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**Creating Zones of Peace for Undocumented Residents during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Civil Society Efforts in North Carolina**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the role of civil society in creating spaces of belonging ("zones of peace") and support for undocumented residents in North Carolina, a relatively new destination for these migrant communities. Nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions have created programs, practices, and places that create a sense of belonging and foster community peacebuilding. However, this is conceptualized and put into practice in unique and varied ways. In addition to offering traditional sanctuary spaces, they have also formed creative solutions to address systemic racism in policing and detention practices. The efforts described here work together to provide a strong local network of protection and resources for vulnerable populations, a network that was sustained and continued to function even during the COVID-19 pandemic. These cases illustrate how innovation exists in the fight against injustices as each group produces spaces and forms of advocacy that can act synergistically with one another for the protection of all people, regardless of their status. They help us to understand peacebuilding and agency, and how spaces, place, and agency can be re-theorized. We argue also for the central place of storytelling, i.e., a strategic peacebuilding tool to bridge the gap between newcomers and existing communities

to create a sense of inclusion and belonging, construct shared meaning, educate, and share knowledge, and exercise agency, all of which are critical in transforming spaces and places in establishing zones and cultures of peace.

*Keywords:* sanctuary, peacebuilding, zones of peace, policing, undocumented, community advocacy, refugees, immigrants, civil society, COVID-19, pandemic, storytelling, belonging, North Carolina

**Creating Zones of Peace for Undocumented Residents during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Civil Society Efforts in North Carolina**

## Introduction

North Carolina is a state on the East Coast migrant stream with heavy reliance on immigrant labor, particularly in the agricultural sector. It is a relatively new destination for the settlement of a variety of immigrant and refugee communities, part of what has been termed the "Nuevo South" (Guerrero, 2017), and bringing with it transformational regional understandings of race and place. As part of this transformation, increased law enforcement and anti-immigrant sentiment affects the lives of many in the state, reflecting a contradictory narrative: a heavy reliance on immigrant labor while at the same time criminalizing immigrant presence (Alexander et. al., 2020).

This criminalization has manifested over the past decade, especially through increased pressure on federal, state, and local cooperation in the area of immigration enforcement. More than in any other state, North Carolina's local law enforcement agencies (especially county sheriff's departments) have entered into agreements with the Department of Homeland Security via the 287(g) "Delegation of Authority Program," among other programs, through which they take on the added responsibility of enforcing federal immigration law as part of their daily efforts to protect and serve local communities (Alexander and Fernandez, 2014). However, this cooperation is distributed unevenly across the state and many jails have varying degrees of cooperation with ICE. Undocumented persons living in the state currently do not have access to a driver's license or other identification. This is the result of the state legislature's repeated failed attempts and inaction to provide driving privileges to residents without legal status which produces risks to drivers who

might encounter law enforcement, leading to swift arrest, detention, and possible deportation (Armenta, 2017; Lopez, 2019). As a result, many immigrant communities live in a climate of fear and apprehension, the result of systemic racism and anti-immigrant sentiment as part of the ongoing trauma of political polarization in the United States (Kline and Castañeda 2019; Monico and Duncan 2020).

Beginning in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically disrupted the lives of many immigrants in North Carolina, as elsewhere in the United States. Immigrants make up outsize shares of both essential workers in the fight against the pandemic and those in the industries hardest hit by its economic impact, including in frontline occupations such as healthcare, food production, transportation, food service, and domestic services. Immigrants frequently have higher rates of susceptibility to the disease due to living conditions, and they tend to earn less, lack health insurance, and be unable to take paid sick leave or work from home, all of which negatively impact outcomes if they are infected or develop symptoms of COVID-19. Immigrant communities also experience significant barriers to testing, treatment, and vaccination. They may be unwilling to engage with official sites or visit hospitals because of their immigration status, even if symptoms become severe. Meanwhile, the pandemic affected the daily operations of the U.S. immigration system, temporarily halting work. Green card processing was suspended, and refugee and asylum seekers resettlement operations were paused (Hackman, 2020a and 2020b). However, detentions, raids, and deportations continued during the pandemic, and thousands of people remained locked in detention centers despite the high risk of COVID-19 transmission in these facilities (Loweere et. al., 2020). As the economy took a negative turn, the various stimulus measures to help support families and businesses were not available to most immigrant families, especially if anyone in the household was undocumented. The first Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act

(CARE Act) distributed some $2 trillion in emergency assistance, but many immigrant families were left out of this benefit (Hinojosa-Odeja et. al., 2020).

