

**RECONCILING LIBERATION AND CHARITY:
CENTRAL AMERICAN LEADERSHIP
IN THE 1980S PHILADELPHIA
SANCTUARY MOVEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

Central American leadership in the 1980s Philadelphia Sanctuary Movement was cultivated through long experiences with social injustice, along with deeply political religious sensibilities rooted in Latin American labor organizing and the base Christian community movement. While it is sometimes assumed that they carried with them only an undifferentiated past of victimization and violence, Central American sanctuary activists and collaborators brought refined community organizing skills, which they intentionally employed to expand solidarity and sanctuary coalitions across Northern America. This dissertation explores some of the ways in which displaced Central American human rights workers moved within this international, interreligious context to further their liberationist goals. In a religious environment steeped in long histories of racialized missionary intervention and human exploitation, Guatemalans and Salvadorans asserted a different vision of sanctuary not only concerned with personal safety, but also with the opportunity to educate the U.S. public while they transformed the practice of sanctuary from the inside out. Harnessing the resources of their own cultural and religious histories and experiences, Central American human rights workers gained access to certain critical segments of the human, social, and political capital of the Philadelphia region to advance the cause of their own survival and flourishing.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It is a story that has not yet been fully documented, much less written about. It is complicated because, you know, from the perspective of the... immigrant asylum seekers, exiles, and activists, we were also very aware that we were trying to do actions that were intended to grow opposition against the official policy in the U.S. and that that would have potential negative repercussions. —Research Contributor¹

At least two schools of thought exist regarding the root of the conflicts in Central America. President Reagan portrays the struggles there as part of one great struggle between East and West, between the Soviet Union and the United States. Under his administration, fear of Communist encroachment has guided U.S. foreign policy and is used to justify intensive intervention in the region. On the other side of the political spectrum, many Central American analysts see the primary issues in Central America as hundred-year old struggles for land reform, for the right to organize, for the right to political participation and for political freedom. —Sarah Goldstein and Glenn Stein, *Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role*²

Stories about the 1980s Sanctuary Movement often begin with what happened to people. By the mid-1990s, war and civil unrest in El Salvador and Guatemala had displaced nearly three million people, with nearly 300,000 killed and thousands more tortured or disappeared by pro-government forces supported by U.S. military aid.³ Central American immigrants, exiles, refugees, and asylum seekers sought temporary and permanent shelter within their home countries and neighboring Latin American countries, as well as Mexico, the United States of America, and Canada. There, they frequently encountered a chilly, if not violent, reception.⁴ In the United States, federal government policies regarded Central Americans as economic migrants “generally undeserving” of state protection, despite the ongoing U.S.-involved civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, and the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act.⁵ As a result of this uneven

application of the law, only a small percentage of Salvadorans and Guatemalans who applied were successful in gaining legally recognized political asylum in the United States by the early 1990s.

During this time period, Central and Northern American religious activists adopted the term “sanctuary” to describe their efforts to create safe passage and a political platform for individuals displaced by violence in Central America. As anthropologist Hilary Cunningham notes, religious sanctuaries in the United States were “cultural spaces that drew ‘God’ and ‘Caesar’ together into a discourse about power, and, more specifically, into a highly charged discussion about the proper mixture of religion and politics in society.”⁶ Sanctuary practices, however, are not simply products of power struggles between religion and state, but also include negotiations within and between communities of people.⁷ Not limited to religious humanitarianism, sanctuary is also embodied within acts of resistance oriented towards community survival and security. Those communities most subject to violence have created powerful networks of mutual aid with varying degrees of engagement with outsiders. Such acts, as Aimee Villarreal suggests, make up broader, shifting “sanctuaryscapes” in which affected peoples create physical and intangible spaces of protective “containment” amidst the far-reaching disruptions of colonial violence in the Americas.⁸

There is a common assumption that refugees lose everything in their displacement. Without “territorial connection” to their home countries (and sometimes without state-recognized citizenship), the lives of these individuals are prone to being interpreted only in terms of “absence and loss.”⁹ While the 1980s Sanctuary Movement has sometimes been criticized as being too White and Anglocentric, “forensic”

investigations such as this one continue to reveal the extent of Latine¹⁰ and Central American contributions to the movement's reach and organizational infrastructure, despite their often hidden nature.¹¹ As Lloyd Barba and Tatyana Castillo-Ramos argue, it is simply inaccurate to describe the Sanctuary Movement as an "immigrant movement without immigrant leaders."¹² These arguments, while intended to spotlight the very real, racialized power inequities embedded within the movement, reinforce perceptions of refugees as monolithically constrained, victimized individuals without creative recourse. Such a view ironically creates a distorted portrait of displacement where individuals are, in the words of Demetria Martínez, "not so much agents of their own history, but... its victims, who function primarily as the objects of knowledge for an alien people."¹³ These critiques, while intended to spotlight the very real, racialized power inequities embedded within the movement, risk oversimplification of the movement and may reinforce a caricatured image of "the refugee."

As the story of the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania branch of the Sanctuary Movement demonstrates, Central Americans expressed active leadership during their exile in the United States. Central American leadership in the Sanctuary Movement was cultivated through long experiences with social injustice, along with deeply political religious sensibilities rooted in Latin American labor organizing and the base Christian community movement. While it is sometimes assumed that they carried with them only an undifferentiated past of victimization and violence, Central American sanctuary activists and advocates brought refined community organizing skills, which they intentionally employed to expand solidarity and sanctuary coalitions across Northern America.¹⁴ My research explores some of the ways in which displaced Central American human rights

workers moved within this international, interreligious context to further their liberationist goals. In a religious environment steeped in the legacies of racialized missionary intervention and human exploitation, Salvadorans and Guatemalans asserted a different vision of sanctuary not only concerned with personal safety, but also with the opportunity to educate the U.S. public while they transformed the practice of sanctuary from the inside out.

Harnessing the resources of their own cultural and religious histories and experiences, Central American human rights workers gained access to certain critical segments of the human, social, and political capital of the Philadelphia region to advance the cause of their own survival and flourishing. Pushing up against a longstanding tradition of religious colonization in which returned foreign missionaries interpreted the “other” for their religious communities at home, “the other” came like exiled apostles seeking secure spaces where their knowledge, skill, and vocations could be expressed and received. They and many of their Northern American Jewish and Christian counterparts also experienced a seismic shift in their own identities as they engaged in interreligious work, many for the first time. As a result, several Northern American religious activists in Philadelphia who joined the “anti-intervention political struggle” of Central American organizers through the Sanctuary Movement gradually came to understand the ideals of their participation in terms of reciprocity, though this proved difficult to fully realize. Central Americans in Philadelphia urged their allies to move beyond participation based simply on requests for humanitarian assistance toward more collaborative work of shared political struggle and reciprocity. In doing so, they pushed against the paternalism and maternalism of sanctuary-supporting Northern American religious organizations as they

continued to work out their liberationist goals of social transformation on an international scale.

Chapter Organization

While this introduction provides a general project overview, including theoretical and methodological approaches, Chapter Two offers a selective survey of some of the major religious influences of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, including its intersections with American hemispheric liberation movements and interreligious peace activism. Christian institutions, while deeply implicated in colonial and neoliberal violence, have also paradoxically provided the infrastructure for community preservation, survival, and resistance. Latin American Catholic liberationism, which arose amid far-reaching struggles for social reform and land rights, generated a religious conscientization movement through *comunidades eclesiales de base* (base Christian communities, or CEBs) and other grassroots organizations that crossed state borders through exiled Latin American labor and human rights organizers, refugees, and immigrants, as well as returned Northern American religious workers. These individuals brought their convictions to the United States and Canada, where they helped organize the religious arm of the Central American peace and solidarity movement, a loosely confederated, socio-political movement that eventually included nearly 2000 Northern American organizations committed to ending human rights abuses and U.S. interference in Central America.

Among the millions of displaced Guatemalans and Salvadorans who traveled northward into Mexico, the United States, and Canada, those most dedicated to public

activism carried with them a sense of purpose that sometimes outweighed their personal goals as they deliberately sought out Northern American influencers in religious communities. The involvement of these sympathetic Northern Americans helped provide safe passage and access to political lobbying that brought greater awareness of the United States government's support for repressive military regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador. Chapter Three explores how, in Philadelphia, Central Americans found a well-established religious, political, and educational infrastructure that could support their cause. Though they often faced exclusion and invisibility within the Sanctuary Movement, Central American activists attempted to utilize the circumstances of their exile for the common good of their families and home communities. This chapter, which examines the early years of public sanctuary activism in Philadelphia, explores selected aspects of Philadelphia's history of religious movements, and some of the ways in which certain Central American organizers were able to graft themselves into this complex landscape to bring attention to the crises affecting their homelands.

After the federal Operation Sojourner crackdown and subsequent Sanctuary Trials, the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 allowed some Central American sanctuary and solidarity activists to further develop a more permanent community infrastructure in the United States. These organizers would play a crucial role in restructuring transnational ties and shifting the goals of sanctuary activism in Philadelphia toward repatriation and economic development in Central America. In doing so, Central American organizers would push Northern American allies toward a more expansive understanding of sanctuary – one that more fully recognized the capacity and authority of exiles and refugees in an endeavor for a fuller sense of “solidarity” and

“accompaniment.” Chapter Four explores how the Sanctuary Movement continued to evolve in the Philadelphia region during the late 1980s and early 1990s, as sanctuary activism pivoted toward repatriation and economic development, and expanded beyond its predominantly urban, Protestant Christian core toward a broader interreligious base that included greater Jewish participation as well as more open Catholic endorsement.

The fifth chapter explores in-depth the contributions of the nearly thirty individuals closely involved with the Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia who provided interviews for this research study. This chapter provides a closer look at the web of relationships between Central and Northern Americans and the ways in which Central Americans asserted their leadership in ways that fundamentally changed sanctuary activism and religious approaches to social action in the Philadelphia region and beyond. These interviews demonstrate both commonalities and divergences among selected Sanctuary Movement activists and advocates in terms of prior contexts to their involvement in the movement, sanctuary ideology and practices, characteristics of their relationships with other organizers in the movement, the role of race in sanctuary organizing, and the varying religious dimensions of sanctuary. While not all-encompassing, these interview samples and findings are suggestive of the ways in which many 1980s sanctuary activists remember their motives for participation and understand the transformational effects of sharing space with others representing a wide range of experiences and backgrounds.

Why Sanctuary? Why Philadelphia?

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Philadelphia metropolitan region had re-emerged as a significant international immigration gateway for the first time since

the Industrial Revolution. In 2019, more than a quarter of all Philadelphia city residents were either immigrants or the children of immigrants.¹⁵ Philadelphia's demographic changes also provide a snapshot of a larger national trend: In the United States, the overall proportion of foreign-born to native-born residents had reached its highest level in at least a century.¹⁶ Several studies have highlighted the importance of religious institutions to immigrant integration and focus largely on the refuge or comfort such spaces provide members amidst this challenging climate,¹⁷ as well as the role of religion in immigrant social integration.¹⁸ Religious communities are also strategic spaces wherein marginalized individuals might gather to resist "identities assigned to them by the wider public."¹⁹ For centuries, settlers, immigrants, and refugees have created and transformed religious expressions of sanctuary in Philadelphia. In doing so, they have not only resisted externally imposed identities, but also struggled against the bodily effects of such exclusionary and antagonistic social constructions and their often-racialized components. As such, resistive sanctuary has been a means of survival and community-making, as well as a decolonizing force.

My interest in sanctuary grew out of my interactions with immigrant rights advocates in Philadelphia and those working in international religious humanitarian organizations. I have always been intrigued by the ethical complexities of relationships that form out of intercultural and interreligious work, as well as the ways in which this type of work challenges and changes individuals, communities, and institutions. After moving to Philadelphia just before the turn of the millennium, I grew roots in the city's vibrant community organizing scene, and met many, many people who were making their own journeys from all over the world, including those who came to Philadelphia without

knowing whether they would ever attain the security of legal residence in the United States. The renewed intensification of immigration politics after the 2016 U.S. presidential election catapulted sanctuary organizing into public visibility in ways not seen since its forerunner, the 1980s Sanctuary Movement. While modern sanctuary activism predated the 45th presidential administration by nearly five decades, the Trump era saw an explosion of coordinated sanctuary efforts among new and established religious and secular organizations who were alarmed by the administration's anti-immigration politics and rhetoric.

In the midst of these challenges, new sanctuary leadership in Philadelphia, particularly African, Asian, and Latin American immigrants, began to reshape the meaning and practice of sanctuary in ways that directly confronted White humanitarian patterns of social engagement. I observed firsthand how these individuals, in the face of such challenges, infused their hope and resilience into an urban ecosystem that has for centuries nurtured dedicated community leaders and international activists in the midst of the colonial enterprise and its legacies. I was both fascinated and personally challenged by this impactful work and set off to learn more about how these community leaders were reshaping sanctuary in and beyond Philadelphia. I had, what I thought, was a good plan: Research a bit about Philadelphia's 1980s sanctuary movement to explore the basic contextual links to contemporary sanctuary organizing, and afterwards spend most of my time doing ethnographic work among members of Philadelphia's largest interreligious sanctuary coalition.

Enter COVID-19. Everything shut down for months, including the many in-person meetings and informal gatherings that had previously characterized this local

sanctuary coalition's operating approach. What followed was a mass, communal encounter with fear, isolation, and death, as civil unrest and an increasingly unstable political environment unfolded in the United States. In addition to the deaths of over one million people in the U.S., the pandemic created severe hardships including job loss, food insecurity, and chronic illness, resulting in a crushing amount of community need.²⁰ The work of the sanctuary coalition became consumed with providing mutual aid for impacted communities in the city, including material, spiritual, and legal support. As the pandemic worsened, opportunities for in-person ethnographic observation dramatically declined, and the few public meetings that remained moved online due to safety concerns about the virus. The Trump administration's intensified policing of immigrant communities resulted in fears of deportation and family separation, along with an increasing number of hate crimes worsened by the administration's alignment with White supremacist groups. In a city where one might encounter people from all over the world with a single, mundane outing, BIPOC immigrants vanished from the streets as community members became increasingly fearful of leaving their homes. Immigrant friends and relatives worryingly restricted their public activities, some seriously considering leaving the country for a safer locale as soon as an opportunity allowed.

The chaotic noise of social upheaval could be quietly deafening at times. In the midst of social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and precautionary hygiene, I, like so many others, found myself expanding into digital space. Putting my ethnographic work mostly on hold until things improved, I began to reach out to Philadelphia's 1980s sanctuary activists to complete research for a brief summary of what I wildly and incorrectly presumed to be a peripheral part of national sanctuary activism during that

era. After each interview, I said to myself (and probably my husband and whoever would listen), “I think I only need to talk to one or two more people.” This little dance went on for several months, as each person recommended someone else for me to contact, and again and again, I could not resist reaching out to “just one more person.” At some point, I had to admit that my cursory investigation into Philadelphia’s 1980s sanctuary activism had blossomed into an endeavor all its own. I found evidence of the little publicized legacy of Central American leadership in sanctuary organizing, human rights work, and interreligious peace activism, as well as the quieter but impactful role of Northern American sanctuary organizers from Philadelphia’s historic religious institutions and movements. While I had been initially planning to examine the ways that immigrant leaders advocated for more reciprocal, equitable partnerships within Philadelphia’s new sanctuary movement, it became evident that this struggle was nothing new. As one research contributor shared with me: “Each generation has to learn the same lessons.”

Methodological and Theoretical Considerations

While working on this project, I had the opportunity to visit the Harriet Tubman National Historic Site near Cambridge on Maryland’s Eastern Shore. While occasionally mentioning the courageous participation of White Quakers in the Underground Railroad, the exhibit overwhelmingly concentrated on Tubman and other Black leaders, and emphasized the fact that Tubman often traveled alone during her rescue missions, “without help.” While sympathizers have long compared the 1980s Sanctuary Movement to the Underground Railroad, what has often been missing in retellings of both movements is the recognition of the realities and capabilities of those who find

themselves to be refugees. This necessary correction has been thwarted time and again by racialized assumptions about dependency within humanitarian work, resulting in archival imbalances that privilege White histories, as well the intentional obfuscation of subversive work and the strategic use of social tropes by refugees themselves, which can be subject to misinterpretation by outsiders. Additionally, as a distinctly *human* endeavor with human products, sanctuary is not always neatly systemizable, underscoring the need for continuous community engagement during the analytical process. Or, as, Arjun Appadurai expresses it: “It may be that your systematic way is not suited to the most important object that you do not know but ought to be thinking about.”²¹

My methodological practice strives to be, above all, relational and operates with an expansive view of religion and religious involvement that reaches beyond institutional buildings, congregations, or memberships. As someone who has been immersed in religious social justice work in Philadelphia and beyond for over two decades, my position affords several practical advantages, including access to extensive community networks and lived understanding of local religion on the ground. There is, however, a longstanding debate on whether certain positionalities on the part of the researcher preclude the ability to offer critical analysis, particularly when one shares an ethical orientation with research participants, as is the case here. In the beginning, my perceived lack of critical distance from sanctuary organizing caused me considerable anxiety due to ingrained attitudes within the humanities that unrealistically elevate detached and “value neutral” research, while devaluing civic scholarship as uncritically “activist.”²² This is particularly of concern among scholars of religion who face a longstanding, though artificial, disciplinary separation into “confessional” and “non-confessional” categories.²³

It is not, however, so simple to divide individuals into neat “insider” and “outsider” categories, as each person is part of a unique set of social relationships involving both.²⁴ Ideological orientations and behaviors are not solely produced by religious traditions and institutions, but are generated from within the academy as well. In the end, all research is necessarily confessional, and a constructed activity. It is not a question of whether we bring certain assumptions to our work, or the supremacy of a particular group status, but how the exploration of these assumptions and positional limits might inform our work.²⁵

It is my conviction that positionality need not serve as an automatic prerequisite or disqualifier, as human bias is natural and irrevocable. Rather, positionality is both the pin and the map of a certain landscape, and both are helpful in determining potential limitations and considerations for ethical research design and analysis. These are, as Thomas Tweed aptly describes, “self-conscious sightings from where we stand, reflexive surveys of the disciplinary horizon.”²⁶ For this endeavor, such surveys must take into account my identity as a non-immigrant, White woman with state-recognized U.S. citizenship. These structural forces create analytical and relational blind spots, as well as the inclination to *walk away from* rather than *engage with* the deeply embedded racial injustices that affect BIPOC individuals and communities in the United States. Well before the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, leaders of grassroots community organizations across the Americas have been working on the critical tasks of decolonization and anti-racism not only in the wider social sphere, but also within the very structures of community organizing. Academic researchers and institutions must also do the same. Even well-meaning researchers can create exploitative relationships with research participants that reproduce deep, colonial structures that have existed for

centuries between White researchers and BIPOC communities. This reality is not merely an instrumental backdrop for another academic enterprise, but rather a central concern that I hope informs every aspect of its production.

What I observed throughout this process was a wide-ranging sense of religious identity and practice in motion. Finding “root metaphors” more expansive to describe human phenomenon than one-to-one correspondent language, Tweed likewise describes religion largely in the context of “flows”: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”²⁷ This approach to theory and metaphorical definition allow for greater flexibility in engaging with the study of religion, particularly among those with migration experiences, but also for the many non-immigrants who experience physical movement and spiritual change during their sanctuary activism. Tweed’s dual focus on movement and home-making help situate the theorist as well as the communities and individuals that the theorist encounters, in that, like theory and the theorist, religion is understood as “dynamic and relational.”²⁸ As one moves through a shifting horizon (in this case the time and space of Philadelphia’s sanctuary story), one never encounters “religion in general,” but rather “traces” and “trails” of religious flows like “the wake of a speeding boat” as religious flows transform “people and places, the social arena, and the natural terrain.”²⁹ At the same time, it is important to account for limitations in this transformational process, including postcolonial state structures and practices that constrain, direct, and punish movement based on caste and difference.³⁰ These limitations have concrete implications for the possibilities of creative agency and mobility.³¹ Sanctuary work is both driven and shaped by these boundaries, which are felt

to be both real and malleable, shaping structures, boundaries, and flows that also impact the researcher. Michelle Burgis-Kasthala aptly expresses this experience of movement: “Rather than feel assured by the solidity of an identifiable field site, I realized that the ‘field’ of my research was a messy, emergent series of fragmented experiences in which I am implicated.”³²

Constructivist grounded theory, coupled with community-engaged research, affirms the experiential position of the researcher as well as community knowledge and strengths through its treatment of the analytical process. Grounded theory, originally coined by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, approaches theory development as an imperfect and incomplete process resulting from engagement with data rather than the use of data for theory verification.³³ As a result of this process, Kathy Charmaz argues that one has the opportunity to foster greater “methodological self-consciousness.” Constructivist grounded theory, as articulated by Charmaz, retains Glaser and Strauss’ analytical focus, but challenges its stance of researcher objectivity and data neutrality. The researcher constantly tests the limits and mobility of their own horizon, along with the limits of their own reflexive self-awareness.³⁴ In decolonizing research, this is an absolutely critical posture in that it can be a means for challenging the role of the academic “expert” and adopting a posture of humility that takes seriously “multiple forms of knowledge” and encourages both institutional and individual accountability.³⁵ Likewise, community-engaged research models are particularly useful for humanities-based interreligious research projects such as this one, which rely on a great deal of community knowledge and exchange. Marianne Moyaert asserts that interreligious scholarship must recognize that “critical knowledge and data” is not the exclusive domain

of the academy, but instead extends to “grassroots” encounters between people holding “complex and intersectional identities” that challenge the boundaries and definition of religion.³⁶ These encounters disrupt and complicate historically defined and defining schemes of religion and provide fresh insights about “lived religion.” As Talal Asad argues, the way forward is not simply better translation of intercultural contexts, a power-laden and incomplete exercise, but rather a practice of making space for that which is a “discomforting—even scandalous—presence.”³⁷

Sanctuary activism, full of the discomforting presence of those occupying unauthorized space, invites state surveillance, a well-established occurrence born out of the contemporary and historical repression of human rights leaders throughout the Americas, including the United States. Therefore, regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, this project required an honest assessment of risk from all parties involved. Though my work often occurred in “remote” places away from physical interpersonal encounters, it also involved a reorientation of space and time, as well as certain ethical considerations. Risks for contributors range from social injury caused by stigmatization attached to research outcomes to more severe forms of physical and emotional harm.³⁸ For this reason, only previously published public “sanctuary names” are used for Central Americans who entered the Sanctuary Movement, and nearly all others are cited anonymously. Additional care was also taken to ensure the secure storage of data during the research and writing phases of this project.

This endeavor would not have been possible without the knowledge, suggestions, questions and corrections of the nearly forty research contributors who agreed to be interviewed for this project.³⁹ While the former statement might seem better suited to a

brief acknowledgement, these contributors were foundational for providing interpretive meaning and histories that helped put accessible written archives into context.⁴⁰ Ideally, it is my hope to have initiated the beginnings of a more reciprocal relationship between myself and research contributors instead of “helicopter” or “drive-by” approach disinterested in community desires, outcomes, and well-being.⁴¹ With this in mind, I have attempted a reconfigured loosening of systemization and surveillance techniques that hopefully cede space for participants to freely interrupt established research practices and narratives.

For this reason, I made the decision to structure my dissertation around the human experience, and to create room for previously occluded voices to emerge, especially the Central Americans, Jews, and women of all backgrounds who were integral to the Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia and beyond. While document-based archives are foundational for understanding the Sanctuary Movement, one must be careful not to mistake the volume of these archives as a sole determinant of research outcomes.⁴² Document-based English language archives overwhelmingly focus on Northern American experiences while comparable written collections in Central America presently do not seem to exist.⁴³ While this study focuses on selective experiences with public sanctuary, hopefully it provides some insight to experiences of those whose record of sanctuary exists only in their bodies and in privately held memories.

¹ Research Contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

² Sarah Goldstein and Glenn Stein, *Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role*, ed. David Saperstein (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1987), 107.

³ Susanne Jonas, “Guatemalan Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges,” Migration Policy Institute, March 27, 2013, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/guatemalan-migration-times-civil-war-and-post-war-challenges>; Cecilia Menjívar and Andrea Gómez Cervantes, “El Salvador: Civil War, Natural Disasters, and Gang Violence Drive Migration,” Migration Policy Institute, August 27, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/el-salvador-civil-war-natural-disasters-and-gang-violence-drive-migration>.

⁴ “Immigrants, exiles, refugees, and asylum seekers” represents a compilation of terms Central American research contributors used to describe themselves and others who were displaced.

⁵ Susan Bibler Coutin, “Falling Outside: Excavating the History of Central American Asylum Seekers,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 36, no. 03 (2011): 569; Susan Bibler Coutin, “The Formation and Transformation of Salvadoran Community Organizations in Los Angeles,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, ed. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 161-69. For Guatemalans and Salvadorans, legal, state-recognized asylum was notoriously difficult to obtain, with rejection rate hovering about 97% for individuals throughout the 1980s (“The Formation” 162).

⁶ Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 101.

⁷ Gervase Rosser, “Sanctuary and Social Negotiation in Medieval England,” in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. John Blair and Brian Golding (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996), 60.

⁸ Aimee Villarreal, “Sanctuariescapes in the North: American Southwest,” *Radical History Review* 2019, no. 135 (2019): 47.

⁹ Molly Todd, *Beyond Displacement: Campesinos, Refugees, and Collective Action in the Salvadoran Civil War*, Critical Human Rights (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 5.

¹⁰ In line with community-produced efforts to create gender inclusive and grammatical fluid terminology, the term “Latine” will be used here in place of the traditional adjective “Latino.” See Samantha Chery, “A Guide to How Words like Hispanic and Latinx Came About,” *The Washington Post*, October 1, 2022, sec. Lifestyle, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/10/01/hispanic-latino-latinx-latine-words-history>.

¹¹ One Salvadoran research contributor used the term “forensic” to describe the research process due to the lack of straightforward evidence in existing records, a situation that is partially intentional. This individual never learned the names of several Central American collaborators, who commonly used pseudonyms and committed

conversations to memory. The contributor felt that the deliberate cultivation of forgetfulness “made us all fairly invisible, so to speak.”

¹² Lloyd D. Barba and Tatyana Castillo-Ramos, “Latinx Leadership and Legacies in the U.S. Sanctuary Movement, 1980–2020,” *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2021).

¹³ Demetria Martínez, “Solidarity,” in *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera*, eds. Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 172.

¹⁴ “Northern America” here refers geographically to Mexico, Canada, and the United States of America. Similarly, the term “Northern Americans” will be used throughout this dissertation to describe native or long-term residents in these regions. It is of absolute importance that this latter term be understood in terms of its diversity. Although White, Anglo-Americans of European settler ancestry comprised the majority of Sanctuary Movement volunteers, Latin American immigrants as well as individuals from Asian, Indigenous, Latine, Hispanic, and African American communities were also active participants in the movement. The contributions of these latter groups are a critical, yet vastly understudied aspect of interreligious sanctuary activism.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center, “Philadelphia’s Immigrants: Who They Are and How They Are Changing the City,” June 7, 2018, http://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/assets/2018/06/pri_philadelphias_immigrants.pdf.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, “The Foreign-Born Population in the United States,” 2010, http://www.census.gov/newsroom/pdf/cspan_fb_slides.pdf.

¹⁷ See, for example: Charles Hirschman, “The Role of Religion in the Origins and Adaptation of Immigrant Groups in the United States,” *International Migration Review* 38, no. 3 (2004): 1206–33; Terry Rey and Alex Stepick, *Crossing the Water and Keeping the Faith* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Manuel A. Vásquez, Chad E. Seales, and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, “New Latino Destinations,” in *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of América*, eds. Havidán Rodríguez, Rogelio Sáenz, and Cecilia Menjívar (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2008), 31–32.

¹⁹ Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie F. Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion Across the Americas* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 161.

²⁰ Larry Eichel and Katie Martin, “The Pandemic’s Troubling Impact on Philadelphia,” Philadelphia Research and Policy, Pew Charitable Trusts, September 9, 2021, <https://pew.org/3CZ0Lkx>.

²¹ Arjun Appadurai, “The Right to Research,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 4, no. 2 (July 2006): 169.

²² Marie Sandy, “Tracing the Liberal Arts Traditions in Support of Service-Learning and Public-Engaged Scholarship in the Humanities,” *Humanity & Society* 37, no. 4 (November 2013): 308, 313-14.

²³ Mark Q. Gardiner and Steven Engler, “Semantic Holism and the Insider—Outsider Problem,” *Religious Studies* 48, no. 2 (2012): 239–55.

²⁴ Robert K. Merton, “Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 1 (1972): 22.

²⁵ Melanie Birks, Karen Hoare, and Jane Mills, “Grounded Theory: The FAQs,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (January 2019): 3-4.

²⁶ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 33.

²⁷ Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 54.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 55.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 62.

³⁰ Manuel A. Vásquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 295.

³¹ Manuel A. Vásquez, “The Limits of the Hydrodynamics of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2009): 436-37.

³² Michelle Burgis-Kasthala, “Researching Secret Spaces: A Reflexive Account on Negotiating Risk and Academic Integrity,” *Leiden Journal of International Law* 33, no. 2 (June 2020): 278.

³³ Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967), 32.

³⁴ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 18, 21.

³⁵ Vivian Chávez, “Cultural Humility: Reflections and Relevance for CBPR,” in *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: Advancing Social and Health Equity*, eds. Nina Wallerstein et al. (Newark, New Jersey: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 359; Marcie Fisher-Borne, Jessie Montana Cain, and Suzanne L. Martin, “From Mastery to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence,” *Social Work Education* 34, no. 2 (February 17, 2015): 172.

³⁶ Marianne Moyaert, “The Scholar, the Theologian, and the Activist,” in *Interreligious Studies: Dispatches from an Emerging Field*, ed. Hans Gustafson (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020), 40.

³⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 199.

³⁸ Malika Roman Isler and Giselle Corbie-Smith, “Practical Steps to Community Engaged Research: From Inputs to Outcomes,” *The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 40, no. 4 (December 2012): 908.

³⁹ Most interviews were virtual, one hour in duration, and for those who gave permission, recorded through Zoom. I later transcribed and coded recorded interviews and interview notes, using the themes sourced from contributor recommendations, previous experience with sanctuary organizations, as well as primary and secondary research sources, including published texts and physically stored archival materials.

⁴⁰ Although the exact flow of interview topics varied from person to person, all contributors responded to common questions addressing: 1) How they became involved with the Sanctuary Movement, 2) Positive and challenging aspects of their relationships with other activists, 3) Racial tensions they observed or experienced within the movement, 3) Personal understandings of sanctuary, 4) Spiritual/religious dimensions of sanctuary activism, and 5) Advice for their past selves or contemporary community organizers. Contributors were provided with questions in advance of their formal interviews and were free to answer according to their own preference. Some contributors answered each question in order, while others “freestyled” and provided remarks on additional topics. Several gave valuable suggestions regarding the questions themselves and useful archival sources. I remain extraordinarily grateful for their assistance, and for the opportunity to talk with such a thoughtful group of people.

⁴¹ Nina Wallerstein et al., “On Community-Based Participatory Research,” in *Community-Based Participatory Research for Health: Advancing Social and Health Equity*, eds. Nina Wallerstein et al. (Newark, New Jersey: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 4-5.

⁴² Every effort was made during the research phase of this project to access relevant document-based archives, held in organizational and private collections. This archival study should be understood as a work in progress, as certain collections were inaccessible due to COVID-19 related closures.

⁴³ Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles against Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 20.

CHAPTER 2

“I HAVE NOT COME TO SIT ON MY HANDS”:

SANCTUARY AS RELIGIOUS CONSCIENTIZACIÓN

While the 1980s Sanctuary Movement has sometimes been criticized as being too “White” and Anglocentric, “forensic”¹ investigations continue to reveal the extent of the “hidden leadership” of Central Americans who were critical to the movement’s growth and success.² This leadership, as will be discussed below, was cultivated through long experiences with social injustice and deeply embedded political and religious communal sensibilities. These efforts have, at times, been overshadowed by selective remembrances that assume the undifferentiated beneficence of humanitarian interventions and the utter dependency of those who are displaced. This frame of dependency has been reinforced by a Northern American sanctuary discourse that emerged during and after the 1980s movement, which has coalesced into a sanctuary canon that tends to communicate sanctuary as a uniformly beneficial, historically traceable, humanitarian religious practice.³ This view of sanctuary is far from neutral and depends upon a view of sanctuary that assumes the authority and beneficence of White Christian legal apparatus and theological narratives.⁴ Such acts of constructing historical memory are full of choices that, over time, produce “inborn absences” in historical narratives and the preserved archival record.⁵ While an in-depth examination of the diverse historical expressions of sanctuary is beyond the scope of this chapter, this selective introduction to the religious dimensions of the Sanctuary Movement attempts to bring core voices into these silent spaces to make more visible persons and voices occluded by these absences,

and to show how individuals moved uneasily across boundaries to make, remake, and challenge sanctuary and solidarity practices.

Human Rights and Asylum

As a byproduct of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and European settler colonialism, modern industrial wealth has relied upon the ability of capitalist entities to reimagine and enact flexible and financially expedient forms of coercive labor and violence, including state-supported exploitation of natural resources and continued violence against African diasporic and Indigenous peoples.⁶ Such industrial development accompanied the rise of United States imperialism in the nineteenth century as White elites and Protestant missionaries reinterpreted Manifest Destiny through expanded commercial and colonial activity in Latin America and Asia.⁷ As chattel slavery and direct European political control came to an end in the Americas, a sense of duty arose among the White upper classes in the Americas to invest moral and economic capital to control resources, stave off European competition and provide a social welfare framework that addressed religious and humanitarian concerns.⁸ Such activities ultimately helped widen racialized social stratification in Latin America, and initiated what has now become nearly two centuries of U.S. economic, political, and military interference in the region, including the acceleration of the Cold War during the twentieth century.⁹

The knotted positions of settler religious groups in this troubled landscape can be difficult to unsnarl, particularly those which are foreign or transnational. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink describe this interpretative problem:

...where we see links among activists from different nationalities and cultures, others may see cultural imperialism—attempts to impose

Western values and culture among societies that neither desire nor benefit from them. Are ‘moral’ campaigns just thinly disguised efforts by one group to gain its interest and impose its will on another?¹⁰

Still, Keck and Sikkink conclude that while humanitarians frequently expressed paternalism and exclusion toward their intended beneficiaries, these ethical thorns do not preclude the significance of their occasional challenges to state power.¹¹ Christian institutions in particular, while deeply implicated in colonial violence, have also paradoxically provided the infrastructure for community preservation, survival, and resistance. During the industrial era, the growth of the Protestant Social Gospel movement and the re-emergence of Catholic social teaching demonstrate that while religion continued to be a vehicle for imperialism, it also provided an impactful means for addressing problematic legal and social structures.

Catholic social teaching has had an especially prominent role in the development of international human rights advocacy and Latin American liberation movements, two powerful drivers of modern transnational sanctuary organizing. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Catholic social teaching, along with labor and solidarity movements, emerged as responses to the Industrial Revolution and its accompanying waves of global migration. An important modern signpost was Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, influenced by centuries of community-based religious and lay work on both sides of the Atlantic,¹² which paid homage to the work of the Spanish missionary jurist Bartolomé de las Casas (d. 1655). Las Casas, whose writings include the first known reference to *derechos humanos* (human rights),¹³ advocated for the inherent humanity of Indigenous peoples in the Americas and thus, their ineligibility for enslavement. For replacement labor, Las Casas encouraged an increase in African enslavement, a proto-

colonial practice already well underway on island plantations near the western African coast. Despite his involvement in accelerating the Transatlantic Slave Trade (a role he later regretted),¹⁴ Las Casas was later admired as a model of humanitarian ethos. Las Casas's advocacy work with Indigenous peoples, rooted in his firsthand encounters with and participation in genocidal violence, would subsequently influence the Catholic doctrine concerning God's "preferential option for the poor," including the obligation to counteract "social sin."¹⁵ His theological writings and recorded legal arguments also helped shape modern human rights language, which would guide the development of Northern American sanctuary movements during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. (Northern American sanctuary activists throughout the 1980s widely read works by Gustavo Gutiérrez and other prominent liberation theologians who regarded Las Casas to be a forefather of their writing and work.)

