

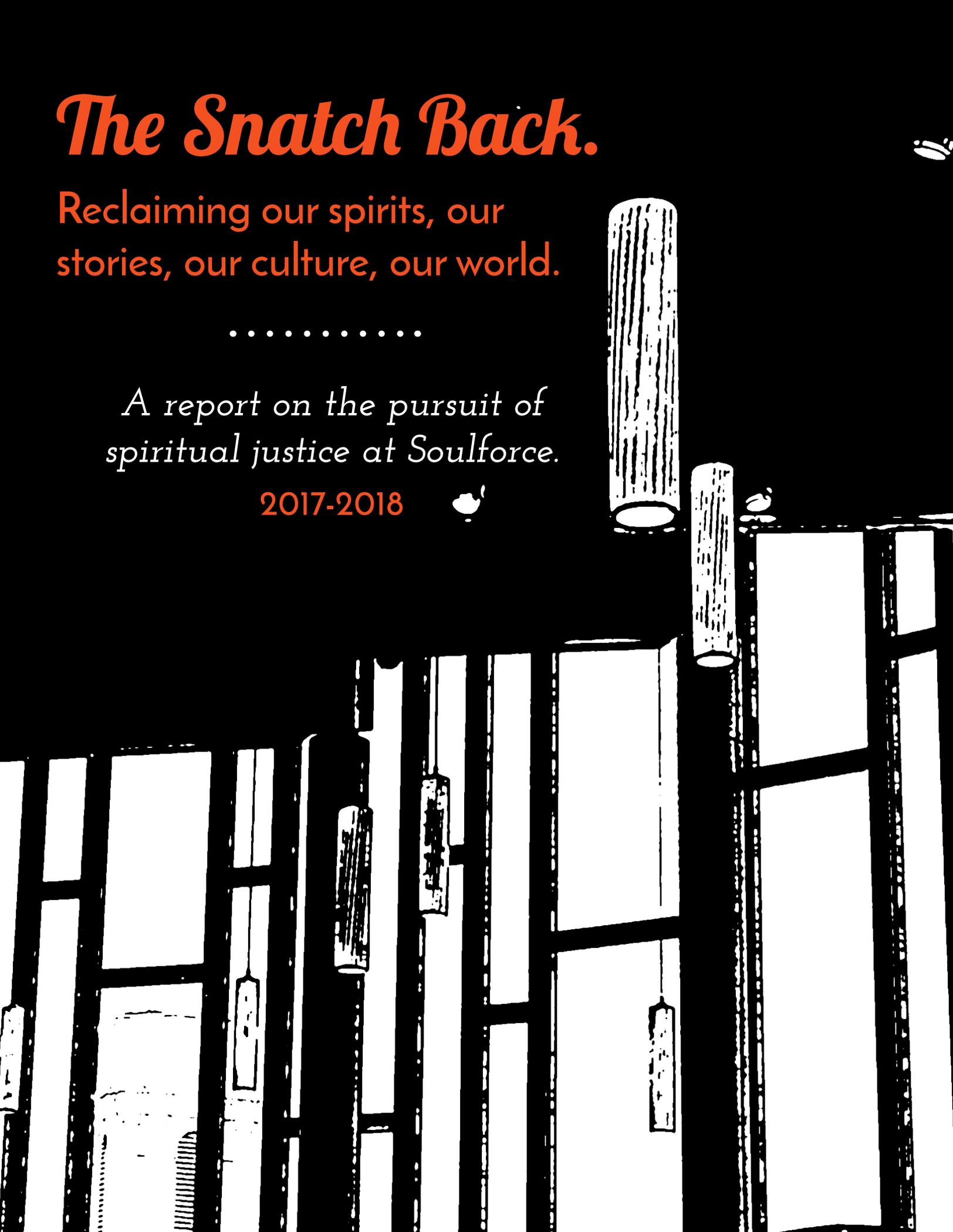
# *The Snatch Back.*

Reclaiming our spirits, our stories, our culture, our world.

.....

*A report on the pursuit of spiritual justice at Soulforce.*

2017-2018



Soulforce celebrates 20 years of spiritual justice in 2018.

We started out as the organization willing to take the Religious Right to task. **Moral and physical courage** were our hallmarks. Our analysis pointed to the most powerful leaders shaping the oppression of LGBTQI people, and we steered our protest directly to their doorsteps.

And then **Youth leadership** turned us upside down and inside out.

Programs like the Equality Ride, Give Back IX, and Q Camp taught us about our opposition's inner workings and our people's needs. Youth leadership revealed that being **theologically equipped** in the People's Gospel, so to speak, is essential and that **spiritual care** is critical to sustaining movement.

These programs taught us an undeniable truth: **there is no Religious Right without white supremacy.**

These insights tell us a lot about how we, Soulforce, got here.

They also tell us how we, as a nation, got here.

Forever changed by our own youth-led revolution, we continue to center young people in hostile contexts and return to a power analysis of the Right to define our targets and aims.

We've adapted as our adversary has changed: our greatest foe is no longer the Church—it is the ideological system of **Christian Supremacy, delivered by parachurch organizations**, that wraps systematic violence in moral authority.

Good thing we have 20 years of de-coding the Right, crafting counter-narratives, and healing our people. **We are made for this.**



About the cover: The main hall of Chicago Theological Seminary where we gave a workshop on Christian Privilege and Islamophobia. This room works to let spirit and light in without all the troubled signifiers of institutionalism.

# *The Snatch Back.*

Reclaiming our spirits, our stories, our culture, our world.



From Summer 2017 to Summer 2018, we worked with youth, elders, human rights defenders, grassroots activists, and aligned organizations across LGBTQI, racial, and reproductive justice movements to advance cultural and political shifts that benefit *all* communities who are targeted by the adversary that LGBTQI people know all too well: the Religious Right and its ideological system of Christian Supremacy.