This paper examines the role of civil society in creating spaces of belonging and support for undocumented residents in the state of North Carolina, efforts which largely persisted despite the pandemic. Non-profit organizations and faith-based institutions have created programs, practices, and spaces that create a sense of belonging and foster community peacebuilding. This is conceptualized and put into practice in unique and varied ways, as we describe here. In addition to offering traditional spaces of sanctuary, which we argue can be best conceptualized as "zones of peace," they have also formed creative solutions to address systemic racism in regard to policing and detention practices. The efforts described here work together to provide a strong local network of protection and resources for vulnerable populations, a network that was sustained and continued to function even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Theoretical Background: From Sanctuary to Zones of Peace

### *Peacebuilding, Space, and Place*

By focusing on strong local efforts, we can understand the spatial dimensions of peacebuilding agents (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017), and the use of space and place as vehicles through which peace can be explored. This necessarily requires a focus on agency, which we examine here through the efforts of local NGOs and faith-based communities, to help in re-theorizing peacebuilding. We draw upon the critical peace studies literature and include a focus on critical human geography which allows us to examine the mutual constitution of space and place (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017). This is particularly critical given our framing of the state as a relatively new destination for immigrant communities as part of the "Nuevo South," which entails transformational regional understandings of place and belonging (Guerrero, 2017).

In addition, this paper is built on three key theoretical concepts to map peacebuilding agency: sanctuary, citizenship, and civil society.

***From Sanctuary to Zones of Peace***

To be operationalized and translated into practice, the concept of peace requires definitional precision and a pragmatic vision for social change. “Peace” includes not only the absence of personal and structural violence, but also a level of togetherness and unity (Galtung, 1969; 1996). This requires the creation of a “culture of peace” that addresses structural violence and seeks to increase social cohesion within and across societies. The United Nations defines a “culture of peace” as a “set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation (UNESCO, 2021).”

One way in which a culture of peace has been operationalized in the area of immigration is through sanctuary efforts by local communities. Sanctuary can be defined as “a place where certain individuals, communities or categories of people can go to be safe from those who would otherwise harm them, usually through the use of violence (Hancock and Mitchell, 2007, p. 2).” The first sanctuary systems recorded were in Greece from approximately the sixth century B.C. onward. These were conceived as a way of using the sacred space in an altar, temple, or any other large place to honor deities, while “the inviolability of the particular territory of a sanctuary arose from the Greek concept of *asylia.”* This social institution of *asylia* guaranteed inviolability and safety for those traveling. However, the individual seeking protection was expected to undergo a ceremony of appearing openly and stating the reasons why they sought protection (Mitchell, 2007). After the request, they would become what were called supplicants, or *hiketes*, as the sanctuary worked with the person to find a solution to their problem.

The idea of sanctuary has evolved over the years, as has the related concept of asylia (from which we get the term asylum). Today, sanctuary has come to refer to hosting someone, generally in a house of worship, offering welcoming and safe places for individuals seeking protection, asylum seekers, migrants, and those who are under the threat of detention, deportation, or incarceration (Carney, Gomez, and Mitchell et. al., 2017). Often, those who are under the protection of a refuge must remain unidentified for protection purposes. The mission of the faith-based sanctuary draws upon welcoming and protection commitments to the "stranger" (Rabben, 2016; Houston and Morse, 2017). More broadly, the concept of sanctuary can refer to wider community efforts to safeguard immigrants, people of color, Muslims and other religious groups, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or questioning, asexual and/or straight people, from state violence (American Friends Service Committee, 2018).

Sanctuary practices have been a part of the immigrant rights movement in the United States for decades and continue to play a part in the struggles against injustices around the world. In the U.S., it gained popularity in the 1980s as a faith-based social movement against aggressive policies toward migrants, galvanized by the peace and justice philosophy of churches and synagogues (Smith, 1996). It also became a powerful movement of resistance against authoritarian regimes in Central America which were supported by the U.S. government. During this time, religious organizations hid, sheltered, and fed Central American refugees who were forced to flee civil wars, crossing the border with Mexico to enter the United States.