The *Rerum Novarum* encyclical revived Las Casas's interests in Thomas Aquinas's social framework of natural law and justice regarding the common good.¹⁶ Combining an emerging sociological methodology with older forms of Catholic exegesis, *Rerum Novarum* emphasized the need for relational "solidarity" and the "option for the poor and the vulnerable." While the Catholic Church generally remained hesitant to challenge the social segmentation from which it broadly benefitted in Latin America, this language of solidarity would become foundational to liberation theologies that emphasized a social commitment to the poor and redistributive economics.¹⁷ In the United States, *Rerum Novarum* accompanied the increasing presence of social Catholicism, particularly in cities like Philadelphia where Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish organizations had long played an important role in the formation of civic and

ethnic identities within settler and immigrant communities.¹⁸ Catholic social activism also produced key organizational infrastructure that would play a pivotal role in the Philadelphia and national sanctuary movements during the 1980s and beyond. Some of these lay and religious organizations would produce key 1980s sanctuary leaders, including the Maryknoll missionaries, Sisters of Saint Francis, Sisters of Saint Joseph, Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and Catholic Worker movement.

Catholic social activism also provided an important ideological underpinning for international human rights advocacy, including the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁹ a document driven in part by Latin American diplomatic efforts to address U.S. hegemony in the region,²⁰ as well as international concern regarding the large numbers of people displaced by the Holocaust and other global conflicts. During this time period, advocates for an international legal framework for human rights and asylum found themselves pushing against the boundaries of nation states which, for the United States, meant the reinforcement of longstanding racialized approaches to migration and international diplomacy.²¹ The United Nations, therefore, “remained subordinate to the political interests of individual nations” who exercised broad discretion as asylum decisions and immigration policy remained subordinated to national citizenship.²² In the United States, religious organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) emerged during this time specifically to address the needs of those who were forcibly displaced.²³

Comunidades Eclesiales de Base

In the Americas and elsewhere, secular labor and social reforms movements have also converged with the more “radical” elements of the Catholic Church and other religious bodies. In response to the growing usurpation of lands by multinational entities, labor and political organizing among Indigenous and other groups in Latin America and the Caribbean began to intensify. This activity, stemming from at least the early twentieth century, laid the groundwork in the Americas for an intensification of Catholic grassroots organizing in the mid-twentieth century.²⁴ Prior to the 1960s, the Catholic church in the region had been largely dominated by an elite foreign clergy that tended to support oligarchical and military regimes.²⁵ Gradually, at the local level, both foreign and native religious workers became increasingly involved in community development, as traditional missionary programs oriented towards conversion and catechism began to merge with efforts to address persistent poverty and other forms of social inequity.²⁶ These activities found affirmation and encouragement in both the UN Declaration and the 1963 papal encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which named human rights and solidarity as integral aspects of social justice, and recognized the legitimacy of UN development work.²⁷

This encyclical was published in the midst of the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), a reformation movement within the Catholic Church that affirmed the vernacular forms of Catholicism and lay leadership already in existence throughout communities in Latin America and elsewhere and set the stage for the legitimization of interreligious dialogue. These reforms were later acknowledged at the 1968 meeting of the Second Episcopal Conference of Latin America in Medellín, Colombia, where Latin

American bishops affirmed the premise and practices of liberation theology, including the integration of Paulo Freire's *conscientización* ("consciousness-raising") practice with Catholic missions.²⁸ The ultimate goal of *conscientización*, therefore, was social action that challenged entrenched social inequities by empowering local leadership. Thousands of *comunidades eclesiales de base* (base Christian communities, or CEBs) emerged as vehicles for grassroots organizing and Catholic outreach that combined *conscientización* with religious education to build action-oriented self-awareness in local communities regarding the nature and causes of poverty and inequity.²⁹ While some CEBs began as missionary-led catechism and literacy circles in local parishes,³⁰ others formed through native-born Catholic leadership who worked with and alongside locally controlled schools, cooperatives, and public health endeavors.³¹ There is also strong evidence that CEBs were strongly influenced by Indigenous groups and others outside of the church's leadership hierarchy.³² Exiled Guatemalan Mayan political activist Felipe Ixk'oj't described the following example of CEB-driven *conscientización* process to Northern American sanctuary activists during the 1980s:

When we talk about malnutrition we should not only think about bread and tamales and tortillas but also about malnutrition of the brain, about lack of knowledge—lack of knowledge that comes not because people want to be that way but because they have been forced to be that way. That is why we have the classification of superior and inferior peoples. The monopolizers of power have even gone as far to say that those who are clever or smart were born that way. This is a lie, because God created us equals, endowed us all equally. That is why Guatemala is in the midst of this trouble now, so that we all may have opportunity, so that all of us may indeed be equal. That is what I did in Guatemala, and that is why they wanted to kill me.³³

K'iche' Mayan activist and Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who participated in Catholic youth groups as a child, both credited and critiqued Catholic organizations for their role in social reforms:³⁴

Con respecto a los pecados... de la religión católica o de cualquier otra religión mucho más conservadora que la católica, dice que Dios quiere a los pobres y Dios tiene un gran paraíso para los pobres en el cielo. Entonces hay que conformarse con la vida que uno tiene. Pero precisamente, nosotros como cristianos hemos entendido que ser cristianos no es estar de acuerdo con todas las injusticias que se cometen con nuestro pueblo. No es estar de acuerdo con toda la discriminación que se comete en contra de un pueblo humilde que ni siquiera sabe comer carne y después se le humilla más que a un caballo, podría decir. Todo esto lo hemos descubierto viendo todo lo que ha pasado en nuestra vida. Claro, este despertar que existe en el indígena no nació de un día a otro, porque tanto la Acción Católica, las otras religiones, como el sistema, todos han tratado de dejarnos como estamos. Mientras que no nazca del mismo pueblo, lo que es la concepción de cada religión, es para mí un arma principal del sistema.³⁵

While Menchú credits her time as a catechist as an important vehicle for acquiring community organizing skills and a deeper sense of religious commitment, she grew frustrated with the overall conservatism of the Church, which she felt expressed condescension and lack of respect for the capabilities of Indigenous peoples.³⁶

Participation in CEBs and other grassroots social initiatives also created enormous risks, particularly in El Salvador and Guatemala. U.S.-supported military regimes in both countries were focused on eliminating what they perceived as spreading “Cuban-Soviet-East European” communist influences, particularly after the fall of the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua.³⁷ In spite of the danger it posed to their lives, priests and women religious increasingly joined agrarian and labor reform efforts throughout the 1960s and beyond,³⁸ even after landholding elites and multinational sympathizers became associated with extreme incidences of right-wing violence against suspected communists

and other dissidents. In El Salvador, leaflets were dropped en masse with the message, “*Haz patria, mata un cura!*” (“Be a patriot, kill a priest!”) – an exhortation that became reality as military violence against rural organizers and religious workers escalated.³⁹ In 1977, Salvadoran Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande was assassinated near the rural town of Aguilares, along with two others. Grande’s death inspired his close friend Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero to voice opposition to government-backed violence and to express his support for cooperative movements, actions that resulted in his March 1980 assassination.

In December of the same year, four U.S. missionary women in El Salvador, including two Maryknoll sisters, were raped and murdered by pro-government forces. These attacks on religious workers brought overwhelmingly negative international attention to human rights abuses in Central America, and some U.S. religious organizations, along with international advocacy groups, began to lobby the United States government to cut off military aid to El Salvador.⁴⁰ This Cold War aid, which ranged from one to two million dollars *per day* during the Carter and Reagan administrations,⁴¹ directly contributed arms, training, and resources toward military-controlled repression of popular movements in Central America. U.S. military support intensified through the 1980s “Reagan Doctrine” approach to the conflict, as the United States “poured money and matériel” into fighting the newly elected Sandinista government in Nicaragua and anti-government movements in El Salvador and Guatemala.⁴² These resources were purposed not only for intelligence gathering, but also for the torture, killings, and “disappearing” of political dissidents along with other forms of domestic repression.

Religion and Transnational Solidarity

Despite the escalation of violence, anti-government political organizing and community work, including CEBs, continued to grow during both the Guatemalan and Salvadoran civil wars.⁴³ This work became profoundly transnational as both Central and Northern American religious workers deepened their humanitarian and political efforts.⁴⁴ Far from being passive aid recipients, Central Americans were the co-creators of the refugee assistance and information networks that generated and sustained the Sanctuary Movement and the larger Central American solidarity movement. Those who were displaced by the conflicts organized themselves into cooperatives supported by Mexican campesinos and Mexican, Canadian, and U.S. religious organizations and NGOs.⁴⁵ At the same time, expressions of pan-Latine and Hispanic solidarity had also begun to emerge alongside other potent forms of Central American transnational political activism,⁴⁶ including work addressing humanitarian needs, international policy, and civil rights. By the time Central American migration began to intensify in the late 1970s, critical infrastructure was already in place, including centuries-old migration routes, labor and civil rights associations, mutual aid organizations, and church-affiliated resources. Latine and Hispanic Catholics also contributed to pan-Latine solidarity work in the United States. Groups such as PADRES and Las Hermanas fought for greater inclusion of Hispanic and Latine leadership and traditions within the Catholic Church, and Catholic-infused Chicano spirituality was an important force behind civil rights work such as César Chávez's United Farm Worker movement.⁴⁷ It was therefore no accident that one of the first religious leaders to declare public sanctuary during 1980s movement was Father Luis Olivares, a Mexican-American priest in Los Angeles who was well

positioned to express this heritage. According to historian Mario T. García, Olivares “voiced a new pan-Latino solidarity that had been widely articulated before in the Chicano community. Indeed, he symbolically reconstructed Guadalupe into a pan-Latino deity by extending her blessing to include Central America and the Central American refugees.”⁴⁸

Northern American missionaries and other religious workers were also intentionally courted by Central American activists for political, financial, and material assistance.⁴⁹ Central American political activists utilized “signal flare” strategies to alert non-Central Americans to the unfolding crises in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala,⁵⁰ and invited key transnational actors to collaborate in solidarity movements. Among these allies were White, English-speaking Northern American humanitarian aid workers and missionaries whose religious commitments and experiences in Central America lent credibility to Northern American audiences.⁵¹ As the civil wars escalated and these personnel returned to the United States, Central American activists, especially Salvadorans, deliberately cultivated relationships with these U.S. citizens and their spheres of influence so that Central American concerns would receive greater attention among U.S. government policymakers. U.S.-based Salvadoran organizations such as CARECEN,⁵² which was critical in building the Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia, “often had ties to social movement organizations in El Salvador, which in turn were connected to different FMLN factions.”⁵³ Religious groups, particularly those with a history of civil rights, peace activism, and humanitarian work, were intentionally courted as partners.⁵⁴

The national Sanctuary Movement, one such outgrowth of this kind of solidarity work, was the offspring of these transnational partnerships as well as early collaborative efforts between diaspora-led organizations and religious communities across the U.S., especially in larger cities and border regions. This collaboration had far-reaching effects. Influenced by liberation theology and grassroots political activism in Central America, Northern American missionaries, humanitarian aid workers, and labor organizers underwent their own conversion processes. These individuals brought their convictions back to the United States and Canada, where they helped organize the religious arm of the Central America peace and solidarity movement, a loosely confederated, socio-political movement that eventually included nearly 2000 Northern American organizations committed to human rights and an end to U.S. interference in Central America.⁵⁵

Rooted in religious traditions that emphasized social responsibility,⁵⁶ Catholic, Jewish and Protestant sympathizers understood solidarity with Central American political activists as the natural companion of anti-war and civil rights activism.⁵⁷ As the Reagan administration escalated attempts to destabilize the newly established Sandinista government in Nicaragua, solidarity activists were particularly focused on what many in the U.S. feared would be another Vietnam War—this time across Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.⁵⁸ Because of the leftist orientation of some of their Central American affiliates, Northern American solidarity supporters were frequently accused of either deliberately or naively supporting communism.⁵⁹ These accusations would become more pronounced throughout the 1980s as the Central America solidarity movement, including the Sanctuary Movement, gained greater attention in the Northern American

press.⁶⁰ Such press accounts may have contributed to ongoing culture war rhetoric at the expense of cultural nuance. Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, two members of the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America (CRTFCA), argued that communal responsibility was a serious cultural imperative in Latin America that did not necessarily indicate strictly political communist tendencies. This type of communal interdependence was therefore “not a romantic notion,” as sometimes portrayed in the Northern American press, where individualism and “freedom of choice” were often assumed to be normative.⁶¹ The resulting stigma and isolation for Northern American religious supporters, which they sometimes faced in their home congregations and denominations, contributed to the growth of interreligious and ecumenical work.⁶² This interfaith work would gradually take on the traditionally Jesuit practice of *acompañamiento* (“accompaniment”), which Northern American activists interpreted as their duty to be present alongside Central American human rights groups and other socio-political organizations.⁶³ Some accompaniment work was starkly physical as well. Witness for Peace, founded in 1983 by U.S.-based activists, drew thousands of Northern Americans from a variety of religious backgrounds, including evangelicals, Quakers, Catholics, and Jews, to participate in accompaniment work on the ground in Nicaragua and Guatemala.⁶⁴ The goal of this type of solidarity work was to generate eyewitness accounts of U.S.-sponsored military repression and to expand the reach of transnational peace activism and grassroots diplomacy.

Sanctuary and *Conscientización*

These notions of solidarity and accompaniment would become important components of the transnational Sanctuary Movement that grew out of the Central

America solidarity movement during the early 1980s. As thousands of Salvadorans and Guatemalans began to cross the Mexican border into the United States, immigrant-led mutual aid organizations in cities such as San Francisco and Los Angeles partnered with religious groups to provide early settlement assistance.⁶⁵ Many of these organizations had prior experience offering refuge to conscientious objectors during the Vietnam War and early Salvadoran exiles.⁶⁶ By this time, “sanctuary” had already been reincarnated as a religious strategy of opposition to the Vietnam War and of providing protection for draft resisters.⁶⁷ Several of these individuals would later become involved in the Central American solidarity movement in sanctuary and peace activism.⁶⁸ As the migration crisis intensified during the early 1980s and the number of displaced, undocumented Central Americans increased in the United States, sanctuary once again surfaced as an “emergent answer to the shortcomings of human rights laws.”⁶⁹ Although the United States had adopted the Refugee Act of 1980 to align its policies with international asylum law, the Reagan administration with its strategy of “renewed Cold War polarization” drew sharp distinctions between “refugees” and “economic” migrants and rejected the vast majority of asylum claims from Central Americans.⁷⁰ Christian and Jewish communities in the United States, many already primed by earlier involvement in solidarity and accompaniment work, were alarmed by the unfolding migration crisis and the martyrdom of religious leaders such as Óscar Romero. In U.S.-Mexico border regions, religious congregations began to form cooperative arrangements whereby they provided various forms of sanctuary for migrants, including physical housing and concealment in churches and synagogues.

As migrants moved in greater numbers beyond border areas and into the interior U.S., the Sanctuary Movement became larger and more organized, encompassing more than 3,000 sites in churches, synagogues, and universities by the mid-1980s.⁷¹ This coordinated effort included collaboration between Mexican Catholic activists who set up migrant centers near the northern Mexican border, U.S.-based organizations with Central American leadership, and Central America solidarity organizations such as the Tucson Ecumenical Council and the CRTFCA.⁷² These organizations and volunteers worked to create an underground network of accompaniment with Central American exiles and refugees who traveled across the country, many with hopes of crossing into Canada.⁷³ At the same time, Central and Northern Americans engaged in education and *conscientización* regarding the crisis of displaced peoples, critiques of U.S. foreign policy, and the inability of vast majority of displaced persons from Central America to receive asylum despite having credible threats and experiences of persecution. Central Americans, however, soon recognized that most Northern Americans were far more interested in hearing personal stories rather than engaging in potentially “accusatory” political discussions.⁷⁴ Because many Central Americans in the Sanctuary Movement were Catholic and had experience with CEBs and other liberationist practices, a central strategy for Central Americans in the Sanctuary Movement involved accessing public platforms as possible in order to share their *testimonios*. Their testimonies, which usually included graphic depictions of violence that they had personally suffered, also reflected their experiences with religious *conscientización* as they sought to increase Northern American awareness of the United States’ influence over the social and political realities of Latin America.⁷⁵

While transnational sanctuary networks facilitated the expansion of consciousness-raising activities through the movement of people and ideas, the Sanctuary Movement also had a geographically specific character and operating structure. As Sergio González observes, the Movement remained “highly localized” despite the presence of national coordination:

Each sanctuary community maintained autonomy while most congregations also navigated within the parameters of their denominational affiliation. Coalitions also contended with distinct regional factors. Because of their proximity to the border, for example, faith networks in places such as Arizona, Texas, and California had a much more direct relationship with Mexican and Central American refugee networks than those coalitions in places such as Minnesota or Massachusetts.⁷⁶

Sanctuary work was also strategically local in that purposeful disconnection helped mitigate risk for both Central and Northern American participants. For Central American exiles, personal safety, fear of deportation, and concerns about retributive political violence against family and friends back home were first-level concerns, particularly considering the massive FBI surveillance the movement had garnered. Therefore, any information, including names, was often minimally shared as a means of securing anonymity, and thus, protection.⁷⁷ Though at diminished risk, U.S. citizen sanctuary workers were also scrupulous regarding information sharing and public activity regarding housing and legal aid to undocumented migrants, actions that U.S. Courts eventually ruled to be in violation of anti-harboring clauses within the Immigration and Nationality Acts of 1917, 1952, and 1986.⁷⁸

(In)Visibility

Despite the role that Central Americans had in forming and sustaining the Central America solidarity movement, including sanctuary activism, their contributions have often been marginalized in written accounts.⁷⁹ In earlier academic studies and journalistic records, the role of Central Americans tends to be muted, with heightened emphasis on anonymity and victimhood. Instead, accounts of the 1980s movement tended to focus on the activities of White, Anglo-American sanctuary leaders, especially those implicated in high profile federal crackdowns on sanctuary organizing. Despite the transnational, ecumenical foundation of the Sanctuary Movement, earlier descriptions of the movement may have reinforced images of White saviorism and cowboy heroism by focusing attention on Anglo-American leaders such as Tucson sanctuary organizers Rev. John Fife and Jim Corbett. Corbett, a Quaker rancher who received widespread attention for his role in developing a migrant safehouse network in the U.S. Southwest,⁸⁰ partnered with a task force of the Tucson Ecumenical Council,⁸¹ a group of multinational religious leaders with previous experience in transnational community advocacy. Accounts of Corbett hitchhiking his way out of Yellowstone on his own at thirteen years of age and Fife's experiences hunting wild pigs,⁸² for example, may have provided a skewed vision of sanctuary leadership as one of rugged individualism, which nonetheless made for an attractive story for interested readers. After Corbett, Fife, and other Tucson area activists were arrested in the 1985 Operation Sojourner crackdown, some media outlets portrayed sanctuary workers as a group of crafty outlaws who had been able, despite the openness of their actions, to outwit a plodding and clumsy law-enforcement agency."⁸³

An overemphasis on the dependency and vulnerability of displaced persons also complicated relationships between Northern and Central Americans, ironically through the central sanctuary practice of sharing *testimonios*. Ideally, the sanctuary *testimonio* was intended as a means for Central Americans to make their own histories public and present, and to open a means of dialogue between Northern and Central Americans.⁸⁴ These *testimonios* were a culturally mediated strategy used by Central Americans to create additional public spaces through religious organizations for sharing information about the realities of violence in Central America and the work of the solidarity movement. Far from being performances of passive suffering and victimhood, *testimonios* were intentionally sculpted to seize attention and persuade the listeners to action.⁸⁵ While originally designed to be a liberative practice, the context of reception for *testimonio* at times created interference for its intended message and outcome. Representatives of media organizations, who were often invited to religious gatherings where *testimonios* were shared, at times simplified stories to make them more palatable to media consumers. Such translative processes contributed to the erasure of BIPOC sanctuary and solidarity efforts, including the work of Native and African American organizers.⁸⁶ Within the Sanctuary Movement, U.S. citizen sanctuary organizers also debated the extent to which *testimonios* should mention controversial political issues. Some organizers preferred more humanitarian-focused *testimonios*, while others deliberately cultivated relationships with Central Americans who could narrate their own experiences of persecution in reference to the problematics of both U.S.-Central American relations and immigration policy.⁸⁷ Regardless of their position on the political spectrum, non-migrant sanctuary organizers were keenly focused on establishing the

legitimacy of Salvadoran and Guatemalan claims to asylum, few of whom were approved in comparison to their Northern European counterparts. *Testimonios* therefore became an important proof for legitimizing Central American migrants' status as "refugees." This push, coupled with religious rhetoric highlighting biblical instances of accompaniment, poverty, and displacement, may have unwittingly reinforced paternalistic associations of refugee status with victimhood by creating a set of narrow, trauma-centered narratives.

For White Anglo-American participants, sanctuary activism also involved a reconfiguration of identity into a global one as well as a dedicated interest in the performance of justice. This identity, in contrast to that of the fleeing migrant, involved reinventing the meaning of the Underground Railroad as well as that of the base community. There is substantial evidence that Railroad imagery lent historical and religious legitimation to the Tucson activists' efforts from very early on, as sanctuary activists often compared their work to antebellum abolitionist activity. The reference was so interwoven into the movement's internal and external rhetoric that INS officials once bizarrely countered that sanctuary workers were not working for a just cause but instead were more akin to slave traders bringing "chattel" into the United States.⁸⁸ Other than the involvement of Quakers in the movement's undergirding, there are several possible explanations for why the Railroad became a useful trope to describe and justify sanctuary. First, the plight of Central American war refugees was not initially a matter of great concern to the broader American public. Therefore, an appeal to a historical movement which had been widely accepted as just and noble lent publicity as well as legitimation. Secondly, the Railroad was a significant symbol of membership into an alternative religious community with its own interreligious rituals that had developed

around sanctuary activism.⁸⁹ Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant sanctuary workers all formed their own “underground” religious organizations, which signified belonging and conversion to “a more authentic religious practice than that of their own religious congregations.”⁹⁰ This comparison, however, was not without its detractors. Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, CRTFCA representatives, offered a direct critique of comparisons of White Anglo-American sanctuary organizing to the nineteenth century Underground Railroad, especially given the relatively light sentences for prosecuted U.S. citizen sanctuary activists in comparison to the risks endured by abolitionist conductors such as Harriet Tubman and William Still.⁹¹ Very early in the movement, Mexican sanctuary workers also challenged the exceptionalist mythology behind comparisons to the Underground Railroad, particularly the assumption that the United States should be the preferred destination for displaced Central Americans. These sanctuary workers argued that it was not wise to transport people into the United States indiscriminately, out of concern that some Central American migrants would not fare well in the U.S. due to language barriers, racial discrimination, and legal obstacles.⁹²

Another expression of this search for authenticity was the attempt to replicate *comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBs) into a Northern American non-immigrant context. By the mid-1980s, liberation theologies, including the CEB movement, had made significant inroads among self-identified progressive Protestants, Catholics and Jews in Northern America.⁹³ Latin American liberationists such as Gustavo Gutiérrez had gained an international following through post-Vatican II ecumenical initiatives,⁹⁴ and those involved with the Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement helped mainstream liberationist practice and theology among receptive Northern Americans,

particularly after the martyrdom of Óscar Romero. For most Northern Americans in the movement, however, religious *conscientización* took place through a much different social positionality. In Tucson, for example, it would have been illogical for the mostly unimpoverished Northern American practitioners to ask, “Why am *I* poor?” Instead, the question “Why is there poverty?” was raised as a way of understanding “the systemic nature of injustice and place the individual as part of the whole.”⁹⁵ Whereas *conscientización* in Latin American contexts usually arose from personal experiences with poverty and social inequity, Northern American sanctuary activists adapted this organizing model as a structure for reinterpreting their own privilege. As such, many White Northern American sanctuary volunteers understood their activism as a way “to redefine who they [were] and redeem their privileged status.”⁹⁶ Robin Lorentzen found this to be particularly true for White women, who comprised the majority of Northern American sanctuary workers during this time period.⁹⁷ Those whom Lorentzen interviewed tended to express discomfort regarding their racial and citizenship status, and their relative lack of personal risk in sanctuary organizing as compared to their Central American counterparts.⁹⁸

Jewish sanctuary activists, however, also tended to express a more direct sense of identification with displaced Central Americans in ways that their Christian counterparts did not, and were reticent to adopt Christian exegetical framings of liberationist concepts.⁹⁹ As Marc Ellis observes, the Jewish response to the rise of liberation theology was varied. While some appreciated the “possibility of a politically active force for uplifting poor and oppressed people” and found resonance between CEBs and the havurot movement, others suspected that liberation theology may be “an ancient form of

Christian triumphalism in a new guise” and had difficulty envisioning the cross as a symbol of social justice.¹⁰⁰ Although sometimes controversial,¹⁰¹ Jewish sanctuary advocates found more success in likening the situation in Central America to historical Jewish experiences with persecution and displacement, particularly the difficulties Jewish refugees faced in attaining political asylum during the Shoah, a searing memory only a few decades old.¹⁰² Although many U.S. Jews remained skeptical about supporting what appeared to be outside the realm of “Jewish concern,”¹⁰³ this appeal produced some success in building Jewish solidarity activism within the Sanctuary Movement and the larger Central American solidarity movement, particularly among Reform and Reconstructionist congregations. Although lay leaders, many of whom were feminist and lesbian,¹⁰⁴ were overwhelmingly responsible for Jewish solidarity organizing, rabbis promoted their efforts through carefully-constructed arguments and appeals to humanitarian concern.¹⁰⁵ One of the earliest Jewish leaders in the Sanctuary Movement, Rabbi Joseph Weizenbaum of Temple Emanu-El in Tucson helped persuade his Reform congregation to support sanctuary by sharing his father’s experience as an undocumented immigrant who smuggled himself to Ellis Island.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Rabbi Francis Barry Silberg, another early sanctuary advocate, shared the following anecdote with Reform Temple Emanu-El B’ne Jeshurun in Milwaukee:

A colleague of mine and I exchanged stories about how and why we became rabbis. I told him mine and then he told me his:

I entered Birkenau with the liberation forces in '45. I was standing just outside the main gate when an emaciated sickly inmate walked up to me. He looked at me, hauntingly, for a minute that seemed like a lifetime, and asked “Are you a Jew?”

“Yes,” I said.

He slapped me across the face and said, "You're too late." I became a rabbi because I never wanted to be too late again.

Now I am going to call the Sanctuary Committee and see what we can do about endorsing and providing sanctuary in this sanctuary. And I pray we aren't too late.¹⁰⁷

The endorsement of Nobel laureate and Shoah survivor Elie Wiesel lent further credibility to sanctuary activism and helped enhance Jewish visibility in the Christian-dominated movement. In 1985, at the Inter-American Symposium on Sanctuary, Wiesel proclaimed: "No human being is an illegal," an assertion now foundational to immigrant rights advocacy in the United States.¹⁰⁸

Though sometimes reticent to voice concerns publicly, Central American political organizers also critiqued the Sanctuary Movement, particularly the paternalism and stereotyping they experienced therein. The writings of Salvadoran Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino are representative of these larger concerns, as Central Americans continued to push their Northern American counterparts to toward more mutually affirming collaborative relationships:

Solidarity...is not mere humanitarian "aid," of the kind that often is prompted by natural disasters, for example. That kind of aid is obviously good and necessary and is a correct response to an ethical imperative. But if solidarity were no more than material aid, it would not be anything more than a magnified kind of almsgiving where givers offer something they own without thereby feeling a deep-down personal commitment or without feeling any need to continue this aid. In authentic solidarity the first effort to give aid commits a person at a deeper level than that of mere giving and becomes an ongoing process, not a contribution.¹⁰⁹

Some of this uneasiness was channeled second-hand through a public debate that emerged between Tucson-based sanctuary organizers and the CRTFCA in the mid-1980s. Northern American women were especially vocal about what they perceived as gendered paternalism from their non-migrant male counterparts. Women claimed that the division

between non-migrant men and women sanctuary activists was one of “partnership versus paternalism” in that women tended to want true partnership with Central American migrants whereas men “merely wanted to support them.”¹¹⁰ Women, however, often found themselves in caretaking roles, particularly for the many migrants who were quite young at the time – some only teenagers. For the many Catholic women religious who became involved in the Sanctuary Movement during this time, this caretaking approach was a normal gendered expression of the charitable orientation of Catholic missionary work and Catholic domestic missions. Many Central Americans in sanctuary, however, resented the more controlling aspects of this caretaking approach, which verged on micromanaging such aspects of their lives as infant care.¹¹¹ These experiences may have contributed to Central American complaints of other forms of racialized treatment in which they were sometimes treated like “pets” and excluded from meaningful decision-making regarding their own involvement in the movement. As one Guatemalan participant admonished: “I have not come to your country to sit on my hands.”¹¹²

Moving On

On January 14, 1985, the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Phoenix, Arizona brought indictments against sixteen Sanctuary Movement leaders, including six clergy members and women religious. The indictments were made public on the same day that the INS arrested nearly eighty Central and Northern American sanctuary volunteers and participants in Philadelphia, Phoenix, Tucson, Seattle, and Rochester, New York.¹¹³ These indictments would lead to the second and more prominent of two major Sanctuary Trials,¹¹⁴ in which eleven U.S. and Mexican citizens would be tried for transporting

undocumented individuals into the United States and “harboring” them illegally.¹¹⁵ Government prosecutors offered political asylum in exchange for Central American witness participation,¹¹⁶ and secured restrictions that successfully limited defense efforts to demonstrate the defendants’ religious imperative for sanctuary work. While the jury of *U.S. v. Aguilar* ultimately decided to convict most of the defendants, the trial energized the commitment of sanctuary activists and created additional opportunities to publicize the goals of the movement. The trial also marked a turning point in expressions of sanctuary and solidarity, particularly concerning how Central Americans expressed leadership in relation to Northern American allies. While earlier models of sanctuary activism continued, Central Americans continued to work in separate organizational modes where they could express more control over “their own histories, identities, and experiences.”¹¹⁷

Although the Central America solidarity movement was the largest organized social campaign in the United States since the 1960s Civil Rights era,¹¹⁸ it had largely waned by the early 1990s, owing in part to the creation of limited pathways to legal U.S. residency and changing political circumstances in El Salvador and Guatemala.¹¹⁹ Immigration advocacy in the United States and humanitarian interventions in Latin America continued, however, as models of sanctuary organizing moved beyond the boundaries of religious organizing and into the civic sphere. Some Sanctuary Movement veterans remained involved in these efforts, as Central and Northern Americans worked toward an expanding sense of sanctuary and solidarity as they refocused their efforts on supporting return and resettlement efforts, along with immigration rights advocacy.

While more attention has been paid to sanctuary organizing in the U.S.-Mexico border regions, much of the landscape of 1980s era sanctuary and solidarity activism in the northeastern part of United States remains open to investigation. As will be shown in the ensuing chapters, sanctuary activism in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was crucial to the development of 1980s Sanctuary Movement and its evolution into transnational economic development partnerships. The disproportionate focus on Northern American sanctuary activists has at times overshadowed discussion of the religious experiences, motivations, and labor of Central Americans engaged in transnational sanctuary work. These factors have contributed to the misperception that sanctuary organizing during the 1980s was solely a White, Anglo-American endeavor focused on rescue work. While the majority of Philadelphia-based sanctuary allies met this description, Guatemalans and Salvadorans who worked in and adjacent to Philadelphia sanctuary activism contributed critical leadership with wide-ranging impacts. In many cases, this leadership was born through the deeply felt, ongoing mission-oriented experiences of religious conscientización which they shared with Northern American co-laborers and prospective allies. The following chapters are intended to provide insight into these relationships, as well as the role of Guatemalans and Salvadorans in shaping sanctuary and solidarity activism, which had far-reaching ripple effects across a host of local, national, and international social projects and institutions.

¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

² Lloyd D. Barba and Tatyana Castillo-Ramos, “Latinx Leadership and Legacies in the Us Sanctuary Movement, 1980–2020,” *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2021). This leadership was often intentionally hidden as part of the strategic invisibility that Central American leaders adopted during the movement.

³ Seeing themselves as actors in a long-lasting sacred struggle between oppressors and protectors, Northern American sanctuary activists considered textual accounts of Hebrew “cities of refuge” and Greco-Roman asylum as precedent. One such insider publication is Ignatius Bau’s *This Ground is Holy* (1985), which defends the legitimacy of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement by arguing that sanctuary is a primordial sacred practice that supersedes the authority of human governments (124). Bau’s text is a prime example of sanctuary rhetoric that communicates the “moral duty to provide assistance” to asylum seekers (Villazor, “What is Sanctuary?” 140). Bau’s account has been cited by sanctuary scholars since the 1980s movement, despite overarching questions regarding the reliability of archival evidence (Shoemaker et al, *Sanctuary and Crime*, 39-40) and the conflation of “asylum” with “sanctuary” practices.

⁴ Aimee Villarreal, “Sanctuariescapes in the North: American Southwest,” *Radical History Review* 2019, no. 135 (October 2019): 44. An additional source that has reinforced this view is Pierre Timbal Duclaux de Martin’s *Le Droit d’Asile* (1939), a reconstructed history of asylum from Greek, Roman, and Hebrew texts to twentieth century practice.

⁵ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 49, 147.

⁶ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

⁷ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 187.

⁸ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 175-76.

⁹ Sergio González, “The Sanctuary Movement,” in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History, June 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.790>. The continued involvement of U.S. and multinational corporations in Latin American affairs has directly contributed to ongoing social, political, and climate crises including the erosion of Indigenous peoples’ access to land, labor abuses, ecological destruction, and mass migration and displacement.

¹⁰ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 39.

¹¹ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 76-78.

¹² Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teachings and Movements* (Mystic: Bayard/Twenty Third Publications, 1998), 8-17.

¹³ David M. Lantigua, “Faith, Liberty, and the Defense of the Poor: Bishop Las Casas in the History of Human Rights,” in *Christianity and Freedom*, eds. Timothy Samuel Shah and Allen D. Hertzke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 177.

¹⁴ Lawrence Clayton, “Bartolomé de Las Casas and the African Slave Trade,” *History Compass* 7, no. 6 (2009): 1526–27.

¹⁵ Bernard V. Brady, *Essential Catholic Social Thought*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 17. The option for the poor refers to an exegetical understanding of the Bible which stresses God’s prioritization of the well-being of those who are poor or hold diminished social power.

¹⁶ David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., *Catholic Social Thought: Encyclicals and Documents from Pope Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 2-3. *Rerum Novarum*, “Of Revolutionary Change,” is also known by the subtitle “On the Conditions of Labor.”

¹⁷ Séverine Deneulin, *Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition: Towards an Integral Ecology* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 26-27.

¹⁸ Mich, *Catholic Social Teachings and Movements*, 31; Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Catholic Social Activism: Progressive Movements in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 22-23.

¹⁹ Brady, *Essential Catholic Thought*, 99-100.

²⁰ Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 84.

²¹ Rachel Ida Buff, “Sanctuary Everywhere: Some Key Words, 1945-Present,” *Radical History Review* 2019, no. 135 (2019): 26.

²² Buff, “Sanctuary Everywhere,” 19.

²³ While organizations such as HIAS primarily focused on resettlement of Jews, particularly in the aftermath of World War II, AFSC adopted an ecumenical approach in Latin America and in other populations, including Palestinians in the newly created nation state of Israel.

