



JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT

Fall 2022

“Give, and it will be given to you.

*A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and
running over, will be poured into your lap.”*

Luke 6:38

Earlier this year, our community gathered on a Saturday afternoon to celebrate the birthday of Carlos (*pictured above*), who just turned four years old. His mother, Alejandra, had poured her energy into the preparations for this party, cooking, cleaning and hanging ribbons and balloons. We sang and played games ("Here comes Carlos on his pony!"), danced a conga line, ate hot dogs, lasagna, and rice pudding. Carlos, a fun-loving kid, enjoyed the scene quite a lot. Alejandra had told us beforehand that she was praying for this party to somehow be a blessing. It was indeed a blessing—for Carlos, for Alejandra, and for all of us.

Carlos and Alejandra are asylum seekers from Venezuela. (We've changed their names, and others in this newsletter, for privacy.) Carlos and Alejandra are part of a very large wave of Venezuelans that have left the country in recent years because of political repression, violence, and widespread hunger there. More than a quarter of Venezuela's population has left since 2014, making this one of the largest migration crises in the world right now. Most Venezuelans are living in neighboring countries in South America, but many have made the dangerous journey north to the United States in search of a safe and stable place to live.

Another family that we hosted this year told us about their journey north with their six-year-old son. Gabriel and Yolanda had been living in Colombia for more than a year after leaving Venezuela, but felt they could not stay there because of the pervasive discrimination against Venezuelan refugees. During that time in Colombia, they saved up their money to attempt the journey north to the United States. As their journey began, the family piled into an overcrowded boat that set off into rough water.



Carlos's mother Alejandra prepares to serve the desserts as partygoers of all ages weave through the room in a conga line.



We enjoyed summer outings with our guests including The State Botanical Garden (above), Watson Mill Bridge Park (pg. 3 upper right), and several local lakes.

Below: Yolanda, Gabriel, and their son (pictured here with Camille and Ellie) were all very outgoing and eager to practice English conversation during meals, trips, and everyday life moments.



There were half as many life vests as there were people on board, and as the waves grew, the passengers and the boat operator became very afraid. Afterwards, their son told them that he had thought they were going to die. They walked for six days through the jungle — exhausted, with little food, in fear of drug traffickers — until they arrived at last at a Panamanian migrant camp. They waited there for several days, and their son became ill from drinking contaminated river water, which was the only water available. Finally, they were able to leave the camp by bus for Costa Rica. From there they traveled by bus, by motorcycle, and by foot through Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. Along the way, they constantly encountered fees that they could not pay, long waits to cross a border or a bridge, the risk of kidnapping or other violence, and the daily search for someplace to sleep through the night.

They also encountered acts of generosity and compassion. At a church in Honduras, the family was given food as well as money that they needed to continue their journey. Gabriel had developed an infection in his leg, and was treated by nurses at the church. We often hear stories of compassionate aid when people talk about their journey north, alongside the stories of exploitation and violence. We also hear stories of how people had to trust in God during the darkest stages of their journey. One Venezuelan, a woman of astounding faith, told us how she found herself left behind by the group she was traveling with, alone at night in the Panamanian jungle. She cried out to God that if he wanted her to continue, he had to send someone for her — otherwise she would die there. Not long after, she was allowed to join another group of travelers with whom she didn't even speak the same language.

When Gabriel and Yolanda finally made it to the U.S. border, they scrambled across the Rio Grande from rock to rock, and presented themselves as asylum seekers to the border guards on the other side. At this point, their story becomes difficult to follow. They were interviewed by immigration officials, given phone numbers for churches that might be able to help, and provided transportation to San Antonio. An agency in San Antonio provided them with a bus ticket to Atlanta. They arrived in Atlanta late in the evening and stayed awake through the night in the bus terminal. In the morning they started walking. They looked for churches but found them

closed. They saw homeless people sleeping on the streets and wondered if they would be sleeping on the street too. They tried phone numbers they had been given, and eventually someone came in a car to talk to them. That person contacted another person, who brought them some food and said he would get back in touch with them. Eventually, they made contact with Anton Flores-Maisonet of Casa Alterna, a house of hospitality for immigrants in Atlanta. After a short interview, Anton told them, "I'll try to help you."