The movement inspired by peace and justice scholars and practitioners remains present today in churches, campuses, cities, counties, and across different states (Boulding, 2000; Coutin, 1993). While sanctuary began as hospitality to provide safety for vulnerable refugees, over time it has grown into a political movement trying to end human oppression (Martinez, 2020). More

than ever, sanctuary practices have responded to anti-immigrant policy conditions (Orozco, 2018). Immediately after the 2016 election, faith communities began to quickly join the sanctuary movement as the new administration made good on anti-immigrant policies focused on exclusion and punishment. These faith communities confronted the administration's inhumane and unfair deportation policies. Since 2016, the sanctuary movement has grown to over forty coalitions and networks with wide geographical distribution, from cities with a long tradition of receiving immigrants to other parts of the country with a much more recent history of welcoming newcomers (Orozco, 2018). The sanctuary movement has become an effective form of nonviolent resistance to systemic racism in policing and immigration law enforcement policies. We follow those who suggest a move from the concept of sanctuary to "*zones of peace*" to engender local agency while encouraging good governance, transparency, and accountability in local peacebuilding projects (Hancock, 2017).

***Citizenship***

Some 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States continue to live in constant fear without the proper documentation to ensure their stability. Citizenship is a complex set of practices that constitute political belonging. This concept has evolved to expand beyond the nation-state concept to incorporate claims making in various sites and scales. However, citizenship is more than the rights and membership determined by the nation-state. Rather, it can refer to *spaces of belonging* that can surpass or supersede legal membership. There are many other forms of political and cultural membership beyond possession of a passport; people also assert membership by residing and participating in community (Castañeda, 2019). The term *relational citizenship* stresses the idea of both domination and empowerment, i.e., what it entails to be a citizen, subject and abject within the body politic.

***Storytelling as a Peacebuilding Tool***

Peace is conveyed in human relations through interconnectedness and interrelationships creating a web of positive human relations (Reardon, 1989). Storytelling can play a central role in bridging the gap between newcomers and existing communities to create a sense of inclusion and belonging, construct shared meaning, educate, collect knowledge, and exercise agency, all of which are critical in transforming spaces and places in establishing zones and cultures of peace. Through stories, "individuals and groups define social identity, create shared knowledge, negotiate power relations, construct emotions and educate new community members" (Senehi, 2000, p. 99). Life events, along with memories of oppression, can be communicated through storytelling as an intentional teaching strategy to form zones of peace, and stories may serve as a rationale for action (Senehi, 2020; Tursunova, 2014). This is part of a larger effort around the world of witnessing and collecting testimonies through storytelling (Lincoln, 2010).

***Civil Society***

Over the past years, civil society, that is, organized civic involvement to achieve goals (Kocka, 2017), has played an important role in advocating for improvements in the lives of immigrant newcomers. Civil society is represented by an array of institutions, including churches, civic associations, and sports leagues (Dionne, 2000) and has played a major role as people organize into groups to make democratic projects in the name of freedom from bureaucratic state power. "It was in civil society that individuals and groups set out to challenge unresponsive and authoritarian states through peaceful and non-violent methods: strikes, protest marches, demonstrations, dissemination of information through informal networks, and the formation of associational life through the setting up of reading clubs and discussion forums" (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 607). Civil society provides a space for communities to have a voice, share common

interests, and create supportive practices. Hence, civil society transforms spaces into places where communities can exercise peacebuilding agency.

The article is based on the volunteer involvement of Author 1 with several organizations in North Carolina that represent civil society: FaithAction International House, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and Siembra, as well as community-based participatory research with FaithAction International House. The following sections highlight how these, and related nonprofit organizations protected and created sanctuary spaces and zones of peace for undocumented persons, in addition to efforts to address systemic racism in policing, all while dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Creating Sanctuary Spaces and Zones of Peace for Undocumented Residents

### *The FaithAction International House: "Strangers to Neighbors" and ID Card Program*

The FaithAction International House is a nonprofit organization located in Greensboro, North Carolina which serves underrepresented groups, including immigrants living in the community. Their mission states: "We serve and advocate alongside thousands of newcomers each year while educating and connecting diverse communities across lines of culture and faith–turning strangers into neighbors!" (FaithAction International, 2020a). The organization has created a variety of programs including the Immigrant Assistance Center, Stranger to Neighbor Program, and FaithAction ID Program, alongside many volunteering opportunities and educational training. In 2020, they provided services to over 2,000 immigrants and refugee families from over 60 nations, including direct help with food, housing, healthcare, ID cards, and over $100,000 in emergency COVID relief.