²⁴ Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1984), 93-95.

²⁵ Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 223.

²⁶ Phillip Berryman, *Memento of the Living and the Dead: A First-Person Account of Church, Violence, and Resistance in Latin America* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019), 61.

²⁷ Brady, *Essential Catholic Thought*, 117-25.

²⁸ “2ra Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano Medellín” (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1968), https://www.celam.org/conferencias_medellin.php; Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 27-28; Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: United States Involvement in the Rise of Fascism, Torture, and Murder and the Persecution of the Catholic Church in Latin America* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1980), 40-41; Vanilda Paiva, “Catholic Populism and Education in Brazil,” *International Review of Education / Internationale Zeitschrift Für Erziehungswissenschaft / Revue Internationale de l’Education* 41, no. 3/4 (1995): 151–75; Shari J. Stenberg, “Liberation Theology and Liberatory Pedagogies: Renewing the Dialogue” (University of Nebraska, Department of English, 2006), 273, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1195&context=englishfacpubs>. Berryman notes that the Medellín documents included Freirean concepts such as conscientización, and “endorsed pastoral work in basic Christian communities, a term that was just coming into usage.” According to Berryman: “One of the most provocative ideas was the statement that the poor should not simply be integrated into existing structures, which can be oppressive, but should become *autores de su propio progreso*, subjects of their own development.”

²⁹ Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 223; Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, 40.

³⁰ Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 174.

³¹ Kathryn Anderson, *Weaving Relationships: Canada-Guatemala Solidarity* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 11-13; Lernoux, 41.

³² Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 93.

³³ Felipe Ixcot Jalben, “The Culture of the Mayan-Quiché People,” in *Sanctuary: A Resource Guide for Understanding and Participating in the Central American Refugees’ Struggle*, ed. Gary MacEóin (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 144-45.

³⁴ Rigoberta Menchú Tum, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú y Así Me Nació La Conciencia* (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2000), 159. There has been some controversy over the reliability of Menchú’s recorded narrative as the circumstances in which she dictated her story, including her culturally specific use of collective voice and mixed genre style, have generated some misinterpretation and criticism. See Marina Martínez Hernández, “Y así me nació la conciencia la escritura testimonial de Rigoberta Menchú,” Iztapalapa. *Revista de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades* 20, no. 45 (1999): 293–308.

³⁵ With regard to sins... the Catholic religion or any other religion even more conservative than Catholicism teaches that God loves the poor and that God has a great paradise for the poor in heaven. So, one must accept the life that one has. However, we as

Christians must understand that to be Christian does not mean agreeing with all the injustices that are committed against our people. You could say that it is does not mean agreeing with all the discrimination that is committed against a humble people who do not know what it's like to eat meat and are then humiliated worse than horses. We have discovered all of this by seeing everything that has happened in our lives. Clearly, this awakening that exists among Indigenous people did not come about in one day because both Catholic Action and other religions, like the system, have all tried to keep us as we are. So, unless a religion originates from within a people, it remains, for me, a chief weapon of the system. (Translation my own.)

³⁶ Menchú Tum, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, 148-57.

³⁷ María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 23.

³⁸ Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, 65; Robert Tomsho, *The American Sanctuary Movement* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 53.

³⁹ Tomsho, *The American Sanctuary Movement*, 53.

⁴⁰ Lernoux, *Cry of the People*, 80.

⁴¹ William Westerman, "Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement," in *Migration & Identity*, ed. Andor Skotnes (Routledge, 2005), 170-171.

⁴² Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," 24.

⁴³ The official start and end dates for these wars are 1960-1996 (Guatemala) and 1979-1992 (El Salvador). However, both nations have experienced internal conflict in the preceding and following years.

⁴⁴ Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 161.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *Weaving Relationships*, 37; Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, "The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles," *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 108-109. These organizations included El Rescate and CARECEN.

⁴⁶ García, *Seeking Refuge*, 15-16.

⁴⁷ Gastón Espinosa, "Latino Clergy and Churches in Faith-Based Political and Social Action in the United States," in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, eds. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 296; Mario T. García, *Católicos: Resistance and Affirmation in Chicano Catholic History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 171; Luís D León,

“César Chávez in American Religious Politics: Mapping the New Global Spiritual Line,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 862.

⁴⁸ García, *Católicos*, 227. See also: Mario T. García, *Father Luis Olivares, a Biography: Faith Politics and the Origins of the Sanctuary Movement in Los Angeles* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

⁴⁹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, December 2020.

⁵⁰ Héctor Perla, Jr., “Si Nicaragua Venció, El Salvador Vencerá: Central American Agency in the Creation of the U.S.–Central American Peace and Solidarity Movement,” *Latin American Research Review* 43, no. 2 (2008): 138.

⁵¹ García, *Seeking Refuge*, 15-16.

⁵² Central American Refugee Center, now Central American Resource Center.

⁵³ Hector Perla, Jr. and Susan Bibler Coutin, “Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement,” in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspective: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*, eds. Sean Rehaag and Randy Lippert (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 77.

⁵⁴ Perla and Coutin, “Legacies and Origins,” 77-79.

⁵⁵ Van Gosse, “‘El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam’: A New Immigrant Left and the Politics of Solidarity,” in *The Immigrant Left in the United States*, eds. Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 318.

⁵⁶ Gosse, “‘El Salvador is Spanish for Vietnam,’” 303-304.

⁵⁷ González, “The Sanctuary Movement.” Presbyterian minister John Fife and several congregants from Tucson’s Southside Presbyterian Church had experience in Arizona civil rights activism with Latinx and Black communities since the 1960s. Southside would later become a figurehead sanctuary church during the national Sanctuary Movement.

⁵⁸ García, *Seeking Refuge*, 24

⁵⁹ Miriam Davidson, *Convictions of the Heart: Jim Corbett and the Sanctuary Movement* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1988), 141; Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 33. Religious Sanctuary and solidarity supporters were frequently accused of being communist sympathizers and supporting terrorism. During the 1985-86 U.S. v. Aguilar sanctuary trial, state department officials argued that four U.S. women killed in El Salvador in 1980 were not “just nuns” but actually covert FMLN supporters. As evidence they submitted a photo of a separate group of nuns with guns hidden under

their habits. See also: Theresa Keeley, *Reagan's Gun-Toting Nuns: The Catholic Conflict over Cold War Human Rights Policy in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁶⁰ Perla and Coutin, "Legacies and Origins," 82-83. Although relatively unknown to the wider U.S. public, the Central American Solidarity Movement was the largest organized social campaign in the United States since the 1960s Civil Rights era. The movement's "loosely confederated" organization (see above) can be compared in some respects to that of the broader of the twentieth century U.S. civil rights or peace movements, which are also pluralistic and intertwined. Even though Central America solidarity groups did not necessarily share the same political orientation or approach, there was a great deal of interorganizational collaboration and cross-fertilization. Take for example, the movement's yearly Central America Week observances that drew involvement from religious, political, educational, and labor groups.

⁶¹ Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 61.

⁶² Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 32.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 161.

⁶⁴ Dan McKanan, *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 258.

⁶⁵ Perla and Coutin, "Legacies and Origins," 78-79.

⁶⁶ González, "The Sanctuary Movement."

⁶⁷ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 94-95.

⁶⁸ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020; David R. Weber, *Civil Disobedience in America: A Documentary History* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1978): 271. Vietnam-era sanctuary organizing included influential public figures such as Rev. William Sloane Coffin, Jr. and Dr. Benjamin Spock, who were both arrested for their role in assisting draft resisters.

⁶⁹ Buff, "Sanctuary Everywhere," 30.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 24.

⁷¹ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 34; Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 53.

⁷² González, "The Sanctuary Movement."

⁷³ Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 52.

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- ⁷⁴ Westerman, “Central American Refugee Testimonies,” 170-71.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 174, 177.
- ⁷⁶ González, “The Sanctuary Movement.”
- ⁷⁷ Research contributor in discussion with the author, December 2020.
- ⁷⁸ Mary L. Dohrmann, “Hemming in ‘Harboring’: The Limits of Liability under 8 U.S.C. § 1324 and State Harboring Statutes,” *Columbia Law Review* 115, no. 5 (2015): 1224; Valerie Munson, “On Holy Ground: Church Sanctuary in the Trump Era,” *Southwestern Law Review* 47 (2017): 54-55.
- ⁷⁹ Perla, “Si Nicaragua Venció,” 137-38.
- ⁸⁰ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 25, 157.
- ⁸¹ Robin Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 14.
- ⁸² Ann Crittenden, *Sanctuary: A Story of American Conscience and the Law in Collision* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 34-35.
- ⁸³ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, qtd. 49.
- ⁸⁴ Westerman, “Central American Refugee Testimonies,” 177.
- ⁸⁵ Perla, “Si Nicaragua Venció,” 137-38.
- ⁸⁶ Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary* 5, 60; Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.
- ⁸⁷ Chinchilla, Hamilton, and Loucky, “The Sanctuary Movement,” 107.
- ⁸⁸ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 25.
- ⁸⁹ Susan Bibler Coutin, *The Culture of Protest: Religious Activism and the U.S. Sanctuary Movement* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 225.
- ⁹⁰ Coutin, *The Culture of Protest*, 207.
- ⁹¹ Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, 58-59. According to the authors, the real comparisons to conductors of the Underground Railroad were not White, Anglo-American activists, but rather female Guatemalan and Salvadoran leaders such as Rigoberta Menchú, Yolanda de la Luz, Mama Aquin, Lil Milagro, and La Guadalupe.

⁹² Crittenden, *Sanctuary*, 122.

⁹³ Some Jews found resonance with CEBs in the practice of *havurot*, “small Jewish fellowships” that were intended to reinvigorate Jewish community life and integrative religious study. In Philadelphia, *havurot* have been important vehicles for Jewish participation during both the 1980s and twenty-first century sanctuary movements. See Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 48-51; Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 319-22.

⁹⁴ Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 23-27.

⁹⁵ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 132, 228n15. An example of this type of reflection is Robert McAfee Brown’s *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes* (1984).

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 132-33.

⁹⁷ Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement*, 81.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 115.

⁹⁹ Leon Klenicki, “The Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Jewish Exploration,” *American Jewish Archives* 35, no. 1 (1983): 27–39. In a discussion of Gutiérrez’s “one-dimensional” reading of the Book of Exodus, Klenicki sharply critiques the Catholic Church in Latin America for its lack of constructive dialogue with Jews and for reinforcing anti-Semitism in its ecumenical efforts (36-37).

¹⁰⁰ Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 48-51, 74; Dana Evan Kaplan, *Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 48-49, 267-72; Arthur Waskow, “The Torah Roots of Sanctuary,” 1985, private collection. As Kaplan notes, Philadelphia was an important center for the Jewish Renewal movement, with “many progressive-thinking young religious Jews.”

¹⁰¹ Michael Berenbaum, “Claiming Responsibility,” in *Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role*, ed. Sarah Goldstein, Glenn Stein, and David Saperstein (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1987), 33; Coutin, *The Culture of Protest*, 80, 204.

¹⁰² The term “Shoah” will be used here instead of the more common “Holocaust,” to differentiate from ideologies of divine right put forth by certain neo-nazi groups and other antisemitic Christian nationalist organizations. For more on this subject, see: Zev Garber, “The Slaughter of Six Million Jews: A Holocaust or a Shoah?,” *TheTorah.com*, accessed December 16, 2022, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-slaughter-of-six-million-jews-a-holocaust-or-a-shoah>. The term’s specificity also allows recognition that

genocide, or holocaust, is a human tragedy experienced by more than one group of people.

¹⁰³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Rachael Kamel, “Feminism, Jewish Identity, and Jewish Dissent: American Jewish Women’s Voices on Middle East Peace, 1982-2007” (Master’s Thesis, Philadelphia, Temple University, 2008), 6, 32.

¹⁰⁵ As will be discussed in chapter four, many Jews were uncomfortable with certain political aims of the Sanctuary Movement, particularly public opposition to U.S. policy and the State of Israel’s approach to Central America. Humanitarian appeals, therefore, were deemed most effective in countering this initial discomfort.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Goldstein and Glenn Stein, *Providing Sanctuary: The Jewish Role*, ed. David Saperstein (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1987), 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, *Providing Sanctuary*, 30-31.

¹⁰⁸ Aurora Camacho de Schmidt, “Introduction: Sanctuary for Central American Refugees in the 1980s” (*The New Sanctuary Movement, Promise or Peril?* Swarthmore College, March 22, 2017), unpublished manuscript, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Jon Sobrino, “Bearing with One Another in Faith,” in *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 3.

¹¹⁰ Lorentzen, *Women in the Sanctuary Movement*, 58.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 70-71.

¹¹² Golden and McConnell, *Sanctuary*, qtd. 169.

¹¹³ Ronald J. Ostrow, “Clergy, Nuns Charged with Alien Smuggling: 16 Persons Indicted in Crackdown on Growing Sanctuary Effort for Central American Refugees,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1985, Home Edition edition, sec. 1.

¹¹⁴ J. Michael Kennedy, “Two Convicted of Smuggling Salvadorans, Vow to Continue Sanctuary Refugee Work,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1985, sec. B. The first trial, decided in Houston in 1985, resulted in convictions for Stacey Lynn Merkt and Jack Elder, two staff members of the Casa Óscar Romero border shelter in San Benito, Texas. A Salvadoran man who had been assisted by Merkt and Elder agreed to testify against them after being told by U.S. Border Patrol that they would reconnect him to his family in Washington, D.C. if he assisted with investigation.

¹¹⁵ “U.S. Indicts 16 on Alien Aid Charges: Clerics in Group Accused of Illegally Giving Sanctuary,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1985, Late Final Edition edition, sec. 1.

¹¹⁶ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

¹¹⁷ Westerman, “Central American Refugee Testimonies,” 179.

¹¹⁸ Margaret Power and Julie A. Charlip, “Introduction: On Solidarity,” *Latin American Perspectives* 36, no. 6 (2009): 3.

¹¹⁹ Perla and Coutin, “Legacies and Origins,” 82-83.

CHAPTER 3

“WE ARE PILGRIMS AMONG YOU”: SANCTUARY AS MISSION IN EXILE

It is impossible to know the full extent of the Sanctuary Movement's reach in southeastern Pennsylvania during the 1980s. Countless Central Americans moved through the Philadelphia area during a migration crisis spurred by political instability and endemic violence. Like their counterparts displaced to other regions of Northern America, exiles and refugees who came to and through Philadelphia carried with them an array of varied and flexible goals. Some arrived with often illusory hopes of political asylum in the United States or Canada, while others held steadfast in their desire return to their home countries and deliberately chose not to pursue legal asylum status. Some Central Americans provided instrumental leadership in sanctuary and solidarity work but remained out of the public eye due to safety and privacy concerns.¹ Others were less politically involved and quietly encountered sympathetic individuals and religious groups through established and improvised migration routes. Still more had limited or no contact with Northern American religious organizers and relied on other resources, including family members already living abroad.

Among the millions who became displaced and traveled north, those most dedicated to public activism often carried with them a sense of mission greater than their personal goals. Those who were more politically active engaged in deliberate strategies to connect with certain influencers in Northern America, including religious communities. The involvement of these sympathetic Northern Americans helped provide safe passage and access to political lobbying that brought greater awareness to the United States government's support for repressive military regimes in Guatemala and El Salvador. In

Philadelphia, Central Americans found a well-established religious, political, and educational infrastructure that could support their cause. Though they often faced exclusion and invisibility in the Sanctuary Movement,² Central American activists attempted to utilize the circumstances of their exile for the common good of their families and home communities. This chapter, which examines the early years of public sanctuary activism in Philadelphia, will explore selected aspects of Philadelphia's history of religious movements, and some of the ways in which certain Central American organizers were able to graft themselves into this complex landscape to bring attention to the crises affecting their homelands.

Abolition and Sanctuary in the Quaker City

Dominic Vitiello rightly observes that Philadelphia's Sanctuary Movement "grew out of, and then morphed back into, a set of transnational solidarity movements."³ Foundational among these movements were historical campaigns to end the enslavement of people with African heritage, including the Underground Railroad and other community-generated mutual aid projects. The international abolitionist movement was deeply tied to the inherently global character of the Philadelphia region, where African and European diasporas worked together, adjacently, and at times, in opposition, to one another to end the practice of slavery and slave trading in the Americas. These somewhat uneasy relationships, marked by complicated entanglements with race, religion, and blood capitalism, would impact local and national Sanctuary Movement ideology and practice centuries later.

Although the Philadelphia region has long been culturally and religiously diverse, its urban center bears the moniker "Quaker City" due to the influence of the Society of

Friends on its development. Conceived as a sanctuary city for White Christian European settlers, Philadelphia was formally established as a colonial settlement in seventeenth century Lënapehòkink by William Penn,⁴ a Quaker aristocrat and son of a politically influential English admiral.⁵ Philadelphia's founding, along with the new colonial province of Pennsylvania, did not occur in an unpopulated wilderness but rather on the ancient homeland of the Lenni Lenape and other Indigenous peoples. Prior to Penn's arrival, culturally diverse African and European migrants had also sporadically settled in the region through enslavement, indenture, and voluntary migration. Cognizant of the colonial violence endured by Indigenous peoples in the New World, Penn wrote poetically about his "Holy Experiment" and the utopian "City of Brotherly Love" where certain European settlers might exist in harmony with each other and with Native peoples.⁶ Ironically, these settlers, many of whom were refugees, repeated the persecution they experienced and created refugees out of the Indigenous peoples they encountered. Indigenous individuals and communities who endured this encroachment engaged in deliberate strategies of survival during the subsequent centuries, including armed resistance, partial assimilation, intermarriage, and hidden identity.⁷

Like most North Atlantic settlements, Philadelphia remained relatively small and was viewed with some condescension by European elites, even well into the nineteenth century.⁸ Despite its second-class status, Philadelphia would continue to grow in influence as an American center of religion and trade, as it became increasingly pluralistic through a milieu of Indigenous, African, and European communities created through various migration circumstances, including enslavement, indenture, poverty, and persecution. After the Civil War, the imposition of Jim Crow and the Industrial

Revolution created an explosive wave of immigration, as millions of African American refugees fled the U.S. South during the Great Migration, accompanied by increasing migration from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, and eastern and southern Europe, including Jewish communities fleeing genocidal violence. In every one of these migrant communities, community-produced religious organizations would have a central role in providing stability and solace, as well as critical organizing spaces and platforms oriented toward community protection and social integration.

Despite its early diversity, the Penn family's political control over the settlement enabled the region's wealthiest Quakers to exert disproportionate social and financial influence until at least the latter years of the nineteenth century. This oligarchy contributed to the mythologization of Penn as a model of progressivism and religious freedom,⁹ despite Penn's apparently uncritical participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and his role in the displacement and genocide of Indigenous communities. These injustices did not go unnoticed by his European contemporaries, including, notably, a small number of Dutch-German Quaker settlers who drafted the 1688 Germantown Quaker Petition Against Slavery, the first abolitionist document issued by a European religious body in the Americas. European settler support for the abolitionist movement would continue to grow in Philadelphia, as a small subset of radical Quakers including Antoine Bénézet (Anthony Benezet), Benjamin Lay, and Francis Pastorius, became more vocal in their condemnation of Quaker slaveholding and demanded a broadscale end to human bondage. As European settler participation in the abolitionist movement grew, radical White Quakers and those from other religious backgrounds partnered with Black American organizers to provide safe shelter for individuals fleeing slavery and publicly

campaigns for legally inscribed abolition. In nineteenth-century Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as increasing numbers of refugees arrived from the U.S. South, both Black and White Underground Railroad coordinators utilized church buildings (including Quaker meetinghouses and private homes) as railroad stations.¹⁰

By the 1980s, the Underground Railroad had become evidence for an exceptionalist mythology of the steady progressivist arc of U.S. history, in which White abolitionists from Quaker and other religious backgrounds played a leading role. This selective remembrance preserved a sense of moral rectitude that was particularly important to White organizers of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, as the Underground Railroad became a foundational precedent for sanctuary work.¹¹ While it is true that certain White abolitionists supported community-produced efforts, Black leaders had a primary role in creating and sustaining the Underground Railroad as part of their strategic efforts for self-liberation.¹² Well before the twentieth century Latin American base community movement, Black theologies of liberation had formed a sustaining pillar of African diasporic life in the Americas, as countless people “sought to transform their status as chattel and stateless aliens into that of actual citizens” in the societies in which they lived.¹³ Philadelphia, a North/South border region and major colonial trade port, was from its earliest days of settlement a center for Black culture, religion, and commerce. Amidst extreme colonial violence, Philadelphia’s Black communities, who represented diverse social circumstances, religious backgrounds, and regional origins,¹⁴ formed a powerful network of mutual aid intended to build African American safety, wealth, and citizenship.¹⁵ The Railroad and its goal of sanctuary, therefore, were primarily expressions of community-produced mutual support with profoundly religiopolitical

roots, including Philadelphia's Free African Society, co-founded by Black Methodist ministers Absalom Jones and Richard Allen.¹⁶ This foundation would become obscured in dominant narratives as White abolitionist writings and remembrances created an "embellished" mythology that overemphasized the role of White abolitionists and diminished the personhood of fugitives as that of solely "helpless, frightened passengers."¹⁷

AFSC and Interreligious Solidarity

As Jim Crow took hold after the U.S. Civil War and the Great Migration ensued, a different sort of interracial work emerged among Quakers and other religious activists, one that intersected with the growing peace movement and emerging forms of inquiry intended to address the tumultuous impacts of industrialization and societal discord.¹⁸ By 1900, U.S. American Quakers had developed substantial "social and theological connections" with mainline Protestant denominations, which planted the seeds of an ecumenical religious pacifism that would later grow into a distinct culture with its own forms of communication, rituals, music, and dress.¹⁹ One such product of this era was the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), founded in 1917 as a subgroup within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to facilitate alternative service for religious conscientious objectors during World War I. After the war, AFSC gradually evolved into an independent, ecumenical organization dedicated to furthering a global peace witness, social reform, and humanitarian causes. During this time, AFSC rapidly built upon pre-existing Quaker relief and missionary work in the United States and Europe, and initiated new programs in Mexico, Central America, and Palestine.²⁰

By 1950, Quakers comprised only about one-third of AFSC's staff,²¹ and AFSC had developed an extensive portfolio of international and domestic projects wherein cross-cultural cooperation and integrated leadership were prioritized, but not always fully realized.²² Despite these ongoing structural dynamics, African Americans, particularly Quaker intellectual and draft resistor Bayard Rustin, had an outsized impact on the organization as AFSC broadened its longstanding emphasis on "cross-cultural understanding" and "race relations" into an internationalist framework.²³ In 1955, AFSC published the seminal essay, *Speak Truth to Power*, a Cold War critique based on an articulation of anti-racist pacifism, co-authored by Rustin, who later became known for his international human rights advocacy.²⁴ (Rustin, who was openly gay, also worked through extremely repressive circumstances to facilitate Quaker involvement in Civil Rights activism, while influencing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s internationalist pacifism and engineering the 1963 March on Washington.)²⁵

AFSC also applied its antiracist internationalist focus to Central America as it attempted to reshape the role of its foreign workers there. In the mid-1970s, AFSC hired two former Catholic missionaries, Angela and Phillip Berryman, as Quaker International Affairs Representatives in Guatemala to document U.S. interference, human rights abuses, and ecological destruction in Central America, and to coordinate non-governmental and religious relief efforts.²⁶ The Berrymans met with a range of Central American and foreign labor and human rights activists, relief workers, Catholic missionaries, academics, and journalists, and regularly shared their findings with AFSC's Philadelphia office. The office would then distribute their reports to religious, human rights, and development organizations, who "understood who was preparing these

reports, but... agreed not to cite them” due to the risk of being classed as “subversive” by the Guatemalan and Salvadoran militaries.²⁷ In 1978, the Berrymans returned briefly to the United States where they spoke with urgency to small audiences in several cities:

We felt impelled to try to alert our audiences to the rising tide of violence that was all around us. Central America aroused little interest: at a noontime brown-bag lunch organized at the University of Colorado Denver campus, only one person showed up. The organizers...joked that he was probably CIA. Within a year a revolution would come to power in the region, U.S. government involvement would deepen, and the Central America crisis would be in the headlines for a decade.²⁸

In 1980, as the political situation in Guatemala continued to deteriorate, the Berrymans moved their young family to Philadelphia where Angela remained on AFSC staff as a national Peace Division coordinator and Phillip worked as an independent author and translator.²⁹ Both Berrymans would fill a crucial role in the coming decade in providing educational outreach regarding Central America and supporting the growing Central America solidarity movement, including sanctuary activism.

Public Sanctuary in Philadelphia: The Makings of a Movement

Although its connection to the larger Sanctuary Movement is unclear, the first Philadelphia area religious organization to provide *public* sanctuary during the 1980s was likely Fellowship Farm, a Quaker-initiated interracial cooperative. Founded in 1951 by Marjorie Penney, the farm, an outgrowth of the Young People’s Interracial Fellowship of Philadelphia, was closely linked to AFSC in its history and mission for advancing civil rights, growing intercultural understanding, and countering antisemitism.³⁰ By the early 1980s, as the national Sanctuary Movement began to coalesce, the farm had already supported over one hundred Salvadoran, Cuban, and Haitian asylum seekers with legal

assistance and material needs.³¹ With assistance from the Red Cross, AFSC, and other organizations, the farm hosted displaced individuals who worked as agricultural laborers and facilitated community programming in exchange for room and board.³² In these early years, the practice of sanctuary had not yet attracted the deeply politicized gaze that it would garner in subsequent years, and Central Americans remained largely out of the public spotlight. Consequently, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) did not prioritize prosecuting religious organizations like Fellowship Farm for assisting undocumented travelers,³³ instead focusing on border control and selective employer enforcement.³⁴

This would soon change as Central Americans stepped out of the shadows and allied with AFSC and other U.S.-based religious groups who became a powerful amplifier for Central American criticisms of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America.³⁵ On July 5, 1983, a group of Salvadoran activists left New York City for an eighteen-day march to Washington, D.C.³⁶ While undocumented Salvadorans had already become highly organized by this time (mainly in California), the march appears to have been their first major event on the U.S. East Coast, signaling the entrance of Central American activists into the U.S. public sphere where they hoped to expand their base of Northern American allies.³⁷ On July 11th, the caravan arrived in Philadelphia and rallied at City Hall, where they were joined by local allies, including David Fattah from the House of Umoja and Philadelphia City Council member David Cohen.³⁸ Caravan members stayed overnight in the city, and shared dinner and conversation with members of the Tabernacle United Church and other supporters in West Philadelphia.³⁹

One of the caravan's leaders was nineteen-year-old Saúl Solórzano,⁴⁰ who fled San Salvador two years prior, leaving behind his parents and four sisters. In El Salvador, Solórzano had been a university student involved in organizing base communities (CEBs) at the Catedral Metropolitana de San Salvador with Archbishop Óscar Romero.⁴¹ One night, an *esquadrón de la muerte* intercepted Solórzano on his way home:⁴²

I heard the first bullet, but I didn't think it was for me. It was usual to hear these noises. The third bullet was a strike in the electric post and I was there so I was very scared.... When I got in the house, all my family was like this (he folded his hands as if in prayer) and shaking... My family said, "You can't stay here." They took me to my uncle's house. Next day I came home and then my little sister told my mother, "Mummy, the soldiers are looking for Saul." My mother took down all the pictures of me on the wall and hid them. She gave me 10 *colones* (about \$4) and told me to stay away... I met my mother in a restaurant in San Salvador.... She was very sick - over me. She had heart trouble, she was very thin. She asked me if I would leave the country and I said, "But how? Where?" She told me, "Your sister's boyfriend is going to New York, he has two brothers in Boston. Go with him." We left on a bus, three or four days up to Mexico City. The bus was full going up to Mexico, but nobody except five or six, including the driver, returned to Salvador.... Everybody, when they arrived in Mexico, tried to talk like Mexicans. When we were riding buses in Mexico, we carried newspapers in front of our face.⁴³

Solórzano and his companions eventually made their way through Mexico and, with the help of Mexican acquaintances, traveled across the border into California.⁴⁴ In Los Angeles, Solórzano quickly became involved with other young Salvadorans who were organizing solidarity campaigns for those affected by the Salvadoran civil war.⁴⁵ From there, he traveled across the United States, city to city, where he helped grow immigrant leadership and build alliances with religious groups and other human rights supporters.⁴⁶

By the time Solórzano arrived in Philadelphia with the 1983 caravan, several area individuals and religious communities, mostly Quaker and Catholic, were already quietly assisting Latin American refugees in their homes and engaging in international solidarity

work.⁴⁷ Their early involvement led to the formation of Central America Refugee Action (CARA), a coalition of religious groups and individuals that would serve as the main organizing vehicle for Northern American sanctuary and solidarity activists in the region.⁴⁸ Although the coalition was broadly ecumenical, Quaker meetings and organizations would form a core pillar of support for CARA's educational outreach and funding. (By 1983, AFSC's Philadelphia staff, with the help of regional AFSC offices in Chicago and Tucson, was co-sponsoring ecumenical trainings for religious groups interested in participating in the Sanctuary Movement. At these trainings, Angela Berryman provided "How to Workshops" in which she introduced audiences to the political circumstances involving Central America, the reasons for the migration crisis, and the rationale and structure of becoming a sanctuary community.)⁴⁹

With the assistance of CARA and AFSC,⁵⁰ the young Solórzano stayed behind in Philadelphia where he established the Interfaith Office on Human Rights and Accompaniment in the nearby offices of the Christian Association of the University of Pennsylvania.⁵¹ Although he chose not to enter public sanctuary with a Northern American religious community, Solórzano played a major role in helping CARA expand their coalitional presence in Philadelphia.⁵² The Social Action Committee of Tabernacle United Church, located adjacent to the university's campus, had already received an invitation from local and national sanctuary organizers to join the nascent Sanctuary Movement.⁵³ At Tabernacle, Solórzano and other Salvadorans engaged in educational and political outreach and contributed to the congregation's discernment process. Tabernacle members also formed their own sanctuary committee, co-led by two university students with ties to Witness for Peace and other Christian social justice

organizations. This committee, with the help of the Interfaith Offices and key partners such as Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America (CRTFCA) and AFSC, embarked on a study of Central American political history and explored the religious roots of sanctuary.⁵⁴ When put to vote, the congregational decision to join the Sanctuary Movement was nearly unanimous, with only a few abstentions.⁵⁵ On March 4, 1984, eight months after Solórzano's arrival in Philadelphia, Tabernacle United Church became the first public sanctuary host congregation in the Philadelphia area.

