "A Loving Father" by Moon Sanchez Brand).
- Volunteer aiding mother traveling to California (Page 67, "Impact on Migrants Served" by Terry Burton).
- Provision of medicine to migrant's daughter (Page 79, "Tylenol and Cough Syrup" by Lucretia Burton).
- Story of Venezuelan family (Page 102, "The Miracle Child" by Chili and Peggy Ornelas).
- Interaction with Guatemalan migrant (Page 120, "¡Alabaré!" by Lucretia Burton).

SERVICES



The Interfaith Welcome Coalition offers [various essential services](#) to migrants passing through San Antonio. The organization relies on volunteers and staff to support individuals and families as they continue their journeys, often after being released from detention centers, and arriving at bus stations and airports. Whether offering physical supplies, emotional support, or coordinating complex care needs, their efforts significantly improve the experiences of migrants as they navigate unfamiliar and often overwhelming situations.

BUS STATION OUTREACH

Volunteers greet migrants and distribute essential supplies like food, water, diapers, and over-the-counter medicines. They help individuals navigate the bus station, explaining travel itineraries and directing them to their buses. If necessary, volunteers facilitate transfers to the airport or local shelters.

AIRPORT OUTREACH

Volunteers work in teams to welcome migrants at the airport, providing backpacks containing snacks, toiletries, and toys for children. They assist with printing tickets, help navigate the ATM, explain travel connections, and help families prepare for airport security. Volunteers support families through the check-in process and stay with them until they proceed to their departure gates.



More than
346,593
people served



MEAL SUPPORT

IWC distributes sack lunches to migrant families traveling through the San Antonio Greyhound bus station. Volunteers coordinate with local organizations, like [St. Francis Assisi Mobile Loaves & Fishes](#), [Redeemer Presbyterian Church](#), and the [San Antonio Food Bank](#), to prepare non-perishable meals and deliver food bags daily. This provides crucial nourishment for migrants to take on long trips across the country, and prevents migrant families from going hungry.

The airport provides a smaller version of the non-perishable meals for migrants who have to wait more than four hours to travel.



BACKPACK MINISTRY

Migrants are often released without any supplies for their journey. Volunteers create and distribute backpacks filled with essentials such as blankets, notepad, pen and toiletries to help migrants sustain themselves on long trips. These backpacks ensure that no migrant leaves the bus station or airport without basic necessities.

We also have backpacks for the children with a face mask, etch a sketch and stuffed animal. These items keep the youth entertained so that the parents are able to focus on traveling.



LOGISTICS

The logistic volunteers assist the bus station, the airport, and the backpacks ministry in moving supplies to assist migrants efficiently. The supplies that are moved are heavy and require younger volunteers. Many come individually or with their civic or faith group like our partners at the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints.



HOSPITALITY PROGRAM

The Hospitality Program addresses short-term accommodation needs for migrants who have a unique need such as being released from the hospital. A dedicated Hospitality Coordinator and volunteers manage this program, handling requests from hospital social workers, nonprofits, federal agencies, and IWC staff. The coordinator arranges temporary shelter, meals, transportation, and case management, ensuring migrants are cared for during their time in San Antonio.

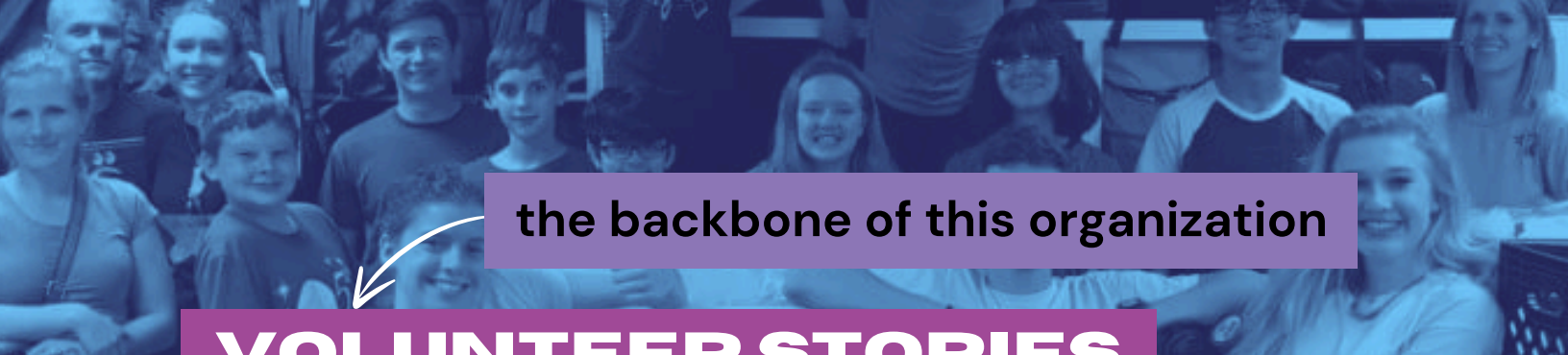
The Hospitality Coordinator also provides trauma-informed care, supporting migrants during hospital stays or after medical discharge. They coordinate a smooth handoff to long-term care sponsors, helping migrants reunite with family members or find shelters. This program reflects the IWC's commitment to compassionate, dignified care for asylum seekers and refugees.