Over the years the organization has created substantial growth by expanding programs. For instance, the Immigrant Assistance Center has a group of bilingual staff members who work one-

on-one providing emergency assistance to families facing detention and deportation, in addition to organizing back-to-school backpacks, holiday toy drives, and working to distribute FaithAction ID cards. Volunteers also accompany immigrants on health care visits or with social service appointments, help visit or write letters to clients and friends in detention centers, and assist with arranging financial aid for rent, healthcare, utility bills, and legal fees when necessary. Over the years, communities in North Carolina, like other places across the United States, have witnessed large numbers of new arrivals who have brought with them their ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity (FaithAction International, 2020b). The Stranger to Neighbor program's primary goal is to embrace this diversity and offer a space to understand and communicate effectively with one another in order to build up relationships with new neighbors and work together for the common good.

Another program that FaithAction implemented is their ID Drive which allows individuals to have access to a form of identification and to build greater understanding, trust, and cooperation between local law enforcement and the diverse neighborhoods they serve to create safer, more inclusive and united communities for all. The ID provides cardholders with a trustworthy form of identification that is recognized by law enforcement, city departments, health centers, schools, businesses, and cultural arts organizations. The FaithAction ID Drive has provided over 20,000 ID cards to people who are currently unable to obtain a federally issued form of identification, often because of their undocumented status. Groups who have benefitted from these programs are newly arrived immigrants, refugees, the homeless, those released from prison, faith leaders, and the elderly, among others.

The FaithAction ID Drive has currently expanded into other communities like the greater Midwest and Southeast areas of South Carolina, and Ohio, as well as Oregon, Virginia, and Florida

and continues to be held across different locations in North Carolina. A member seeking to receive a card must attend a mandatory orientation about the benefits and limitations of this card. Law enforcement officers are present at the ID drives to communicate with those seeking to obtain a card, educating them about laws and listening to the needs of the community. Participants have to provide proof of identification in the form of a passport, embassy ID, driver's license, or a national ID, and also show some proof of current address such as a utility bill, bank statement, health record, or lease agreement (FaithAction International, 2020c). The ID costs $10 and is renewed each year. During the COVID-19 pandemic, drives were suspended and FaithAction issued ID cards by appointment only.

The ID program has proven to be very successful. The effectiveness of the program was evaluated in 2019 and 2020 by using a survey developed by FaithAction staff and collected by Guilford College students and supervised by Author 1. The survey asked questions related to the utility of the ID, places the ID has been useful, negative experiences, and how the ID made holders feel. Sixty-four respondents considered the ID useful, while only two said they did not have a need for it. The respondents specified the places ID has been useful: interactions with police (n=34), schools (n=27), stores (n=13), city departments (utilities, public parks), and cultural arts organizations (n=21).

Respondents described positive experience(s) using the ID when police asked for identification and at checkpoints along roads. Specifically, one respondent stated that when they were "pulled over by police," they were "given a ticket but were allowed to leave." The majority of respondents answered that the ID was valid for use at medical institutions, stores, cultural festivals, stores, libraries, and pharmacies. Four respondents stated that they had trouble using the ID in law enforcement interactions, health centers, schools, businesses (e.g., gas stations and

pharmacies), and city departments. Another respondent shared that her ID was denied because it was "not valid in a birth certificate center." Another unfortunate experience shared was from a participant who "went to the pharmacy and the people working there asked very intrusive questions about where they received the ID and where they were from," in addition to rejecting the ID.

To conclude the survey, we asked people who renewed their IDs, "How does the Faith Action ID make you feel in your community when you are interacting with law enforcement, local institutions, and our diverse community?" Of the 64 respondents, 49 people answered that they felt safe, 9 said they felt secure, 5 felt integrated in their community, 6 felt trusted, and 4 respondents used the write-in option to describe positive feelings such as "satisfied," "confident," and "happy." Based on the data collected, the I.D. program has successfully met its goals in aiding the growth of community building and safety for individuals at risk from police violence.

FaithAction also worked closely with numerous organizations and individuals across the state to update and strengthen the Safer Roads and Communities Act of 2021 (HB 311), a bill that provides a driver's license for hundreds of thousands of immigrants who do not have access to a state government-issued ID. This was the North Carolina state legislature's third effort to provide driving privileges to residents without legal status (Alexander et. al., 2020). Though many Democrats and moderate Republicans in the state supported these bills, getting them passed and signed into law can be challenging, and organizations like FaithAction have organized community dialogues and advocacy support for the measures.