Tabernacle's sanctuary vote would quickly be put to use. On March 20, 1984, a few days before the fourth anniversary of the assassination of Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero, the Ixk'oj't family and several dozen CRTFCA activists stopped in Philadelphia during their caravan trip from Chicago to Weston Priory (Bennington, Vermont).⁵⁶ While visiting the city, the Guatemalan family held a news conference, stayed the night at Tabernacle Church, and attended a church dinner at First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG). During public appearances, the entire Ixk'oj't family, except for their baby, was masked with bandannas and scarves, a common sanctuary practice intended to thwart INS detection and protect family members back home.⁵⁷ At the news conference, Elena and Felipe Ixk'oj't spoke to the audience with the assistance of an accompanying Maryknoll translator. Elena, a "small, self-possessed" Mayan weaver, narrated her family's story in the language of biblical metaphor:

We are pilgrims among you. As Joseph and Mary became refugees to protect the lives of their child Jesus, who when he grew up worked for the people of his pueblo (village), so now I think of the future of my children, whom I hope will return someday to Guatemala.⁵⁸

Elena's recorded *testimonio* provides evidence for the extensive biblical and theological repertoire that Central Americans brought to the Sanctuary Movement. Here, Elena utilizes the Holy Family's flight to Egypt and the Christian pilgrim archetype to demonstrate the legitimacy of their cross-border journey.⁵⁹ These references were no doubt carefully selected as they reinforced traditional religious imperatives to aid refugees and show hospitality to outsiders. Her statements are also revealing of the ways that Latin American liberative practices encouraged a deeply personal approach to the Bible in which people could envision themselves as apostolic actors. Like Elena, Felipe also relayed the story of their involuntary flight, but carefully emphasized that he was not an "economic refugee." In Guatemala, Felipe had been a Catholic lay organizer where he had been engaged in literacy outreach with seventeen other Mayan teachers. Local army personnel interpreted these actions as "subversive" and killed all seventeen men, leaving Felipe as the only survivor. Felipe interpreted this ordeal as an example of the persecution shared by all "Indians" like himself, who by reading the Bible had come to believe "that we are all equal, and that no one is born better than another."⁶⁰

The central purpose of such events was to educate the Northern American public regarding the U.S. role in Central America and the reasons for the migration crisis.⁶¹ *Testimonios* such as Elena and Felipe's were also intended to be transformational encounters, for both the speakers and the listeners alike, reflecting a long and varied tradition within Latin American cultures. As Ana Forcinito explains, *testimonios* are intended to provide an unmediated narration from a collective perspective, highlighting "the urgency to bear witness to an event or series of events perpetrated with the aim of eliminating a community or a group (a narrative linked to documenting human rights

violations and genocide).”⁶² The result is a living, embodied story that “emerges from the critical examination of one’s own life” and creates a historical memory for people who are “confronted by power and becoming empowered.”⁶³ These testimonios would also have a lasting effect on Northern American activists, who were carried by the urgency of these stories, as well as the sophistication and intentionality of the messengers. A little over a month after the Salvadoran caravan left the city, a group of Northern American sanctuary and solidarity activists intercepted U.S. Secretary of State Jeane Kirkpatrick at an event hosted at Philadelphia’s Bellevue-Stratford Hotel. As Kirkpatrick spoke, two women wrapped in shawls stunned audience members with a sudden burst of loud prayers. As protestors assembled outside the venue, Temple University professor Arthur Schmidt pointedly decried U.S. intervention in Central America as “based on contempt, because it assumes that people in the region can do nothing by themselves.”⁶⁴

A “New Underground Railroad”: Public Sanctuary Accelerates

In April 1984, shortly before the Kirkpatrick encounter, Salvadoran activists Ernesto and Linda Fuentes entered sanctuary with Tabernacle United Church. While Ernesto and Linda were not the first Central American participants in Philadelphia’s Sanctuary Movement, their longer stay and sustained engagement with a variety of partners helped spark an acceleration of sanctuary and solidarity activism in the area. Within a year of their arrival, several other local religious bodies had announced that they, too, would become sanctuary hosts or sanctuary supporting communities.⁶⁵ These groups would join nearly two hundred religious organizations in the United States who comprised the Sanctuary Movement at the time.⁶⁶

Philadelphia was not the first sanctuary stop for Ernesto and Linda. Like many others who traveled along the sanctuary network's "underground railroad," the couple had already worked with several congregations and religious organizations in Mexico and the United States prior to arriving in the City of Brotherly Love. Linda and Ernesto, then in their mid-20s, had also been involved in community organizing work in El Salvador, an endeavor motivated by their religious convictions and sense of community concern. In El Salvador, Ernesto taught economics at a night school and worked at a camp for internally displaced people—highly dangerous work which eventually led to his decision to seek refuge with an interfaith theological community in Mexico City.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Linda, a union organizer in El Salvador's banking and textile sectors, began receiving threats and her apartment was subsequently searched by the Salvadoran military.⁶⁸ After several close friends and associates were tortured and killed, she soon discovered that her name was also on a death list:

Four of the bodies were found October 8th – they had been strangled and tortured.... That day, the bodies appeared on a television report. After playing the national anthem and showing the flag, the announcer said these were Communists who had been killed by a death squad.⁶⁹

Ultimately, she perceived only two options for her survival: "Leave the country or join the guerilla movement."⁷⁰ After praying for the "signs and opportunity" to make the best decision, Linda chose to leave El Salvador. She met Ernesto in Mexico City, where he had already encountered the Sanctuary Movement through a Catholic nun who had provided him with a place to stay. Ernesto, whose English skills and theological training made him an attractive candidate for the movement, recalled receiving the following proposition: "Would you be interested in talking to somebody? Instead of being in Mexico, doing nothing or waiting, you can go and do something for justice in the United

States.”⁷¹ Ernesto and Linda met with Quaker organizer Jim Corbett and other sanctuary leaders, who discussed with them the parallels between the Sanctuary Movement and Harriet Tubman’s work with the Underground Railroad.⁷² After a period of discernment, they decided to join this “new underground railroad” out of their “commitments and [their] goal to do whatever was needed to seek peace and a better life in El Salvador.”⁷³ Corbett, who would become legendary for his rugged disposition, personally accompanied Ernesto and Linda across the forty-mile trek along the U.S.-Mexico border through the Sonoran Desert.⁷⁴

After crossing into the United States, Linda and Ernesto made their way to Southside Presbyterian Church in Tucson, a well-known early sanctuary congregation pastored by Rev. John Fife, and traveled throughout the area speaking to university students, religious groups, and other organizations.⁷⁵ By January 1984, the couple had moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where they lived in sanctuary with Immanuel Lutheran Church, a majority African American congregation on the city’s north side and the first congregation within 300 miles to join the Sanctuary Movement.⁷⁶ The small congregation received Ernesto and Linda warmly and their support remained firm, even after the church began receiving threats from the Ku Klux Klan.⁷⁷ At the invitation of Rev. Lucius Walker, Linda and Ernesto also participated in Central America Week in Washington, D.C., where they encountered a range of solidarity groups, including labor unions.⁷⁸ After a few months in St. Louis, Linda and Ernesto moved eastward, and eventually connected with Tabernacle sanctuary organizers who drove them to Philadelphia.⁷⁹

In Philadelphia, they were greeted enthusiastically, as nearly 1,000 people gathered at Tabernacle church to welcome them as they walked down the aisles, serving

communion.⁸⁰ While most of their sanctuary contacts continued to be White, non-Hispanic or Latine partners, in Philadelphia, Ernesto and Linda encountered a wider breadth of partners than in previous locations, including some Hispanic and Latine community organizers.⁸¹ As before, most of their sanctuary activities consisted of speaking engagements. They met with numerous student, religious, labor and government audiences, which were arranged by Tabernacle's sanctuary committee and other solidarity organizations, including Witness for Peace.⁸² From Linda's perspective, the flurry of activity showed that they were desirable speakers due to their "very fresh" perspective on what was going on in Central America and their ability to provide more detailed accurate "alternative news" within and beyond mainstream media outlets.⁸³

Ernesto, for example, shared the following frank assessment with *The Philadelphia*

Inquirer:

[U.S. policy] is clearly not to protect democracy, but to protect economic interests in the region. Among the corporations in El Salvador are Texas Instruments, General Foods, General Motors, Maidenform, Max Factor, Firestone, John Deere, Goodyear, Coca-Cola and McDonalds. And there are a lot of U.S. coffee companies that depend on the coffee exports. It appears [to be] a total lie that the U.S. government is involved to improve things, because since 1980, when the civil war began, the situation for the people—politically, economically and socially—has gotten worse, not better.⁸⁴

Most in-person audiences were receptive, though there were a few tense encounters with individuals who would accuse them (at times quite vocally, in front of the entire group) of being Communists,⁸⁵ a charge they emphatically rejected.⁸⁶ A Tabernacle organizer who accompanied them to many of these events once asked if the repetitive nature of giving their testimonio and educating the public created traumatic experiences for them. They responded that the engagements were welcome as long as they had a friendly

audience; in that environment, they found a meaningful and healing experience.⁸⁷ One year after their arrival in Philadelphia, Linda told a reporter: “We have big hopes.... We come from terror, and we are not free from terror here. We have no alternative but to fight. You can’t just sit down and be depressed. It’s better to live active than die depressed.”⁸⁸

“We Must Be Firm”

Meanwhile, Northern Americans in other Philadelphia area religious communities were also preparing for their entry into sanctuary activism. In the city’s Germantown section, the Social Concerns committee of the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG) considered their sanctuary response with other allied congregations in northwest Philadelphia. An early encounter with two Salvadoran men appears to have strongly influenced the direction of the church. In 1983,⁸⁹ the FUMCOG committee was asked to host two young Salvadoran men who were travelling to Canada. The men stayed overnight at the church, had dinner with FUMCOG members, spoke with them about their torture, arrest, and escape, and solicited their help in ending U.S.-involved political repression in Central America. One committee member later remembered this “profoundly moving” visit as a defining moment, an encounter that “opened [their] eyes” and galvanized their resolve to become a sanctuary church.⁹⁰ Not long after the men’s departure, FUMCOG Social Concerns members had dinner with [committee?] from the nearby St. Vincent de Paul Catholic parish.⁹¹ At the dinner, St. Vincent members asked for an update on FUMCOG’s sanctuary deliberations, to which a FUMCOG member responded enthusiastically:

I said, famously, “Yes, we're going to do sanctuary. We're going to do it in about six weeks,” and all the people on my committee were like, “What did [they] say?? What are you talking about? We're nowhere [close]!” But I believe, you know, it's like if you say it, you can make it happen. You know, if you're really committed to it, you can make it happen. So anyway, it wasn't six weeks. It was like, another year.⁹²

Over the next several months, with the assistance of CRTFCA, the Tucson refugee support group (trsg) and other organizations,⁹³ the FUMCOG committee engaged in carefully researched efforts to persuade a somewhat hesitant and “fearful” congregation to become a sanctuary congregation. Similar to Tabernacle church’s response, the FUMCOG congregation eventually voted overwhelmingly in favor of becoming a public sanctuary church. (Only a few withheld their affirmation due to concerns about the potential for government action against the church and family members.)⁹⁴

Preparations soon began for a displaced family’s arrival. Out of all the Central Americans who participated in the Sanctuary Movement in the Philadelphia area, the Morelos family would become the most publicly visible, which created both opportunities and challenges for Central and Northern Americans alike. As with Ernesto and Linda, the Morelos family’s journey to Philadelphia involved several stops in Mexico and the United States, and an evolving strategy for safety, survival, and activism. Joel Morelos had grown up in southern Guatemala on a sugarcane plantation, and was a union carpenter and vocal opponent of the U.S.-supported Guatemalan military regime. At night school during the late 1970s, Joel became a student group leader,⁹⁵ resulting in his kidnapping and torture during an anti-government protest.⁹⁶ Despite this experience, Joel remained in his leadership roles, including his union organizing work.⁹⁷ He later reflected: “I was born and raised in a very bad situation.... I [was very lucky] because I had food. A lot of people didn't have that. Seeing that situation pushed me to be active, to

tell my opinions.”⁹⁸ After his name began to appear on death lists, Joel went into hiding as pro-government forces began to massacre people in his town.

In 1983, Joel, now accused of being a Communist sympathizer, fled from Guatemala to Mexico with his wife Gabriela and their young daughter Lucy.⁹⁹ (Meanwhile, Gabriela’s brother, an agricultural union leader, had been killed by government forces, leaving Gabriela’s elderly parents to fend for themselves on their small farm.)¹⁰⁰ While in Mexico, the Morelos family struggled to meet basic needs as they unsuccessfully sought asylum there.¹⁰¹ In 1984, with the help of Northern American-based Sanctuary Movement volunteers Jesús Cruz and Wendy LeWin, along with Mexican volunteers Father Dagoberto Quiñones and Maria del Socorro de Pardo Aguilar from El Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Nogales, Sonora, the Morelos family crossed the international border into Arizona and made their way to Pennsylvania.¹⁰² Unbeknownst to the family and the other sanctuary volunteers, however, Cruz was working as an undercover INS informant in the joint FBI-INS sting “Operation Sojourner.”¹⁰³ This encounter would soon bring the Morelos family, Sanctuary Movement leaders, and Philadelphia sanctuary organizers under INS scrutiny and into the national spotlight.

Like Ernesto and Linda, the family’s decision to enter the United States was driven by an immediate need for survival as well as an engrained sense of Christian mission to help end the violence in Central America. After arriving in the United States, Joel was particularly focused on taking advantage of opportunities to share his story and his faith.¹⁰⁴ FUMCOG sanctuary organizers, including Spanish-speaking members, arranged events wherein Joel would share his testimonio and educate audiences about the

political and social situation in Guatemala. Joel's testimonio was not merely narrative, but also corporeal, as he physically carried his witness in the evidence of his torture at the hands of the Guatemalan military. During his sanctuary activism, Joel frequently exposed his scars to stunned audiences, which generated this newspaper account:

In 1977, after a student march, Morelos was abducted - a fate considered worse than death. He said the gunmen sought information on student organizations that he had been active in. Today, he pulls up the sleeve of his gray-and-white sweater, exposing scars from the gashes on his hands and arms inflicted during the torture. He also suffered a hearing loss.¹⁰⁵

Though detractors occasionally challenged Joel's account,¹⁰⁶ this demonstration appears to have been extremely effective. One FUMCOG sanctuary volunteer remembered Joel's testimonio as remarkably impactful and convincing: "I felt that the message that Joel was giving in that witness was so extraordinary, so important, and I think it really changed a lot of people's hearts, and that the effort was being mirrored all over the country."¹⁰⁷

Initially, the Morelos family lived in the Methodist church's main building, surrounded with 24-hour accompaniment from sanctuary volunteers who provided meals and companionship. Because this intensive environment proved to be a bit "stressful" for the family and the church building did not have adequate heat, the family relocated to an apartment in an "off the road" neighborhood property owned by FUMCOG members Marion and David Brown, in exchange for caretaking work at Marion's childcare center.¹⁰⁸ Only weeks later, in January 1985, Gabriela and Joel received a call from Jesús Cruz, who had traveled with them across the U.S.-Mexico border. Cruz, whom the family considered a treasured friend and whose photo resided on the wall of the family's new apartment,¹⁰⁹ informed them that he and a companion would be traveling to Philadelphia and that they wished to offer a gift for Lucy's birthday.¹¹⁰ Early on the cold morning of

January 14th, after Joel had left for work, Cruz and his companion arrived as promised for a visit with Gabriela and Lucy. The pair presented Lucy's gift, ate birthday cake, and proceeded to arrest the young mother and her child.¹¹¹ Gabriela and Lucy were taken to the federal courthouse in downtown Philadelphia, and Joel turned himself in to authorities later that afternoon.¹¹²

At the time, FUMCOG, led by the Rev. Theodore (Ted) Loder,¹¹³ was a large congregation which counted several business leaders, lawyers, teachers, and social service professionals among its active membership. The congregation, along with other CARA coalition members, also had close ties to certain congressional figures, including Pennsylvania Democratic representatives Bob Edgar (1943-2013) and William Gray (1941-2013), both ordained ministers who provided critical support for Philadelphia-based solidarity work in subsequent years.¹¹⁴ Following the arrests, Rep. Edgar initiated a bipartisan letter from nearly eighty members of the House of Representatives to the Reagan administration, asking for the withdrawal of its request for ten million dollars in additional military aid to Guatemala. Rep. Edgar additionally brought Joel and Gabriela to testify at a congressional hearing in support of religious leaders' arguments that Central American refugees were justified on the basis of "the 1980 Refugee Act's grounds of 'persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution' at home" and that the federal government was violating its own laws by accelerating enforcement efforts.¹¹⁵ The publicized detention of a refugee mother and child in federal prison also drew unexpected comment from Pennsylvania Republican Senator Arlen Specter, a resident of Philadelphia who had largely resisted public alignment with solidarity messaging. A member of the Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Operations, Specter offered a rare,

open criticism that the Morelos family's arrests were "inappropriate" and issued a request for the subcommittee to fully review U.S. asylum policies.¹¹⁶

FUMCOG, the CARA coalition, and sympathetic community organizations were able to arrange for the Morelos family's release on bail and offer legal services to support their ongoing efforts to attain asylum.¹¹⁷ A few months after their release, Joel and Gabriela sent the following message to FUMCOG and Philadelphia area sanctuary organizers, thanking them their work:

You have said, in your different ways of giving support, that we are human beings and that we have the right to live. In addition, you have given us the opportunity to bring our truth to light, telling of the suffering of an entire people who, although wounded, fight, searching for peace through Christian faith...In you, we have seen manifested the power of God; through you, God has shown us mercy. You, too, have come closer to God in understanding what God really wants from each of us. It is a gift to understand such things, because in many minds there is confusion, doubt, and insecurity. The sacred Scriptures say, "Look with diligence at the things of God."¹¹⁸ We have understood what to do in accord with God's call concerning justice, peace, and liberty, and we must be firm, for God has promised always to be at our side.¹¹⁹

Like Elena and Felipe Ixk'oj't's news conference testimonios the year before, Gabriela and Joel's statement provides evidence of identification with a particular subset of biblical narratives, specifically that of the New Testament Epistles.¹²⁰ In addition to the experience of finding refuge with a supportive community, the family's exhortation to "be firm" and search for "the things of God" suggests a confident affinity with the apostolic exiles of the early Christian era. The Epistles, a set of letters attributed to apostolic missionaries who founded the earliest Christian churches, frequently frame persecution as an expected condition for those doing the work of God, and assume an exhortational stance of authority and co-laboring with those under discipleship (training).¹²¹ Likewise, Gabriela and Joel's message expresses a sense of leadership

among Northern Americans in the Sanctuary Movement, including the religiopolitical way they understood their flight from Guatemala, their “fight” for peace, and their hopes for a safe return.

Sanctuary on Trial

On the day of the Morelos family’s arrest, the United States Attorney’s Office in Phoenix, Arizona announced federal indictments of sixteen sanctuary leaders, including six clergy members and women religious. The indictments had been handed down the week prior but remained sealed until INS agents had the opportunity to detain dozens of Central American refugees, including Joel and Gabriela, in order to “hold them as material witnesses.”¹²² Although Philadelphia-based sanctuary coordinators long suspected federal surveillance, the family’s detainment “very suddenly, very clear[ly]” revealed the extent of infiltration into the movement since it occurred in tandem with the arrests of nearly eighty Central and Northern American sanctuary volunteers and participants in Phoenix, Tucson, Seattle, and Rochester, New York.¹²³ Those indicted included Rev. John Fife, Jim Corbett, Wendy LeWin, Maria del Socorro Pardo de Aguilar, and Fr. Ramón Dagoberto Quiñones, all of whom had interacted with the Morelos family (and some with Linda and Ernesto, who were not arrested). These indictments would lead to the second and more prominent of two major sanctuary trials,¹²⁴ where eleven defendants would be tried for illegal transporting undocumented individuals into the United States and “harboring” them in the United States.¹²⁵

Legal observers would later accuse the prosecution as well as presiding Judge Earl Carroll of employing excessive “technical rules” in order to control the outcome of the trial.¹²⁶ Included with the sealed indictments were court-approved directives

prohibiting certain types of evidence and arguments during the trial.¹²⁷ Prior to the arrests, federal prosecutors had already successfully secured motion *in limine* restrictions barring content related to: 1) the free exercise of religion, 2) international and domestic asylum law, 3) appeals to necessity or justification, and 4) lack of criminal intent to violate the law.¹²⁸ The motion *in limine* reflected the desire of the prosecution to present the case, known as U.S. v. Aguilar, as little more than a smuggling ring run by “coyotes,”¹²⁹ in contrast to the defense’s argument that the Sanctuary Movement’s activities demonstrated an instance of conflict between religion and state.¹³⁰ The motion drastically constrained the defense’s goal to show that Operation Sojourner was, in the words of one defense attorney, “a politically motivated persecution of religious people who were assisting victims of civil wars.”¹³¹ Unsuccessful in its attempts to strike the motion, the defense was required to submit all of its trial strategies for judicial review in advance of the trial.¹³² The motion additionally prohibited trial participants from mentioning certain words relating to the aforementioned restrictions, including “religion,” “refugee,” “torture,” “killed,” “terror,” and “death.”¹³³ Joel’s testimony, therefore, was limited to only the “dry-boned details” of his illegal border crossing; other aspects of his story were forbidden in the courtroom.¹³⁴ For a brief moment, however, Joel creatively maneuvered around this obstacle and offered a sliver of testimonio, which occurred during a moment of questioning by the prosecution. When asked about the details of his entry into the United States, Joel responded, “I don’t hear with one ear and that’s because of the torture I was subjected to in Guatemala.”¹³⁵ Though it was ultimately stricken from the record, Joel’s comment reached the jury and national audiences through widely shared news reports.

While the jury ultimately decided to convict most of the defendants, the trial only energized the commitment of sanctuary organizers and created additional opportunities to publicize the goals of the Sanctuary Movement. Susan Coutin argues that the trial itself became a “spectacle” that worked against prosecutorial efforts to recast the Sanctuary Movement as a mundane instance of human smuggling:

Surveillance and prosecution are powerful ways of knowing and therefore produce authoritative accounts of reality. In that individuals (in this case, U.S. officials) never fully control the discourses they deploy, however, being the objects of surveillance and prosecution enables the scrutinized to shape the images that scrutiny produces. As a result, covert observation and criminal trials produce not one but multiple accounts of reality, each of which is granted some authority by the power of the tactics that produced it. Thus, the procedures that produce “official truth” simultaneously call this truth into question.¹³⁶

Sanctuary supporters worked intently to cultivate an alternate set of truths and imagery for public consumption. Unable to present as much evidence during the trial as they had wished, lawyers for the defense sought widespread media coverage in hopes that sympathetic reporting might persuade potential jurors not to convict.¹³⁷ In Philadelphia, where Sanctuary Movement and other solidarity organizers already had well-established relationships with local media, an explosion of coverage ensued in the sixteen months between the arrests and the trial’s conclusion. The city’s major newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, offers a dramatic example. In 1985 alone, the newspaper dedicated space to at least fifteen articles relating to the Sanctuary Movement coverage (compared to eight in 1984, and two in 1983). This increased coverage provided greater visibility for those in sanctuary and enhanced opportunities for attention to their stories, including their religious and political perspectives. One of the most prominent examples is a multipage color feature in the *Inquirer*’s Sunday magazine during the summer of 1985, which

included lengthy interviews with Ernesto, Linda, Joel, Gabriela, and others in public sanctuary with local religious communities. In this piece, Gabriela describes the beauty of Guatemala and its ancient, indigenous heritage:

Did they miss their country? Gabriela, who up to this point had hardly talked at all, reacted immediately to the question. She clasped her heart and said with great feeling, “Oh yes, very, very much. It's such a beautiful country. Lots of mountains, lots of flowers. And in the mountains there are many signs of Mayan Indian culture - ruins of temples, stone tablets with Mayan writings. All so beautiful. . . . More than anything else, we want to live in peace in our country.”¹³⁸

This brief recorded exchange communicates the reporter’s sympathetic attitude toward Central American refugees and affirms the stated temporary nature of the Morelos family’s residency in the United States. While the motives of the journalist are unknown, the resulting portrait was successful for sanctuary supporters in that it sharply contrasted government accusations that solidarity activists were the unwitting accomplices of violent Communist factions and that Central American migration to the U.S. was purely economic.

The manner in which Central Americans were portrayed in certain U.S.-based media accounts during this time was also influenced by a deliberate strategy on the part of the trial’s defense and religious sanctuary organizers. Mainstream media coverage pertaining to the trial overwhelmingly focused on two primary questions centered on arguments for the defense: 1) whether Central American participation in sanctuary activism was precipitated by legitimate refugee status as those fleeing war, and 2) whether Northern American sanctuary workers’ defiance of federal immigration laws merited First Amendment constitutional protection. Despite the targeted arrests of national sanctuary leaders, the INS denied that Operation Sojourner was intended to

destroy the Sanctuary Movement.¹³⁹ Political interpreters likewise interpreted the operation as a largely “symbolic” move that communicated the Reagan administration’s “confrontational, post-election get-tough policy.”¹⁴⁰ Rev. Loder,¹⁴¹ pastor of FUMCOG and sanctuary theologian, likewise remarked that the Sanctuary Movement was “a symbolic statement” created from the duty of a “higher call” to follow God’s law above human laws.¹⁴²

While such themes were present in sanctuary coverage prior to the January 1985 arrests, the subsequent emphasis on these two trial-related legal questions may have contributed to narratives that oversimplified Central American sanctuary participant stories and identities, and further elevated the trope of the deserving, yet dependent refugee in need of benefactor protection. In 1985, FUMCOG members, in concert with six other Methodist sanctuary churches in the U.S., produced the short film, *A Sanctuary Church*, which was distributed nationally to United Methodist churches and other religious groups.¹⁴³ Narrated by Rev. Loder, the film features local television coverage and interviews with Joel, Gabriela, and several Philadelphia-area sanctuary volunteers. While the film’s interviews with Northern American volunteers overwhelmingly emphasize the religious bases and personal convictions that compelled them to action, interview excerpts with Joel and Gabriela also reveal the profound religious sense in which some Central American sanctuary participants understood their displacement, and their motivations for their political work in the United States. At one point in the film, interspersed with footage of guerrilla warfare, Joel recounts the physical and spiritual challenges of their displacement in Mexico, along with their introduction to the Sanctuary Movement:

...uno tiene siente uno que se muere, y máxime cuando yo veía a mi hija que no tenía zapatos, que no tomaba leche, que comía de lo que la gente nos regalaba. Eso era nuestra situación que a veces desmoralizada fe cristiano. Bueno, pues yo acudí con un licenciado que alguien me dijo que fuera con él a pedirle...

[Dialogue stops. Scene switches to war footage in which a soldier can been seen shooting a man. Scene then switches back to Joel.]

...que él tenía alguna representatividad de la ONU y le pedía auxilio y él me dijo que le dejaran nombre y dirección donde yo estaba. En cualquier momento que se pudiera, que él nos iba a ayudar. Entonces nosotros estamos con él porque la estadía en México no era legal...

[Dialogue stops. Scene switches to war footage, with multiple individuals engaged in a shoot-out. Scene then switches back to Joel.]

...Teníamos siempre el miedo de que Migración podía detectarlos y mandarnos de regreso. Gracias a Dios, por medio de un amigo encontré al Santuario, el Movimiento Santuario que está en los Estados Unidos y él me ayudó a que fuéramos a una iglesia. En esa iglesia nos dieron un apoyo para viajar a los Estados Unidos.¹⁴⁴

While Joel's retelling of his spiritually "demoralizing" experience in Mexico culminates with his connection to the Sanctuary Movement, Gabriela appealed to a sense of shared religious identity with Christians in the United States:

As a Christian, I have faith in God and that's why I'm here in sanctuary to tell all our sisters and brothers that they should join together with us so that there might be peace in our country because we're all sisters and brothers, because we're all children of God. And as Christ died for us, so we have to do the same as Him because I have faith in Him and God is with us. I know that one day we'll be able to live in peace.¹⁴⁵

Although the film overwhelmingly centers perspectives that emphasize the importance of U.S. traditions of religious dissent, Joel and Gabriel's recorded statements provide an alternate viewpoint on sanctuary work. Their filmed testimonios detail their experiences with extreme violence and vulnerability, their purpose for joining the Sanctuary Movement, and a call for international religious unity.

Conclusion

At the height of public attention to the Sanctuary Movement, much ado was made about the battle for symbolic power between religious actors and the state. For Salvadorans and Guatemalans who participated in public sanctuary activism in Philadelphia during this time, sanctuary was much more than a symbolic political statement. Rather, the choice to enter and remain in sanctuary reflected efforts to deliberately engage with U.S. voters through religious communities for the purpose of survival and political change. Although the majority of Salvadorans and Guatemalans profiled in this chapter were quite young at the time of their arrival in Philadelphia, most were experienced organizers who had already engaged in religio-political activism in their home communities, as well as Mexico and the United States. Though subject to media, government, and religious distortion, their recorded testimonios reveal a fused political and religious sensibility that challenged colonial portrayals of the refugee as utterly dependent and helpless. Instead, their words and actions communicate a more apostolic sense of self, with notions of dependency grounded in an understanding of collectivity inspired by a common faith in God. As the Sanctuary Movement grew and changed during the latter part of the 1980s, Central American organizers in Philadelphia would continue to push Northern American allies toward a more expansive understanding of sanctuary – one that more fully recognized the capacities of exiles and refugees, including the legitimacy and authority of Central American community leadership.

¹ Hector Jr. Perla and Susan Bibler Coutin, “Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement,” in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspective: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*, eds. Sean Rehaag and Randy Lippert (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013): 74.

² Marta Caminero-Santangelo, “The Voice of the Voiceless: Religious Rhetoric, Undocumented Immigrants, and the New Sanctuary Movement in the United States,” in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspective: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*, eds. Sean Rehaag and Randy Lippert (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 92–105; Serin D. Houston and Charlotte Morse, “The Ordinary and Extraordinary: Producing Migrant Inclusion and Exclusion in US Sanctuary Movements,” *Studies in Social Justice* 11, no. 1 (2017).

³ Domenic Vitiello, “Sanctuary and the City,” *The Metropole* (blog), March 6, 2019, <https://themetropole.blog/2019/03/06/sanctuary-and-the-city/>.

⁴ Lēnapehòkink is the Unami name for the ancient homeland of the Lenape people, some of whom still reside in the area in the present day.

⁵ In 1654, Admiral William Penn, Sr. led the naval forces that seized Jamaica from Spain, thus establishing the island as the center of British slave trading in the Caribbean.

⁶ Penn’s “experiment” was not merely a test to determine the effectiveness of his political strategies in the New World, but rather carried dimensions of personal religious experience as well. As Quaker historian J. William Frost explains, “holy experiment” is a phrase that communicates an early Quaker eschatological understanding of the operations of the Inner Light. William Penn and Society of Friends founder George Fox both used the word “experimental” in their writings to describe the process of receiving divine knowledge, as the word “experiment” during this time was also synonymous with “experience.” It was likely that Penn believed the colonial charter to be a gift from God and a sign of the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. For Penn, the “holy experiment” was not an exercise of free governance and liberalism, but rather an apocalyptic expectation that the colony might become the promised land, given the right conditions. See J. William Frost, “‘Wear the Sword as Long as Thou Canst’: William Penn in Myth and History,” *Explorations in Early American Culture* 4 (January 2000): 32-36.

⁷ The second irony (perhaps of many) is that community churches and language manuals, most of which were initiated by European missionaries, eventually helped preserve some aspects of Indigenous languages and cultures, including that of the Lenape. See Rick Kearns, “Fulfilling a Prophecy,” *Indian Country Today*, September 13, 2018, <https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/fulfilling-a-prophecy>; Kyle Woodward, “Indigenous Language Revival: The Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project as a Case Study in Indigenous Identity, Representation, and Place-Based Knowledge,” *James Madison Undergraduate Research Journal* 5, no. 1 (2018): 71–80.

⁸ Kariann Akemi Yokota, *Unbecoming British: How Revolutionary America Became a Postcolonial Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10-11.

⁹ Frost, “‘Wear the Sword as Long as Thou Canst,’” 38.

¹⁰ In the 1980s, some of the same historic congregations and meetinghouses that had participated in anti-slavery abolitionist work would once again support refugees – this time, Central Americans participating in the Sanctuary Movement.

¹¹ Caminero-Santangelo, “The Voice of the Voiceless,” 95.

¹² Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 61.

¹³ Sylvester Johnson, *African American Religions, 1500-2000: Colonialism, Democracy, and Freedom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 211.

¹⁴ Free, enslaved, and indentured French-speaking Saint Domingans of African descent, many of whom were Catholics brought to Philadelphia by wealthy White plantation operators fleeing the French Revolution. A significant minority within the early milieu of northeastern American seaboard cities like Philadelphia, Black Saint Domingans and their descendants retained a distinctive culture while finding opportunities to contribute to the development of broader Black community and human rights movements in these settlements. Philadelphia parishes Old Saint Mary’s and Saint Peter Clavier would have an important role in these efforts. See John Davies, “Class, Culture, and Color: Black Saint-Domingan Refugees and African-American Communities in the Early Republic” (University of Delaware, 2008); François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2014).

¹⁵ The self-liberative strategy of “purchasing oneself” was, by far, the most common means of securing freedom. See Cheryl Janifer Laroche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁶ The African Episcopal Church and Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal, led and co-founded by Jones and Allen respectively, were expressions of the Free African Society’s efforts to create safer communities and social uplift for Black Philadelphians.

¹⁷ William C. Kashatus, *William Still: The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), 4.

¹⁸ By World War I, most mainline Protestant denominations in the United States had declared opposition to war, a position that would dramatically reverse during the Second World War.

¹⁹ Patricia Appelbaum, “Introduction,” in *Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist Culture Between World War I and the Vietnam Era*, ed. Patricia Appelbaum (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5-6. Notably, this broad and varied movement was still heavily segregated, apart from smaller religious sub-movements such as the International Peace Mission, led by African-American religious leader Father Divine, who moved his interracial ministry to Philadelphia during the early

1940s. See Judith Weisenfeld, *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

²⁰ J. William Frost, "'Our Deeds Carry Our Message': The Early History of the American Friends Service Committee," *Quaker History* 81, no. 1 (1992): 41. Frost notes that from the beginning, AFSC was clear that it was not a missionary organization and "wanted to establish a program to promote international good will." Nevertheless, AFSC did collaborate and negotiate with Quaker missionaries, who representative a small fraction of a much larger, growing Protestant missionary presence in Latin America. By the 1920s, mainline Protestant denominations had made a territorial agreement amongst themselves whereby they had divided up the geographical sections of Mexico.

²¹ H. Larry Ingle, "The American Friends Service Committee, 1947–49: The Cold War's Effect," *Peace and Change* 23, no. 1 (1998): 29.

²² Allan W. Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917-1950* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 151-182.

²³ Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood*, 20-24; Harold D. Weaver, Jr., "Bayard Rustin," in *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights*, eds. Harold D. Weaver, Jr., Paul Kriese, and Stephen W. Angell (Philadelphia: Friends General Conference Quaker Press, 2011), 151–77; Jake Hodder, "Toward a Geography of Black Internationalism: Bayard Rustin, Nonviolence, and the Promise of Africa," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 6 (November 2016): 1360–77. AFSC's approach combined the traditional Quaker appeals to conscience with emerging sociological methods that used anti-racist scientific reasoning. (The Social Gospel and Christian Socialist movements were also important intersectional influences.) Early on, AFSC hosted several educational conferences designed to create dialogue between African American and White participants that included scholars and activists such as Bayard Rustin, W.E.B. DuBois, Charles S. Johnson, and Franz Boas. Rustin continued to support AFSC after the Second World War, as he engaged in pan-African, international civil rights work.

²⁴ Weaver, "Bayard Rustin," 161. Ingle, "The American Friends Service Committee," 41; Kathryn Montalbano, *Government Surveillance of Religious Expression: Mormons, Quakers, and Muslims in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 73-81. *Speak Truth to Power's* direct criticisms of the Cold War, as well as AFSC's deepening role in civil rights and anti-war activism drew increasing FBI surveillance into AFSC's activities. The extent of government surveillance, dating back to at least 1921, was discovered through a 1971 citizen-led break-in at an FBI office in Media, Pa., orchestrated by peace activist and Haverford mathematics professor William C. Davidon and his wife, Ann Morrisett Davidon. Montalbano observes that although surveillance of AFSC was extensive, the organization's reliance on non-Quaker staff proved confusing for the FBI as the agency sought to understand AFSC's activism exclusively in terms of its "Quaker roots."

²⁵ John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Though Rustin had already been under FBI surveillance for two decades due to his past affiliation with the Communist Party, political attacks in the lead-up to the 1963 March on Washington introduced fresh scrutiny, particularly concerning his sexual orientation. Ironically, these attacks, led by Senator Strom Thurmond, helped legitimize Rustin's work as civil rights leaders and sympathetic press members both willingly and ambivalently defended the march against its White supremacist detractors (346-349).

²⁶ Phillip Berryman, *Memento of the Living and the Dead: A First-Person Account of Church, Violence, and Resistance in Latin America* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2019), 156, 173-74.

²⁷ Berryman, *Memento of the Living and the Dead*, 167.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 181.

²⁹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

³⁰ Blair Eden Kaminsky, *75 Years of Fellowship* (Pottstown, PA: Fellowship Farm, 2007), 4-33. Founded in 1931, the Young People's Interracial Fellowship (YPIF) emerged from a partnership between an African-American minister Dr. Fred Wentzel and two White women, one Quaker (Grace Warner Waring) and one Presbyterian (Helen Bryan). The first meeting was held at a weekend retreat at Pendle Hill where Black and White young adults from nearly "a dozen Protestant denominations" gathered, including college students from Temple, Swarthmore, and the University of Pennsylvania. Marjorie Penney joined shortly after and became a leader of YPIF in 1932. YPIF, initially sponsored by AFSC, eventually established Fellowship House (in a former coffin factory!), a communal space in North Philadelphia, and later, Fellowship Farm in Montgomery County. Throughout its existence, the organization maintained close ties with Quaker groups as it focused on interracial dialogue, integrating churches, anti-lynching, labor organizing, civil rights, anti-Semitism, and youth programs.

³¹ Emilie Lounsberry, "A Bloody Past and Iffy Future on a Montco Farm, Salvadorans Await Word on Asylum," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 4, 1983, sec. Local.

³² Kaminsky, *75 Years of Fellowship*, 54-55.

³³ INS, established in 1933, was the precursor to what is now three divisions of the Department of Homeland Security: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

³⁴ Sara Solovitch, "Offering Sanctuary to Salvadoran Refugees - Illegally," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 5, 1984, sec. Local.

³⁵ One research contributor felt that, among Protestant groups, AFSC was on the vanguard of a Northern American religious response to the Central American crisis due its history along the U.S.-Mexico border: “I think that we [AFSC] were one of the first national organizations with grassroots, very local, tentacles if you will, to begin realizing that what we were looking at as border crossers were no longer simply Mexican people who needed to work in the United States but Central Americans who were looking for shelter because of the war...” (Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021).

³⁶ Maida Odom, “Salvadorans Bring Message to Phila.: Refugees, Heading to Washington, Protest Reagan Policies,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 12, 1983, sec. B. In the months prior, Cohen, had helped pass two Council resolutions urging the protection of Salvadoran refugees and an end to the Reagan administration’s military aid to El Salvador.

³⁷ Caryle Murphy, “Salvadoran Refugees End Walk, Protest U.S. Policies,” *The Washington Post*, July 23, 1983, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1983/07/23/salvadoran-refugees-end-walk-protest-us-policies/2fbf48aa-4cff-4da5-a633-396c321ea762/>; Susan Bibler Coutin, “The Formation and Transformation of Salvadoran Community Organizations in Los Angeles,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, ed. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 159-61.

³⁸ The House of Umoja was founded by David and Falaka Fattah in 1968 as a community-based, violence intervention organization. See “From West Africa to West Philadelphia,” *House of Umoja* (blog), accessed April 8, 2022, <https://www.houseofumoja.net/aboutus.html>.

³⁹ Murphy, “Salvadoran Refugees End Walk”; Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020. Tabernacle United Church, adjacent to Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania is affiliated with two different denominational conferences: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the United Church of Christ. The organizers’ visit was coordinated by local and international solidarity organizations, including CISPES (Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador) and, likely, AFSC.

⁴⁰ Several contributors conjectured that “Saúl Solórzano” was probably not his precise birthname. Exiles and refugees often used pseudonyms, even with each other, to protect the lives of their family members and themselves, a concern that some perceive as ongoing, even after several decades. For this reason, only the public names (those which have already been published) of Central American exiles and refugees will be used in this chapter and elsewhere.

⁴¹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020; Sara Solovitch, “Offering Sanctuary.”