RESOURCES FOR MIGRANTS

RECURSOS PARA MIGRANTES





the backbone of this organization

VOLUNTEER STORIES

BY MICHELLE RUMBAUT

It is truly remarkable that for an entire decade the IWC volunteers have remained steadfast in their mission to provide assistance to the thousands of asylum seekers coming through San Antonio. The infectious passion with which Kelly Allen launched this effort, and Sister Denise continued, lives on today with every encounter. As Margaret Mead has often been quoted, **"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."**

Over the last ten years we volunteers have had the privilege to personally interact with these migrants, and to see the real-time impact of world events and US policy reflected in the changing waves of people we greet at the bus station and airport. The IWC volunteers were on duty when groups of unaccompanied minors were crossing the border, as each day brought dozens of Central American mothers and their children through the station, when there was a huge influx in desperate Haitian families filling the sidewalks of St. Mary's, during the traumatic period of family separations, when the collapse of various South American countries triggered a new flow of immigrants braving the Darien Gap, amid the many collaborations with the City and Travis Park Church and Catholic Charities, and through the current period where the number of immigrants is low but the positive impact we make for each traveler remains high.

Many of those we serve give us deep thanks for the meals, maps, backpacks and kindness we share with them, and say that we volunteers must be angels. I have found, however, that the courageous committed parents who are fleeing their homelands in pursuit of a better life for their children are actually the angels I admire and am privileged to help through IWC.

The following are quotes from other volunteers who are **the backbone of this fine organization.**

"This work breaks my heart, but it also heals it."
Carly Leech





"As I was giving our medicines, a woman asked me "Do you have any medicine to erase from my memory all the horrible things I have seen?" I told her this is the only medicine I can offer and I just stood and held her while she cried. She then smiled at me and said thank you.

My hope is that what we have to offer in this brief encounter will help to heal a little part of them"

Janice Olsen

Once one of the mothers asked me how to buy a soft drink in the bus station snack bar, and when I showed her, she immediately asked if she could buy me one as well. She who has so little, and I who have so much!

Many women have shown some of their vulnerability and fears, yet they fight for a better life for their children and themselves. They are amazing, a testimony to the value of human life and the pursuit of safety and well-being.

Treedy Chapa

My new friend reminded me that this is what "America" really stands for: Welcome.

Terry Burton



"Estamos contigo - We are WITH you." These are words that are an important part of our welcome to the asylum seekers at the airport. ...

One day in the TSA Security line, a young woman in front of us gave me a big hug and said "I'm so grateful for what you are doing with these families!"

Then to the mama at my side, I explained with a smile that I didn't know that woman at all! Her eyes widened, and I told her that there were people like that all over the country, who are glad that they are here." And the mama's eyes filled with tears.

Jo Pendleton, June Hartley, and Ellen Jackson

IMPACT OF HIRING COORDINATING DIRECTOR AND STAFF



VICTORIA "TORI" SALAS

IWC Coordinating Director

The decision to hire staff in 2021 marked a significant turning point for the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC), fundamentally transforming its organizational structure and operational capacity. Before this, the IWC had been largely volunteer-driven, relying on the dedication and passion of its members to carry out its mission. However, the growing demand for its services, coupled with the increasing complexity of the migrant crisis, necessitated a shift towards a more formalized organizational structure. This change has had profound effects on both the efficiency of the organization and the scope of its impact.