Another major activity organized by FaithAction is a set of trips for volunteers to visit people detained at Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, Georgia. Across the United States, there has been an increase in detention facilities in the years following 9/11. Today, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) run the largest

immigrant detention system in the world. In FaithAction's book, *Making Our Way to Lumpkin: Visits with Our Immigrant Neighbors in Detention,* the group notes that over 400,000 immigrant neighbors are currently in various jails and prisons across the nation. Approximately 70% of ICE arrests in North Carolina take place in jails when the local sheriffs followed ICE detainer requests which hold undocumented immigrants from a few days to many weeks until ICE agents pick them up. Four federal courts have ruled that this ICE practice violates the Fourth Amendment. Nonetheless, under the Trump administration, ICE prioritized arrests of undocumented persons.

A large number of those arrested in North Carolina were taken to Stewart Detention Center which has been widely criticized for human right violations and low numbers of permanent releases from detention. During the pandemic, detainees faced increased risk of COVID-19 transmission. In fact, the Stewart Detention Center ranked second in the nation with the highest recorded number of COVID-19 cases in the United States, including at least four deaths among detainees (The Associated Press, 2021).

FaithAction works with the families that are left behind by providing food, healthcare, ID cards, housing needs, and other emergency services. Those in the detention center are helped with legal assistance, phone cards, and other urgent needs. The idea of visiting the detention center emerged from discussions among board members and volunteers, who enthusiastically formed the Friends of Immigrant Neighbors facing Detention (FIND) group to coordinate trips to Stewart Detention Center. Over 50 community members have made this trip from Greensboro to spend about 60 minutes with their detained neighbors and friends (Fracarro, 2020). They say they are encouraged to make these trips to talk to detainees, reassuring them that they are not alone, and will help support their families through difficult times. A few who have been released from the detention center have visited FaithAction in person to share how the visits and support helped them

and their families. Below is a testimony collected by Author 1 about a person whose pseudonym is Brian and whose life has long been clouded by the danger of deportation:

> Brian is 27 years old of Caribbean descent. He is a U.S. resident, but the government wants to deport him back to the Dominican Republic, a country he has never known since he has lived in the U.S. almost his entire life. He has been in prison for 5 years; he did not want to say much about the crime he committed as a young man. He was transferred to the Stewart Detention Center a year ago.
>
> Brian clearly articulates that prolonged detention waiting for a court hearing made him feel very anxious. He wants to know if he can stay or whether he should leave the country as soon as possible. He will not know how long he will be detained, when he will be released on bond under "reasonable supervision", or when he will be granted the right to remain lawfully in the United States. As he is extremely frustrated, he is now ready to leave for the Dominican Republic and stay with his mom. His mom has encouraged him, saying that he can start a new life, work, marry, and have children there. While listening to his story, I felt that Brian is ready to move on and reunite with his mother.
>
> Brian's health was negatively affected in detention. He visited a doctor and discovered that he has high cholesterol but could not follow the doctor's nutritional advice as there are no fruits or vegetables served. As we talked, he held a brown bag with a peanut butter sandwich he got for his "kosher meal" lunch. Certainly, it was a meager portion with poor nutrition to feed a young man. Brian has lost weight already and is afraid that his health will get worse. I asked him how he takes care of himself. Brian shared that he used to make

alcohol when he was in prison, using potatoes and ketchup, and sold it to inmates. He shared that alcohol enabled him to feel better, as it helps him forget his hardships in life.

Brian offered that the staff here treats people as "prisoners" even though they are in the detention center, and call them "illegal." They are expected to work and are paid $1 for cleaning or working in the kitchen. With this amount it is impossible for Brian to cover his visits to the doctor and medical costs.

Brian's does not have a wealthy social support network. His brothers and sisters do not visit him often, as they have their own families. He shared that his favorite activity was watching TV – he likes watching soccer and other sports – but this was cut. Now, he feels ready to leave because of the emotional and psychological toll on his well-being. He desires to support children in his community back home through mentorship and leadership programming. He plans to earn money to help his mother although he is fearful that he may not earn enough to support a family. He wants to marry a "white girl" to be happy in life.

This narrative touches on many issues that highlight the multiple layers of structural violence that affect Brian's life: racism, detention, mental and physical health stress, and substance use. However, here he also lays out his hopes for the future: improving his health, helping his family financially, marrying someone. Stories such as this humanize people in detention, giving people a glimpse into the complex lives of their immigrant neighbors. FaithAction's "Stranger to Neighbor" efforts utilize a four-step model in storytelling (education, exchange, community action, and storytelling) as an important component (Fracarro, 2021). In sharing the story of what

they learned and experiencing this together, community members progressed from stranger to neighbor by making friends and building trust.