⁴² María Cristina García, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 26. Literally “death squad,” a right-wing extremist group with ties to the Salvadoran military government. These paramilitary groups were enabled by a system of government informants, some of whom had support from the CIA and wealthy diaspora living in the United States. As García notes: “Those believed to have ties to insurgent groups or who challenged the established order in any way— through labor organizing, sermons and public speaking, classroom instruction, publications, and journalism— were tortured, raped, and killed. Thousands of mutilated corpses appeared in town sewers, garbage dumps, street gutters, and shallow graves, left by their torturers as a warning to others: eyes gouged, tongues and limbs severed, breasts, genitalia, and throats slashed.”

⁴³ Solovitch, “Offering Sanctuary.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pamela Constable, “Saul Solorzano Touched Thousands of Lives in D.C.’s Central American Community,” *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2011. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/saul-solorzano-touched-thousands-of-lives-in-dcs-central-american-community/2011/09/01/gIQAh1nYzJ_story.html.

⁴⁶ Unlike the vast majority of Central American refugees, Solórzano arrived in the United States in 1981, just before the January 1, 1982 asylum eligibility deadline established by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. His legal status almost certainly contributed to his relative freedom of movement and available career options. After leaving Philadelphia, Solórzano move to Hempstead, NY, where he served as an outreach worker among the area’s growing Salvadoran population. Solórzano eventually settled in Washington, D.C., where he continued his advocacy work as the executive director of CARECEN until his death in 2011. CARECEN, or Central American Resource Center, was founded by Salvadoran exiles in 1983 as the Central American Refugee Center. (Its name change reflects the reality of the *guerra prolongada* and the need for permanent settlement assistance in the United States.) See Alvin E. Bessent and Paul Marinaccio, “Trial By Calendar,” *Newsday (Suffolk Edition)*, October 19, 1986; Susan Bibler Coutin, “The Formation and Transformation of Salvadoran Community Organizations in Los Angeles,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, eds. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 159-64.

⁴⁷ Based on historical trends and the national trajectory of the Sanctuary Movement, it is also very likely that Catholic women religious were also hosting refugees at Philadelphia area convents during these early years. The extent of this activity is unknown, and more research is needed about their involvement.

⁴⁸ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2022. This contributor indicated that CARA records are scant due to the extensive precautions taken by organizers to guard the coalition’s activities. I was able to locate a few meeting

documents in private collections, but to my knowledge, there is no publicly accessible, comprehensive CARA archive available.

⁴⁹ Angela Berryman in discussion with the author, October 2020; Carolina Interfaith Taskforce on Central America, “Meeting Agenda: Central America – In Search of Sanctuary,” October 21, 1983, Witness for Peace DG 149, Acc 99A-020, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA; Solovitch, “Offering Sanctuary.” Chestnut Hill Friends Meeting was the first Friends meeting in Philadelphia to declare public sanctuary. Although the Quaker community did not make their sanctuary declaration until February 1985, members (particularly Natalie Kempner) continued to host refugees in their homes and contributed in significant ways to the formation of CARA. Members of Germantown Friends and Southampton Friends meetings, like their counterparts elsewhere in the U.S., also provided bail funds for detained migrants, with Southampton members mortgaging their meetinghouse as “property bail” for those in need.

⁵⁰ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020. AFSC and the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were instrumental in facilitating sanctuary and solidarity network expansion, as well as interreligious peace and justice education regarding Central America. Although Quaker meetings were discussing sanctuary as a strategy well prior to that of congregations like Tabernacle, it took much longer for meetings to become fully sanctuary supporting, due to the religious imperative of community consensus.

⁵¹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2022; William Westerman, “Reciprocity and the Fabric of Solidarity: Central Americans, Refugees, and Delegations in the 1980s,” in *International Volunteer Tourism: Critical Reflections on Good Works in Central America*, eds. Katherine Borland and Abigail E. Adams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 40. The office was loosely affiliated with the Interfaith Office on Accompaniment founded by José Artiga in Berkeley, California, and may have been initially called the “Office of Information and Solidarity with Salvadoran Refugees.”

⁵² Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020.

⁵³ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020.

⁵⁴ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020.

⁵⁵ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2021. These abstentions were not due to the potential for fines or prison time for “harboring,” but instead reflected concerns about repercussions for family members who held federal employment.

⁵⁶ Associated Press, “Churches Help Illegal Aliens,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 20, 1984, sec. National; Vincent Del Giudice, “Refugee Accuses Reagan of

Supporting Terror Regime,” United Press International (UPI), March 19, 1984, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1984/03/19/Refugee-accuses-Reagan-of-supporting-terror-regime/1410448520400/>; Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020. Weston Priory, a Benedictine monastery situated near the Canadian border, was slated to become the 100th official sanctuary host in the rapidly expanding national sanctuary network.

⁵⁷ Beth Gillin, “Another Night of Sanctuary - Guatemalan Refugees Rest at a Phila. Church,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 23, 1984, sec. Local. While religious sanctuary has never been formally protected by federal law, a Philadelphia-based INS representative at the time commented that the “priority” for immigration enforcement was not individuals such as Ixk’oj’t family, but rather “illegal aliens employed in well-paying jobs” and those crossing unlawfully through U.S. ports of entry. Offering a different perspective, an accompanying CRTFCA representative remarked that the INS would not arrest Central Americans in public sanctuary because of the negative political attention it would bring to U.S. policies in Central America.

⁵⁸ Gillin, “Another Night of Sanctuary.”

⁵⁹ The Gospel of Matthew includes this narration of the flight to Egypt: “Now when [the wise men] had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.’ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son’” (Matthew 2:13-15, ESV). The theme of pilgrimage continues throughout the New Testament epistles. See, for example, 1 Peter, addressed to “To the exiles of the Dispersion” (1:1), and the Epistle to the Hebrews, which recounts familiar stories of Noah, Sarah, Jacob, and Abraham who were also “strangers and exiles on the earth” (11:13).

⁶⁰ Gillin, “Another Night of Sanctuary.”

⁶¹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁶² Ana Forcinito, “Testimonio: The Witness, the Truth, and the Inaudible,” in *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories*, eds. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Ben. Sifuentes-Jáuregui, and Marisa Belausteguigoitia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 239.

⁶³ William Westerman, “Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement,” in *Migration & Identity*, ed. Andor Skotnes (Routledge, 2005), 177.

⁶⁴ Beth Gillin, “Protestors Greet Kirkpatrick - U.N. Envoy Says Little on Central America Policy,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 5, 1984, sec. Local.

⁶⁵ Beth Gillin, “Illegal Aliens Here Plan to Tell Their Tale,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 1984, sec. Local; Solovitch, “Offering Sanctuary to Salvadoran Refugees – Illegally.” Tabernacle was supported by a growing ecumenical sanctuary alliance that included Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Quaker, Catholic, Episcopalian, and Mennonite congregations.

⁶⁶ Michael D. Schaeffer, “Churches’ Sanctuary Movement: Heeding a ‘Higher Call,’” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 28, 1985, sec. Local.

⁶⁷ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Robert L. Koenig, “Salvadorans Here Fear Death Squads,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 25, 1985, Final edition, sec. A.

⁶⁸ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Gillin, “Illegal Aliens Here Plan to Tell Their Tale.”

⁶⁹ Koenig, “Salvadorans Here Fear Death Squads.”

⁷⁰ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁷¹ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁷⁴ With humored fondness, Linda remembers Corbett as an “adventurer” who snacked on “raisins and yellow cheese” as he walked and camped along the Geronimo Trail with them during their strenuous journey. This ordeal gave Linda great respect for Corbett and other U.S. citizens who took on personal risk during the Sanctuary Movement. Though the outsized attention given to White male leadership in the Sanctuary Movement has been appropriately questioned, it is worthwhile to note that Corbett’s accompaniment work was astonishing given his physical condition. From a young age, Corbett suffered from rheumatoid arthritis—a painful and debilitating disease which had no effective treatment at that time. For a representative press biography of Corbett, see Linda Witt, “On the Line Jim Corbett Tilted at the Law on Principle--Now He Has Thousands of Accomplices,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 1985, Sports Final, C edition, sec. Magazine.

⁷⁵ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁷⁶ “North Side Church Welcomes Illegal Aliens,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, January 24, 1984, Final edition, sec. A; Pamela Schaeffer, “North Side Church to Give Sanctuary to Illegal Aliens,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, December 4, 1983, Final edition, sec. D.

⁷⁷ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020. These threats would eventually qualify them to receive political asylum in the United States, an opportunity they eventually declined due to safety concerns concerning family and friends, and their desire to return to El Salvador. Regional sanctuary coalition volunteers, the majority of whom were White and resided in the St. Louis suburbs, were uncomfortable with visiting the majority Black church and neighborhood. By contrast, Ernesto remembers the urban community as extraordinarily supportive, and felt a welcoming presence there.

⁷⁸ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020. Rev. Lucius Walker, an American Baptist minister, was the founder of Pastors for Peace, an interreligious organization oriented toward accompaniment and relief work in Latin America. Ernesto and Linda remember the Central America Week gathering as an important opportunity to broaden their activism beyond the needs of their home country: "...We spoke not just in favor of El Salvador, we spoke about Central America issues."

⁷⁹ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020. Although Ernesto and Linda were hosted by Catholic women religious and lay organizers during their journey eastward, they worked mostly with Jewish and Protestant Christian volunteers after their arrival in Philadelphia. As Ernesto recalled, "Very few Catholics [in Philadelphia] were officially involved because there was this cardinal in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania who was completely opposed to criticizing the government so he never gave permission for a church to be used as a sanctuary church publicly."

⁸⁰ Research contributor in discussion with the author, July 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2021

⁸¹ Ernesto Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020. Although comprising less than six percent of the city's recorded population during the 1980s, Hispanic and Latine residents, the majority of whom were Puerto Rican, were an active force in Philadelphia politics and community organizing. See Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities and Other Urban Places In The United States," Working Paper (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.html>; Victor Vazquez-Hernandez, "Pan-Latino Enclaves in Philadelphia and the Formation of the Puerto Rican Community," in *Global Philadelphia: Immigrant Communities Old and New*, eds. Ayumi Takenaka and Mary Johnson Osirim, Immigrant Communities Old and New (Temple University Press, 2010), 77–95.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁸⁴ Gillin, “Illegal Aliens Here Plan to Tell Their Tale.”

⁸⁵ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020.

⁸⁶ Linda Fuentes in discussion with the author, October 2020; Koenig, “Salvadorans Here Fear Death Squads.”

⁸⁷ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2021.

⁸⁸ Rotem Bar, “If You Knew the Truth, Then Surely You Would Help Us,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 2, 1985, sec. Features, *Inquirer Magazine*, 24. Eventually, Linda and Ernesto, along with their infant son (who was born in Philadelphia), decided to leave the area, but continued to work as invited speakers at various events. The family spent a few years in the New York metro area where they furthered their education, assisted displaced Salvadorans, and aided political and humanitarian organizations. In early 1990, weeks after the high-profile assassination of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter at Universidad Centroamericana El Salvador, Ernesto and Linda returned to El Salvador to continue their work with displaced communities there. Friends in the United States were “shocked” by their willingness to return to El Salvador amid the ongoing violence and the grave danger it posed to their lives. Apart from a few years of diplomatic service in the United States, they have remained in Central America as social service providers with religious and non-governmental organizations.

⁸⁹ This date is probable, but not yet confirmed. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, access to FUMCOG archives was not available during the research phase of this dissertation. Former sanctuary volunteers were able to provide a sampling of materials from their personal files, though none of these materials dealt specifically with this early visit from the two men.

⁹⁰ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020.

⁹¹ FUMCOG and St. Vincent’s likely were already collaborators through the Northwest Interfaith Movement, a social justice coalition of religious communities in Northwest Philadelphia.

⁹² Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020.

⁹³ The trsg, facilitated by Jim Corbett and others, was a collaboration between Tucson and Nogales sanctuary workers. The organization was purposely spelled with lower case letters due to Corbett’s wish to communicate humility and informality based on Quaker values. See Hilary Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande: Sanctuary and the Politics of Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 26-30.

⁹⁴ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020.

⁹⁵ Cunningham, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 291.

⁹⁶ Lini Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum, Life in Limbo Ends for Two Guatemalan Refugees in City,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 24, 1986, sec. Local.

⁹⁷ Linda Herskowitz, “Defying the Law to Give Sanctuary,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 10, 1984, sec. Local.

⁹⁸ Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum.”

⁹⁹ Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 292-94.

¹⁰⁰ *A Sanctuary Church*, produced by Martha Ankey, George Hatzfeld, John Hughes, Roberta Millard, and Mike Oas (Philadelphia, PA: First United Methodist Church of Germantown, 1985), DVD.

¹⁰¹ Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum.”

¹⁰² Socorro and Father Quiñones, who collaborated with Jim Corbett, were instrumental in creating safe passage for migrants traveling through Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. The cathedral itself was utilized as a border shelter and “rendezvous” point, from which the two Mexican Sanctuary workers personally escorted many migrants by car or on foot. See Lloyd D. Barba and Tatyana Castillo-Ramos, “Latinx Leadership and Legacies in the U.S. Sanctuary Movement, 1980–2020,” *American Religion* 3, no. 1 (Fall 2021): 9.

¹⁰³ Kristina M. Campbell, “Operation Sojourner: The Government Infiltration of the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s and Its Legacy on the Modern Central American Refugee Crisis Sanctuary Cities Symposium,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 13, no. 3 (2017): 474–507; Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 293-94. Operation Sojourner formally began in December 1983 (Campbell 479). Jesús Cruz had been a paid INS informant since 1980, when he and his nephew accepted offers of immunity from prosecution for their role in a smuggling enterprise that illegally transported migrants into the United States (480-81).

¹⁰⁴ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum.”

¹⁰⁶ Daniel Schwartz, “Recruiting for Sanctuary: Explaining Involvement in the Original and New Sanctuary Movements of Philadelphia” (University of Pennsylvania, Urban Studies Program, 2009), 40, https://repository.upenn.edu/senior_seminar/7.

¹⁰⁷ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020.

¹⁰⁸ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020; Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 164.

¹¹⁰ Research contributor in discussion with the author, September 2020; Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 295.

¹¹¹ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020.

¹¹² Marc Kaufman, “3 Guatemalan Aliens Arrested in Crackdown on Sanctuary Movement,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 15, 1985, sec. Local.

¹¹³ Rev. Loder was also a close associate of Dr. William Sloane Coffin, chaplain at Yale University and a founder of Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam.

¹¹⁴ Rep. Bob Edgar was an ordained Methodist minister and former Drexel University chaplain. Concurrent to his government role, Rep. William Gray became active in the anti-apartheid movement and served as senior pastor at Bright Hope Baptist church (1972-2007). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, both representatives would become a critical support for the larger Central American peace and solidarity movement, as activists worked toward increasing asylum access and demilitarization.

¹¹⁵ Paul Horvitz, “Military Aid Opposed for Guatemala,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 1, 1985, sec. National.

¹¹⁶ “JCCA: MEMO – Conversation with Bill Klein, Aide to Arlen Specter,” March 6, 1965, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, private collection; Marc Kaufman, “Sanctuary Movement Energized by Arrests,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 16, 1985, sec. Local. Specter, the son of Jewish Ukrainian immigrants, did not offer any specific recommendations regarding asylum policy for Guatemalans. He would later vote in favor of the Moakley-DiConcini bill, which granted extended voluntary departure for Salvadorans for one year.

¹¹⁷ “Central America: MEMO – Conversation with Brian Rudnick,” March 6, 1985, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, private collection; Kaufman, “3 Guatemalan Aliens Arrested.”

¹¹⁸ This phrase appears to be a summary of epistolary exhortations, rather than an exact Biblical reference. Consider, for example, Romans 12:1-2: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (ESV).

¹¹⁹ Joel and Gabriela Morelos, “Message from the Refugees,” *News of the Ten Twigs: A Sanctuary Letter of the First United Methodist Church of Germantown* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 1.

¹²⁰ Consider, for example, this parallel from 1 Corinthians 2:12-16 (NASB): “Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God. We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. But the one who is spiritual discerns all things, yet he himself is discerned by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.”

¹²¹ This sense of persecution must have been particularly acute as it spread beyond the immediate Morelos family to relatives in Guatemala. Miriam Davidson recounts the sequence of events: “In October [1984], the apartment in which Morelos and his wife were living was broken into, and papers with addresses on them were taken. Morelos was arrested in January, and on February 2 his brother and cousin were tortured and killed in Guatemala. A few months later, Morelos received a letter mailed from Philadelphia to a New York address known only to his family in Guatemala. It contained clippings from a Guatemalan newspaper announcing the kidnapping, torture, and murder of his brother and cousin” (Davidson, *Convictions of the Heart*, 138).

¹²² “U.S. Indicts 16 on Alien Aid Charges: Clerics in Group Accused of Illegally Giving Sanctuary,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 14, 1985, Late Final Edition edition, sec. 1.

¹²³ Research contributor in discussion with the author, October 2020; Ronald J. Ostrow, “Clergy, Nuns Charged with Alien Smuggling: 16 Persons Indicted in Crackdown on Growing Sanctuary Effort for Central American Refugees,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1985, Home Edition edition, sec. 1.

¹²⁴ J. Michael Kennedy, “Two Convicted of Smuggling Salvadorans, Vow to Continue Sanctuary Refugee Work,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1985, sec. B. The first trial, decided in Houston in 1985, resulted in convictions for Stacey Lynn Merkt and John Elder, two staff members from the Casa Oscar Romero border shelter in San Benito, Texas. One of the defense lawyers was Elisabeth Brodyaga, who would open her own migrant center, El Refugio, during the following year. Philadelphia sanctuary activists had ties to both centers and sponsored a family from El Refugio shortly after it officially opened. This endeavor will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

¹²⁵ “U.S. Indicts 16 on Alien Aid Charges.”

¹²⁶ Kathryn M. Olson and Clark D. Olson, “Judges’ Influence on Trial Outcomes and Jurors’ Experiences of Justice: Reinscribing Existing Hierarchies Through the

Sanctuary Trial,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 22, no. 1 (February 1994): 22.

¹²⁷ Douglas L. Colbert, “The Motion in Limine—Trial without Jury: A Government’s Weapon against the Sanctuary Movement,” *Hofstra Law Review* 15, no. 1 (1986): 50. Colbert indicates that these intended defense strategies were discovered through a police search of Sister Darlene Nicgorski’s home and personal files.

¹²⁸ Colbert, “The Motion in Limine,” 7n5, 8, 19-23. Historically, the motion *in limine* (Latin, “at the threshold”) had been used by the defense to prohibit evidence that would create undue prejudice among jury members. By the 1980s, the motion was increasingly used by federal prosecutors to reduce prosecutorial error and jury prejudice through “evidentiary boundaries,” including the elimination of “entire defenses.”

¹²⁹ Colbert, “The Motion in Limine,” 52; Demetria Martínez, “Solidarity,” in *Border Women: Writing from La Frontera*, eds. Debra A. Castillo and María Socorro Tabuenca Córdoba (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 169.

¹³⁰ Storer Rowley and Manuel Galvan, “Refuge or Smuggling? Sanctuary Trial to Decide,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1985. According to Rowley and Galvan, an INS spokesperson in Washington, D.C. maintained that INS was not “targeting” the Sanctuary Movement, but rather that this was a more routine case: “We’re saying we’ll prosecute 15,000 to 20,000 smugglers (of illegal aliens) this year. These are only 16 more” (qtd.)

¹³¹ Michael L. Altman, “The Arizona Sanctuary Case,” *Litigation* 16, no. 4 (1990): 54.

¹³² Colbert, “The Motion in Limine,” 8-9; Edward B. Havens, “A Judge Ruled Tuesday That He Was Prompted By...,” United Press International (UPI), February 11, 1986, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1986/02/11/A-judge-ruled-Tuesday-that-he-was-prompted-by/2657508482000/>. There were also attempts by the prosecution to discredit Joel as a trial witness due to the content of his participation in a pre-trial mock exercise at Arizona State University. In the mock exercise, Joel stated that he “loved” the sanctuary defendants and did not wish to testify against them.

¹³³ Altman, “The Arizona Sanctuary Case” 24, 54; Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 254. Trial rules also removed religious titles from defendants’ names, rendering Sister Darlene Nicgorski as “Miss,” and Father Ramón Dagoberto Quiñones and Reverend John Fife as “Mr.”

¹³⁴ Crittenden, *God and Caesar at the Rio Grande*, 295.

¹³⁵ “Alien Tells of Aid in Entering U.S.,” *New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast)*, February 10, 1986, sec. A.

¹³⁶ Susan Bibler Coutin, “Smugglers or Samaritans in Tucson, Arizona: Producing and Contesting Legal Truth,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 3 (1995): 549.

¹³⁷ Altman, “The Arizona Sanctuary Case,” 25.

¹³⁸ Bar, “If You Knew the Truth,” 31.

¹³⁹ Schaeffer, “Churches’ Sanctuary Movement.”

¹⁴⁰ “Much More than Sanctuary,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1985, sec. Editorial.

¹⁴¹ Rev. Loder and Nobel prize winner Elie Wiesel were featured speakers at the 1985 Inter-American Symposium on Sanctuary, held in Tucson. In his introductory speech, Wiesel remarked, “No human being is illegal.” Wiesel again made this assertion in the foreword to Loder’s 1986 book, *No One But Us: Personal Reflections on Public Sanctuary by an offspring of Jacob*. The phrase has since become a rallying cry for global human rights work and immigration reform in the United States. See Aurora Camacho de Schmidt, “Introduction: Sanctuary for Central American Refugees in the 1980s,” unpublished manuscript, March 22, 2017; Ted Loder, *No One But Us: Personal Reflections on Public Sanctuary by an Offspring of Jacob* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1986).

¹⁴² Schaeffer, “Churches’ Sanctuary Movement.”

¹⁴³ Monica Yanakiew, “Methodists Meet over Sanctuaries,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 1985, sec. Local. Although the film largely features FUMCOG members, the film also includes interviews with congregational, labor, and political Sanctuary supporters from other Philadelphia-based congregations and organizations.

¹⁴⁴ Hello, I’m Joel and this is my sanctuary... I felt like I was dying, especially when I saw my daughter didn’t have shoes, didn’t have milk to drink, and ate what people gave us. That was our situation and it sometimes demoralized our Christian faith. So, I went to a lawyer that someone had recommended and asked him [switch to war footage clip] if he had any connections to the UN. I asked him for help, and he told me to leave him the name and address of where I was staying, and that... he was going to help us. So we were with him because the stay in Mexico was not legal. [war footage clip] We were always afraid that immigration authorities would detect us and send us back. Thank God, through a friend I found sanctuary, the Sanctuary Movement in the United States, and he helped me to go...we went to a church. In that church they gave us support to travel to the United States. (Translation my own.)

¹⁴⁵ *A Sanctuary Church*. English translation dubbed over original Spanish, which is muted and indecipherable.

CHAPTER 4

“A MORAL ISSUE, NOT A FAD”: SANCTUARY AFTER THE TRIALS

In the fall of 1986, six months after the Sanctuary Trial verdicts, the Morelos family received political asylum in the United States, an “exceedingly rare” accomplishment attributed to State Department intervention and legal support coordinated through Central American Refugee Action (CARA) volunteers, most notably those from the First United Methodist Church of Germantown (FUMCOG).¹ The family greeted the news of their asylum approval with relief but held onto hopes that conditions in Guatemala would improve enough to allow for their eventual return.² This newfound security, along with the continued belief that their work in the United States originated from God and not “some organization,”³ energized the family to openly seek a “redefinition” of their relationship with Northern American sanctuary activists. In a letter to FUMCOG, they expressed gratitude for the support they received and the impact of their alliance with the church:

You can hardly begin to understand what we feel as we go to speak before various groups and identify ourselves as Guatemalans and as refugees in sanctuary in the First United Methodist Church of Germantown. Our relationship with you serves as the very basis on which we are able to receive and answer the invitation to speak about the injustices endured by the people of Central America and in particular the people of Guatemala. So important is our partnership as Christians that we have been able to reach sectors of Northern American society that otherwise would have been inaccessible. And when we speak of this “importance,” believe us, it is not out of the pride of the self-promoter but rather out of the pride of Christians who stand as an example to the local community, the country and, why not say it, to the world as well of what our Father in Heaven intended for His church to be. As we carry his will we must all bear in mind the scriptures such as Matthew 7:21.⁴ But we must also keep in mind that our work is at once Christian and political, in accordance with the example set by Jesus Christ.⁵

As the letter continued, however, the family revealed a sense of frustration borne from communication struggles and a certain lack of trust with Northern American volunteers, which they felt created a “tremendous number of disadvantages” for them. They were especially troubled that Northern American allies did not fully understand their “mission” or their experiences, and at times displayed a “lack of sensitivity” evidenced by the habitual exclusion of the family from sanctuary decision-making and planning processes.⁶ To address these concerns, the Morelos family requested greater independence and proposed practical steps that would allow fuller expression of their rights to self-determination and privacy.

The FUMCOG letter is emblematic of the turn that sanctuary organizing would take in the late 1980s as changing circumstances allowed Central American leaders in the United States to reconfigure relationships, roles, and priorities. Far from being passive aid recipients, these community leaders continued to develop more permanent community infrastructure in the United States and played a crucial role in restructuring transnational ties and shifting the goals of sanctuary activism in Philadelphia toward repatriation and economic development. In doing so, Central American organizers would push Northern American allies toward a more expansive understanding of sanctuary – one that more fully recognized the capacity and authority of exiles and refugees in an endeavor for a fuller sense of “solidarity” and “accompaniment.” This chapter will explore how the Sanctuary Movement continued to evolve in the Philadelphia region after the Sanctuary Trials, as sanctuary activism pivoted toward longer term expressions of “solidarity” and expanded beyond its predominantly urban, Protestant Christian core to a broader interreligious base that included greater Jewish and Catholic participation.

Rethinking Sanctuary

Central Baptist Church, an American Baptist Church affiliate located in the affluent mainline suburb of Wayne, Pennsylvania, was an early member of CARA, Philadelphia's loosely connected interreligious sanctuary consortium, and in October 1984 became the first suburban congregation in the area to declare its intentions to become a sanctuary congregation.⁷ By the summer of 1985, three Philadelphia area congregations (Tabernacle United, First United Methodist Church of Germantown, and Central Baptist Church) were active public sanctuary host congregations and two additional communities (Chestnut Hill and Southampton Friends meetings) had announced their plans to become public sanctuary hosts.⁸

In early 1985, shortly after the Operation Sojourner arrests, Mauricio Lopez arrived at the newly refurbished sanctuary apartment in Central Baptist Church (CBC). Unlike other Central Americans who had participated in public sanctuary in the Philadelphia area, Mauricio arrived alone and appeared to be a newcomer to organizing and activism work.⁹ While in public sanctuary, the testimonio he shared summoned images of a "quiet, normal life" in San Salvador:¹⁰

On weekends, we'd go to the park, the kids rode their bikes. On Sundays, after Mass, we would go to some friends' house and have lunch, spend the day talking and laughing. We had a dog, a Doberman pinscher, and I even raised some chickens in the backyard. I always liked animals. . . . We had a very typical, harmonious life. I was very close to my family.¹¹

One fateful day, this life was suddenly disrupted when soldiers stopped the bus on which Mauricio had been traveling and confiscated Mauricio's and other passengers' valuables. Mauricio immediately objected to the seizure and was subsequently arrested and tortured:

I was in the cell for a whole week, allowed out only once, when the international press and the Red Cross came to the camp. [Military

officials] told us beforehand to say that we were well-fed and treated well. If the press asked us why we were there, we were supposed to say that we were captured while fighting combat against the Salvadoran army. Which is, of course, absurd, an absolute lie.¹²

Warned to leave the country, Mauricio returned to his family for a short time before fleeing his homeland with little more than the clothes on his back.

Ten months after leaving his native El Salvador, Mauricio arrived in Pennsylvania at Central Baptist Church (CBC) at the height of the Operation Sojourner crackdown.¹³ He stayed for two years in the “sanctuary apartment” in the chancel—a converted, enclosed area behind the church building’s physical sanctuary.¹⁴ During his stay at CBC, Mauricio engaged in activities similar to that of other Central American sanctuary participants, though, by comparison, he appears to have been less politically engaged, sharing few details regarding his personal circumstances.¹⁵ Although Philadelphia INS officials gave assurances that they would not enter the church to make arrests, CBC Sanctuary Task Force volunteers observed incidents of local police surveillance and maintained twenty-four hour accompaniment for months, including carefully planned security measures and overnight shifts in which volunteers would sleep in the church sanctuary just outside of the sanctuary apartment.¹⁶ Volunteers additionally assisted with medical appointments and employment, and sponsored social activities such as language exchanges and shared meals. While the archive of Mauricio’s recorded communication is scant, there is evidence that he, like the Morelos family, sought greater involvement in decision-making regarding his personal arrangements and sanctuary activism. In the early months of Mauricio’s sanctuary stay, CBC sanctuary volunteers attempted to keep him under close surveillance out of concern for Mauricio’s physical safety and the threat of legal problems for the church. The exercise of such constraints soon became a point of

contention between Mauricio and certain members of the CBC sanctuary committee, resulting in more freedom for Mauricio to work and socialize outside of the church facilities.¹⁷

Ultimately, during the fall of 1987, Mauricio chose to return to El Salvador despite the still-raging war, and subsequently did not maintain contact with CBC volunteers. As one CBC sanctuary organizer recalled: “[We] said goodbye, and we never saw him again. Never a single word... That was really hard.”¹⁸ The nature of Mauricio’s experience inspired a period of reflection on the future direction of the CBC Sanctuary Task Force committee’s work and the quality of their relationships with Central American exiles and refugees. Several months after Mauricio’s departure, the CBC Sanctuary Task Force, now renamed “Sanctuary Partners,”¹⁹ issued this statement to the congregation:

In October Mauricio left Central Baptist Church. For over six months he had struggled with his plans for his future vis a vis both his sanctuary commitment and his pressing need to reestablish closer contact with his family. The parting was difficult for both Mauricio and the members of the Task Force, as well as for the wider congregation, but we affirm Mauricio's strength in deciding to move ahead with his life.... After a transition period of re-evaluation and healing, the Task Force held a congregational dinner to dialogue with the congregation about what our Sanctuary ministry should be in the future. It was recognized that our commitment to our sisters and brothers in Central America is a moral issue, not a fad. It was also recognized [that] the idea of sanctuary as rescue work is shifting toward sanctuary as advocacy and solidarity.²⁰

While notions of “advocacy and solidarity” were not new to the Philadelphia or transnational Sanctuary Movement, this shift in thinking was indicative of a crucial turn that would deepen the Sanctuary Partners’ search for more equitable international

relationships, particularly as they pivoted toward interreligious collaboration in support of Central American campaigns for repatriation and resettlement.²¹

Jewish Solidarity and the Birth of CASA

The growth of Jewish-led interreligious sanctuary work, particularly in suburban Philadelphia, also helped direct Philadelphia sanctuary activists' attention away from temporary "rescue work" within the United States and towards longer term "accompaniment" and economic investment in repatriated Central American communities, particularly in El Salvador. Luis and Sonia Ramos and their family, who arrived in the Philadelphia area during 1986-1987, were particularly important in fostering this transition. The family was initially sponsored by the Central American Sanctuary Alliance (CASA) of Delaware County, a member organization of CARA, Philadelphia's largest sanctuary coalition. The origins of Delaware County CASA (active between 1987-2007), can be traced to Jewish-led efforts to bolster local Jewish participation in social justice organizing, including sanctuary and interfaith activism. A small number of local Jews had been active in sanctuary and solidarity efforts during the early 1980s through progressive Jewish organizations such as New Jewish Agenda as well as through familial and community ties with Christian peace activists. New Jewish Agenda (NJA), a national progressive organization founded in 1980 on the principles of *tikkun olam* (Hebrew: "repair of the world"), sponsored the first Jewish delegation of Witness for Peace to Nicaragua in 1984, led by NJA Philadelphia chapter peace activist, Phyllis Taylor.²² During the same year, Taylor, Bertram "Buddy" Korn, Jr.,²³ Lance Laver, and others created Jews Concerned for Central Americans (JCCA) to serve as a

“bridge” between Jewish organizations and the predominantly Christian sanctuary and solidarity groups in Philadelphia.²⁴

Initially, JCCA outreach was particularly concerned with the widespread belief that Central American issues were outside the realm of “Jewish concern” due to the historical prioritization of the needs of Jewish refugees from European countries and the former Soviet Union.²⁵ To counter these perceptions, JCCA argued that Jews were obligated to respond to the refugee crisis as both an imperative from the Torah and from the collective experience of the Shoah and its catastrophic exacerbation due to widespread international asylum refusals for Jewish refugees.²⁶ JCCA members organized educational events at area synagogues featuring Central and Northern American speakers, lobbied Jewish congressional representatives (including Senator Arlen Specter), and raised funds for Sanctuary Movement host churches in the Philadelphia area.²⁷

Although they achieved a measure of success, the impact of these efforts had a smaller impact than had been hoped.²⁸ By 1986, at the height of the Sanctuary Movement, the Congregation of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College was the only local Jewish congregation which had made a public sanctuary declaration.²⁹ Additionally, members of two separate Jewish congregations, Beth David (reform) and Beth Israel (reconstructionist), while lacking consensus to declare congregational sanctuary, formed sanctuary-supporting *havurot*.³⁰ As the two havurot began offering direct assistance to displaced Central Americans, havurot members were challenged by limited resources and thus solicited surrounding suburban religious communities for support.³¹ The result of this outreach was CASA, a primarily Jewish-Quaker interreligious coalition with

additional involvement from mainline churches.³² Sonia and Luis Ramos, exiled Salvadorans who came to the Philadelphia area through the CASA coalition's intervention, would later take on primary leadership roles in the organization. Their collaboration with CASA would be crucial in compelling more Jewish activists toward open political critique of U.S. foreign policy, and in shifting CASA towards supporting Salvadoran refugee repatriation and long-term economic development.

Like many other sanctuary participants profiled in this project, the Ramos family left their home country due to extremely violent political persecution brought on by their union involvement and church-supported community leadership.³³ Prior to leaving El Salvador, Luis Ramos served as the general secretary of a Salvadoran textile union and operated a family welding business that fabricated window and patio bars.³⁴ In a documentary interview, Luis, who first became active in El Salvador's popular movement during the 1970s,³⁵ described the circumstances that led to his political awakening:

Nací en uno de los barrios más pobres de San Salvador, que es Candelaria, y viví en la pobreza, pero nunca entendí en realidad qué era pobreza. Parecía que la vida era normal. Tuve mi primer trabajo en una fábrica japonesa y poco a poco fui dándome cuenta en realidad lo que es el obrero, lo que es el sufrimiento, lo que es la opresión. Luego me di cuenta que los salarios eran una cosa que ni siquiera teníamos alcance a vivir justos y tener los derechos. La educación no era alcanzable en este país, como decía. Nacimos pobres y vivimos pobres y morimos pobres. Nos dimos cuenta de que la única forma que íbamos a cambiar era luchando por nuestros derechos. Poco a poco nos fuimos organizando.³⁶

Luis continued his union organizing work until 1986, when intense military bombing neared their hometown and his family began receiving death threats.³⁷ One night, Salvadoran Civil Defense soldiers forcibly removed Luis from his home and threatened to kill him if he did not discontinue his union activities.³⁸ With the extreme danger

brought on by this turn of events, Luis and Sonia buried a cookie tin containing valued documents and memories, and escaped in the middle of the night, entrusting the care of their three children to Luis's mother.³⁹ The couple left a note for their oldest child, then only thirteen years-old:

...We're not able to wake you up because you will wake your brother and sister and they would cry. Take care of yourself, take care of your brother and sister. Try to understand your grandmother. I love you very much.
Your mother, Sonia.