This report contains the activities, outcomes, community feedback, and financial picture of a year in spiritual justice made possible by you.



# Executive Summary

The phrase that stayed in the front of our minds and programs this past year is **Indomitable Spirits**.

The spiritual, political, and strategic efficacy of cultivating Indomitable Spirits was sparked during our 2017 Vacation Bible School program for youth in hostile contexts.

So much more is possible when Biblical “terror texts” don’t claw at our hearts and drain our confidence.

So much more is possible when we **de-mystify the machinery of the Religious Right’s strategy** through opposition research.

So much more is possible when we create **channels for passing down and around the wisdom** of our elders and accomplished activists of all ages.

are the **backbone** of this movement.

Over the past year, we dedicated ourselves to **stoking the moral courage and political confidence of over 2,000 people** through our workshops, webinars, direct actions, and public witness. From Charlottesville and Michigan to Los Angeles and Chicago, we showed up at organizing hot spots and movement strategy hubs to share our training tools, analysis, healing practices, and lessons learned from 20 years in the field.

When we show up for youth in conservative spaces to support their cultural and political development, we know that work doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We must also teach parents and pastors, enlist the support of allied institutions and politicians, and **shape our organization’s theory of change based on lessons learned from working with and for youth**.

The young folks we partner with are





***Soulforce Staff:*** Grace, Yaz, D.J., Haven, and Alba (not pictured: Thekla)

creating change within environments that are an object lesson in how toxic power premised upon violent hierarchy dresses up in Christianity...and how we must be **equally skilled in religious and political tactics** to be adequate to the task of our liberation.

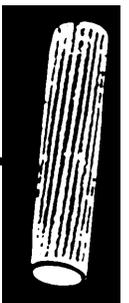
As false morality shape-shifts into new ideologies and policies every day, we have our youth leaders and young adult programs to thank for shaping

us into a nimble, intersectional organization that is primed for this political moment.

**Thanks to you, we've been training for this for 20 years.**

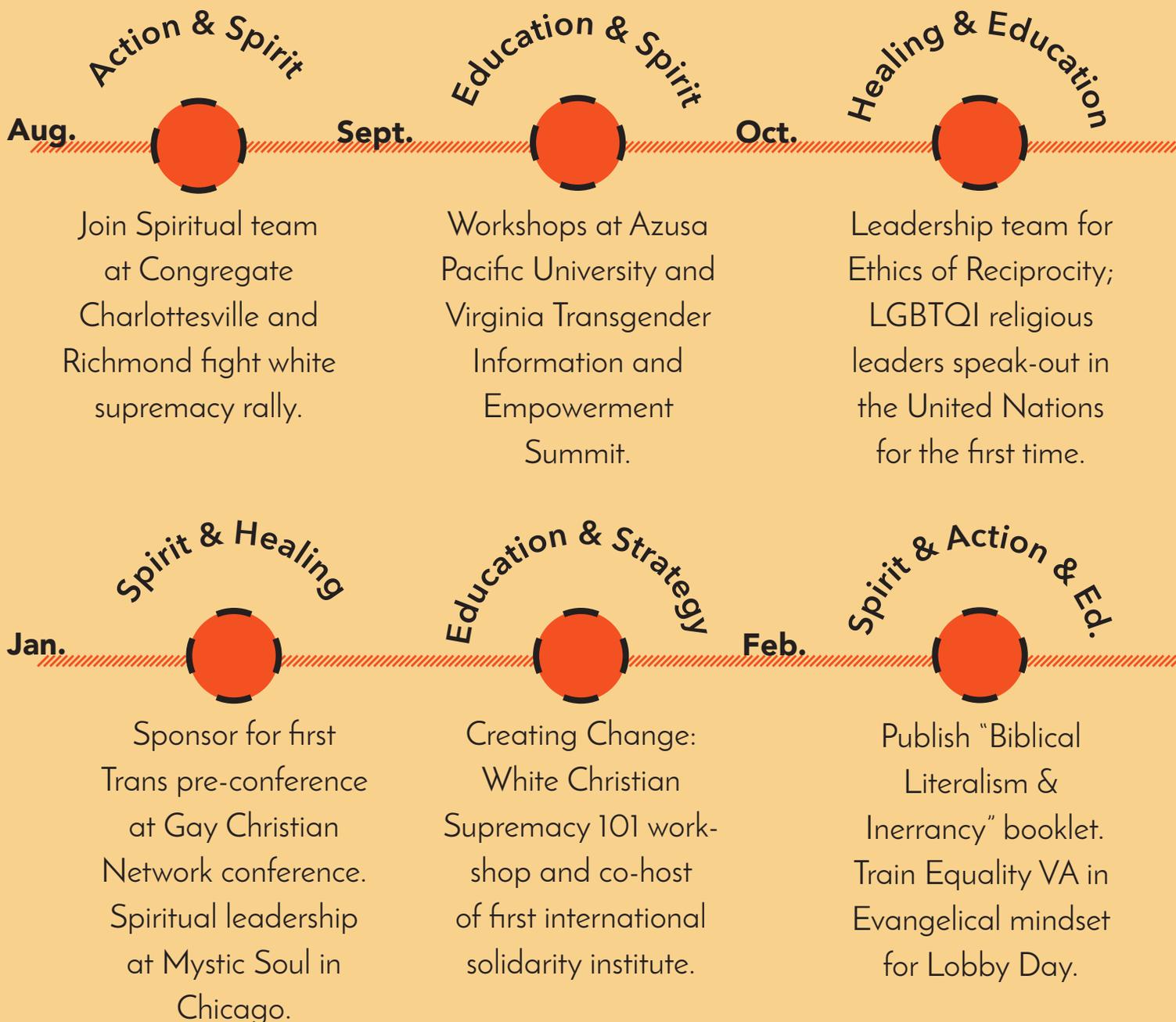
Onward and upward,

Haven Herrin, Director



# Timeline

The greatest hits from youth-led and youth-centered work.