***El Refugio: Hospitality House for Family Members of the Detained***

El Refugio is another program formed to provide hospitality and shelter at no cost to families visiting their loved ones at Stewart Detention Center. It was formed by co-founder Ameilcar Valencia, now executive director of El Refugio Ministry, alongside his wife, Katie Beno-Valencia, and a group of compassionate people who support their work. The program spreads awareness about detention centers and advocates for justice for immigrants (El Refugio, 2020). Ameilcar shared the following quote about the many injustices for immigrants, "For years, detention and deportation policies have stripped immigrants of their rights and dignity. The system feeds on fear and hate, creating millions of victims, affecting real people, people with stories and dreams, people with names and gifts to share" (Valencia, 2019). El Refugio continues to welcome hundreds of guests and also sponsors a post-release program that makes sure that all of those released can arrive home safe. Without El Refugio, the visits made from Greensboro to Lumpkin would have not been possible.

While the hospitality house had to close during COVID-19, El Refugio has turned its efforts to surveying people detained during the pandemic and their family members to better understand the impacts of COVID-19. This survey asks questions about your detained family and friends' experiences in detention during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results will be used to advocate for the best possible conditions at Stewart by creating a report to be shared with other organizations and members of Congress.

***Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL): Lobbying for Policy Change***

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is a Quaker organization founded in 1943. They focus on issues including criminal justice, economic justice, environment and energy, gun violence prevention, immigrants and refugees, peacebuilding, and voting and elections. As a group of lobbyists, they work at Capitol Hill and across the U.S. to advance policy. Their advocacy connects Quaker testimonies on peace, equality, simplicity, and integrity with legislation in the U.S. Congress and the administration (FCNL, 2020a). Their Immigration and Refugees program welcomes and creates a safe space for these communities, especially refugees escaping violence in their home country, human trafficking, and/or seeking asylum. The FCNL promotes immigration policies that help families stay together and migrate to the U.S. to be protected and apply for lawful permanent status. The organization also strongly believes that immigration policies should be implemented by federal authorities only, not delegated to local law enforcement, in order to promote belonging and safe spaces for all individuals seeking protection.

The FCNL hosts a Spring Lobby weekend each year, organized by youth members, and focusing on different issues. In 2017, the theme was on justice, #ResistInJustice. In 2018 and 2019, the group focused on immigration. In 2020, they held a virtual spring lobby weekend due to the coronavirus pandemic focused on Climate change. The 2021 gathering was virtual because of the pandemic. It focused on “The Crisis of Police Violence” (FCNL, 2020b) since police brutality has continued to underlie so many injustices in local communities. In the wake of growing racial justice movements, there is an urgent need to end systematic racism and militarization instilled in policing practices.

***American Friends Service Committee: #SanctuaryEverywhere***

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is another Quaker organization, founded in 1917. Their mission is to promote lasting peace with justice as a practical expression of faith in action. They work with communities and partners worldwide to fight unjust systems as well as devote themselves to service, development, and peace programs throughout the world. The organization also stands on behalf of the vision: "A just, peaceful, and sustainable world free of violence, inequality, and oppression." Some of the areas they focus on include international peacebuilding, ending mass incarceration, creating inclusive communities, building economic justice, and defending immigrant rights. The AFSC has about 24 offices in the U.S. as well as in several international locations.

The AFSC has a North Carolina Immigrant Rights Program that seeks to build a community that values the human dignity of all state residents. They work to advocate for fair and just policies that will respect the rights of everyone. The organization works alongside other groups including Siembra, Sanctuary for All, Triad Immigrant Family Support Fund, Communities against Islamophobia, and Engaging the Quaker Community, some of which are described in further detail below. The organization supports #SanctuaryEverywhere in solidarity with Black, Latinx, and Muslim communities, and is in support of the movement of congregational sanctuary for immigrants. Community members, congregations, and organizations in North Carolina have worked together in the stand for the sanctuary movement. They have worked with approximately seven families. Some of their stories are shared below:

Oscar was born in El Salvador and came to Greensboro, NC in 2005 seeking a better life.

In 2012, he started his own roofing company, employing several U.S. citizens (AFSC, 2020). After Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) gave Oscar one month to leave

the country, he took sanctuary at the Congregational United Church of Christin in Greensboro, NC. Currently, Oscar is the fifth person in a sanctuary in North Carolina and is hoping to reunite with his three children again.