Greetings to everybody. Take care of yourself and behave... Your father,
Luis.⁴⁰

After a harrowing journey out of El Salvador and across Guatemala and Mexico,⁴¹ Sonia and Luis made their way through the desert into the Lower Rio Grande Valley, where they were soon arrested by U.S. Border Patrol.⁴² In Texas, INS agents transported them to a makeshift detention center consisting of several trailers placed in the middle of a highway. Because the center was overcapacity with the many individuals who were crossing there at the time, Sonia and Luis were released on their own recognizance with an order to pay a bond of one thousand dollars each.⁴³ Having insufficient funds to pay either the bond or lodging costs, they followed the advice of an empathetic taxi driver and traveled to El Refugio del Rio Grande.⁴⁴

Founded by lawyer and activist Lisa Brodyaga in 1986, El Refugio del Rio Grande was a 45-acre ranch and compound created specifically for Central American "political refugees."⁴⁵ At Refugio, displaced Guatemalans and Salvadorans maintained the farm and ranch, and were provided access to English classes, a medical clinic, and legal services. Although Luis and Sonia fully expected to leave their organizing work behind as they fled El Salvador, the couple quickly engaged with their new community at

Refugio, which attracted interest from visiting Northern American sanctuary and solidarity activists. Luis later reflected:

If somebody told me when I left my country, you will become part of these struggles, I will say that you're kidding, because when I left my country, I thought that everything was still there. You know—the struggle, the problems, my involvements, my beliefs.... So when I [traveled] through Mexico, the problems we [had], I never thought that this is going to be for good. I thought that was going to be for just my own personal life.⁴⁶

Sonia and Luis, now community leaders at Refugio, helped manage the needs of displaced people at the center, including Luis's low-cost paralegal services, which helped pay a portion of their living expenses and bond costs.⁴⁷

Refugio was frequent host to visitors and volunteers, among them representatives of CASA Delaware County who toured the area and met with migrants and community activists to learn about immigration issues and explore avenues for providing sanctuary.⁴⁸ In the spring of 1987, CASA paid Luis and Sonia's remaining immigration bond and brought them north to an apartment in suburban Philadelphia.⁴⁹ Within a matter of months, Sonia and Luis began traveling widely across the United States, recounting their brutal experiences through sanctuary testimonios for predominantly White American audiences, including religious organizations, university groups, congressional staffers, and sanctuary and solidarity associations.⁵⁰ Still painfully separated from their children and Luis's mother, who remained in El Salvador, these speaking engagements were often incredibly traumatic. Despite these difficulties, Sonia, in an interview for this project, stressed the importance of giving her testimonio, which she considers a lifelong obligation:

It is quite hard for the immigrants, but we want to be here, and we'll fight for it. And these stories help.... We've done it for many years and still,

when someone asks me to go and perform, to do art, to do an interview, I do it with the bottom of my heart... Now it's not that painful. No. At the beginning, we were without our children for fourteen months. I did it without my children. Oh my. I couldn't stop my tears and I will go, like, *crazy* until one doctor stood up and said that they were abusing me and they shouldn't let me speak my story because we didn't know if the children were coming. It was painful.⁵¹

In 1988, at Luis and Sonia's request, representatives from the Philadelphia CARA coalition traveled to El Salvador and brought the three Ramos children and their grandmother to United States, where the family was finally reunited.⁵² With assistance from CARA and CASA, and the mementos from their buried cookie tin, the Ramos family won political asylum later that year, a rare instance of success in an immigration system still overwhelmingly closed to Central American asylum seekers.⁵³

While Luis and Sonia's migration story shares many similarities to that of other Central Americans in sanctuary activism, the manner in which they traveled through the United States represented a marked departure from the workings of the earlier, mostly clandestine, "underground railroad" sanctuary network. Unlike those who had participated in public sanctuary in Philadelphia prior to the Sanctuary Trials, Sonia and Luis had no formal escort for their U.S.-Mexico border crossing other than hired coyotes and seem to have had no pre-established plan, except to contact relatives in the United States upon arrival. (In this respect, their experience was more typical of the thousands of Central Americans who have migrated to the United States and Canada since the early 1980s, and of many immigrants in general.) By the time the Ramoses arrived in the United States, Quakers from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting had been routinely paying immigration bonds for detained Central Americans for years.⁵⁴ Following this more traditional route instead of the riskier, fragmenting "underground railroad" sanctuary

network, CASA joined a growing number of religious individuals and groups (including sanctuary activists) who were providing aid without explicitly breaking the law. Instead, CASA and the Ramos family used an “overground railroad” approach that focused on certain asylum seekers who remained in the United States while awaiting the outcome of their immigration cases.⁵⁵

Along with Quaker precedents, some Jewish CASA members may have also preferred this approach due to a desire to avoid open political critique and the more divisive political aspects of the larger Central American solidarity movement, both of which created obstacles for effective organizing and outreach among local Jewish groups. Prior to the formation of the sanctuary-centered havurot and CASA, early JCCA members engaged in intense debate regarding how to effectively address the relationship between the State of Israel and Central American governments while maintaining support for Israel. Given the close relationship of JCCA to CASA,⁵⁶ this less controversial approach likely contributed to CASA’s primarily “overground railroad” sanctuary orientation as well, at least initially. Some local Jewish solidarity activists, however, in line with the position taken by New Jewish Agenda (NJA), sharply criticized the Israeli government for providing weapons and training to the Guatemalan and Salvadoran militaries, arguing that this arrangement was not only unjust, but also threatened Israeli national security.⁵⁷ Others were gravely concerned about the Reagan administration’s reports of anti-Semitism among Sandinista leaders in Nicaragua and allegations of ties between Central American guerrillas and the Palestine Liberation Organization.⁵⁸ As a result, there was some concern about the viability of garnering local Jewish support for political lobbying against U.S. policy in Central America, given the more complicated

relationship of Jews to the region and the possibility of “needless polarization in the Jewish community because of its implicit politics.”⁵⁹ Instead, some early JCCA members recommended that the organization focus only on less controversial issues, such as advocacy for increased refugee access to asylum in the United States and improved treatment of asylum seekers awaiting case outcomes.⁶⁰ JCCA members who wished to engage in more extensive political lobbying, however, soon determined the agenda of the organization, and in 1985, JCCA became a subcommittee of New Jewish Agenda.⁶¹

Like JCCA, the hesitancy and aspirational neutrality of some Jewish CASA members would quickly shift. A member of Beth Israel’s sanctuary-supporting havurah directly credited this evolution to the work of displaced Central Americans such as the Ramos family:

In the beginning, most people wanted to offer humanitarian kindness to people in trouble.... But after having Sonia and Luis with us and meeting other refugees, our mission is now to influence U.S policy, to stop supplying money to a regime that is killing and torturing Salvadorians.⁶²

The move away from seeking a neutral position on the migration crisis would affect the entire Beth Israel congregation as well, with far-reaching effects on the future of the synagogue and local peace activism. As the Beth Israel havurah’s positions on sanctuary and political activism increasingly diverged from that of the larger congregation, the havurah and congregational leadership faced opposition from congregational members who felt that sanctuary and other types of political work would lead to uncomfortable public associations of Beth Israel with opposition to U.S. foreign policy.⁶³ Tensions rose to new heights in 1987 after Beth Israel’s rabbi, Brian Walt, a South African immigrant and anti-apartheid activist, participated in an NJA-sponsored memorial for Palestinians killed during the First Intifada. Less than one year later, desiring an inclusive, “vision-

based” religious community with an explicit focus on social justice and sanctuary,⁶⁴ Rabbi Walt and thirty families separated from Beth Israel and formed their own synagogue called Mishkan Shalom, or “Sanctuary of Peace.”⁶⁵ A pledge of support for Central American justice work was written into Mishkan Shalom’s founding statement, making the new synagogue the second Jewish sanctuary congregation in the Philadelphia area.⁶⁶

Following their successful bid for asylum, the Ramos family would continue to work with Mishkan Shalom and other CASA coalitional members as they transitioned to permanent residency in the United States. Now reunited with their family and able to pursue legal employment in the United States, Luis and Sonia moved toward financial independence from the coalition while continuing their solidarity work with both Central and Northern American organizers. CASA continued its focus on educational outreach and political lobbying and agreed to compensate Luis for his involvement with the organization. A July 1988 fundraising letter describes this arrangement:

Over the next few months, CASA will undertake a major effort at outreach to other faith communities to encourage them to join us in bringing morality to foreign policy. Luis has agreed to work only four-fifths time at his welding job, so that he will be able to devote substantial time to assisting CASA through his considerable organizational skills. CASA, in turn, has agreed to make up the shortfall in Luis’ salary, and to continue to support the family’s needs.⁶⁷

This arrangement is an additional example of how Philadelphia-based sanctuary activists attempted to rehabilitate sanctuary as solidarity in hopes of more equal partnerships between Northern and Central Americans. Changing circumstances also contributed to these shifting goals. With greater access to legally recognized employment and residency, some Central Americans were able to exert more control over both their subsistence work

and political activities with Northern American organizers. More secure residency status also enabled Central Americans to organize transnational alliances more freely and to further develop immigrant support resources in the United States and Canada.

Going Home

At a Delaware County Pledge of Resistance protest during the fall of 1988, Luis Ramos proclaimed: “The Salvadoran people want to work out our own solutions to our problems. We need help from the U.S., not intervention.”⁶⁸ This paradoxical statement, directed toward continued U.S. involvement in the Salvadoran civil war, expresses the post-colonial dilemma of reparations without interference. The statement subtly stresses a full approach to anti-interventionism in that Central Americans were not only resisting U.S. intervention in their home countries but also in their organizing activities with Northern American sympathizers. Non-intervention was, therefore, promoted through an expanded notion of sanctuary as the result of equitable community collaboration rather than temporary shelter provided by a more privileged entity. As ideas about sanctuary expanded, this became a major goal of Philadelphia-based sanctuary organizers as they reoriented their activities toward repatriation and sistering relationships.

By the late 1980s, CARA member organizations had become less active in emergency sanctuary organizing and were shifting to other projects. Meanwhile, exiled Salvadorans in the Philadelphia region urged religious sanctuary organizers to continue to back their efforts to end the civil wars and to become more involved in supporting displaced Salvadorans’ repatriation initiatives.⁶⁹ Salvadoran organizers took the lead in establishing the projects and priorities of this new era of solidarity organizing, which evoked both admiration and umbrage. As one Northern American organizer remarked:

There were Guatemalans in the whole national sanctuary thing. But the story was that if you had fifteen Guatemalans and three Salvadorans and fifteen North Americans and you had a meeting, when the action plan came out, it would be the Salvadoran action plan. The Salvadorans were just really, really good organizers. It was said with some amusement, but separately with some resentment too.... The guys who were here in Philly were involved in the whole direction that the sanctuary took in Philadelphia, and then, for some of us, the direction that...the post-sanctuary movement took.⁷⁰

The Ramos family and Pedro Menéndez of the Interfaith Office on Human Rights in El Salvador would take a leading role in this “post-sanctuary” era, which would eventually result in the establishment of formal sistering relationships between CARA coalition members and resettled communities in El Salvador.

The first major Salvadoran resettlement project to involve Philadelphia sanctuary organizers was the “Going Home” campaign, initiated by exiles in the United States and displaced Salvadoran *campesinos* in Mesa Grande, Honduras.⁷¹ Like their counterparts in Northern America, Salvadorans in Mesa Grande and other communities of displaced persons were often highly organized. Facing dire circumstances, Mesa Grande residents quickly formed religious groups (namely, *comunidades eclesiales de base*) and *directivas comunales* (community councils) in order to survive.⁷² These grassroots organizations supported residents’ material and spiritual needs, and negotiated with governmental and non-governmental organizations, including international entities.⁷³ After hearing encouraging reports of *re pobladores* who had repopulated towns in the Salvadoran provinces of Chalatenango and Cuscatlán in 1986,⁷⁴ residents of the Mesa Grande camp began preparing for their own return to El Salvador with the support of the refugee-led CRIPDES (Comité Cristiano Pro-Desplazados de El Salvador / Christian Committee of the Displaced) and other Salvadoran organizations.

U.S.-based Salvadoran organizations were critical in establishing international support for carrying out the *repladores*' plan of return, especially among religious groups who had supported the Sanctuary Movement. The nationally-oriented Interfaith Office on Accompaniment, led by José Artiga and Oscar Chacón, and the SHARE Foundation (then directed by Artiga's spouse, Eileen Purcell), were among the most active U.S.-based organizations that established "sistering" relationships between Northern American religious groups and Salvadoran communities in Central America.⁷⁵ Founded in 1981 in Washington, DC as the Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research and Education Foundation, SHARE initially partnered with Catholic humanitarian organizations to provide assistance to internally and externally displaced Salvadorans. As an extension of its humanitarian and development work, SHARE established a Sister Parish program between the U.S. and El Salvador in 1986 and later expanded beyond its originally Catholic base to include Protestant organizations.⁷⁶ Using an accompaniment model similar to that of Witness for Peace, SHARE coordinated educational campaigns throughout the United States and arranged international delegations to El Salvador for the purpose of recruiting Northern Americans for short-term material aid and longer-term participation in Sister Community relationships.⁷⁷

The largest of these projects was the Going Home Campaign, launched in 1987 in partnership with Mesa Grande residents and the Interfaith Office on Accompaniment.⁷⁸ Through Pedro Menéndez, who worked for the Interfaith Office's Philadelphia affiliate, Going Home coordinators secured the support of remaining members of Philadelphia's CARA sanctuary coalition to form the Delaware Valley Going Home Steering Committee.⁷⁹ The renamed "Sanctuary Partners" committee at Central Baptist Church

appears to have been one of the most active groups involved. The CBC committee agreed to rent the now vacated CBC sanctuary apartment to Menéndez and provide a weekly salary to support his outreach work among local religious communities and congressional representatives.⁸⁰ By the late 1980s, Salvadoran organizers, the CBC committee, and other CARA members had participated in several outreach efforts supporting the repatriation of communities in El Salvador, the establishment of sister communities, and fundraising for community development, including schools.⁸¹

Throughout repatriation campaigns such as Going Home, state-sponsored violence in El Salvador continued to draw intense scrutiny. Violence against religious workers appeared particularly egregious and served only to galvanize international religious support for Salvadoran-led repatriation projects and peace negotiations. One of the most infamous incidents occurred in 1989, when a platoon of Salvadoran soldiers entered Central American University and murdered six liberationist Jesuit priests, their cook, and the cook's daughter. A 1993 UN Truth Commission report describes the victims, who were immediately regarded as martyrs:

In the early hours on 16 November 1989, six Jesuit priests, a cook and her 16-year-old daughter were shot and killed at the Pastoral Centre of José Simeón Cañas Central American University (UCA) in San Salvador. The victims were Fathers Ignacio Ellacuría, Rector of the University; Ignacio Martín-Baró, Vice-Rector; Segundo Montes, Director of the Human Rights Institute; Amando López, Joaquín López y López and Juan Ramón Moreno, all teachers at UCA; and Julia Elba Ramos and her daughter, Celina Mariceth Ramos.⁸²

The Commission later found that the soldiers were specifically ordered “to kill Father Ignacio Ellacuría and to leave no witnesses.”⁸³ After the killings, the soldiers took money and a suitcase full of photographs and documents and opened fire on the outside of the

building. Before departing, they wrote the following message on a piece of cardboard:
“FMLN executed those who informed on it. Victory or death, FMLN.”⁸⁴

Reminiscent of the assassination of Óscar Romero, the tragedy evoked profound grief for Pedro Menéndez and Luis Ramos, both of whom had personally collaborated with one or more of the slain priests.⁸⁵ In an interview several years later, Ramos described their influence on his activism and his faith:

Personalmente mi inspiración han sido la vida Monseñor Romero, los jesuitas, los compañeros caídos en la lucha. Todo eso, compañeros que dieron su vida, merecen que nosotros mantengamos esa esperanza, esa fe, y seamos vigilantes y partícipes de que esto que hemos logrado no se termine acá.”⁸⁶

Ramos and Menéndez funneled their anguish into a renewed push for urgent action from their Northern American allies. Two weeks after the murders, Ramos took leave from his welding job to participate in a series of CASA-supported events, including a memorial procession and weeklong vigil at Swarthmore College and Swarthmore Friends Meeting. During the vigil, Ramos shared his goals with members of the press:

I want to bring to the attention of the American people the fact that the American government is supporting the war inside of El Salvador.... That support is just producing more violence and oppression and has nothing to do with helping our people.... [Father Ellacuría] was a very kind man and very well-known because of his many activities in El Salvador. And many times his name appeared on published death-squad lists of people who the death squads said they would kill. We can't bring the priests back. They have already been killed. But we can continue their work in order to change the situation in El Salvador.⁸⁷

Meanwhile, Menéndez, in his capacity as a fulltime Interfaith Office organizer, worked with CBC and other CARA members in the hopes that international attention to the November assassinations would re-energize local engagement with Central American issues. With Christmas soon approaching, Menéndez led Northern American allies in an

“Advent Call to Fasting for El Salvador” consisting of “vigils and vespers” among Philadelphia area clergy and congregations.⁸⁸ Menéndez also gathered religious leaders, including women religious, for a demonstration at the U.S. Courthouse in Philadelphia on December 11, 1989. Of the sixty demonstrators who gathered, sixteen were arrested and fined for distributing leaflets and blocking the entrance to the building.⁸⁹

The Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia Interfaith Offices also continued to lobby members of Congress, particularly Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), an influential member of the Senate Appropriations Committee who had shown some willingness to break with Republicans regarding military spending and asylum in the past. For months, Menéndez and Artiga coordinated a weekly protest with local clerical and lay leaders outside Senator Specter’s home in northwest Philadelphia.⁹⁰ At the first vigil in November 1989, Specter greeted protestors with some irritation, but agreed to listen to the testimonio of an unidentified Salvadoran woman through a translator and interacted with Northern Americans as they shared their concerns.⁹¹ Each Sunday after religious services, activists from CARA and other solidarity groups continued to gather outside of Sen. Specter’s home, protesting his refusal to sign a bill that would partially withhold military aid until the Salvadoran government adequately investigated the UCA killings.⁹² The Philadelphia Interfaith Office additionally sponsored a march on March 24, 1990 on the tenth anniversary of Romero’s assassination, in remembrance of the over 70,000 Salvadorans who had already died as a result of war-related violence. Over seven hundred Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish students, leaders and lay people marched from Philadelphia City Hall to the U.S. Courthouse, walking two-by-two with signs such as “*Que mi sangre sea*

semilla de liberación (Let my blood be the seed of liberation),” the words Romero reportedly shared in one of his final press interviews.⁹³

Sistering

As the months of protests and vigils wore on, participants moved into a new phase of solidarity organizing squarely focused on political advocacy and economic development, guided by Pedro Menéndez, Luis Ramos, and other Salvadoran organizers. In 1990, building from relationships forged through CARA and the Going Home Campaign, Philadelphia area religious leaders and congregations formed the Romero Interfaith Center.⁹⁴ As the end of the Salvadoran civil war neared, the Romero Interfaith Center (RIC) established a sistering relationship with Las Anonas de Santa Cruz, a community of resettled Salvadorans in El Salvador’s Usulután province.⁹⁵ An RIC-produced history offers the following account of how this connection emerged:

A community of nomadic refugees from El Salvador’s civil war, weary of running through the hills with the military on its heels and subsisting on fruits, roots and charity for years, settled on land formerly known as the village Santa Cruz in the Usulután Department. Regular harassment by the military led CRIPDES to ask a committee in the U.S. to accompany this newly-formed community. The Romero Interfaith Center (RIC) in Philadelphia had recently emerged from the Sanctuary Movement and the Going Home Campaign, the first offering refuge from war-torn countries of Latin America like El Salvador and the second supporting Salvadoran refugees in repopulating their homelands, and was called to accompany Santa Cruz. Two delegations traveled from Philly to meet the people of Santa Cruz in November of 1990, solidifying and celebrating this new sister relationship.⁹⁶

Menéndez, who had relationships with both the FMLN and CRIPDES, established the connection with the Las Anonas community and encouraged the RIC to form a sistering arrangement.⁹⁷ Subsequently, RIC and SHARE representatives traveled to Las Anonas

where they met with CRIPDES organizers and *directiva* leaders, and the sistering connection was born.⁹⁸

The RIC, initially based at Central Baptist Church, continued to work with Las Anonas through CRIPDES and its two main U.S.-based partner organizations, SHARE and CISPES. In the early years of the sistering relationship, the RIC employed one part-time staff person who worked with Menéndez and Ramos to organize fundraisers and trips to El Salvador, and mobilize RIC volunteers.⁹⁹ In 1992, the year of the Chapultepec Peace Accords, Philadelphia's St. Vincent de Paul parish, which had a long-standing committee supporting sanctuary and other Central American solidarity efforts, voted to endorse the RIC as a congregation.¹⁰⁰ Mishkan Shalom would join soon after, bringing the Center's four main congregational pillars to CBC, Tabernacle United, St. Vincent's, and Mishkan Shalom. With its declaration of congregational support, St. Vincent's became the first Catholic parish to publicly embrace any aspect of sanctuary organizing in Philadelphia. While the Medical Mission Sisters and a small group of other Philadelphia area Catholics had openly supported sanctuary in the years prior,¹⁰¹ the politically conservative archdiocese leadership explicitly prohibited Catholic parishes from becoming public sanctuary hosts, despite its somewhat sympathetic stance toward Central American Catholic refugees.¹⁰² Instead of physically housing individuals in public sanctuary in religious buildings, Philadelphia parishioners were encouraged instead to be "helpful and humane."¹⁰³ With the Sanctuary Movement's new turn toward international development work, sympathetic Catholics could more freely organize and gather support in Catholic spaces. The RIC and its relationship with Las Anonas soon came under the leadership of St. Vincent's volunteers, who interpreted the arrangement

primarily in terms of a “Sister Parish” relationship (the original intent of SHARE during its formational years),¹⁰⁴ though non-Catholic religious groups remained involved with the coalition.¹⁰⁵

At least two other sistering relationships also developed among former Sanctuary Movement groups in the Philadelphia area. As Central Baptist Church’s involvement in the Las Anonas sister community receded, the congregation developed its own sister church arrangement with a Baptist church in Santa Elena, El Salvador, initiated in 1988 as a “covenant of partnership” with Iglesia Bautista Peniel in Santa Elena, also located in El Salvador’s Usulután province.¹⁰⁶ This relationship was likely facilitated by the International Ministries department of the church’s parent denomination, the American Baptist Churches (ABC), headquartered in nearby King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. The work of Puerto Rican Baptist minister Victor Mercado (d. 2009), the first ABC International Ministries area director for Latin America, was central to the denomination’s efforts to end its “paternalistic approach to mission” and recognize the independence and property rights of Baptist churches in Cuba, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Haiti.¹⁰⁷ Many of these churches were already active in solidarity work, including refugee assistance, and became essential partners for establishing transnational partnerships oriented toward resettling and rebuilding displaced communities during the late 1980s and beyond.¹⁰⁸

The Delaware County CASA coalition also developed its own sistering relationship with the resettled community of Nuevo Gualcho in the San Vicente province of El Salvador. After the 1989 UCA murders, the Ramos family presented CASA with an ultimatum: They would not remain involved with the coalition unless they supported a

repatriated community in El Salvador.¹⁰⁹ The coalition agreed, and the family “facilitated years of trips and financial aid” to Nuevo Gualcho, leading several Northern American delegations to El Salvador and providing guidance for the transnational partnership.¹¹⁰ The arrangement lasted until 2007, when both CASA and the sistering relationship were formally brought to a close.¹¹¹

Conclusion

After the conclusion of public sanctuary arrangements in religious buildings, the leadership of Central American exiles was critical in shaping the trajectory of the Sanctuary Movement toward the development of sistering communities. This evolution was marked by a strong ethos of anti-interventionism communicated in the religious terms of “solidarity” and “accompaniment” which was intended to shape subsequent activism around the recognition of Central Americans' primary authority in sanctuary work. As Central Americans worked to redefine their relationships with Northern American supporters, they also advocated for a fuller approach to sanctuary that included their rights to return and a renewed push to achieve the social justice goals of their pre-exilic community activism. In Philadelphia, this continued to be characterized by a changing constituency of interreligious activism, animated by shifting coalitions of Jews, Protestants, and Catholics with their own ideological, historical, and ethical context for sanctuary work. The following chapter will further explore this kaleidoscope of interreligious activism, giving voice to the experiences of Central and Northern American sanctuary activists and supporters in greater depth and comparative detail.

¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020; Lini Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum, Life in Limbo Ends for Two Guatemalan Refugees in City,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 24, 1986, sec. Local.

² Kadaba, “Given a ‘Rare’ Blessing of Asylum.”

³ Gabriela and Joel Morelos to First United Methodist Church of Germantown, June 1987, private collection, Philadelphia, PA.

⁴ Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (ESV)

⁵ Morelos to First United Methodist Church.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Resolution to Declare This Congregation to Be a Sanctuary Church as Adopted by Vote of the Congregation on October 23, 1984,” November 1984, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-109, Folder “Sanctuary Project, 1984,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA.

⁸ Rotem Bar, “If You Knew the Truth, Then Surely You Would Help Us,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 2, 1985, sec. Features Inquirer Magazine, 22.

⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁰ Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹¹ Bar, “If You Knew the Truth,” 20.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020. The Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America (CRTFCA) also played a crucial role in vetting Mauricio for participation in the Sanctuary Movement and facilitating his journey eastward from Los Angeles to Philadelphia. Due to the involvement of Salvadoran Baptist churches in sanctuary and solidarity work, it is also possible that Mauricio was recruited for the Sanctuary Movement through this arm of the sanctuary network, as Salvadoran Baptists were involved in transnational accompaniment initiatives such as Witness for Peace. See also: “Accused Salvadoran Pastor Now in Mexico Seeking Refuge,” *Baptist Press: News Service of the Southern Baptist Convention*, November 13, 1984, 1; Ed Griffin-Nolan, *Witness for Peace: A Story of Resistance* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991); Sandra Bauer Prima, “Central Baptist Church Congregational Meeting Minutes,” October 23, 1984, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-109, folder “Sanctuary Project, 1984,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴ Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁵ Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020; “Sanctuary Task Force Annual Report 1986-1987,” 1987, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “Sanctuary Task Force, 1985-87,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA.

¹⁶ Mark Butler, “U.S. Agency Says It Won’t Go into Church for Alien,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 6, 1985, sec. Local; Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁷ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁹ A similar change occurred among Quaker organizers. By the late 1980s, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s “Sanctuary Working Group” had been redesignated as “The Central America Working Group” due to the “broadening meaning of Sanctuary” and the “wider range of approaches” Quakers and coalitional partners were using in their solidarity activities, including legally approved methods of assisting displaced individuals and support for Central American repatriation campaigns. See Michael Crauderueff, “1991 Report to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting’s Representative Meeting: The Central American Working Group,” 1991, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, RG2/Phy/772, Central America Working Group, Series 1: Minutes, Minutes 1985-1992, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA; Anne Richan, “Dear Friend,” October 27, 1989, Central America Working Group, Series 1: Minutes, Minutes 1985-1992, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

²⁰ “Sanctuary Partners Annual Report 1987-1988,” 1988, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “Sanctuary Partners, 1988,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA.

²¹ It would also bring the church into alignment with shifts already taking place in the American Baptist Church’s overall approach to international missions, which is discussed later in this chapter.

²² Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, 1st ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987), 53-55. Taylor and her husband, Dick (Richard) Taylor were founding members of Witness for Peace. At the time, NJA’s vision of *tikkun olam* primarily concerned support for Israeli/Palestinian peace efforts, anti-racism work, and LGBT rights. NJA, a New York-based organization with a chapter in Philadelphia, was particularly critical of Israeli military aid to Central American governments and the Reagan administration’s claims of widespread antisemitism among members of the Sandinista government.

²³ Korn, a prominent journalist for the Philadelphia-based *The Jewish Exponent*, would later split from the group over political disagreements involving Israel, but remained interested in assisting with “direct, non-political refugee assistance” for Central Americans. (Bertram W. Korn, Jr. to Lance Laver, October 21, 1985, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection.)

²⁴ “PRESS RELEASE: New Jewish Group Formed on Central America, July 31, 1984, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection, 2; Research contributor in conversation with the author, June 2021; Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021.

²⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, June 2021.

²⁶ Mark Joffe, “Sanctuary Issue Becomes a New Concern for Jews,” *The Jewish Exponent*, March 8, 1985, 21.

²⁷ Lance Laver to Pauline Rosenberg, n.d., Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection; “PRESS RELEASE: New Jewish Group Formed on Central America”; New Jewish Agenda, “Jews and Central America: The Need to Act,” 1984, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection. Although members had varying views on the subject, some JCCA representatives additionally framed lobbying and peace work in terms of supporting the well-being of the State of Israel, in light of its involvement in supplying arms to Central American governments.

²⁸ Joffe, “Sanctuary Issue,” 21.

²⁹ Meeting Minutes, February 2, 1986, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection; Congregation of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, “Resolution in Support of Sanctuary for Central American Refugees,” 1986, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection.

³⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020; Sanctuary Committee of Beth David Reform Congregation, “Chavurah Lahayyim (Fellowship for Life),” 1985, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection; Marilyn Silverstein, “Synagogues Back Sanctuary,” *The Jewish Exponent*, January 10, 1986.

³¹ Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County to ASDI [Asociación Salvadoreña de Desarrollo Integra], 1992, Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County Collected Records (CDGA), folder “1992,” Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

³² “CASA Timeline,” 1993, Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County Collected Records (CDGA), folder “History and Goals,” Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

³³ Jamie Moffett, dir., *Return to El Salvador*, written by Betsy Morgan and Julia Shields (Philadelphia, PA: Jamie Moffett Media Design and Production, 2010), Docurama.

³⁴ Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

³⁵ Laura Jackson, dir, *El Salvador: Portraits in a Revolution*, produced by Laura Jackson and Betsy Morgan (1992, New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 1994), <https://video.alexanderstreet.com/watch/el-salvador-portraits-in-a-revolution>.

³⁶ Moffett, *Return to El Salvador*. Translation (my own): I was born in Candelaria, one of San Salvador's poorest neighborhoods, and although I lived in poverty, I never understood what poverty was. It seemed like a normal way of life. I had my first job in a Japanese factory and little by little it occurred to me what labor was, what suffering was, what oppression was. Then I realized that our wages put living a fair life and having rights completely out of reach. Education was not attainable in this country, one could say. We were born poor and we lived poor and we died poor. We realized that the only way that things were going to change was if we fought for our rights. Little by little we organized ourselves.

³⁷ Leslie Florio, "Political Refugees Find a Home in Media," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 1988, sec. Neighbors Delaware; Jackson, *El Salvador*.

³⁸ Moffett, *Return to El Salvador*.

³⁹ Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁴⁰ Jackson, *El Salvador*.

⁴¹ Sonia detailed several instances of rough treatment by immigration and border personnel in Guatemala and Mexico, but also remembered the kindness of strangers. At one point, an acquaintance suggested they pose as *Guadalupanos* on pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. They decided to go to the Basilica, where they were able to evade immigration authorities and secure bus transportation for the next segment of their travels.

⁴² Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁴³ Ibid. Sonia used the word "corralón" to describe the center, a place with apparently dehumanizing conditions.

⁴⁴ Initially, with the assistance of a relative in the United States, Sonia unsuccessfully attempted to gain asylum in Canada while Luis stayed behind at Refugio. She later returned to Refugio until the couple's departure for Philadelphia.

⁴⁵ “A Center of Non Violence, Democracy and Human Rights in a World of Conflict,” Refugio del Rio Grande, accessed May 11, 2021, <https://refugiodelriogrande.tripod.com/>; Matt Schudel, “Lisa Brodyaga, Lawyer for Refugees, Immigrants at Texas Border, Dies at 81,” *Washington Post*, accessed June 22, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2022/01/06/immigration-lawyer-lisa-brodyaga-dies/>. Prior to establishing Refugio, Brodyaga traveled extensively as a human rights observer throughout Central America and provided legal representation for both asylum seekers and sanctuary workers in the United States.

⁴⁶ Jackson, *El Salvador*.

⁴⁷ Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁴⁸ “Interfaith Sanctuary Taskforce Minutes,” CARA, November 19, 1986, private collection.

⁴⁹ Research contributors in conversation with the author.

⁵⁰ Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2022.

⁵³ Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County to CASA Contributor, July 25, 1988, private collection; Sonia Ramos in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁵⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2020; Robert G. Neuhauser to Richard P. Bansen, n.d., Central America Working Group, Series 3: Financial, Requests to CAWG for Funding, 1989-1992, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. This approach may have been preferred due to Quaker requirements for community consensus. One contributor noted that Quaker congregations were among the earliest in the Philadelphia area to express interest in becoming sanctuary hosts but had a lengthier community approval process that did not often result in full support for becoming public hosts in the Sanctuary Movement. By 1987, only a handful of Quaker meetings in the region had publicly hosted individuals in sanctuary, including Chestnut Hill and Germantown Friends Meetings in northwest Philadelphia. Accessible records are scant regarding these individuals, who included a young woman “Paz” who later worked for CARECEN in Long Island, New York.

⁵⁵ Meeting Minutes, October 9, 1990, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “CBC Sanctuary Partners, 1990,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA.

⁵⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, June 2021.

⁵⁷ New Jewish Agenda, “Jews and Central America.”

⁵⁸ Meeting Minutes, July 24, 1984, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection.

⁵⁹ Meeting Minutes, January 31, 1985, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection; Meeting Minutes, March 7, 1985, Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection, 1.

⁶⁰ In reference to “Micah’s admonition to work for justice and show mercy,” an early JCCA press release urged that Jews “should not forget their own experiences as refugees and the dehumanizing effect on the Jewish people’s collective psyche of a largely apathetic and often hostile world” (“PRESS RELEASE: New Jewish Group Formed on Central America”).

⁶¹ Meeting Minutes, n.d. (1985?), Jews Concerned for Central Americans, records, private collection.

⁶² Florio, “Political Refugees Find a Home in Media.”

⁶³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁶⁴ Murray Dubin, “A Bold Blend of Religion, Politics, New Jewish Congregation Links Prayer and Public Policy.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 29, 1988, sec. Local.

⁶⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020; “History,” Mishkan Shalom, accessed July 9, 2020, <https://mishkan.org/history.html>.

⁶⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁶⁷ Central America Solidarity Alliance of Delaware County to CASA Contributor.

⁶⁸ Dan Hardy, “Marchers Protest Central American Policies of U. S.,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 22, 1988, sec. Neighbors Delaware.

⁶⁹ Meeting Minutes, December 2, 1987, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “Sanctuary Task Force, 1985-87,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA; Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020; Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁷⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁷¹ Vic Compher, “Introduction: The Exile and the Return,” in *Going Home - Building Peace in El Salvador: The Story of Repatriation*, eds. Vic Compher, Betsy Morgan, and Laura Jackson (New York: The Apex Press, 1991), 7-8.

⁷² Molly Todd, “Salvadorans by Flight: Peasants and Citizen Action on the El Salvador -Honduras Border, 1960–1990” (University of Wisconsin, 2007), 88-89.

⁷³ Compher, “Introduction,” 4-5.

⁷⁴ Lit. “repopulators.” This designation is an outgrowth of the desire of displaced Salvadorans to shed the “refugee” label in favor of a term that expresses a personal and communal sense of agency and purpose.

⁷⁵ Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles against Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 46-47; Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2022. Chacón, who had worked with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, helped coordinate the first “sistering” relationships that emerged from the earliest repatriation campaigns. He would also assist with similar endeavors among Philadelphia area sanctuary organizers.

⁷⁶ “History,” SHARE Foundation, 2016, <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/history.html>; Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2022. SHARE was particularly concerned with connecting with women religious, who would form an important base of support in expanding the Sister Parish program in the United States.

⁷⁷ The “sister cities” model had been previously implemented in Nicaragua where Witness for Peace and other human rights organizations had become involved. See Francisco Alvarez Solís and Pauline Martin, “The Role of Salvadorean NGOs in Post-War Reconstruction,” *Development in Practice* 2, no. 2 (1992): 103–13; Claire Weber, *Visions of Solidarity: U.S. Peace Activists in Nicaragua from War to Women’s Activism and Globalization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006).