## *Our Four Pillars:*

**Nov.** Action & Education

Logistics leadership for Justice for Mahesh action to fight employment discrimination at Azusa Pacific U.

**Dec.** Research & Education

Webinar with Columbia Law connecting LGBTQI and racial justice in Masterpiece Cakeshop case.

Education & Spirit

Publish "Across the Divide" holiday conversation helper. Gender workshop for Side by Side youth group in Virginia.

**Mar.** Research & Education

Train 225 global activists on Right Wing strategy at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

**Apr.** Action & Education

Pomona-Pitzer Give Back IX action captures 70 "solidarity love letters" for students on Christian campuses.

Action & Education

Support student-led direct actions at Hope College and Spring Harbor U. Workshop on Islamophobia at Chicago Theological Seminary.

*Research & Strategy*

*Political & Theological Education*

*Spiritual Reclamation & Healing*

*Strategic Direct Action*



# *By the Numbers*

*188*

*People involved in our direct action campaigns*

*2,508*

*People trained by Soulforce staff: 975 in person, 1,533 online*

*77*

*Spirit spaces and healing rituals for organizers, 373 participants*

*79*

*Organizational partnerships*

*8*

*Events on campus*

*8*

*Regional and national media pieces*

*904*

*Resource downloads*

*20*

*New monthly donors*

*5*

*National and international movement strategy meetings*



*7*

# Youth & Student Power

We fueled the power of youth and students in the South and on Christian campuses across the country through seed grants, lending our social media to their mobilization efforts, one-on-one spiritual accompaniment work, opportunities to participate in our national campaigns, and logistical support for direct action planning and public relations.



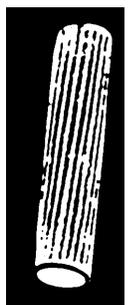
Our young folks' aims have included demanding LGBTQI student group recognition, establishing a wider plane for protest and visibility, improving employment policies, securing anti-bullying protections, and supporting Trans Women of Color. Students find us through word of mouth, our

theological resources, and our free online offerings like the Campus Organizing Toolkit, the only one in the country to specifically address the needs of LGBTQI Students and Students of Color on Christian campuses. **We meet them exactly where they are with whatever they need,**

from funding and toolkits to emotional support.



Student athletes at Pomona-Pitzer College's third annual Give Back IX direct action where a dozen right wing schools showed up to play.



# Events

## Azusa Pacific University

APU is a longtime Soulforce focus school that we've engaged since 2006 for many reasons: APU's athletic director is an advisor for diversity and inclusion at the NCAA, APU bills itself as a progressive Christian school, and it's located in Los Angeles, a nexus of Christian Higher Ed strategy design.

We were **invited on campus** for two different events. The first was a focus group with Equality California to discuss state legislation regarding Title IX and religious freedom.

The second event was a panel for the Christian, Life, Faith & Ministries class that was packed out with 70 students.

"Justice for Mahesh" was a student-led direct action that we supported with on-the-ground logistics, messaging and PR direction. **The action aimed to highlight the abuse experienced by a queer man of color on staff at APU.**

Christian Higher Ed organizing is our entry point into naming how racial justice and LGBTQI issues meet in the context of so-called "**religious freedom,**" the **Right's primary delivery mechanism for anti-LGBTQI legislation today.**



9

Student leaders at Azusa Pacific University we supported with expertise in PR that garnered 4 regional and national news pieces.



# The New York Times

## At Christian Colleges, a Collision of Gay Rights and Traditional Values



## Media Coverage for Youth-Led Actions

New York Times, DailyWire, NBC, Medium, Christian Post and more.



**STUDENT VOICES**

Writer ▾



Edit



HOME ED SCIENCE COLLEGE MOST READ | PUBLIC SERVICE STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS PROGRAM

## The Life and Death of Title IX on Christian Campuses

Athletes at Pomona-Pitzer College practice Queer and Trans solidarity with LGBTQI people, on and off campus.

*“For this event, we wanted to focus on positivity, which is why we chose to write solidarity letters. It is important to voice to religious colleges and the NCAA that EVERYONE should be accepted and religion should not play a role in this. I think it is important to continue providing support for LGBTQI students but also demand change,” says Bennet.*



*“My favorite conversation* was with two students from California Baptist University who told me how horrible their school treated students who identify as LGBTQI. This broke my heart, but I loved to see that they were still passionate about the cause. Some students had no idea LGBTQI students were being treated like this and others said their school was culpable of this.”

-Maddie Bennet, Give Back IX action leader

## Pomona-Pitzer College

Student athletes at Pomona-Pitzer have participated in the Give Back IX campaign for three years because their school hosts an NCAA Track & Field invitational that regularly includes a dozen or more of our target Christian universities.

Since we started the Give Back IX campaign in 2016, we have achieved several wins, including new Trans inclusion policies for would-be championship hosts and clarity on exactly what it will take to get the NCAA to divest from schools using “religious freedom” to

discriminate against LGBTQI students and staff: Building up the moral courage and coordination of schools, athletic departments, and teams to one day refuse to play these oppressive schools. **That requires base-building**, so this year’s theme is “Solidarity Love Letters,” wherein any school can host letter-writing drives to LGBTQI students on Christian campuses. This supports young folks in harm’s way and builds relationships with student leaders who in one or two years’ time will have the knowledge and skills to attempt these more aggressive tactics with the NCAA. **Inspired by Pomona-Pitzer, one seminary has already signed up for Give Back IX this fall.**



## Hope College & Spring Arbor University

Students at Hope College achieved the organizing holy grail for Christian campuses: **uniting groups for students of color and LGBTQI organizers** in intersectional activism.

