

JOC Stories of Engagement and Volunteerism

Molly Kellogg

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I was the oldest of a family of seven in the Midwest. My parents, a young couple during the depression, had compassion for anyone down on their luck for whatever the reason; we often had a houseless person living in our basement for months at a time until they could find a place to live. I think I inherited that sensitivity to suffering and injustice from them, fed by the wider God in all of us.

I ran an infant care program in the barrios of Managua, Nicaragua many years ago. When we moved to Santa Barbara after years of living in Latin America, Europe, and Asia, and I became a Trinity Parishioner, I focused on houseless issues. I feel such gratitude for the welcome I've felt and the freedom to bring my whole heart, mind, soul, and spirit to whatever ministry I was part of. What a joy it was to be on the Adult Formation Committee (Adult Transformation Mark Benson liked to call it) for many years. During that time, I led a 'Wisdom Group' to dive into the writings of Cynthia Bourgeault about Jesus as a Wisdom Teacher of inner transformation. For five years we met in the Meditation Chapel to learn and share, to chant and practice Centering Prayer. What a rich time that was.

I was shocked that in an affluent town like Santa Barbara, houseless people were wandering the streets and living in cars. I worked at Casa Esperanza, before it became Path and was rewarded with the humor and kindness of the hundreds of houseless people I worked with over those years.

Six years ago, we discovered that our Hispanic neighbors weren't showing up...for food distribution, events, even to Hispanic stores...we learned that they were afraid to drive because of enforcement activities of ICE. With considerable interfaith assistance I founded DRIVERS LISTOS to provide safe rides for our immigrant neighbors. Often joined by Betty Wenzel, I spoke at many faith communities in town to recruit volunteers. Betty and I arranged training for volunteers led by Molara Vadnais, a Legal Aid attorney and a former Trinity parishioner. With 45 volunteers, we have provided rides to over 800 of our immigrant neighbors.

Currently, I also serve on the Board of Directors of the Immigrant Legal Defense Center and the Steering Committee of the Interfaith Sanctuary Alliance and during the Covid pandemic I was a member of the Latinx & Indigenous Migrant COVID-19 Response Task Force. Again, shocking that we had to work so hard to ensure equal access to testing, vaccinations, and health care for our indigenous neighbors.

Three years ago, we founded an interfaith group: Santa Barbara Afghan Refugee Resettlement Task Force. We have successfully resettled an Afghan mother and her 2 daughters in Dallas,

where she has some family and there is an Afghan community. We continue to socially support the family and assist financially the mother in becoming self-sustaining.

I never use the term “Christian compassion” or “Christian Charity”. I’ve witnessed generous compassion and charity in the many Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish communities and organizations with which I’ve been associated over the years. It’s just compassion and charity.