One of the most notable effects of hiring staff has been improved organizational efficiency. With dedicated personnel in place, the IWC has been able to streamline its operations, ensuring that resources are used more effectively and that services are delivered in a more coordinated manner. The hiring of a Coordinating Director, [Victoria "Tori" Salas](#), who has a Master's in Human Services and Administration with a Nonprofit Leadership Certificate, let IWC apply for and manage grants more effectively, which in turn enabled the organization to expand its services and reach a more significant number of migrants. This professionalization of the organization has been crucial in maintaining the IWC's sustainability in the face of increasing demand.

Additionally, the hiring of a Volunteer Coordinator, Bus Station Coordinator, and Data Specialist has significantly impacted the volunteers, who remain the backbone of the IWC. With staff members handling administrative and logistical tasks, volunteers have been able to focus more on direct service and engagement with the migrants. This shift has improved the quality of the services provided and enhanced the volunteer experience, making it more fulfilling and less stressful. Volunteers now have the support they need to perform their roles more effectively, which has led to higher volunteer retention and satisfaction.

Also, the formalization of the IWC's structure has allowed for better coordination with other organizations and agencies. By having staff members who are cognizant of networking and collaboration, the IWC has built stronger relationships with partner organizations. This has facilitated more comprehensive care for migrants, ensuring that their needs are met at every stage of their journey. For example, IWC's collaboration with local shelters and its own Hospitality Coordinator has been instrumental in providing temporary shelter for migrants who are unable to continue their journey immediately, offering them a safe and supportive environment while they await further arrangements.

With a more robust organizational structure, IWC can now broaden its scope and take on new initiatives. Recently, IWC has been able to expand its outreach efforts to the San Antonio Airport, engage in advocacy work, and participate in larger-scale coalition work aimed at addressing the root causes of the migrant crisis. This expansion has increased IWC's impact and positioned the organization as a critical player in the broader movement for migrant rights and justice.

IWC's financial stability has been credited to becoming a 501(c)(3) organization on January 1, 2021. We can now access larger grants, including private foundations, federal grants, and donations that were previously out of reach. This increased funding has not only allowed us to expand our services but has also provided a more stable financial foundation for the organization, ensuring its ability to continue supporting migrants in the long term since receiving EFSP funding in 2020 under the guidance of Eugene Hileman.

The decision to hire staff in 2021 has been a transformative step for the Interfaith Welcome Coalition. It has increased the organization's efficiency, improved the volunteer experience, strengthened partnerships, and enhanced financial stability. We now have a [Volunteer Coordinator](#), a [Data Specialist](#), a [Hospitality Coordinator](#), a Bus Station Coordinator, and several Welcome Associates that attend the Greyhound Bus Station and Airport. As we continue to grow and adapt to the evolving migrant crisis, these changes will ensure that IWC remains a more sustainable, vital resource for migrants seeking safety and hope in the United States. The organization's future is now more secure, allowing it to continue its essential work in service of the most vulnerable.

References:

Efficiency and grant management (Page 45, Chapter: "Organizational Transformation" by Mary Grace Ketner).

Impact on volunteers (Page 68, Chapter: "Volunteer Experience Post-2021" by Lenna Baxter).

Coordination with partner organizations (Page 80, Chapter: "Building Stronger Partnerships" by Terry Burton).

2024 BOARD



Katie Myers



John Feagins



Sandy Guevara



Jamey Sepulveda



Rosita Lira



Bob Martindale



Eugene Hileman



Ella Bridgewater



Lenna Baxter



Karen Sacre



Rayen Dennis



Abel Vega



Bill Loebig



Clemencia Prieto



Sanjuanita
Madrigal Coole



Gilbert Ornelas



BOARD CHAIR **THROUGHOUT THE YEARS**

2014-2015

Reverend Kelly Allen

2016-2017

Lenna Baxter
Sister Pat Conolly

2018-2020

Lenna Baxter
Mary Grace Ketner

2021

Dan Klein
Terry Burton

2022

Terry Burton

2023-2024

Katie Myers

THANK YOU

To our dedicated Board & Staff

"It is such a blessing to know that in our outreach, we can support others so they feel safe and cared about."