For their #95 Stories campaign on new student orientation day, organizers at Hope handed out baked goods to incoming freshmen while proclaiming an equitable and just vision for their campus and telling their stories.

At Spring Arbor, another school that, like Hope, we've visited on the Equality Ride in years past, we attended a direct action march with alumni, students, and community members in a campaign called "Cut the Clause" in reference to the **policy that forbids the "support" of homosexuality with or self-identifying as queer.**

Our support included campus organizing toolkits, one-on-one support calls, and showing up in person to boost their leadership.



I have seen the ways bad theology kills: emotionally, physically, spiritually. I've seen the ways that institutions used religion to hide the truth of queer people's belovedness and wholeness and beauty, and that breaks my heart.

-Caitlyn J. Stout, 21, Spring Arbor University, ac-

# Training, Resources & Solidarity

## Seed Grants

Our work with youth is relational—making ourselves available and matching our expertise and resources with whatever is most useful to young leaders. For some, that is a late night phone call because they are reeling from their school administration’s intimidation, and for some it’s lending the strength of our membership lists to their petition drive.

Soulforce has begun to offer **seed grants to youth challenging Christian Supremacy in their communities.** They can use these funds for nearly anything: printing, technology, supplies, banners, travel, and more.

Our first seed grant went to Rachel Hester of North Carolina for their group, NC Queer Troublmakers. The request was for web hosting for their statement of solidarity, a base-building initiative to push

faith communities to be in active solidarity with Trans Women of Color and to list ways to take concrete action.

*“It was impactful to be able to collaborate with other people on the statement and flesh out our demands for how people live out their advocacy for trans people.”*

*Even though it’s a time specific [project], it’s something people in my community still go back to. It’s something people have shared with their own congregations.”*

-Rachel Hester



**Soulforce  
Seed Grants**

In the spirit of emboldening Youth and Young Adults working at the grassroots, we are excited to offer seed grants to those who are organizing in politically and spiritually hostile contexts.

## Signal Boosting

The Stafford High School gay-straight alliance in Virginia reached out to Soulforce to provide them with a training in basic organizing skills and moral support. Our staff offered **group spirit care via a video call** focusing on spiritual violence and student activism. Later, Soulforce endorsed and boosted a student-led campaign to implement **protections for Trans students** through their county's school board. And they won!

*"I am excited to tell you all that our anti bullying policy has been amended to include 'actual or perceived gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation.'*

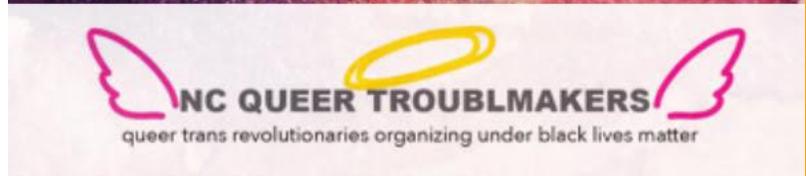
*And bias training for administrators will begin this summer, the course will be LGBTQ+ inclusive but focused on minorities in general! Thank you all for your support in this effort."*

-Anthony, Stafford GSA leader



Above: Stafford GSA training by webinar.

Below: The Troublmakers' Soulforce designed shout out.



## Theological Skills

Vacation Bible School in Summer 2017 and our events on campus continue to teach us **how hungry youth are for theological training** that is accessible and positive. So much of what they have been taught by their schools or dominant culture is dreary and oriented towards obedience and punishment.

We bring in sunshine and fresh air with our workshops and booklets. As just one example, working from our base in the South, we provided two trainings in October and December to the Side by Side Queer and Trans youth group in Richmond, VA. **We broke open old myths and provided new purchase for young folks to claim a different, more joyful narrative.**





# Youth Outcomes

## Strength & Capacity

- 227 youth trained in organizing skills and theological analysis
- 37 youth supported in their leadership for campaigns and direct actions

## Sustainability

- 64 youth provided space for healing and spirit care
- 4 student groups supported in working together across identities and campuses

## Institutional Change

- One anti-bullying policy win in VA
- Re-drew the map for unacceptable discrimination and permissible activism on 2 campuses



# Politicizing the Faithful

## ...and "Spiritualizing" the Political

Our campus work is a microcosm of how churches, parachurch organizations, politicians, right wing philanthropy, and the Right's legal strategies coalesce to drive an anti-LGBTQI agenda from the grassroots to the highest levels of government. Christian Higher Ed is often a canary in the coal mine on so-called "religious freedom" and other emerging strategies.

.....

We have a mantra: **No politics without spirit, and no religion without a power analysis.** A unique role we fulfill in the movement is to weave together political skills and theological acumen in the context of our primary framework- combatting Christian Supremacy- so that we are *all* more prepared to challenge the Religious Right that is united more and more everyday under racist and patriarchal postures wrapped in righteousness.

### Networking & Strategy

Soulforce showed up to share opposition research, provide workshops, hold healing space, and create powerful messaging over the last year with groups like Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ), The Highlander Center, SisterSong, and the Rolling the Stone Away conference.

**Our job is to help organizations and activists in the LGBTQI movement and beyond de-code the role that Christian Supremacy plays in their work** so that we can unify our aims and undermine the false grip on morality that the Right uses to win.



We always strive to generously share our lessons, analysis, and resources gained through 20 years of spiritual justice work.

Our partnership with SURJ is an especially rewarding one. We joined the teaching faculty for their year-long cohort of white religious leaders in the United States working to resist the Right. We provided training to over 500 people in the “moral symbolism” of white gun ownership, how to resist the Right’s use of fear as a tactic, and how policing structures evolved in tandem with the Church to privilege whiteness.