Jose fled from El Salvador during the civil war in the 1980s and was seeking asylum in the U.S. Jose had a drinking problem and separated from his wife. His alcoholism also led him to be charged with and plead guilty to driving under the influence and domestic abuse. Years later, he was able to reconcile with his wife and served as a preacher in North Carolina for almost two decades. However, under Trump's administration and the harsh policies, Jose was targeted as a "criminal" by ICE which forced him and his family to leave the congregation. Now his case is under a petition so that he can be liberated.

In 2002, Rosa fled Honduras from extreme domestic violence. She had an abusive partner who stabbed her multiple times at the age of 19. Rosa has four children, three of whom are U.S. citizens. Honduras is considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world, and she will put her life at risk if she returns home. In addition, her former partner threatened to kill her if she ever went back. However, her asylum case was denied, and she has been asked to leave the U.S. Rosa has sought sanctuary in the Church of Reconciliation (Presbyterian Church USA) and Chapel Hill Mennonite Fellowship (Mennonite Church USA) while her attorney is fighting for her case with the support of AFSC/Siembra.

The storytelling that accompanies each of these cases are shared with the community to help them understand experiences of exclusion, racism, and oppression, functioning as intentional

strategy to form zones of peace and as a rationale for action (Kolano and Davila, 2019; Reimer, Standish, Thiessen, 2018). Many of these people are now under sanctuaries in order to be protected as their families ask for petitions to be able to remain in the U.S. Very few of them, like Minerva, who was in the sanctuary for three months, have been able to go back home. Minerva is from Mexico and, along with both of her sons, was in sanctuary at a Greensboro church so she would not be deported. Her oldest son, who is blind, was born in Mexico. She decided to come to the U.S. to provide him with better health services. Eventually, a federal immigration judge in Texas vacated her deportation order and, after three months in sanctuary, Minerva was able to reunite with her family again.

Since the end of the Trump administration, an increasing number of individuals are leaving sanctuary across the country – from 40 people in 16 states in 2020 to twenty-three in thirteen states today (Gammage, 2021). The future of sanctuary, for now, depends on the new President's plans for immigration reform.

***Siembra: Fighting to End Criminalization and Limit ICE Collaborations***

Siembra is an organization comprised of Latinx people dedicated to defending their rights and building power "with papers and without papers" within leadership teams in North Carolina. The organization was started in 2017 and serves Alamance, Durham, Forsyth, Orange, and Randolph counties. They have worked with sheriffs to limit ICE collaborations, worked with families impacted by detentions, run a 24-hour ICE defense hotline across ten counties, and organized Latinx voters to elect candidates and promote policies aligned with the vision for a life with dignity for all (Siembra NC, 2019).

In 2019, Siembra worked to limit collaborations between ICE and local law enforcement, standing with communities against ICE, and building immigrant worker power. Siembra advocated

for and succeeded in reversing policies supporting HB 370 in Forsyth and Guilford counties. They also worked as part of a successful statewide campaign to convince Governor Roy Cooper to veto HB 370, which would have required sheriffs to work with ICE. Siembra also supported about fifty-nine families impacted by ICE detention centers by distributing over $45,000 in emergency cash assistance. This work has continued during the COVID 19 pandemic. Siembra distributed face masks and offered free COVID-19 testing in Guilford, Forsyth, Alamance, Wake, Randolph, Durham, Mecklenburg, Rockingham, Davidson, and Chatham counties. These efforts were coupled with voter rights information as they helped individuals who are eligible to vote to receive information and vote early during general elections. During the last general election, Siembra also hosted a group of UndocuQueer speakers who discussed what the 2020 election mean to them and how it can affect everyone in the community in different ways.

During COVID-19, Siembra launched a #PledgeYourCheck effort which allowed people to donate their federal stimulus to provide emergency cash assistance to immigrants dealing with ICE detention and loss of income due to COVID-19 (Siembra NC, 2019). These immigrants are themselves excluded from unemployment benefits and the federal stimulus. This offers a way for neighbors to help each other out and spread the benefits of the federal stimulus.

***St. Barnabas Episcopal Church: Sanctuary in the House of Worship***

The St. Barnabas Episcopal Church has become one of many churches creating space for protection and belonging. Hundreds of congregations across the country have supported undocumented people who are at risk of deportation, however, only a few have housed them. In the U.S., there are currently about forty-eight people taking sanctuary in houses of worship. These houses of worship are considered “sensitive locations,” which means that the federal enforcement

officers will not arrest individuals seeking sanctuary in them (Shimron, 2019). Many people who are in sanctuary are later reunited with their families, but others stay for a long time.