– Sister Denise La Rock, Daughters of Charity

LOOKING AHEAD:

THE WORK OF THE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE, PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



Advocacy within the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) began early, during meetings at First Presbyterian Church, with an open invitation for participation. Initially, advocacy was seen as a civic duty to push for immigration reform. Alongside this, a smaller group, mostly bilingual individuals experienced in working with Latin American immigrants, began visiting the Karnes County Detention Facility, privately operated by The GEO Group, which had contracts for both federal prison and immigration detention centers. This raised serious concerns.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, in partnership with pro-bono lawyers from RAICES and the Texas Civil Rights Project, small groups began visiting the Karnes Detention Center, 50 miles from San Antonio, which had transitioned to a "Family Detention" facility, holding women and children. Men were held separately. Through legal contacts and testimonies from released women, it became clear that detainees were being held far beyond the 21-day limit mandated by the Flores Agreement. RAICES staff, Mohammed Abdollahi and Johanna De Leon, discreetly coordinated with IWC, sending us information about women in need of visits. We gathered their stories, testimonies, and legal battles, eventually organizing press conferences in front of San Fernando Cathedral to raise awareness. Gradually, we educated and mobilized San Antonio, participating in mass rallies at the Texas State Capital, particularly during the child separation crisis in 2017.

In small groups, volunteers like John Dauer, Sister Sharon, and Rebecca Flores made weekly visits to Karnes. Flores recalls, "We planned conversations with women and children who had become our friends in the Karnes visitors room. At first, we could bring writing materials, and things felt a bit freer, but as pressure increased from detainees and advocacy groups, detention staff became more hostile."

After several months, the women [held a hunger strike](#) protesting their extended detainment, with some having been there for up to 11 months. The media covered the strike, and detainees saw us supporting them on their televisions inside. A woman and child Rebecca was visiting were among the strike leaders. As punishment, the mother and her son were placed in a dark room, traumatizing the child, who began bed-wetting and refused to get out of bed. He was only ten years old.

After three months, many detainees were released, thanks in part to the stories we gathered. The GEO Group and other corporations were finally forced to comply with the Flores Agreement, limiting family detention to no more than 20 days and involving the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Visits to Karnes continued for months, with some volunteers expanding their efforts to the Dilley Detention Center, adapting to the ebb and flow of federal immigration policies.

In September 2019, after the El Paso massacre that claimed the lives of 23 people from the U.S., Mexico, and Germany, IWC held a vigil and demonstration in Laredo to oppose the violence directed at Latinos and immigrants under the "Remain in Mexico" (RIM) policy. The RIM policy placed asylum seekers at the mercy of dangerous cartels, forcing them to wait in Mexico for U.S. court dates, often missing their hearings. Many were deported without any clarity on their status.

On October 26, 2019, the [Bold Border Action \(BBA\)](#) took place on the banks of the Rio Grande at Dos Laredos Park. Partnering with the [Hope Border Institute](#), [L.U.P.E.](#), and Laredo immigrant rights groups, hundreds of people gathered, many arriving by bus. Prayers from multiple faiths and an indigenous blessing opened the event, followed by speeches from various organizations. During the event, [six IWC members waded into the Rio Grande](#), tethered by ropes held by the [Brown Berets](#). Reverend John Garland read the names of the 22 victims of the El Paso massacre, seven children who died in ICE custody, and a mother and daughter who perished trying to cross the river to seek asylum. White carnations were released into the river to honor their memory, as the crowd called out, "Presente!" after their names were read. [Poet Nephtali De Leon](#) read a moving poem, which resonated deeply with everyone present.





At the Laredo demonstration, our public statement symbolized a human bridge between the U.S. and Mexico, showing solidarity with those harmed by U.S. immigration policies. The committee, including Mary Grace Ketner, Lenna Baxter, Jan Olson, Sister Denise LaRock, Sister Sharon Altendorf, Rebecca Flores, Jean Durel, John Garland, and Laura Varela, organized the event. There was a [fast for justice](#) later that month at San Fernando Cathedral.

Later that year, IWC partnered with [survivors of the WWII Crystal City Japanese Internment Camp](#) to speak out against modern-day abuses in detention centers. The alliance gathered at the Dilley Detention Center, where Japanese American survivors shared their experiences, vowing, "[Never Again is Now](#)," which is also the name of the organization. In a symbolic gesture of solidarity, they hung origami crane strands on the barbed wire fences created by current detainees. IWC also held a rally at Travis Park in San Antonio, where Sister Denise and Rebecca Flores accepted donations on behalf of the organization.