At Rolling the Stone Away in St. Louis, a gathering of LGBTQI faith-based activists from several decades, we spoke on two panels: de-colonizing church inclusion work and current opposition research on the Right—and why the last 20 years should look very different than the next.

Soulforce brought its De-Coding Christian Supremacy workshop to SisterSong’s Let’s Talk About Sex Conference in New Orleans to “skill up” folks around the connections among reproductive, racial, and LGBTQI justice laid down by right wing Christian logic.



Above: Banner for our first webinar for the SURJ white religious leaders cohort.

Below: SisterSong arranged the conference schedule so that Soulforce could provide an opening day training on Christian Supremacy.



*“Soulforce appears to do something that no other LGBTQ advocacy group does that I’m aware of—really focus on the power of people’s inner spirit in terms of helping people to heal from the damage religious individuals/groups perpetrate against us, as well as help us to reclaim the sources of strength for ourselves that are the foundation of well being and our justice work, whether that’s religious or not. VERY inclusive and empowering and healing.*

-Christian Supremacy 101 at Creating Change workshop attendee

The Ethics of Reciprocity team, a project led by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation.



## Skilling Up Our People

Soulforce regularly feeds our members hearts and minds with “hot topic” webinars and in-person workshops that honor the complexity of what we face.

Our Christopher Columbus Day “Resisting Empire” webinar **balanced political analysis and healing** as we examined the trauma that befell us all—queer folks, white folks, femme folks, working class folks included—in the project of empire.

*“Since that workshop last January, I have become far more plugged in with Soulforce, my wife and I agreed that we wanted to start giving regularly to support their work in all its manifestations. I love boosting your social media alerts and sharing your newsletters with friends.*

*I have also shared your online workshops, webinars, and Vacation Bible School with*

*staff and my students at the college. This semester I made the “Resisting Empire” webinar extra credit for my students (some even took me up on the offer!).*

-C. Wess Daniels

After we published “Across the Divide: a How-To for Having Tough Conversations with Conservative Evangelicals (and Surviving!)”, Equality Virginia asked us to train their Lobby Day leaders in understanding conservative mindsets before they visited to the capitol.

We provided this same training to the global LGBTQI religious leaders in the Ethics of Reciprocity event at the United Nations. They were the first group of such leaders to take the stage inside the UN building, and the audience had been intentionally packed with a more conservative lean.

We make sense of the Right for groups that are not oriented toward faith and reveal the political potential of religious work.



# Relevant... Right Now!

Here is the most profound lesson from our work with youth in hostile contexts: There is no Religious Right without white supremacy. Insights gleaned through our youth programming are invaluable to many spaces and movements beyond campus. Christian Supremacy-taught, embodied, walked out through legal strategies in Church and God's Campus-affects us all.

.....

While we remain true to our mission and roots-working with activists of all ages, boldly addressing the source of the problem, embracing the ideological battles of our liberation, cultivating theological skills, and fostering creative direct action-we cannot deny that we are in an important *Moment* that requires joining our leadership with others to fight the rise of the politics of domination and draconian legislation.

The two themes that emerge as the most toxic and effective strategies from the Right at this moment are white supremacy and "religious freedom."

Fittingly, these are two areas where Soulforce has something valuable to offer.

## Fighting White Supremacy

In our deepening partnership with SURJ, we were invited to join their cohort of contributors to their weekly podcast, *The Word Is Resistance*, where we reach an additional 150+ folks per post. Every month or so, we offer the "social justice read" on the **common lectionary** for that week, tying our message to trending political issues, such as the one-year anniversary of the white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, VA.



Last summer we poured our spiritual and political might into responding to that violence. In **Charlottesville**, our Spiritual Strategist Rev. Alba Onofrio joined in the pastoral leadership team. And in Richmond, VA, our Director of

In April, we married our skills in de-coding Christian Supremacy with the efforts to **fight Islamophobia** stoked by the Muslim travel ban and other statements from this administration; Chicago Theological Seminary



Soulforce joined in the pastoral response team in Charlottesville to provide a protective front for activists challenging white supremacy in the streets.

Programs, Yaz Mendez Nuñez, participated in an interfaith service to prepare activists for the counter protest to a white supremacist rally there.

invited us to present a workshop to a crowd of 65 on Christian privilege, anti-Muslim bias, and anti-Blackness.



*"I feel like this is such a missing link in the interfaith work I've been engaged in. No one ever seems to talk about Christian supremacy and the ways Christianity has been co-opted by systems of power and oppression. I am so very glad this is an essential component of our conference."*

*-Chicago Theological Seminary colleague*

## Fighting False Religious Freedom

Challenging Islamophobia is not divorced from the project of **reclaiming religious freedom as a tool for justice rather than discrimination.**

We have steadily worked to re-frame the dominant narrative around religious freedom to assist churches, students, global human rights defenders, and activists, as they all report to us their struggle with some version of this right wing narrative where they live.

Our people need a whole new language and mindset in this field because religious freedom has slowly been steeped in conservative Christian mythos and Christian Supremacy for two decades.

For example, we encourage our people to consistently make the distinction between "religious freedom" and "religious imposition." We also advise boldly proclaiming LGBTQI identity and religious identity in the same breath whenever possible because the refrain from the Right is that LGBTQI and reproductive rights are trapped in a zero sum game with religious freedom.

And finally, **we encourage transnational solidarity in this fight** because the U.S. Right has zealously exported this ideology to the Global South in an effort to expand and strengthen their message through human rights mechanisms like the United Nations and Organization of American States since the mid 1990s.





## Religion, Law, and the LGBTQ Community

Tuesday, April 24<sup>th</sup> • 6:30-8:00 p.m. • Open to the public

We raised awareness of religious liberty's role in politics for 100+ people.