St. Barnabas became North Carolina's first congregation offering sanctuary by welcoming an undocumented immigrant named Juana who was born in Guatemala and married an American citizen. Juana had four children, two of who were born in the United States. She fled Guatemala fearing the violence that was occurring in her homeland. In 1989, she sought asylum in the U.S., but the judge turned down her request. Since then, Juana has been living in the U.S without authorization. She was granted voluntary departure in 2001 which would have required her to leave the U.S. in exchange for returning for visits or formally applying for citizenship, However, she did not leave. In 2011, ICE appeared at her job. Since then, she has had to check in with immigration officials every year. On April 20, 2017, the ICE office in Charlotte notified Juana that she had to leave the U.S. by May 31st (Shimron, 2019).

Juana entered sanctuary in St. Barnabas Episcopal Church to avoid deportation and separation from her young children. They took her in and, to keep her safe, implemented procedures such as locking all doors and not allowing immigration enforcement officers inside without an arrest warrant signed by a judge (Shimron, 2019). In this way, the congregation sheltered Juana by creating a space of sanctuary. However, she must always remain there. While she feels trapped, she fears that if she leaves, she will lose her freedom entirely. One of her biggest blessings is having family members visit her. According to a representative of the American Friends Service Committee, Juana says that she is very thankful for the church community, and all she asks for is for an "opportunity to fix her immigration status".

Despite these protections and assurances of safety, the COVI9-19 pandemic has affected immigrants living in sanctuary spaces around the country. Due to social distancing measures, they

no longer experience regular church gatherings and interactions with volunteers, leading to increased feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, at the same time, Juana and her supporters are more hopeful than ever after President Biden put a 100-day hold on most deportations after taking office.

**Conclusion**

Refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented immigrants in the United States have had a difficult path in finding belonging and support in their new communities. However, many organizations have formed to help support and serve them, as we have illustrated here with examples from North Carolina, a relatively new destination for these migrant communities. Nonprofit organizations and faith-based institutions have created spaces for those who have arrived to feel welcomed and develop a sense of belonging.

While these organizations all create a sense of belonging for these vulnerable groups, how this is conceptualized and put into practice varies in unique ways. In addition to offering traditional forms of sanctuary space, they have also formed creative solutions such as the 24-hour ICE defense hotline. FaithAction International House has the *Strangers to Neighbors* program to embrace new diversity and find ways to communicate effectively with one another. El Refugio provides hospitality and shelter to families visiting loved ones at Stewart Detention center. American Friends Service Committee builds a community based on the value of human dignity for all North Carolina residents. Siembra helps strengthen and organize immigrant workers. St. Barnabas Episcopal Church became the state's first congregation to offer sanctuary to undocumented immigrants. Lastly, Friends Committee on National Legislation promotes belonging for all individuals seeking protection. These novel forms of hospitality provided by the sanctuary spaces

and other efforts create a sense of belonging to the local community as individuals are welcomed to stay and receive neighborly support.

Each of these community-based peacebuilding efforts described here work together to provide a strong local network of protection and resources for vulnerable populations, a network that was sustained and continued to function even during the COVID-19 pandemic. These cases help to illustrate how innovation exists in the fight against injustices as each group produces spaces and forms of advocacy that can act synergistically with one another for the protection of all people regardless of their status. By focusing on strong local efforts, we can understand the spatial dimensions of peacebuilding agents (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017) to advance the critical peace research agenda. Community-based peacebuilding demonstrates that space and place act as vehicles through which peace can be explored. Furthermore, given these examples, we argue that the transformation of space and place can be approached through a focus on the agency of peacebuilding actors to create zones and cultures of peace. Space, place and agency are useful concepts to re-theorize peacebuilding.

In addition to community-based programming and advocacy, storytelling is a strategic peacebuilding tool to bridge the gap and divisions between newcomers and existing communities to create a sense of inclusion and belonging. The efforts of civil society described here, such as collecting testimonies of people detained or in sanctuary, utilize storytelling as an important component to learn from each other and create a narrative of cooperation rather than conflict. This is part of a larger effort around the world at witnessing and collecting testimonies through storytelling (Lincoln, 2010) and helps construct zones of peace. Storytelling helps people construct shared meaning, mobilize knowledge, and exercise agency, all of which are critical in transforming spaces and places in establishing zones and cultures of peace.

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Appendix 1.

Picture. FaithAction’s Volunteers and Supporters in Greensboro, North Carolina.