Since 2016, the Texas Governor has continuously targeted immigrants, blaming them for state and national problems and pushing harmful legislation. IWC, along with other groups, protested laws like [SB 4](#), passed in 2016, which allowed police to check immigration status and penalized officials for non-cooperation. In 2023, a second SB 4 expanded these powers, enabling untrained police to enforce immigration laws, leading to harsh penalties for "illegal entry" or "re-entry." IWC worked closely with [SA Stands](#) and the Mid-Texas Coalition to combat these laws.

[Operation Lone Star](#), launched in 2021 with \$5 billion in state funds, escalated the criminalization of migrants, many of whom were seeking asylum. This initiative promoted racial profiling and resulted in the mass incarceration of people of color in repurposed state prisons with notorious conditions. In 2024, [Texas Attorney General Paxton attempted to shut down Annunciation House](#) over documentation disputes, but his efforts were blocked by an El Paso judge.

Recognizing the need for proactive action, IWC's Advocacy Committee decided in 2022 that volunteers should take a more active role in lobbying for laws that protect immigrants. That year, volunteers visited legislators in Austin to discuss immigration issues. By 2024, IWC had partnered with [Texas Impact](#) to educate ourselves on the laws that affect our work and organize against harmful legislation.

Looking to the future, IWC remains committed to comprehensive immigration reform, recognizing that U.S. immigration policies and foreign interventions contribute to the root causes of migration. In September 2024, IWC will co-host a [10th-anniversary conference with Texas Impact](#) to address the conditions driving immigration and counter the negative narratives around immigrants. The conference will also mobilize thousands of volunteers and supporters to advocate for local, state, and national change.

As IWC celebrates ten years of existence, we recognize that we are now called to advocate effectively to create a secure life for the men, women, and children we serve. Service work must be paired with justice work. The following 10 years will require even more decisive action as we lean into our faith and mission to serve, advocate, and **Welcome with Dignity.**

CONTRIBUTORS

Rebecca Flores,
Yvonne Dilling,
Sister Sharon Altendorf, PBVM
Sister Denise LaRock, DOC
Jan Olsen



WELCOME WITH DIGNITY



IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE OF

REV. KELLY ALLEN

“As a pastor of San Antonio’s University Presbyterian Church, [Allen](#) helped form the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, a humanitarian response to the women and children fleeing deadly violence and poverty in Central America and seeking asylum in the United States.”



Photo by Bob Owens

WHAT WOULD KELLY DO?

Kelly was a spark of energy that was focused on the marginalized and vulnerable. She came to University Presbyterian Church in 2009 and began her ministry of inclusion and acceptance. In 2014, along with faith leaders from our community, she advocated for unaccompanied children and youth housed in the San Antonio area. This was the beginning of the Interfaith Welcome Coalition.

After her death, our congregation mourned together and shared stories of the impact Kelly had on our lives. In turn, we told stories of going to Kelly with our success with some project, hoping for a pat on the back or some affirmation. Kelly's response was "Now, what are you going to do?" What was so funny about this was that we each thought we were the only one to get this response. We found out that most everyone had heard those words from her. We were all able to laugh amidst our profound pain.

After her death it became very important to our congregation to continue many of the efforts that Kelly was instrumental in starting.

These days, I often ask myself "Now, what would Kelly do?"

Lenna Baxter

Traveling Mercies: Encounters with Asylum Seekers, by Mary Grace Ketner



Learn More

interfaithwelcomecoalition.org

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@texasiwc



Booklet Editor: [Laura Varela](#), Director of Communications

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Interfaith Welcome Coalition

<https://interfaithwelcomecoalition.org>

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[**IWC 10 Year Anniversary Conference Photo Library?**](#)

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Volunteer Coordinator

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Data Specialist

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Hospitality Coordinator

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<https://www.instagram.com/texasiwc/>

IWC Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/texasiwc>

IWC Twitter (X)

<https://twitter.com/texasiwc?lang=en>

IWC TikTok

<https://www.tiktok.com/@interfaith.welcome>

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