Over 500 people have participated in our "read" on the Masterpiece Cakeshop court case to date.



We trained 4 cohorts of seminary students in challenging the logic of Christian Supremacy to fight Islamophobia and racism.

In December we partnered with the Public Rights/Private Conscience project at Columbia Law School to produce the webinar, "It Ain't About the Cake" that has reached over 500 people to date. This training de-codes the long game of the Right: Roll back LGBTQI rights, especially Trans rights, as a way of bolstering the legal concept of Exemption in order to ultimately shred the social contract and eliminate civil rights for People of Color.

We met again with Columbia Law in the context of SisterSong to map a **collective counter-message to religious freedom narratives** in advance of the Let's Talk About Sex conference. This is an area where the interests of LGBTQI People, People of Color, and reproductive justice advocates meet.

In April, we presented on a panel titled *Holy Inequality!* organized by Stonewall Community Foundation to discuss how "religious liberty," a cognate for religious freedom, is shaping our political reality in overt and covert ways.



This July, we attended the first-ever International Religious Freedom Ministerial, a conference organized by the State Department that brought together civil society and governmental leaders from around the world.

The event felt like two conferences in one; the first was a conference for true religious persecution and genocide organized by career State Department staff, and the second was the agenda hosted simultaneously by Trump political appointees to build moral cover for untrammelled access to the “right” to discriminate against LGBTQI people under the umbrella of actual religious oppression.

It is no surprise that **the first speaker from the floor was the president of a Christian school** we have visited more than any other who voiced his frustration in fundraising because of his campus’s “traditional sexual morality.”



It wasn't all flinty opposition research, though. Muslims for Progressive Values co-hosted a side event on



The administration is re-branding religious freedom itself.

religious violence against women with the Danish Ambassador. Soulforce was invited to speak to the experiences of Lesbians and Trans Women.

The Ministerial was instructive on just how integrated faith-based organizations are within U.S. foreign policy aims; **it was a harbinger of domestic policy to come.** And the event demonstrated the necessity of working transnationally to combat corrupted “religious freedom.”

# Transnational Solidarity

The association of conservative Christian schools we focus on are expanding internationally, which will only increase the commerce of ideas between U.S. right wing leaders and those abroad. Moreover, the U.S. parachurch organizations designing the new Southern Strategy are the same as, or in close league with, those leading a global anti-LGBTQI and anti-immigrant agenda.



Nearly all our programs, from theological booklets to opposing the U.S. Right's occupation of human rights bodies, shows us the smart move is leaning into transnational solidarity.

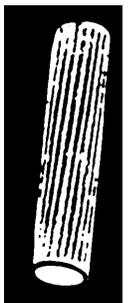
## United Nations

We've already reported on the inaugural Ethics of Reciprocity event that, for the first time, put LGBTQI religious leaders center stage in the UN building.

The Commission on the Status of Women at the UN is another a key organizing space that we are invited to show up for each year. This year, **Soulforce** offered a training in how to

**navigate the right wing presence at this two-week gathering while protecting physical, emotional, and data security** to over 200 gender justice advocates. We also provided some of the overarching messaging and graphics for the LGBTI agenda at the CSW.

We engage in human rights organizing at the United Nations and, similarly, the Organization of American States because they are a **one-stop-shop for taking the pulse on leading right wing organizations** like Family Watch International, C-FAM, Alliance Defending Freedom, and the World Congress of Families.



Following the Commission on the Status of Women, we hosted a “hot topic” webinar for 47 people with speakers from Political Research Associates, IPAS, and an LGBTQI coalition at the Organization of American States glean lessons from a comparative analysis of right wing organizing at the OAS and UN.

**The Right steals frameworks from the progressive playbook**, like positioning “Christian persecution” as oppression, vigorously in the human rights arena; they often pilot their strategies and build cynical legitimacy for them through international alliances such that **we can plan to see those strategies “come home to roost” in the U.S. in coming years.**

## Creating Change

Since 2016, Soulforce has co-hosted the primary international content on offer at Creating Change with the Global Faith and Justice Project and Political Research Associates. This year, the team widened to a coalition of 12 organizations to host the **first-ever international solidarity day-long institute.**

We centered activists’ voices from around the world as we examined the global impact of this administration’s policies on LGBTQI and reproductive justice. The day included 6 unique segments on topics ranging from de-coding Christian Supremacist language in “religious freedom”, aka “cultural sovereignty” in the human rights space, to guidance from Global South activists on how best to act in solidarity.

Joining forces between the UN and OAS is an emerging strategy for gender justice.





"Relief, relief, relief!" one participant shouted. "Relief from something that has always haunted me, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah."

"Free at last, free at last, we are free from condemnation."

-Participants in trainings in Uganda using our theological resources



## Breaking Open Theology

It was the Equality Ride, started back in 2005, that showed us **we can and must make theological skills available to all**. Generalized arguments for love and fairness would only get us so far with the toxic arguments of our adversaries, much less unravel long-held cultural ideologies that underwrite our greatest legal threats.

In addition, so many of our members, especially young folks, have struggled with fundamental doubts about the rightness of their liberation, which saps their sense of what is possible.

In 2016 we started a campaign called Know Your Neighbors to curtail the travel and influence of U.S.-based pastors and organizations abroad. In

Rev. Nokuthula Dhladhla of Soweto, South Africa regularly uses our booklets for her trainings and consults on the creation of new tracts.