⁷⁸ “History,” SHARE Foundation, 2016, <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/history.html>.

⁷⁹ Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1988, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners, Sanctuary Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “Sanctuary Partners, 1988,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ According to William Westerman, at least forty-five CBC congregants visited El Salvador during this time, before the 1992 ceasefire agreement between the Salvadoran government and FMLN. William Westerman, “Reciprocity and the Fabric of Solidarity: Central Americans, Refugees, and Delegations in the 1980s,” in *International Volunteer Tourism: Critical Reflections on Good Works in Central America*, eds. Katherine Borland and Abigail E. Adams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 47.

⁸² Belisario Betancur, Thomas Buergethal, and Reinaldo Figueredo Planchart, “From Madness to Hope: The 12-Year War in El Salvador,” Report of the Commission on the Truth for El Salvador (United Nations Security Council, April 1, 1993), 45, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/168913?ln=en>.

⁸³ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 47. Members of the Salvadoran military regarded UCA as a “refuge of subversives” (49), despite its history as a conservative institution.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 49; Dan Hardy, “Salvadoran Exile Is a Key Protester Against U.S. Role,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1989, sec. Neighbors Main Line. Before leaving El Salvador, Luis Ramos had personally worked with Father Ellacuría, who had been involved in peace negotiations at the time of his death. Additionally, the resettled town of Ciudad Segundo Montes, involved in the Going Home Campaign, was named for Father Segundo Montes, who had done extensive human rights work in the region.

⁸⁶ Moffett, *Return to El Salvador*. Translation (my own): Personally, my inspiration has been the life of Monsignor Romero, the Jesuits, the fallen partners in the struggle. All of that, comrades who gave their lives, deserve that we uphold that hope, that faith, and remain vigilant and active so that what we have achieved does not end here.

⁸⁷ Hardy, “Salvadoran Exile.”

⁸⁸ “An Advent Call to Fasting for El Salvador” (Interfaith Office for Human Rights in El Salvador, December 1989), private collection; Joseph A. Slobodzian, “16 Held at Protest of U.S. Role in Central America,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 12, 1989, sec. Local. The fasting campaign was endorsed by eighty Philadelphia area religious leaders.

⁸⁹ Slobodzian, “16 Held at Protest.”

⁹⁰ Hector Perla, Jr. and Susan Bibler Coutin, “Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement,” in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspective: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*, ed. Sean Rehaag and Randy Lippert (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 79.

⁹¹ Marie McCullough, “Group Decrying Salvadoran Aid Visits Specter,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 28, 1989, sec. Local.

⁹² McCullough, “Group Decrying Salvadoran Aid Visits Specter.” Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2022; “Specter’s Choice: Pa.’s Senator Has a Key Role to Play in Helping End the Violence in El Salvador,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 20, 1990, sec. Editorials.

⁹³ Julian Filichowski, “Working for Justice to Achieve Peace: The Life and Legacy of the Martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero” (The Archbishop Romero Trust, February 27, 2014), 2, <http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/documents/anniversary%20homilies/working%20for%20justice%20to%20achieve%20peace.pdf>; Michael D. Schaeffer, “700 March in Memory of Slain Salvadoran Archbishop,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 23, 1990, sec. Local.

⁹⁴ Romero Interfaith Center, “About Us,” April 12, 2012, <https://romerointerfaithcenter.wordpress.com/about/>; Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁹⁵ Romero Interfaith Center, “History,” April 13, 2012, <https://romerointerfaithcenter.wordpress.com/history/>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Todd, *Long Journey to Justice*, 46-48. As Molly Todd notes, this was part of a larger campaign on the part of U.S.-based Salvadoran organizations to cultivate relationships in “strategic sites” across the United States. The SHARE organization was most closely affiliated with the Popular Liberation Forces (FPL), which sought to “engage different sectors of US society, from faith centers to radical leftists to more moderate groups,” and “encouraged different solidarity groups to take on particular roles, including organizing demonstrations, fund-raising, lobbying, and engaging in civil disobedience.”

⁹⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020 and July 2022. Menéndez eventually left Philadelphia, presumably to attend a Catholic university on the U.S. West Coast, which had been arranged through Saint Joseph’s University in Philadelphia.

⁹⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020. Though RIC affiliates were no longer participating in public sanctuary in religious buildings, there were suspicions that federal surveillance continued, including phone tapping.

¹⁰⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁰¹ “Metropolitan Area News in Brief.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 22, 1987, sec. Local. Although this project primarily focuses on Jewish and Protestant groups, who formed the bulk of Sanctuary Movement activities in Philadelphia, more research is needed about early Catholic participation, particularly among women religious who likely neither publicized the connections they almost certainly had with the national movement nor the hospitality they offered to displaced Central Americans traveling through the region.

¹⁰² Bridgett M. Davis, “Catholics Give Refuge to Salvadoran.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 5, 1987, sec. Local; Philadelphia Archdiocesan Committee on World

Peace and Justice, “The Crisis in Central America: A Catholic Perspective,” November 6, 1985, Jews Concerned with Central Americans, records, private collection; Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021. The Medical Mission Sisters, based in Northeast Philadelphia, welcomed “Oscar” into sanctuary in October 1987. Active in El Salvador’s national youth movement, Oscar fled El Salvador seven years prior after his priest and brother were killed by government soldiers. Rosemary Nagl, a Medical Mission Sister, offered a veiled challenge to the Catholic hierarchy’s position on sanctuary: “Jesus spoke against injustice and He chose the plight of the poor to work with. That’s our call. We have to take the same risks He took. That’s being a Catholic.”

¹⁰³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021.

¹⁰⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Some in-roads were made with Catholic leadership throughout the 1990s, as Philadelphia re-emerged as an immigrant gateway and the city’s immigrant population (including Catholics) dramatically increased. Catholic sanctuary and solidarity activists were instrumental in increasing the archdiocese’s support for immigrants, regardless of citizenship status, and helped sustain Catholic support for the New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia which emerged in the early 2000s. Meanwhile, the RIC, an early member of the U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities network, continues to have an active partnership with Las Anonas and SHARE as of this writing, though the organizational model has shifted away from direct community-to-community funding. Romero Interfaith Center, “About Us.”; SHARE Foundation, “CRIPDES,” <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/cripdes.html>; Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Moffett, *Return to El Salvador*; “Sanctuary Partners 1989-1990,” 1990, Sanctuary Partners/Salvador Partners 1984-92, Box 1-108, folder “CBC Sanctuary Partners, 1990,” Central Baptist Church, Wayne, PA. This relationship was likely forged through Salvadoran pastors Alex and Ruth Orantes, who stayed at Central Baptist Church while serving as missionaries in the United States.

¹⁰⁷ haitianministries, “R.I.P., Victor Mercado,” *Doing Theology from El Norte* (blog), April 27, 2009, <http://haitianministries.blogspot.com/2009/05/rip-victor-mercado-27-april-2009.html>

¹⁰⁸ José Norat-Rodriguez, “Angels in Our Pilgrimage: Victor Mercado,” *American Baptist Historical Society Primary Source* 8, no. 2–3 (2010): 4, 6.

¹⁰⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹¹⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

¹¹¹ Media and Providence Friends Meeting, “Middletown Preparative, Meeting News,” April 2007, Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County Collected

Records (CDGA), folder "History and Goals," Swarthmore College Peace Collection,
Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

CHAPTER 5

SUEÑO CON SERPIENTES:

LESSONS AND LEGACIES OF THE SANCTUARY MOVEMENT

The sistering relationships that evolved out of the Sanctuary Movement were, as Molly Todd describes, a “new kind of commons, a transnational fictive kin network,” a “web of solidarity” intended as a decolonizing force against “the privatization and commodification of shared resources such as land and information.”¹ As demonstrated in previous chapters, the construction of this web began well prior to the phenomenon of the Sanctuary Movement. Building on centuries of liberation-centered grassroots movements, both Central and Northern Americans with prior human rights, labor organizing, and peace activism experience worked within and alongside of the Sanctuary Movement,² a major predecessor of the sistering arrangements that proliferated during the 1980s and 1990s. These social advocates were instrumental in persuading others to become politically involved, many for the first time in their lives, through opportunities of necessity and circumstance.

Using the interview contributions of nearly thirty individuals who were closely involved with the 1980s Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia, this chapter intends to provide a closer look at the evolution of this web of relationships as Central Americans asserted their expertise and leadership capabilities among Northern American religious allies. Given the interview scope and geographical specificities, the aim of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive framework for organizational dynamics within this or any other branch of the Sanctuary Movement, but rather to identify expressed commonalities and divergences among selected Sanctuary Movement activists and advocates.

Contributors discussed how they became involved with the Sanctuary Movement, their own definitions of sanctuary, characteristics of their relationships with other organizers in the movement, the role of race in sanctuary organizing, and personal spiritual or religious dimensions of sanctuary. While not all-encompassing, these interview samples and findings are suggestive of the ways in which surviving 1980s Sanctuary Movement participants currently understand their motives for participation, how they navigated shared spaces with others representing wide-ranging experiences and backgrounds, and the ways in which they experienced the transformational effects of this communal project.³

Paths to the Sanctuary Movement

Central Americans

Although participation in the Sanctuary Movement was elective for both Central and Northern Americans in Philadelphia, their paths and motivations were manifestly varied. As discussed at length in previous chapters, involvement with the Sanctuary Movement offered many Central Americans not only a critical means of physical survival, but also expanded moral, financial, and political resources to continue or commence human rights work on behalf of their home communities. This work was, for most Central American contributors, preceded by a period of religio-political awakening that would prove foundational for their religious development in the United States as they navigated interreligious spaces and relationships and made their own choices regarding their religious affiliation and practice.

Particularly crucial was their involvement in and exposure to multiple expressions of Christianity, which created both the networks and the capacity to engage in

interreligious activism during their displacement from their home countries. Nearly all Central Americans interviewed had Catholic roots and spoke at length of the religious environments that had shaped them in their home communities, including interactions with foreign missionaries or development workers. For example, one contributor remarked on the impact of their Catholic upbringing in a religiously pluralistic town that included evangelical churches as well as a community of Jehovah's Witnesses: "I was curious about everything that was going on. I wasn't just going and memorizing the catechism. I learned everything around."⁴ Although this contributor stated that they were not politically active prior to their displacement, they expressed gratitude for these childhood experiences which fostered a sense of openness to personal religious exploration, a doorway to their interreligious collaboration in the Sanctuary Movement and subsequent opportunities for civic engagement in the United States.

Another contributor, who had engaged in extensive ecumenical work prior to traveling to the United States, described the influence of this work on his decision to join the Sanctuary Movement, particularly interreligious initiatives oriented toward social change. Their involvement with these ecumenical communities fostered a specific sense of agency in terms of religious expression:

That [theological community] changed my whole approach to faith because I had this [assumption]: This is social work, this is faith—like two separate things.... I was transformed and started to understand faith from a different perspective in that faith is your daily life - what you do, what you don't want to do. It's what you decide to do with your life.⁵

For this individual, these interreligious explorations, coupled with their mother's encouragement to study the Bible, led to a perceived "distance" between their ability to enact their own forms of spirituality versus the authority of the Catholic church "as an

institution.” In contrast to the previous two contributors, a different individual, who had been a Catholic youth organizer in El Salvador, indicated that they had had limited exposure to non-Catholic religions in their home community. Despite developing a honed political capacity that facilitated this kind of interreligious work, they experienced difficulty in finding a suitable religious affiliation after their exile from El Salvador:

I can tell you that I became a very active Catholic in a moment of historical anomaly of the Catholic Church in El Salvador. I mean, the Catholic Church that I became very involved with, to the point of being willing to die for it, was not the Catholic Church that historically has been the case. I was really a child of liberation theology and when I first came to the U.S., I honestly was a bit—I just didn’t know that the experience of Catholicism that I had had in El Salvador in my particular timing in history was an anomaly. I thought that that was the way churches were.⁶

Although they chose not to participate in public sanctuary,⁷ this individual had an integral role in the expansion of interreligious sanctuary and political advocacy networks throughout the United States, particularly the northeast corridor region. As demonstrated in the above conversation samples, while varying forms of Catholic practice had strong foundational import, institutional loyalties did not necessarily carry over as their situations and surroundings changed. Nearly all Central Americans interviewed for this project referenced a religious transformation that took place as a result of travel to the United States and their relationships with Northern American sanctuary activists.⁸

Northern Americans

Like their Central American counterparts, Northern American sanctuary and solidarity advocates in the Philadelphia region included seasoned organizers, as well as those for whom the Sanctuary Movement would be their first foray into a lifetime of involvement with political and social causes, including interreligious activism. The

majority of Northern American sanctuary organizers were women, and could be described as White, college educated, and middle or upper class. During the Sanctuary Movement and subsequent repatriation and sister cities campaigns, Northern American contributors were occupied as caregivers of young children, educators, human rights workers, social workers, university students, religious leaders, and small business owners. As has been shown in earlier chapters, Philadelphia's historical legacy as a center for religious peace and human rights movements figured prominently in the expansion of sanctuary activism in the region. Nearly all of Philadelphia's sanctuary-supporting congregations and religious groups counted members who embodied the legacy and knowledge of political protest and civil disobedience from at least the mid-twentieth century Civil Rights era. This core of veteran activism, reflected especially in Quaker groups, was essential to building interreligious solidarity partnerships such as the Central American Refugee Action (CARA) sanctuary coalition and mentoring new organizers and volunteers who had limited previous involvement in social justice campaigns. Additionally, the Philadelphia branch of the Sanctuary Movement included a critical mass of individuals who had witnessed or personally experienced persecution or political repression themselves. This core group included religious leaders and human rights workers, veterans of the Civil Rights, women's rights, gay liberation, and anti-Vietnam War movements, and those with personal and family histories of displacement and violence.

Northern American contributors included a small group of former Christian missionaries and human rights workers with extensive ecumenical work experience (albeit mostly within the confines of Christian interfaith organizing) in Central America,

Mexico, and U.S.-Mexico border regions. Out of these encounters emerged a sense of responsibility to support Central American leaders after having personally witnessed the deteriorating conditions in the region, including the deaths of friends and colleagues in El Salvador and Guatemala. This subset of contributors was more emphatic in stressing the need to move beyond charitable aid to a more comprehensive response addressing the ongoing political and social causes of the crisis. One contributor described this effort as follows:

[It was like] that famous saying: If... you're at a river, and you see all these bodies floating down the river, and you keep pulling them out, that's one way you can act, or you can go upriver and see why they're in the river in the first place. So, a lot of emphasis of ours was trying to work toward and help people understand, to try to come to some kind of peaceful, negotiated solution to the crisis and that that would be the most helpful thing to do.⁹

While these individuals had extensive skills in intercultural humanitarian and development work, they were clear about the necessity of Central American leadership in the Sanctuary Movement and other U.S.-based solidarity efforts. As one contributor expressed: “Who could give better testimony to what the situation was there, but people who were fleeing for their lives?”¹⁰

Testimonios were seen as a critical piece of Central American leadership in the movement, and Northern American contributors described their supporting efforts, whether through broader work to expand the sanctuary network in the United States or the more mundane, though critical tasks such as translation assistance. Several Northern American contributors felt that one of the reasons that Central American testimonios were so persuasive was the intense anti-war sentiment that existed in the United States at the time. These sentiments were not merely characteristic of dissociative political partisanship or voyeuristic interest, but rather grew out of the trauma associated with

compulsory military enlistment and exposure to graphic media depictions of wartime death and suffering. As one sanctuary volunteer explained:

I think it's hard for people nowadays to understand...the gestalt of the times for those of us who were living in that life in that period [of the Vietnam War]. You know, where you're starting to make your big decisions about life and every single big decision had to factor in, well, whether you're going to be deferred or not, whether you're going to live or die, whether you're going to be separated for an extended period of time, whether you're going to come back with venereal disease. All of these things were very much there for everybody.¹¹

After the U.S. selective service resumed in 1980, the widespread fear that U.S. involvement with El Salvador and other areas of Central America would devolve into “another Vietnam” was therefore a major concern with very direct personal implications. Within this fraught environment, the assassinations of Latin American religious leaders, including Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero, were a shocking signpost to several former sanctuary supporters, many of whom had not been previously engaged with Latin American issues.

For this reason, another former sanctuary volunteer went as far to suggest that the Sanctuary Movement may not have even occurred at all without the widespread “anti-war activism that was already functioning” at the time. Like the previous contributor, this individual felt that this major pull towards activism is no longer well understood, as memories of the Vietnam War and the intensity of anti-war activism have begun to fade away in U.S. society:

I think people forget. I mean, my own grandchildren...cannot possibly understand the way there was opposition to war in the United States. It's simply beyond their experience to say that. Everybody knew that [military intervention in Central America] was happening, and many people thought it needed to happen because these were Communists after all—we needed to stop Communism. But there was such a tremendous response from the people who understood that this was no longer about who was Communist

and who wasn't. There were just horrible blood baths going on in Guatemala, in El Salvador, in Honduras....¹²

While only a few contributors mentioned any sort of direct involvement in Vietnam era anti-war activism (such as providing sanctuary for draft resisters), most recalled their congregations' open opposition to the war in Vietnam, as well as the influence of groups with ties to the broader peace movement, such as Clergy and Laity Concerned about Vietnam, Movement for a New Society, Student Christian Movement, and Witness for Peace. From this space of shared concern, socially-focused religious organizations recruited a number of new volunteers into peace activism and campaigns for global justice during the 1970s and 1980s.

One new recruit, who had been a university student at the time of the CARA sanctuary coalition's beginnings in Philadelphia,¹³ recalled the impact of their involvement in Student Christian Movement, specifically how they became aware of unequal trade and the negative impacts of globalization:

I say it was my consciousness raising period.... I'd grown up very—I don't know how you would put it—not having any interest in politics or, you know, any of that stuff. I was active in my church, but I didn't really make those connections to acting out our faith and Student Christian Movement kind of helped to make those connections for me or helped me to make those connections between what we believe and how we live out that faith.¹⁴

This contributor also recalled that older members with activist experience were mentors to younger people in their congregation, encouraging them to take risks to build the Sanctuary Movement. This was a common refrain among those with little to no prior engagement with peace work or political activism. In nearly every case, they were already active in religious groups within and outside of their congregations and were invited by more experienced organizers to join the Sanctuary Movement.

Similar dynamics were in place for Jewish sanctuary advocates for whom the escalating Central American refugee crisis was reminiscent of the large numbers of European Jewish refugees who were refused legal residency in the United States and other nation states during the first half of the twentieth century. While their political perspectives differed, each Jewish contributor mentioned a moral obligation to use their resources to support those whom, like their ancestors, struggled to find safety in deeply precarious circumstances. Jewish contributors also saw opportunities to build better relationships with Central and Northern American Christian peace activists.¹⁵ One contributor, for example, was clear that sanctuary activism provided a direct opportunity to “pay back the debt” to Christians who had helped their grandparents during the Second World War. Others regarded the Sanctuary Movement as a means for “healing” longstanding rifts between Jews and Christians.

Defining Sanctuary

Northern Americans

While Central American contributors overwhelmingly regarded themselves as protagonists during their sanctuary activism, Northern Americans expressed a spectrum of positionality regarding their understandings of sanctuary, ranging from an emphasis on the role of providing refuge to sought-after ideals of international solidarity and partnership. While nearly all contributors understood sanctuary in terms of well-being and safety, the scope of safety varied as did their perspectives on how sanctuary as safety could best be described and achieved.

Those who emphasized their role as refuge providers described sanctuary in terms of the sacred tradition of responsibility towards those in need, and a requirement of their religious commitments and their duty as U.S. citizens; each of these roles carried a moral obligation of charity—in this case, towards those who were displaced. Pointing to the religious authority of sanctuary, Northern American contributors emphasized the vulnerability of sanctuary seekers and the inviolability of sanctuary spaces in the United States, as represented by the three interview samples below:

Ex. 1: For me, [sanctuary] means holy and sacred. And so, providing a space that is sacred and holy for another human being who has been violated in some way because of violence, because of economic inequality. So to provide another human being that holy space in which to exist is relevant as relevant could be.¹⁶

Ex. 2: [Sanctuary] is safe haven, offering a place for those who are in danger of persecution. I mean, how do you define persecution? They were arresting people because of ideology—teachers and students and ... just about anybody. There was no rhyme or reason. It was just a campaign of terror in those countries.¹⁷

Ex. 3: It was the traditional provision of a safe space in a sacred building that by law could not be breached by law enforcement people. So it was very technically that, with the circle around that of kind of intense hospitality and welcome.¹⁸

Others stressed the more practical aspects of sanctuary work and responsibilities beyond providing temporary shelter. One contributor described sanctuary as a complete systemic approach to immigration with a particular focus on asylum seekers. As such, sanctuary encapsulates both “providing shelter to refugees fleeing oppression” and “helping immigrants assimilate into a new culture.” For this individual, sanctuary is not limited to an ephemeral, ancient ethos that elevates the initial act of welcoming refugees but is rather a “large umbrella” that includes the long-term task of helping displaced persons overcome complex obstacles to resettlement.¹⁹

Northern Americans interviewed for this project also described a transformation of thinking about sanctuary that took place as a result of their involvement in the Sanctuary Movement. Many contributors described their present view of sanctuary in broad-based terms as any form of community that provides protection from violence, regardless of place or modality. Most Northern Americans, however, felt that religious communities continue to have a distinctive place in sanctuary work. The following abridged conversation with two sanctuary advocates is illustrative of the ways in which certain Northern American organizers regard religious groups as uniquely positioned for sanctuary work:

MWB: Do you think that your understanding of sanctuary has changed over the years?

Cont. A: I think mine has because I think at first, I thought of it as kind of a... safe space. But in the beginning, it was an enclosed space.... I've come much more to the sense of sanctuary as a safe space that you create for yourself and others really wherever you are... And it's really not much more than physical enclosure, embracing yourself and other people. So, in this case, I would still say it's a matter of creating safe space but doing it in a whole bunch of ways.

Cont. B: This is in a narrower sense than that. But I think that the whole idea that it was churches, religious communities, people with a spiritual center could actually become powerful by offering safety.... At this point, I guess if religious community doesn't do that, then it really doesn't have any purpose at all.... The very center of what a religious community should be is a place that can provide safety and advocate for safety for people no matter where they are, who they are.

Cont. A: Yeah, and they don't *have* to be saints. Remember the original sanctuary was criminals could come.... It's for sinners and as well as saints and other do-gooders.

Cont. B: Realize you're a saint, as Camus would say. It's a matter of common decency.²⁰

In this conversation, Contributor A emphasizes sanctuary in terms of relationships and respect for agency, a change in thinking that occurred through hard lessons described elsewhere in their interviews. While sanctuary is not, in Contributor A's perspective, limited to religious communities and spaces, Contributor B still regards religious communities as a uniquely "powerful" means to facilitate sanctuary.

This power refers, in part, to a recognition of the political strength of religious organizations in the United States and a regard for sanctuary as a deeply political act. Several contributors made clear that providing sanctuary was not a neutral, humanitarian activity but rather a direct challenge to the nation state and to social forces that present a threat to well-being. Sanctuary advocates, particularly those with more intensive contact with displaced communities and individuals, felt deeply that they had an obligation to act, specifically in the realm of public advocacy and policy reform. A Jewish contributor regarded the importance of this challenge to state power as far surpassing the limited direct assistance their community was able to provide to individuals seeking refuge: "Being able to stand up and provide some protection to someone in danger, and then to really stand up against the policies of our government that had led to this felt pretty powerful to me."²¹ From the perspective of a Christian contributor, sanctuary was at the heart of the perennial role of the churches in society. Sanctuary, for this individual, was about "not only the protection of the church, but the witness of church" in meeting "the authority of the state with the authority of the moral force of the universe."²²

While the above comments focus on advocacy on behalf of someone else, some contributors highlighted the ways in which the mere act of making space for Central American self-advocacy in a public Northern American forum was politically subversive.

Sanctuary was, in the words of one individual, “a sphere of safety from which to challenge corrupt authority” where communities of people are “involved in their own self advocacy.”²³ Echoing Óscar Romero,²⁴ one Northern American contributor regarded sanctuary in terms of the power of voice:

In a way it was giving a voice to the voiceless.... The people were able to speak for themselves, which was significant instead of having an intermediary. Everybody spoke about the wars, but you can have people who were suffering from the wars when the wars were happening, speak for themselves, and you can't say, “Well, you're wrong.” [Central Americans were saying,] “This is what my life was. And this is why I'm here, and this is what's continuing to happen in Central America.” So, it's really having the victims be able to speak on their own behalf.”²⁵

Contributors also recalled the personal and communal dimensions of sanctuary spirituality and the physical risks of their political work. For one individual, sanctuary and solidarity work meant a faith that places “action before what our eyes are seeing in relation to persecuted people” who “through no fault of their own” could not remain at homes “where they would really like to stay.” This faith was marked by a willingness to physically protect a person at all costs: “Our bodies will be surrounding them.”²⁶

Central Americans

Central Americans who aligned with the Sanctuary Movement found fertile ground on which to impart their stories amid the flourishing climate of religious anti-war activism in the United States. Although not all Central American contributors self-identified as pacifists, they shared an end goal of peace in Central America through a process of decolonization. This understanding pervaded their approaches to sanctuary activism, going well beyond their own individual acts of seeking refuge in humanitarian-dominated religious environments. For these individuals, sanctuary was instead a self-

liberative endeavor focused on creating long-term community safety and stability through social change. As has been detailed in previous chapters, contributors consistently took an active posture in their international work, and often clearly expressed the range of self-defined goals and identities they carried through their time in sanctuary activism and beyond. In doing so, they pushed against externally imposed ideological limits on sanctuary and the “refugee,” instead adopting terms of self-description emphasizing choice and agency, particularly in relation to Northern American allies.

These terms of self-description, including “exile,” “union organizer,” “immigrant,” “displaced,” emphasize choice and agency as well their ongoing efforts to educate U.S. stakeholders, an endeavor that for some contributors continues nearly four decades later. Education was a substantial piece of sanctuary work in that most Northern Americans they encountered in the United States had little understanding of Latin American histories or cultures. Often mistaken as Mexican during the Sanctuary Movement, one Salvadoran contributor offered this perspective:

For us, sanctuary meant to live, to be able to tell our story, and what we thought about the solutions for our country, and Guatemala, and Nicaragua. We always approached it through the history of our countries, which is absolutely ignored by people in the United States. They don’t know about it. Just that name... banana republics. We don’t even have bananas in El Salvador.²⁷

Other contributors expressed similar frustrations, particularly in terms of the challenges they had in asserting the legitimacy of their own knowledge and leadership capabilities among Northern Americans in the movement. Central Americans labored not only to bring more awareness regarding rudimentary facts, but also confronted paternalistic attitudes fueled by religious ideologies and racialized tropes involving the “refugee.” One individual, who was at the time of the Sanctuary Movement a national coordinator for

Guatemalan organizers in the United States, described how culture, vulnerability, and stereotyping fueled power imbalances in the movement:²⁸

There were instances where—I don't think people intended that—but they were very paternalistic. The language was “our refugees,” “our family,” you know. It began like that, but then also some practices that were very strange. I remember in my case, I felt very troubled by some of the assumptions that people made about us... for example, that they had a higher level of knowledge than we had, and [about] our cultural personality. I would say, being from Guatemala, and when you are in a position like that, of being vulnerable being hosted and being traumatized by the war, we tended to be more on the quiet side.... That's the culture in my country. It's a culture of humility and American culture is a culture of power. It's a culture that has a power orientation so there's this immediate clash right there, culturally speaking. So I felt like nobody understood or cared or were interested in what knowledge we brought to the table, what experience we brought to the table, other than just migrating and being refugees.

In response, this contributor and others began to confront Northern American sanctuary hosts and supporters with direct admonishments to take their suggestions seriously and “value all that [they] represented and not just the immigrant experience.” As a result of these efforts, Northern Americans slowly began to understand the “capacities” of Central American organizers and the dynamics of the movement began to shift.²⁹ As noted above, this shift occurred among Northern Americans most notably in reference to expanded views regarded inclusion and community. As one Central American contributor remarked, sanctuary is not limited to externally imposed protective confinement, but is something built by and for communities anywhere it is needed: “It's not just [those who] hosted us. It's beyond that.... It's wherever you go and there is a community.”³⁰

Encountering the Other

Central Americans on Northern Americans

When asked about what seemed most significant about their relationships with Northern American sanctuary activists, Central American contributors all mentioned their gratitude for the willingness of sanctuary volunteers to risk personal physical harm and other serious consequences, including imprisonment.³¹ While the Guatemalans and Salvadorans who interacted with the Sanctuary Movement encountered paternalistic treatment, the life-threatening nature of their situation was such that overt challenges to hierarchical power structures were not necessarily at the forefront of their concerns, especially during the earliest months of their involvement. One Central American contributor stressed that they, along with many others, were teenagers and young adults at the time and faced extremely pressing circumstances that initially prevented them from focusing on these matters:

We were just very grateful for that support. The circumstances were such that we couldn't really pick [apart] properly on what probably were paternalistic attitudes on the part of the people wanting to help... Afterwards, once we had gone beyond that moment in our lives, we could perhaps see signs that indicated different levels of prejudice, different levels of paternalistic behavior. But I think at the time that we were going through that... the relationships were primarily dominated by a group of people who were in trouble and who needed help from a group of people who wanted to help so I think that was the dominant paradigm of the relationship.... [Now] I'm much more a dedicated student of issues like white supremacy, racism, patriarchal models of operating... but at the time, these were not really top considerations in our minds.³²

Additionally, the “positive commitment” they witnessed from Northern Americans led some contributors to draw a line of separation in terms of their thinking about the United States’ government versus the whole of its people.³³ For these reasons, even though most contributors have since reflected more deeply on the challenges they encountered in the

movement, the majority were hesitant to subject these early relationships to strong critique.

As noted above, however, many Central Americans who entered sanctuary did carefully push back against the racialized paternalism they experienced in the movement, even if initially reticent to do so. One contributor felt that although this paternalism was widespread throughout the movement in Philadelphia and elsewhere, they and others were able to confront it through asserting themselves and voicing their own preferences, which actually led to more positive relationships with Northern American sanctuary workers:

We were not monkeys being shown or being [brought] to one church, to one community organization, to one group, or group of nuns. We grew together... Sanctuary people shared the best with us.... I didn't like beans [from] a can. I said, "Okay, I prefer dry beans and I will cook it and I will prepare pupusas for you, and we will share." Those kinds of things I would say.³⁴

This search for everyday mutuality, however, was not necessarily universal. The above contributor, for example, contrasted this type of relationship with more superficial encounters with Northern American sanctuary volunteers who seemed only to want "to give passively." Still, they felt it was important to stay "open-minded" about how to "receive all those types of care" with "gratitude" amid different types of interpersonal conflicts that arose within the movement. This struggle was part of the important process of learning how to "accompany one another" through a journey that lasted beyond the Sanctuary Movement.³⁵

The more specific concerns and challenges they did express are not always wholly distinct from those mentioned by Northern American contributors, as will be demonstrated below. The issue of language barriers, although a seemingly mundane

feature of the Sanctuary Movement and other forms of cross-cultural encounter, was mentioned as a prominent obstacle by virtually every Central American sanctuary contributor (a concern shared by some Northern Americans as well). Contributors all recalled the challenge of having only limited access to other Spanish speakers during their time in the movement. While some approached this situation as a “good opportunity” to increase their language skills,³⁶ others found the experience isolating, frightening, and frustrating as they felt compelled to learn English to ensure their own safety as well as that of family members who accompanied them to United States. The lack of adequate means of communication also created distance between Central Americans and Northern Americans, including, ironically, moments in which testimonios were shared with non-Spanish speaking audiences through translators. This distance contributed to the further separation of organizing spheres, where “parallel tracks” had developed consisting of Northern Americans who were managing sanctuary congregations and Central Americans who were assisting Guatemalans and Salvadorans in sanctuary and other forms of emergency shelter.³⁷

Central American contributors also discussed the challenges they experienced involving racial identity, legal status, and the surrounding community. Former sanctuary participants who settled permanently in the Philadelphia region have been particularly subjected to an intensified racialized gaze compared to what they experience in their home countries, as they have encountered discriminatory treatment in accessing not only state-recognized legal residence but also education, housing, employment, and, in some cases, full inclusion in sanctuary congregations. Reminiscent of Mauricio’s experience in sanctuary at Central Baptist Church (see previous chapter), a few contributors remarked

upon the ways that encounters with racial discrimination and paternalism impacted them in the Sanctuary Movement. Each contributor who lived in sanctuary detailed experiences with racial profiling, including unprovoked encounters with law enforcement and social interactions that made clear that their racial identity was different in the U.S. than what they had inhabited in their communities of origin.

Moral differences regarding the use of physical force also marked a point of divergence among between some Central American contributors and Northern American allies. While some Central American organizers wholly disavowed violence as a political tactic and expressed a more pacifist orientation, others felt that Northern American peace activists did not fully appreciate the reasons for armed resistance to state violence. One Salvadoran contributor recalled the difficulties he faced in dialogue with Northern Americans on this subject:

Those of us who had come [to the United States] as a consequence of how violent the regime was in our country completely understood why so many young people decided to basically join the rebel forces and become fighters against that regime. I always remember basically saying, “You know, I guess that if I had never experienced what I experienced, I would probably be a pacifist too.” ... It was usually a kind of conversation that ended up with a very polite agreement to disagree, and some folks were particularly more complicated. I remember Quakers in particular were difficult to talk to because we were dealing with people who are acting based on their faith and part of their faith called for, you know, [a] more pacifist approach to conflict. The conversation was always different degrees of complexity.³⁸

Due to these points of disagreement, this individual felt that Northern Americans could be excessively critical of Salvadorans and Guatemalans who willingly joined or were conscripted into armed guerrilla movements and national military service, mostly due to lack of direct experience with war.

Northern Americans on Central Americans

Northern American contributors also reflected on the transformational effects of their relationships with Central American sanctuary participants and advocates, frequently commenting on the meaningful connections they found through the Sanctuary Movement and the ways in which these connections challenged their previously held assumptions about sanctuary and their own identities. Except for a few who had emigrated from or previously worked in Latin America, most Northern Americans who provided interviews for this project stated that they had little to no contact with Central Americans prior to their involvement with the Sanctuary Movement. While this interview sample does not necessarily represent the breadth of experience for all Northern American sanctuary volunteers in Philadelphia, archival records overwhelmingly suggest that the Sanctuary Movement was, for many Northern American sanctuary organizers in the region, the first time they had ever encountered someone from Latin America, let alone anyone from outside of the United States.³⁹ As one contributor remarked, one of the most positive aspects of their relationships with Central American organizers was “being able to connect with someone from another culture and learning from their culture.”⁴⁰ While Central Americans intended their educational campaign in the United States to be primarily about the current and historical effects of U.S. foreign policy, their mere presence initiated a basic level of intercultural learning, friendships, and dialogue with the predominantly White, English-speaking religious groups they encountered. For Northern Americans who remained actively involved as the Sanctuary Movement progressed, this level of encounter evolved into a deeper struggle towards realizing the liberationist ideals of solidarity and accompaniment, which for some, meant a deepening

of friendships with Central American sanctuary participants and supporters as well as an eventual reckoning with the impacts of racial and economic inequity.