Over the years, most of the families that have lived at Jubilee have come to this country through the U.S. refugee resettlement program. Jubilee has also hosted many asylum seekers, though, especially in recent years. Asylum seekers are people who come to this country because they would face persecution or violence if they were returned to their home. Many have already been the victims of violence. They meet the general-language definition of a refugee: someone who flees their country because of violence or persecution. They have not yet, however, been granted official refugee status by the United Nations. The asylum system in the United States was created alongside the refugee resettlement program by the 1980 Refugee Act in order to provide an alternative path to safety for people without refugee status.

To request asylum in the United States, a person must first arrive in this country by whatever means are available to them. Asylum seekers arriving from Latin America often cross the U.S. border and then surrender immediately to border police, or they may present themselves at one of the official ports of entry. These are the only options available to them; it is not possible to apply for asylum from outside the country. After requesting

asylum, asylum seekers go through a screening process meant to determine if they have a credible fear of persecution in their home country. If they are deemed to have a credible fear, then they are generally allowed to remain in the U.S. while their asylum application is processed. Eventually, if their application is granted, they have the possibility of becoming U.S. citizens. If their application is denied, they may be deported back to their home country.

That, in simple form, is how the asylum process is meant to work. In recent years, though, new policies have made it more difficult or impossible for many people to seek asylum. Currently, a public health provision related to the Covid pandemic is being used to turn away asylum seekers from certain countries without giving them access to the asylum process. In October of this year, this policy was extended to include



Our Monday morning women's group can be a space where stories like Alejandra's or Gabriela's are shared. Several times they hosted us at their homes with plentiful refreshments. We usually close the time with a simple, relaxing craft project like these beaded bracelets.

people from Venezuela, so families now arriving at the border are unable to seek asylum regardless of how compelling their case may be.

Once in the United States, asylum seekers are in a more precarious situation than people with official refugee status. That's because, even though they are following the appropriate legal process and are fully cooperating with immigration authorities, they have not yet been granted status as U.S. residents. The asylum application process can take years, and during this time people have to live without the benefits that are available to refugees. The asylum seekers who come to Jubilee need longer-term assistance while they wait for their asylum case to be heard, and part of our work is to connect them with that support after they move on from Jubilee.

Jubilee has always encouraged people to look for ways to welcome refugees in their local communities. Right now, there is an especially great need for church communities willing to support and accompany asylum seekers as they wait for their asylum application to be processed. This could mean being available to help support a family that has lived at Jubilee, or working with another organization like the Congregational Accompaniment Program for Asylum Seekers (uusc.org/capas) that connects asylum seekers with church sponsors. There is also a pathway called humanitarian parole that allows some people to seek refuge in the United States on a temporary basis with the support of a sponsor. If your church community might be able to accompany an asylum seeker in one of these ways, please reach out to us at hospitality@jubileepartners.org.

News articles about refugee crises around the world always emphasize numbers, and the numbers are overwhelming. As Christians, though, we know that every single one of the people reflected in those numbers is a precious human being. What God asks of us is that we meet people in love, as God opens doors for us to do so. The people we meet will be a blessing to us.

from the people of Jubilee



Who we are

Jubilee Partners is an ecumenical Christian service community in northeast Georgia. We offer hospitality to refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants who have fled violence or persecution.

We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; donations are thus tax-deductible.

Your donations and support of our work are most appreciated.

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Left: A third Venezuelan family we enjoyed getting to know this summer.

Right: Coffee and English lesson with Bruderhof volunteer Bethany on the front porch.





"30 Years - Thank you for your friendship!"

Visiting and Visited

In June, Rachel and Sue joined the 30th annual Shalom Mission Communities (SMC) delegation to visit friends in the close-knit community Valle Nuevo, El Salvador. Above: The yearly trek to the muddy Lempa River where Valle Nuevo members who survived a massacre there in 1980 (during the Salvadoran Civil War) recall the details of that horrific border crossing into Honduras.

New friends from East Denver Vineyard Church paid us a visit in July for a service-learning trip. Bottom right: Blake shares a talk in the Neighbor's Field on agriculture, including Karen and Karenni farming practices and the integration of faith and farming. Right: Jubilee novice-daughter Ellie helped the group with a project staining parts for sixteen new picnic tables built by summer volunteer Richard.



Fall colors reflected in the Jubilee pond.



View Jubilee's newsletter in color online at www.jubileepartners.org!

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Land Internship 2023

Jubilee is offering a new opportunity within our Volunteer Program in 2023, specifically oriented toward engagement with our land work over the course of a full growing season (February 1 – November 30).

Learn more at: jubileepartners.org/volunteer/land-internship-2023