*Bible Self-Defense:*  
**Effeminate Men &  
 The "Crime of Sex"**  
 A Soulforce Community Webinar

**August 1st @ 1PM ET**  
*Learn more at [soulforce.org/webinars](http://soulforce.org/webinars)*

**Our monthly webinar takes down the "clobber passages" one by one and provides a new income stream to sustain our content development.**

that process, we learned that intervention is useful, but **the project is incomplete if we do not also respond the theological and spiritual needs of our Global South colleagues.**

We needed to thoughtfully expand the reach of our theological resources beyond our existing audiences with youth in hostile contexts, rural organizers, and church-based and Southern activists.

The audiences for our resources in the Global South are often, not surprisingly, comprised of young adults who have been kicked out of home, church,

and jobs while living in countries that criminalize LGBTQI people.

We now publish healing and practical theological resources for a global audience under the header of "Breaking Open" in two formats:

- Our 6-part online monthly "Bible Self-Defense" course
- Short, accessible theological booklets in several languages, which we couple with printing grants and other forms of support like fundraising advice



The docket for our content development is primarily determined by the needs of our Global South partners because they are bearing the brunt of homegrown and U.S.-based threats.

For example, when we hosted the launch webinar for our “Breaking Open: Biblical Literalism and Inerrancy” booklet in February, **nearly half the participants were from the Global South**, and their most persistent request was for going back to basics to de-fang the “clobber passages” like Sodom & Gomorrah and Genesis.

We are currently working on three booklets that address Marriage & Procreation, Feminism, and Body & Gender Diversity. To develop booklets, we build editorial boards majority comprised of folks from the Global South in order to **co-create resources that are as broadly applicable as possible and primed for translation**. We

then work with individuals to translate and distribute booklets as needed to support workshops in their communities.

These resources remain a healing precursor to even bolder activism for all our members, regardless of age or geography.

*“My spiritual life was an abusive one before I met Soulforce. The only thing I had access to was an abusive God. I saw y’all talk about the Bible and talk about God and what is possible for me in self-love and faith and said, fuck this old life. I want what they have.”*

-Soulforce member, 21, Alabama



# Tending Spirit

The final strategy that our youth work, especially with Queer and Trans Youth of Color, has taught us is that we will not achieve our collective liberation if we do not integrate spirit care. Not only must our process of activism be healing, we must value the work of rebuilding community and remembering what joy looks, feels, and tastes like in order to get free.



Social justice folks talk about this area of work in a lot of ways: Movement Chaplaincy, Healing Justice, Spirit Care. **Soulforce, as a religiously astute organization but distinctly not faith-based group, makes our own blueprints** for combining our commitment to theological skills, spiritual reclamation, and navigating the trauma that the Church writ large has inflicted on so many of us.

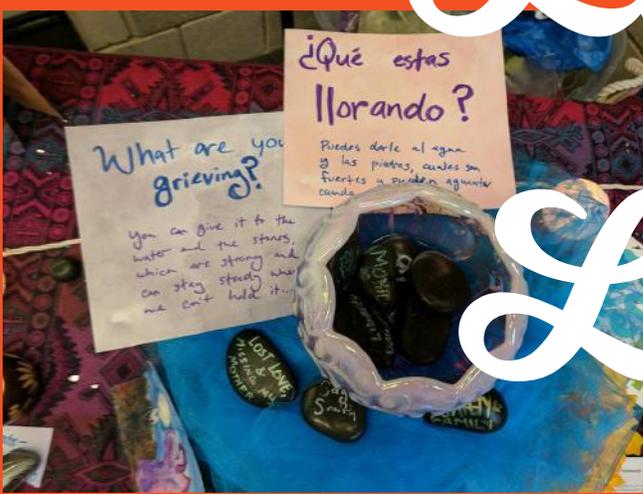
Our job is not to save Christianity from itself; our job is to make it possible for people to reclaim their traditions as they desire, to re-wire how our culture talks about what is Good and Right and Moral, and de-couple religion-powerful catalyst that it is—from

systematic violence. That is no easy task.

A rhetorical strategy that we have adopted in recent years is **the framing of “Christian Supremacy.”** Instead of treating expressions of Christianized violence and nationalism as a valid form of religion, we call it for what it is: a political agenda conveniently cloaked in and making use of Christian language, funding, and infrastructure.

In re-orienting toward Christian Supremacy, we freed ourselves and expanded our range: to be as tender in our healing





# This is what Spirit Care Looks Like.

JOIN ONLINE FOR A DIGITAL LITURGICAL BAPTISM & CERTIFICATION OF SPIRITUALITY FOR CATHOLICS:

## KINDLING THE SPIRIT

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30 7:30PM PST

work as we are [appropriately] aggressive in naming and challenging the violence that terrorizes our people.

**Combining the hard and the soft allows us to embody our politics and spirit most valiantly, hence our tagline: "Sabotage Christian Supremacy."**

Wherever we go, from attending funder gatherings and movement strategy sessions to prep work for youth-led direct actions, we bring our spirit care practices. Below we highlight just some of that work in the contexts of supporting Youth and Trans People.

**Drawing. Dancing. Drumming. Planting. Ancestor Work.  
Crying. Making Sacred. Breaking Open. Loving. Sculpting.  
Singing. Praying. Crying. Reclaiming. Dreaming. Healing.**

*"The song. The song. The song.* Thank you for leading us in that song. I could tell that there were a few who were apprehensive about learning and singing that song together (me one of them), but after we learned it and sang it, it helped us connect, it helped us do something together, and it was really beautiful and I was singing it and moving to it. Thank you for that song. I will sing it and I will share it."

-Creating Change workshop participant

## Spirit Care with Youth

The most common request from our younger members, after theological resources (particularly on gender and Trans liberation), is **spiritual care and accompaniment**. It's about ending isolation, stoking courage, and feeling like someone, or a national organization with resources and a history of direct action, has your back.

When the Stafford High School GSA reached out to us, they wanted to learn about Soulforce and organizing skills, but what really cemented our partnership was providing them spiritual care and encouragement.