As Northern American contributors described their first encounters with Central Americans in the Sanctuary Movement in Philadelphia, many recalled feeling a measure of surprise regarding their knowledge and skill, as well as their willingness to work with them. One individual recalled Linda and Ernesto's celebratory arrival at Tabernacle United Church in 1984 as they walked down the aisles, masked with bandannas as they served communion to the large interreligious group gathered there:

There was something so moving about them serving us. It was the realization of the terrible role our government had [in El Salvador]. It was overwhelming... their forgiveness, their care, their poise, their spirituality, the kindness in their eyes (we could only see their eyes) – just amazing.⁴¹

One former organizer, who traveled to El Salvador with several volunteer delegations during the war, remarked on a sense of shared spirituality that seemed to cross time and space:

I think that as we worked and as we visited the different communities in El Salvador, there was a sense in which we were all in the same religious sphere. We would pray together and we attended the masses and so forth. Even though they were in Spanish and we were not familiar with the format, you could still get the sense of presence, and to me it just added a dimension that was important. I felt that we were providing some help to them too in that it wasn't just that we were there, but we represented a much larger community that was supporting them.⁴²

For some Christian activists, Central Americans came to inhabit almost saint-like personas with almost mystical knowledge and patience. One contributor recalled:

They opened my eyes.... I was amazed at how much they trusted and wanted to help us help them. They were giving and just amazing with their trust and their feelings of needing to change what our country was doing as well as making things better in their own country.... We had a regional meeting of all the sanctuary groups - and I can't even remember what I said. And this one woman, a Salvadoran woman, looks at me and she says,

“You have a Salvadoran heart.” And I just - oh my gosh - that just blew me away because they were teaching me everything. I was just open to it, and I think that's important. If you can't listen and learn from the people you want to help, then all you're doing is paternalistic and I think that's what they were expecting.

Another individual noted a mentoring relationship that had with a Central American organizer that lasted several years: “[He] was important because he was the living, walking, breathing, testifying. And it was very low key. He also spoke very good English.... And he was kind of a mentor to me, even though I know he was younger by a number of years, by more than a decade.”⁴³

Others spoke of the ways in which their encounters with liberation theology presented both opportunities and challenges for forming relationships through solidarity work. One contributor, echoing the sense of mystical connection mentioned previously, was “just amazed, shaken” when she found an unexpected bond with a Central American sanctuary activist who coincidentally had a shared love for her favorite poet, Ernesto Cardenal. This individual expressed a sense of awe at the way in which those in sanctuary in Philadelphia understood the “power of words” as they expressed their Christianity in compellingly political terms and “converted the audiences instantly to their cause.”⁴⁴ Like this individual, some Christian contributors had studied liberation theology or been involved in liberationist community organizing prior their involvement with the Sanctuary Movement. This study was predominantly initiated through small groups in their congregations, which introduced a type of practical discourse on the Bible that felt more meaningful than, as one person put it, “another hokey Bible study.”⁴⁵ These studies were often inspired by a sense of concern about “another Vietnam” occurring in Central America, and offered a means to address these concerns through a spiritual practice

modeled by Latin Americans from which Northern Americans could engage in their own processes of consciousness-raising in regards to their spiritual development and political activism.⁴⁶

As Northern American organizers became better acquainted with Central American leaders through the Sanctuary Movement and beyond, they were challenged to practice an activism characterized by the invitational response of “accompaniment” and “solidarity.” These ideals, based on the notions of reciprocity and mutuality, stood in direct challenge to the norms of colonial dependency manifested through uninvited, racialized missionary and humanitarian work.⁴⁷ Contributors expressed the importance of learning humility and relinquishing control, as they encountered Central American leaders, who, having been trained through their own experiences and *comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBs), “were empowered to be subjects, not objects of God’s liberation.”⁴⁸ This practice towards understanding the limits of their own power involved a willingness to share pain, a valued act in spiritual traditions that emphasize voluntary suffering on behalf of worthy persons or causes. Several contributors mentioned that this was the most difficult aspect of their relationships with Central Americans, in that they became personally invested in the well-being of those subject to fraught circumstances and tremendous suffering. As sanctuary advocates received and bore witness to the pain that people were experiencing, they sometimes experienced despair at the role of their own government in creating suffering while grappling with their own limitations to fully predict, repair or control it.⁴⁹ This was, perhaps, representative of the greatest paradoxical dilemma, in that while they sought to dismantle the hierarchy of “privileged” and “underprivileged,” they also sought to fulfill a divine imperative to assist other human

beings in need while respecting the autonomy of those requesting assistance. As one contributor remarked, Central Americans in sanctuary “needed protection” as well as “independence,” which was “not an easy road to walk all the time,” for Northern American sanctuary advocates felt a sense of responsibility to protect Central Americans from further harm, sometimes at the expense of personal autonomy.⁵⁰

Although Northern American contributors greatly admired the skill and knowledge of Central American activists, they continued to struggle with racialized power dynamics in their working relationships, which Central American leaders readily challenged:

One of the things that people observed quite readily is that Salvadorans knew more about US history than Americans did, than Northern Americans did. And knew our political process better and so they didn't need to be schooled. They actually could help school us because they knew more than we knew. They understood the dynamics better than we did. That was part of the education process that happened during that period of time.... So whenever there were meetings and it seemed as though people were just falling into this “I know better” paternalistic or “we're going to take care of you” kind of [talk], there was a lot of pushback.⁵¹

When asked about racial concerns during the movement, several other Northern American contributors confirmed this lack of awareness regarding race, though not everyone understood it as the important issue for the time. As one Jewish contributor reflected:

We were using our White privilege to provide sanctuary so that was a good thing, to speak up. And to do that, I think, was a good thing, but we also taking care of someone was oppressed, which, you know, creates a hierarchy of, “I'm the care provider, which is a role that's comfortable to me as a person of privilege,” because that's what people of privilege love to do. To take care of people who are “underprivileged” and to use our own privilege to care of an underprivileged person.... But I also don't want to reduce it to that [though] I think it's important to look at that. I think this was acting on the basis of: This is another human being. The

human being is in trouble because he and they are subject to the forces of the empire, which we are part of. It's our empire that does it, and we should challenge our own empire to do what God asks you to do...

While many recognized their “privilege” in terms of the wealth they had as inhabitants of the Global North, they felt that they had not yet developed an adequate awareness of the ways in which race influenced their own beliefs and behaviors in the Sanctuary Movement or in their local communities. A Christian contributor reflected on their own insight as well as the ways that “consciousness” of systemic racism as evolved over the years:

We, the activist people, may have overlooked the fact that the people that we were supporting in Central America were Brown people who were living the consequences of US racism. I think there's been an evolving consciousness of what systemic racism actually means. And I think we might not have heard in the 80s the people who said, “Wait a minute. Why are you taking care of those people... We're here too, poor black neighbors of yours in Germantown. We're here.” ... You know, I think now it's a lot easier to see that, the consequences of racism. White supremacy and privilege have created the poverty that exists in this country that affects so many people of color and the blatant racism towards Brown people from other countries... If you're Brown, you can't come in. If you're Norwegian, fine. It's clearer now, you know, to see that, what has always been true and maybe, you know, we were just tone deaf.⁵²

Though some noticed the racial profiling experienced by Central Americans, this awareness did not necessarily extend to other members of their surrounding communities since international sanctuary work was seen as a “separate issue.” Likewise, some contributors felt that most of the racial issues affecting the movement were external to sanctuary organizing, including underlying pressure from those aligned with “the Reagan camp” and “conservative churches” whose campaign against Communism was perceived as a veneer for racial hostility.⁵³

A few individuals, however, expressed regret on the lack of engagement between their congregations and local African-American leaders and community members at the time of the Sanctuary Movement. One individual, who had been involved with Tabernacle United church in West Philadelphia recalled that while Tabernacle's sanctuary efforts included some African American volunteers, to their knowledge, there were no African American congregations in Philadelphia who participated in the Sanctuary Movement:

Here we are on the edge of West Philly, where White meets Black and where poverty meets wealth... We didn't hear about it, but I think they thought, "Well, you know, why did you have to look halfway around the world to find issues of justice and peace? We're right here." And looking back on it, you know, [they're] right, whether they said it or not. You know, it was always for me a bit of a nagging thing that just sort of bored within me about our inability to connect with the Black community there.

They compared these dynamics to those they later experienced in a global campaign for debt relief, in which most relief-seeking countries were African. They recalled that they didn't have support from African American groups for the campaign because they were not included in the coalition-building process from the beginning: "The movement got started before they were consulted so they felt like they were just window dressing. You know, look pretty and make the picture look better."⁵⁴ Another contributor, from Northwest Philadelphia, also lamented persistent failures to "broaden out" form "inclusive" coalitions to address global issues. Some African Americans in their religious congregation and the broader community were unconvinced about the need for involvement in global human rights concerns while "massive human rights violations" persist in the United States as a whole, and locally in Philadelphia.⁵⁵

Encountering Each Other

Central Americans on Central Americans

Each contributor was also asked to comment on the most positive and challenging aspects of their relationships with other Central Americans or Northern Americans.

Central Americans interviewed for this project spoke about the sense of community they felt with other Salvadorans and Guatemalans who worked with the Sanctuary Movement, areas of disagreement and friction, and the impacts of stress on personal and family health. One individual expressed a feeling of nostalgia for the “very special sense of belonging and community” they experienced during this time:

What I remember the most with almost a sense of missing it, is the level of camaraderie.... The fact that we felt so bonded we each other in the sense of having had our lives interrupted very early on in our lives and having the will to be so devoted to advancing in the place where we were, in any way we could, you know, the struggle that we had been part of, you know, as young adults in our country and that is almost a case of discovering, you know, a family that you choose. Not a family where you were born into, but a family that you choose....⁵⁶

At the same time, points of contention did exist among Central Americans due to the vast diversity represented among sanctuary and solidarity organizers, in terms of nationality, culture, political affiliation, religious outlook, and displacement experiences. Two particularly difficult areas of reconciliation that contributors discussed were matters pertaining to the use of violence and different attitudes toward attaining asylum in the United States. In addition to facing disagreements with Northern American religious pacifists about the use of force, Central Americans were also guarded about discussing their own attitudes and previous involvement in armed conflict with other Central Americans who supported the Sanctuary Movement. While some contributors were careful to defend other Salvadorans and Guatemalans who had participated in military

service or guerrilla activity in their home countries, others described the reticence of some Central Americans to work with those who had this experience.⁵⁷ In the following conversation, this contributor describes an encounter they had at a sanctuary conference:

Cont.: ... They had invited this guy who lived in ... a Native American community in Milwaukee.... He told me that he helped kill people in El Salvador because he was a member of the Treasury police and he had even written some poems that described what he had done. Well, nobody wanted to sleep in the same room with this guy. So, I was asked if I would like to go to the room, to be in the room with this guy and I said yes, well, because we cannot be locked up in the same thing that you have lived your whole life. You have to change yourself, to open up your mind. And we had this chat. [I had] this conversation with him during the night and he told me that he had killed people... but he wasn't comfortable with what he had done.

MWB: Did it change you to hear his story this way?

Cont.: The way I see it is you start to look at ... people like yourself, just with a different view, a different role than what they were doing. They were following orders and what you're doing is to fight against what they're doing. But when you're in a foreign country you become one other person only, so we were all refugees from the war in Central America. That's it. We had to discover what that meant to us at that particular moment, that we shouldn't be fighting each other just because of our backgrounds.... That's what I thought at the time.”⁵⁸

For this individual learning to work with those who had been engaged in killing was an important part of his own character development which resulted from the recognition of an identity shift they had experienced in the United States. From this point of view, the shared experience of becoming disarmed and displaced as “refugees from war” into a singular social identity in the United States made possible a point of connection that was previously undesired and unlikely.

Both Northern and Central Americans described Central American activists as carrying an age-defying persona of wisdom and skill in their sense of community and

organizing capabilities. Central American contributors, however, did not describe these qualities so much in mystical terms but more as a consequence of their upbringing in socially and political difficult circumstances. The above contributor remarked that experiences of persecution and displacement demanded a need for maturity and unity in order to survive: “The fact that we were so young and had to be dealing with so serious sets of issues turned us into very old, young people.”⁵⁹ Despite this accelerated adulthood, contributors also described the ways in which constant stress and anxiety created persisting negative health impacts, some stemming from destructive behaviors including alcohol abuse. The constant news of traumatic events and the deaths of friends and family members, along with the pressure of living up to the high standards of the Sanctuary Movement often created “a great deal of anxiety” and poor “self-care.”⁶⁰ Particularly for those who remained in the United States, such stressors created extremely negative family dynamics and mental health outcomes over the long term, at times resulting in social and legal issues that further impeded efforts to resolve asylum cases.⁶¹

Northern Americans on Northern Americans

Northern American contributors likewise emphasized the overwhelmingly positive aspects of their relationships with other Northern American sanctuary advocates, despite the challenges of working with others in an interreligious environment across a broad spectrum of personalities, perspectives, and backgrounds. Participants noted the revitalizing effect that sanctuary activism had on their congregations, in terms of reviving participatory interest in social justice projects and attracting new congregational membership from the surrounding community. Contributors also remembered a sense of “unity,” “trust,” “commitment,” and “positive energy” between members of their own

religious organizations as well as the strong ties formed between religious groups involved in regional interreligious sanctuary coalitions such as CASA and CARA. As one contributor remarked, the energy of the movement “stretched” their members of their congregation into “completely new territory,” forging lasting “community bonds.”⁶² This comment is reflective of the long-term friendships and coalitional partnerships that formed during the Sanctuary Movement and outlasted the movement itself, in some cases for decades.

Contributors also remarked on the challenges movement activism presented in terms of conflict resolution, power imbalances, relationship stresses, and the difficulties of organizing across a varied “bureaucratic” landscape. Recalling the constant need for “conflict resolution” during their time in the Sanctuary Movement, one former organizer expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn how to unite a diverse group of people around a single cause, an important skill that contributed to the community-facing profession they entered after the movement.⁶³ Another individual recalled the difficulty of operating in an environment of urgency marked by “hierarchical and gender and racial bias” that at times prevented equitable participation:

It's hard for people to get off the “I'm right, you're wrong” perspective and that is really destructive. I think that was challenging then, and it's challenging now—that activist urge to *do* rather than reflect.... It was mostly men, although there are plenty of women who also have this “do, do” energy and...are more reactive than reflective. So that was always a dynamic in all of this and people just tend to get run over with that. And then [there was] our own youthful ignorance and blindness, I would say. You don't know what you don't see. That's the definition of blindness. So, I think there are a lot of things I would do differently now than then, but I didn't have the insight then.⁶⁴

Jewish organizers also remarked upon the unique challenges they faced in interreligious work as well as within intra-Jewish circles. As discussed in previous chapters, Jewish

sanctuary advocates faced the dual challenge of justifying Central American political advocacy as a “Jewish issue” and confronting antisemitism in the broader solidarity movement, both in Latin America and in the United States. Regardless of the frustrations this dynamic may have presented, virtually everyone who provided an interview regarded the experience as instructive with beneficial (albeit unfinished) lessons for themselves as individuals and more generally, for any kind of present or future community organizing.

After the Sanctuary Movement

The interview samples highlighted in this chapter allow a glimpse into the interrelational world of the Sanctuary Movement in the Philadelphia region, and the ways in which Central and Northern American “grew together” and apart as they sought equitable expressions of hemispheric solidarity. Research contributors were nearly unanimous in their descriptions about the skillful leadership of Central Americans who entered or supported sanctuary activism, despite experiential and perspectival differences regarding sanctuary practices. Central American efforts to assert themselves within the movement challenged established norms of White, Anglo-American religious humanitarianism and peace activism, sparking personal and structural transformation as the aims of their collective and individual social action evolved beyond the movement.

As is evident from the above discussion, virtually all contributors, regardless of community of origin, noted the tremendous impact that the Sanctuary Movement had in shaping their values and professional choices. One Central American contributor noted that the movement was a life-changing experience for nearly everyone involved as it led to a reevaluation of their priorities and relationships and set the stage for decisions that would alter their lives for decades to come.⁶⁵ Additionally, sanctuary and solidarity work

opened direct pathways to professional development and career opportunities and contributed to changes in religious practice and altered attitudes toward religious institutions. Several contributors remained involved in human rights work and civic engagement as paid professionals or as community volunteers for several decades after their participation in the Sanctuary Movement.

After their involvement with the Sanctuary Movement, a few individuals interviewed for this project continued to work with immigrant, migrant, and displaced individuals in Latin America and the United States. This work ranged from direct economic development and humanitarian aid to international efforts to shape migration policies across governments throughout the western hemisphere. One Central American contributor, now involved in transnational political advocacy, expressed a “level of clarity” that has evolved in his approach to prospective and current partners in this work:

[Displaced people] are not helpless individuals, but people who are actually struggling. [It's important] to really help people identify, “In what way, am I embracing a struggle that is also mine?” It's not just that I am helping somebody, but when I am actually opposing, let's say, the government of Honduras, I'm not just doing it because by doing that I'm helping somebody in Honduras. I'm also helping myself be a more responsible citizen vis-à-vis my own government in the U.S. because that person in Honduras wouldn't be occupying the position he or she occupies because the US has been enabling [that] ... not because I take pity on them, but in standing with somebody... I'm also addressing my own troubles.⁶⁶

Like their Northern American counterparts, these former Sanctuary Movement advocates emphasized the continuing relevance of accompaniment and solidarity in this endeavor.

Central Americans with state-recognized legal status in the United States also came to share, as more visible and secure stakeholders, a different sense of collective responsibility for the actions of the U.S. government and the well-being of their adopted

communities. One contributor, upon returning to the United States for a short-term job opportunity in the mid-2010s, was stunned by the deteriorating economic conditions of the country and the discontent of those they encountered, even those in higher paying jobs. Although markedly different from their experiences with violence and displacement in their home country, they perceived an element of shared experience in the continued need for long term struggle based on a depth of perspective and understanding:

There is a song by a Cuban singer Silvio Rodríguez that says he dreams with serpents, and when he kills the serpent a bigger one arises. So, that's what we sometimes feel, that you do this struggle but then you have a bigger challenge in front of you, so this never ends. You have to keep struggling every day.⁶⁷

Although this individual no longer maintains a formal religious affiliation, they stressed that “spirituality becomes key to find a way” through difficult circumstances and overwhelming structural challenges. A Northern American contributor concurred:

At this point in my life, I don't feel a need for “words about God.” Where we put our bodies, our energies, our riches, either speak of God, or they don't. And the human ties that matter—especially when we are forced, as we are right now, to be dissociated—are those that have been forged by acts of generosity, bravery, justice that we have shared over the years.⁶⁸

¹ Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles against Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 12-13.

² As mentioned in the introductory chapter, while these descriptors do not capture a perfect range of self-identity, the terms “Northern” and “Central” will be used to describe various Americans according to the geographical location of their original home communities. “Northern America” here refers to Mexico, the United States, and Canada, while Central America refers to all countries north of South America and south of Mexico.

³ While the interview topics for each contributor varied, each person was provided with a list of prepared questions in advance. See methodology section of introductory chapter.

⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁷ They/them will be used in place of the singular he/him and she/her pronouns to protect identifying information and affirm gender diversity.

⁸ These findings align with the broader observation that changes in religious orientation and identity are common during individual migration experiences. See: Douglas S. Massey and Monica Espinoza Higgins, “The Effect of Immigration on Religious Belief and Practice: A Theologizing or Alienating Experience?” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 5 (September 2011): 1371–89.

⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

¹⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

¹¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

¹² Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021.

¹³ Although not all sanctuary advocates had direct ties to local colleges and universities, the role of higher education institutions is a particularly important detail in a region saturated with colleges and universities, many of which have maintained long historical relationships to a variety of religious organizations. Colleges and universities provided crucial infrastructure such as material resources, physical space, willing volunteers, and organizational structure.

¹⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

¹⁵ One research contributor offered additional reflections on race and antisemitism: “[Sanctuary work] brought me into Christian spaces and into contact with devout Christians who were acting on this and also there were moments where we were in Central America... when there were very, very uncomfortable moments when people in the village expressed just basic antisemitic stuff that they had heard and somehow was part of their culture, and they didn’t understand somehow that that would be really hurtful to us. I don’t know how they thought of it... There were probably racial dynamics going on that I was oblivious to, but I think that for me, the issues between Christians and Jews are really quite important issues and they play out of course around Palestine too. I mean, Christian Europe decided it would get rid of its Jewish problem after making Jews unsafe for centuries by supporting a colonial project at the expense other people... would solve the problem of they had created. I mean, I’m being blunt about it. I hope it’s not offensive” (Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020).

¹⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021.

¹⁷ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

¹⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

¹⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, June 2021.

²⁰ Research contributors in conversation with the author, November 2020.

²¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

²² Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

²³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

²⁴ Óscar Arnulfo Romero, *La Voz de Los Sin Voz: La Palabra Viva de Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: Universidad Centroamericana Jose Simeon Cañas, 1980).

²⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020. This contributor also remarked on the difficulty in finding engaged Christians with a suitable political orientation: “Churches everywhere don’t have a lot of young folks who are committed to doing the work of the church, [except] evangelicals, who have a whole different set of issues...That’s a different religion, right?”

²⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021. This individual compared these dynamics to New Sanctuary movements, lamenting the lack of global political consciousness and greater hesitation to risk physical danger. In their estimation, contemporary sanctuary movements would benefit from more extensive political analysis, specifically a “very whole explanation” regarding migration and border issues, including the transnational crisis of gang violence and drug trafficking.

²⁷ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

²⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

²⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

³⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021.

³¹ A few contributors also remarked that, in retrospect, the U.S. government did not appear to have the ability to track the political activities of Salvadoran and Guatemalan organizers in the United States as much as they had initially feared. While the very real threat of INS deportation and the accompanying risk of political violence remained for Central Americans, contributors felt that most federal surveillance was directed instead toward Northern American sanctuary workers.

³² Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

³³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

³⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

³⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020. This individual was careful to emphasize the lasting friendships they formed with Northern Americans as result of their participation in the movement.

³⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

³⁷ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

³⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

³⁹ Given Philadelphia's history of persistent racial segregation and the region's relatively low number of immigrants at the time, this is not particularly surprising, especially for a group that was mostly (but not exclusively), White, Anglo-American, and middle to upper class.

⁴⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁴¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2021.

⁴² Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020.

⁴³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2020.

⁴⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021.

⁴⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2021.

⁴⁶ Central Americans were also aware of these concerns, and deliberately studied United States society and the Vietnam anti-war movement in order to connect with influencers in and from the United States. Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁴⁷ One contributor remarked that this became abundantly clear during their participation in the U.S.-El Salvador Sister Cities movement: "It's been a learning experience to make sure that we are not the oppressors, you know, the wealthy White people who are traveling to El Salvador to work magic. ... Solidarity is mutual... we go with our gifts to offer, but also seeking the gifts of the Salvadoran people, and especially their leadership. They are their own leaders and we can accompany them in their struggle, but we are not going to resolve anything *for* them" (Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021).

⁴⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2020. This individual also commented on liberation theology’s lasting personal impact: “There’s... a way in which the theoretical and ideological framework of the liberation theology is alive and well. It lives in me. It lives in lots of people that I know and some of them don’t even know where it came from but it’s there and it is about being subjects of God’s work in the world.”

⁴⁹ One contributor mentioned the sorrow she felt over the death of a young water rights activist she had met in El Salvador: “I have just never quite gotten over that. I mean, they asked us to go. We went because they—It haunts me. This beautiful young man, they tortured him.”

⁵⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

⁵¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2020.

⁵² Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁵³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, November 2020; Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁵⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, July 2020.

⁵⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁵⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁵⁷ The reticence of some Northern American sanctuary organizers to work with former Central American soldiers is also well documented, one of the major causes for the rift between the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America and the Tucson Ecumenical Council. As one contributor described it, some Catholics were particularly opposed to supporting those with military experience due to the deaths and torture of Catholic religious workers in Central America.

⁵⁸ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

⁵⁹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁶⁰ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁶¹ Research contributor in conversation with the author, May 2021.

⁶² Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁶³ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁶⁴ Research contributor in conversation with the author, September 2020.

⁶⁵ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020.

⁶⁶ Research contributor in conversation with the author, December 2020.

⁶⁷ Research contributor in conversation with the author, October 2020. The song referenced is “Sueño con Serpientes” from Rodríguez’s 1975 album, *Días y Flores*.

⁶⁸ Research contributor, email message to author, November 14, 2020.

CHAPTER 6

BEYOND CHARITY: RETHINKING SOLIDARITY

“Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.” –Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor”¹

At a 2017 conference sponsored by the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), Gabi Murillo recounted her experiences as a transgender youth seeking asylum in the United States. As she described her journey and her encounters with the U.S. immigration system, she emphasized: “I came to the U.S. not to become North American but to save my life.”² Murillo’s sentiments echo that of many Central American labor and human rights organizers who advocated for a sanctuary more expansive than that which could be contained within legally inscribed U.S. citizenship. Central Americans based in Philadelphia during the 1980s contributed to a significant transformation in approaches to sanctuary, which continue to influence international migration policy and grassroots organizing in the present day. In the United States, their advocacy work has long outlasted the Sanctuary Movement, helping improve legal access to asylum and build an infrastructure contributing to the expansion of immigrant-rights organizations.³

There are now an estimated four million documented and undocumented Central American immigrants in the United States, three-quarters of whom arrived after the signing of 1990s peace accords in El Salvador and Guatemala.⁴ Mexico, which has assumed an escalating role as proxy for U.S. immigration control, continues to serve as an important connecting point for migrating individuals. In the contemporary era, just as in the past, it is not uncommon for those in transit to experience “expressions of

solidarity” from Mexican citizens from all walks of life who continue to risk prosecution and imprisonment for their activities.⁵ In the U.S., Central Americans who collaborated with the Sanctuary Movement were instrumental in pushing forward landmark immigration legislation and judicial decisions that provided greater access to state-recognized asylum for Central Americans.⁶ In the present day, however, the majority of undocumented Central Americans in the United States remain in legal limbo, despite the expansion of immigrant-led political lobbying. As a result, immigrant-led political groups in the United States have been largely replaced by advocacy organizations for displaced Central Americans in need of social, financial, and legal support.⁷ These organizations have created a mechanism by which Central Americans have grappled with transitioning from an identity of “refugee” to a significant voting bloc in certain regions of the U.S.⁸

In Philadelphia, broadscale public attention to Central America has largely waned since the 1990s as former Sanctuary Movement workers became engaged in international sistering arrangements and other humanitarian and social justice projects. Meanwhile, Central Americans have woven themselves into the fabric of urban and suburban neighborhoods as they have established churches, religious groups, development organizations, soccer leagues, and other community associations.⁹ Central Americans have also contributed to the formation of New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia (NSM), a nonprofit, interreligious immigrant advocacy coalition founded in 2007. While NSM has engaged in 1980s-style activism such as public residential sanctuary with local congregations (some of whom were involved with the 1980s movement), the organization has since shifted its priorities toward immigrant leadership development and community mutual aid, as it continues its strategic political work in collaboration with local and

regional advocacy groups. Although the City of Philadelphia has never officially proclaimed itself a “sanctuary city,” NSM, as well as immigrant-led sanctuary-oriented groups in Philadelphia have been successful in bringing about key changes in city governance, including the implementation of the Office of Immigrant Affairs in city government, the separation of domestic policing from immigration enforcement, and Philadelphia’s recent “Welcoming City” certification.¹⁰ These organizations have continued to work to provide resources for local immigrant communities and lobby for national immigration reform, activities that have grown increasingly difficult in the wake of unresolved challenges brought on by the Trump administration.¹¹

In addition to external political forces, those working within immigrant-rights organizations continue to face some of the same tensions experienced by human rights workers, sanctuary activists, and political organizers of an earlier era.¹² In fact, many Latin American activists in 1970s and 1980s purposely “resisted taking up the human rights banner” due to concerns about neoliberal nature of humanitarian ventures and the way in which these external organizations seemed to exploit suffering for Western audiences.¹³ One major reason may be the difficulty that White, non-immigrant Northern Americans have had in attaining a broader understanding of the situation due to blind spots and/or privileged positions with respect to neoliberalism and White supremacy.¹⁴ As discussed in the previous chapters, Central Americans who worked with and alongside of the 1980s Sanctuary Movement grappled with this issue from the beginning, making public awareness a centerpiece of their work with Northern Americans and resisting the racialized essentialization of their humanity as refugees dependent entirely on the goodwill of Northern, White benefactors.

A segment of Northern American sanctuary workers appears to have been receptive to these challenges, at least in part. Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, who helped found the Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America (CRTFCA), offered this reflection in their 1986 book, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad*:

A more in-depth understanding of the sanctuary movement must lead us beyond race and class blindness, both within the movement and especially from the perspective of elitist North American interpretations of Central American national movements. The corrective for such a reductionist and classist sense of reality is an understanding of the sanctuary movement in terms of the refugees.¹⁵

Issued nearly four decades ago, these are useful cautions for researchers as well, given the historically close ties of academic researchers to social movements such as the Sanctuary Movement. While conducting interviews for this project, I had the opportunity to converse with a Philadelphia-based Northern American contributor who, while not directly involved with 1980s sanctuary activism, has long supported Central American solidarity efforts through academic, religious, and non-governmental organizations. This individual was careful to emphasize what they felt was an urgent need to move away from “top down” approaches in order to resist the “professionalization of knowledge” that continues to reinforce social inequities and sometimes obstruct community-driven work and goals.¹⁶

Part of the solution may be to move away from reliance on what Eve Tuck calls “damage-center research.” While often well-intentioned toward bringing about reparative change, Tuck argues that damage-centered research is, in fact, a “pathologizing approach” in which deficits and experiences of oppression are used to “singularly define a community”:¹⁷

In damaged-centered research, one of the major activities is to document pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe. Though connected to deficit models—frameworks that emphasize what a particular student, family, or community is lacking to explain underachievement or failure—damage-centered research is distinct in being more socially and historically situated. It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy.¹⁸

In its place, Tuck calls for a shift toward “desire-centered research” that recognizes the complexities and contradictions of human communities and focuses on community goals and desires. She also urges communities subject to the gaze of researchers to enact a “moratorium on damage-centered research” and to refuse to participate in any research that may be harmful by design or of limited community benefit.¹⁹

Of course, whether this project is of any real benefit to the specific communities in focus remains to be seen. In addition to the obvious limits of my positionality, much more needs to be done in terms of documenting memories and events pertaining this kind of religiopolitical work, including a more in-depth analysis of relevant Latin American scholarship, archival material (and its location), and media publications. Additionally, in Philadelphia, the transnational ties of religious workers, the role of Catholic women religious, and the development of progressive Jewish organizations in relation to sanctuary and solidarity all deserve much more attention than I have been able to provide here. Regardless, my hope is that this humble exercise will encourage others to reach across borders and bravely express their own human rights in the face of repression and work for genuine equity, enterprises that, at the very least, may lead to perceived irrelevancy or resistance within academia and other social strongholds. Spanish-Salvadoran philosopher and theologian Ignacio Ellacuría urged scholars to re-envision of the role of the university as having the responsibility to respond to human need and social

problems in a multidirectional manner that honors all forms of ability and knowledge.²⁰ Those who hold disproportionate economic and material capital must go beyond “mere charity,”²¹ and take meaningful risks to address the calamitous state of our current social order and unfolding climate catastrophe. As the Central American leaders in these pages demonstrate, such work is not “a romantic notion” of careerism and rugged individualism,²² but an interdependent human imperative for communal survival and flourishing.

¹ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3.

² Eric A. Gordon, “CISPES Keeps Solidarity with Salvadoran People’s Movement Alive in U.S.,” *People’s World*, August 17, 2017, <https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/cispes-keeps-solidarity-with-salvadoran-peoples-movement-alive-in-u-s/>.

³ Susan Bibler Coutin, “Falling Outside: Excavating the History of Central American Asylum Seekers,” *Law & Social Inquiry* 36, no. 03 (2011): 569.

⁴ Edur Velasco Arregui and Richard Roman, “Perilous Passage: Central American Migration through Mexico,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, eds. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 45-47; Jeanne Batalova, Erin Babich, and Jeanne Batalova, “Central American Immigrants in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, August 6, 2021, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states>.

⁵ Arregui and Roman, 49, 55-56.

⁶ Susan Bibler Coutin, “The Formation and Transformation of Salvadoran Community Organizations in Los Angeles,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, ed. Enrique Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 164-66. Key cases include the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, and 1991 American Baptist Churches (ABC) v. Thornburgh case, which initiated temporary protected status (TPS) status for thousands of Central Americans in the United States and allowed 300,000 Guatemalans and Salvadorans access to asylum. (The ABC is headquartered in suburban Philadelphia and is the mother denomination of sanctuary congregation Central Baptist Church.) ABC was one of eighty religious and advocacy organizations who filed suit on behalf of Guatemalan and Salvadoran asylum

seekers. Dick (Richard) Thornburgh, Pittsburgh native and former Pennsylvania governor, served as United States Attorney General from 1988-1991.

⁷ Ibid, 163.

⁸ Ibid, 165-69.

⁹ Domenic Vitiello, *The Sanctuary City: Immigrant, Refugee, and Receiving Communities in Postindustrial Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022), 54-55.

¹⁰ Nate File, “Philadelphia Is Now Officially a ‘Certified Welcoming’ City. Here’s What It Means for Immigrant Communities,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 18, 2023, <https://www.inquirer.com/news/certified-welcoming-city-philadelphia-immigrants-20230218.html>; Goldstein and Stein, *Providing Sanctuary*, 131; Domenic Vitiello, *The Sanctuary City*, 203. During the 1980s, Swarthmore, PA appears to have been the only officially designated sanctuary locale in the Philadelphia metropolitan region.

¹¹ Ibid, 57.

¹² One incident that received public attention involved an alleged involuntary disclosure of NSM staffers’ immigration status to federal officials, which was accompanied by accusations of discriminatory behavior within the organization. See Laura Benshoff, “Three at Philly Immigrant Organization Fired after Claiming Boss Outed Them to ICE,” *WHYY*, March 21, 2018, <https://whyy.org/articles/three-at-philly-immigrant-organization-fired-after-claiming-boss-outed-them-to-ice/>.

¹³ Molly Todd, *Long Journey to Justice: El Salvador, the United States, and Struggles against Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021), 17.

¹⁴ Todd, *Long Journey to Justice*, 17.

¹⁵ Renny Golden and Michael McConnell, *Sanctuary: The New Underground Railroad* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 61-62.

¹⁶ Research Contributor in conversation with the author, April 2021. They also emphasized that this is not merely a U.S.-Central American issue, but one that also applies to certain South American attitudes toward Central America as well as internal work affected by racial and class divisions within Central American societies.

¹⁷ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 413.

¹⁸ Tuck, “Suspending Damage.”

¹⁹ Ibid, 422-23.

²⁰ William Westerman, “Reciprocity and the Fabric of Solidarity: Central Americans, Refugees, and Delegations in the 1980s,” in *International Volunteer Tourism: Critical Reflections on Good Works in Central America*, eds. Katherine Borland and Abigail E. Adams (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 50. As noted previously, Ellacuría, five other priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter, were murdered by U.S.-trained Salvadoran soldiers in the November 1989 attack on Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador.

²¹ Golden and McConnell, 190.

²² Ibid, 61.

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APPENDIX:
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFSC – American Friends Service Committee

CARA – Central America Refugee Action

CARECEN – Central American Refugee Center, now Central American Resource Center

CASA – Central American Sanctuary Alliance of Delaware County

CBC – Central Baptist Church (Wayne, Pa.)

CEB – *comunidad eclesial de base* (base Christian community)

CISPES – Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador

CRIPDES – *Comité Cristiano Pro-Desplazados de El Salvador* (Christian Committee of the Displaced), now *Asociación de Comunidades Rurales para el Desarrollo de El Salvador* (Association of Rural Communities for the Development of El Salvador)

CRTFCA – Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America

FMLN – *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)

FUMCOG – First United Methodist Church of Germantown (Philadelphia, Pa.)

JCCA – Jews Concerned for Central Americans

NJA – New Jewish Agenda

NSM – New Sanctuary Movement of Philadelphia

RIC – Romero Interfaith Center

SHARE – Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research, and Education Foundation

UCA – Universidad Centroamericana (The Central American University), El Salvador