When Faith in America organized an action at Biola University, a trend-setting school for right wing strategies and thought, to call out professional health care programs cast in the mold of LGBTQI discrimination, **Soulforce was called in to provide the spiritual**

**preparation for participating students**, a gathering we dubbed "Kindling the Spirit."



Communing with our spiritual leadership kindred at Mystic Soul.

When we attended Mystic Soul in Chicago in January, a conference oriented toward Spirit and Culture Workers of Color, our Spiritual Strategist provided one-on-one spiritual direction sessions for young adults. One of the conference organizers affirmed us most poignantly in telling us that when they ask Youth of Color, "**Who is spiritually looking out for you?**" the answer is **Soulforce**.

The God of Christian Supremacy is power, and the currency of Christian Supremacy is spiritual violence. Thus, it is not enough to be a political home for people. We must also be a spiritual home, especially Youth, Trans People, and People of Color.



## Spirit Care with Trans People

Ceremony, ritual, and holding spiritual “third space” can be an overlooked element of our movement. These spaces serve as a clarifying ground where people refine their beliefs, build relationships, and heal trauma. It also integrates naturally with our theological skill building work.

At Virginia TIES (Transgender Information and Empowerment Summit), we not only taught a **standing room only “Radical Trans Bible Study”** but also hosted an altar for the 400+ participants at the conference. Thirty-three people personally interacted with it, leaving “stones and affirmations” as part of their conference experience.

Fifty-five people joined in the Virginia Anti-Violence Project’s “Trans Inspiration Project,” an all-ages event created for and by Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People who deserve more joyful spaces. **Soulforce provided healing space that centered the spiritual questions of grief and celebration.** We built an altar and offered meditative and relaxation space to Southern Trans folks and their allies.

When we care for our people, especially the most marginalized among us, we care for the longevity of our movement.

*“Because of Soulforce, I can wrap my mind around spirit work that I couldn’t do before. Because of Soulforce, I truly understand this: what I believe.”*

**-Rev. Mykal Slack, TDOR service organizer**

NBC OUT > NBC OUT & PROUD

NBC OUT AUG 17 2017, 10:49 AM ET

# OutFront: Queer Latinx Reverend Confronts Hate in Charlottesville

by JULIE COMPTON



## Media Coverage

NBC, Huffington Post, Advocate, and more.



SUBSCRIBE TO THE ADVOCATE

ADVOCATE 50<sup>TH</sup>



TRENDING

Donald Trump

Texas

Feminism

Chechnya

#Advocate50

Trans

COMMENTARY ▶

## Queer Clergy Needs to Mobilize Against Fascism and White Supremacy

Two LGBTQ religious leaders share their experiences in Charlottesville and make a plea for all spiritual people to rise up.

BY REV. ALBA ONOFRIO & DR. ROBYN HENDERSON-ESPINOZA  
AUGUST 21 2017 11:04 AM EDT



### Repairing the Damage of Conversion Therapy

FACEBOOK WATCH



1,324,479 Views

HUFFPOST

# Comprehensive Outcomes

**Eradicating Shame and Doubt:** 705 people trained in liberating theology by Soulforce staff; an additional 2,725 people trained in 30 workshops led by our Global South partners using Soulforce religious resources

**Nurturing Safety and Healing:** Affirmed by movement elders and teachers as a spiritual and political home for Youth, People of Color, and Trans People because of our dedication to training (34 workshops) spirit care (11 events), and student support (5 campuses).

**Protecting Public Dissent:** Sustained the viability of and courage for direct action by advising, resourcing, or leading 6 campaigns.

**Uniting for Sustainability:** Seeded the ground in many movements with critical skills in de-coding Christian Supremacy while building durable ties with 19 organizations working in communities that have a common adversary.

**Building International Alliances:** Provided messaging, theological tools, and networking channels that bind together global grassroots activists who are impacted by the U.S. Religious Right.



# Financial Report

July 1, 2017 to  
June 30, 2018

## Revenue

Individual Giving	\$148,126
Foundation Giving	103,000
Sales	745
Earned Income	5,000
Other	531
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$257,402*</b>

## Expense

Salaries & Contract Labor	\$219,888
Overhead	19,108
Fundraising	14,617
Direct Program Costs	24,871
Translation	335
Seed Grants - Youth, Global South	2,911
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$281,730</b>

\* Our largest annual grant in the amount of \$100,000 was awarded just before this reporting period.



# Onward & Upward

---

## Lessons

- The messaging and tactics we have used on campus to combat “religious freedom” and white supremacy are needed now more than ever off campus in many movements.
- Spirit care and practical theological skills are an essential, in-demand precursor to robust campaigning.

## Gains

- Increasing rates of new membership and donorship, especially new recurring donors, and four new foundation partners.
- Trusted convener and resource hub for global partners.
- Proven capacity for hosting soulful, authentic, and educational online spaces.

## Next

- Take the lessons from our youth work to explore the possibility of a “religious freedom” campaign that unites across ages, movements, and geographies.
- Author the Christian Left response to the AWID Rights at Risk Report that outlines the global right wing agenda.

## Gratitude

We are immeasurably grateful for our devoted members, individual donors, and foundation supporters, including Arcus Foundation, Borealis, Carpenter Foundation, Collingwood Foundation, H. van Ameringen Foundation, Myers Foundation, Proteus Fund, and the Small Change Foundation for their commitment to ending political and religious oppression.



# Soulforce



Soulforce works to end the political and religious oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people through relentless, nonviolent resistance.

We pursue collective liberation using radical political analysis, spiritual healing, and strategic direct action.

In our work, we center those most targeted by Christian Supremacy: People of Color, Trans People, and Youth in Hostile Contexts.

The South holds our origin story and continues to shape our organizing ethic, programs, and aspirations.

