



Soulforce

2022-2023
Program Report

*Nurturing
Ecosystems for
Liberation*

Letter from the Executive Director

Beloved Soulforce,

We send you warmest greetings from our homes to yours from across states and beyond borders. Soulforce has grown into a thriving global community of holy troublemakers and spiritual resisters against the forces of Spiritual Violence and white Christian Supremacy, and YOU are a part of it!

Every time we live our truth, every time we tell our stories out loud, every time we choose love over self-hatred and isolation, every day we try to live and learn into a more authentic version of ourselves.... just by being ourselves, we are advancing the work of liberation.

Here at Soulforce, we find great solace and encouragement in looking to the natural world. Whether it is the flexible gender of the clownfish, the homosexual/bisexual practices of over 1,500 species of animals in the wild, or the seven types of asexual reproduction that occur naturally all around us every day, we know that our LGBTQIA+ community is perfectly natural and belongs to a beautifully diverse and complex ecosystem.

The night-blooming cereus of the Sonora desert reminds us that some of nature's best work happens in the dark (and in the desert!). The giant sequoias remind us that we don't have to compete with each other to be strong, reach for the stars, and live full lives. The mycelium teaches us about the critical value of the small things, the everyday interactions of being in community that get people the information and support we all need to survive.

At political moments like these, when democracy and equality are decaying before our very eyes, it can be easy to fall into inertia and hopelessness. We hope that this annual program report — from just one of Soulforce's now 25 years of relentless nonviolent resistance— serves as a point of hope and inspiration. Our community is strong and vibrant, and we will continue to do the work with great love and passion, undeterred by the extreme Right's successful tactics to erode our basic human rights. We know that

this didn't happen by accident or by the hand of God. We know our history and theirs; this political moment is the result of decades of the Right organizing people against their own best interests through weaponizing the Bible and distorting the Christian faith.

Fear of God and fear of our neighbors has been mobilized to create an entire political identity that centers around hate and white supremacy. But just like these false narratives have been intentionally constructed for the power of few, we know that they can be deconstructed and healed by the true lived narratives of the many. This work is a testament to life and to the work of our people across borders and beyond silos to live, love, and heal into the world we all deserve.

With hearts ablaze and spirits unyielding,



Reverend Alba Onofrio
Executive Director





Soulforce works to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQIA+ people and all marginalized people by deconstructing the ideologies of white Christian Supremacy at play in our daily lives, from internalized oppression to global systems of domination. Through education, conscientization, and accompaniment work, Soulforce aids in the healing of our communities' spirits from weaponized religion and moralized systemic violence.



In this political and culture moment, our current focus is to:

- **Neutralize right-wing Christian ideologies and anti-rights rhetoric** by deconstructing the theologies of white Christian Supremacy and how they make their way into laws, culture, and institutions;
- **Amplify accessible queer feminist resources on liberatory Christian theologies by and for traditionally under-resourced activists and faith leaders** to support an activist agenda via workshops, written resources, videos, and livestreams; and
- **Support the work of human rights defenders in hostile fundamentalist contexts** by acting as a strategic thought partner, visibilizing alternative Christian theologies that buttress their activism, and providing theological and rhetorical language and frameworks for activists to defend their social justice efforts within a Christian cultural and political context.

Reconnecting Native

Throughout October and November of 2022, we hosted a series of Instagram Live conversations on what it means to reconnect to Native identity in the face of white Christian Supremacy. This vital initiative emerged in the wake of the discussions sparked by Pope Francis' public apology on behalf of the Catholic Church for its role in establishing Federal Indian Boarding Schools, as well as the release of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report that revealed the scope of harm done by these state-sponsored boarding schools.

We know that we can't dismantle the systems that oppress us without listening to the voices of our Indigenous siblings, and we are deeply thankful to our guests, who generously shared with us about their journey and the ancestral wisdom they have gained along the way.



SpiritualiTEA

One of the ways that white Christian Supremacy harms us is by separating us from our communities, making us believe that our experiences and traumas are uncommon and unrelatable. To support survivors of Spiritual Trauma in connecting with other survivors and healing together, we created SpiritualiTEA, a monthly live digital conversation where special guests share their experiences with Spiritual Violence, their healing journeys, and the strategies they've used to take back their power from white Christian Supremacy. We even created a very special Soulforce tea blend to share with our guests during these Instagram Live conversations! The calming properties of its ingredients (lavender, lemon balm, and chamomile) teach us to prioritize our rest and well-being, allowing us to connect to our collective joy and resilience. These powerful conversations—and the herbs they are accompanied by—create sacred spaces of self-nurturing, interconnectedness, and spiritual healing.



Our Spanish-language digital media project keeps growing! Teología Sin Vergüenza (Shameless Theology) is an intentionally transnational, diverse, and interdisciplinary platform by and for Queer Latinx feminists, developed in response to the Religious Right's stronghold on Spanish-language religious media across Latin America and in the US. We do the weaving work to intertwine the wisdom and strategies of the academy, the church, and our activist movements, and together, we articulate a Latin American Queer feminist theology that can strengthen our organizing efforts.

As a part of our TSV programming, this year we released **seasons 5 and 6 of our ongoing live conversations** with Latinx theologians, pastors, and activists who shamelessly live out queer feminist theologies in their lives, communities of faith, activism, and/or academic institutions. These new episodes **amplify the voices of activists and theologians** from Perú, Brasil, El Salvador, Colombia, Nicaragua, México, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Chile, and Argentina, as well as a whole season recorded live in Cuba. This brings us to a total of **71 episodes and 66 guests** so far! The recordings can be found on YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram.

We also have expanded our Instagram content to reach new audiences, which resulted in a **341.8% increase** in our reach compared to the same period last year! One popular segment is our monthly segment called "Bible Queeriosities": short videos that reveal surprising and sometimes scandalous facts about the Bible. (Did you know that there are unicorns in the Bible?!) These fun and intriguing factoids offer our followers new perspectives that invite them to engage with the sacred text in ways that confront hegemonic interpretations.

We also released the Spanish translation of our **newest theological resource** about Gender Diversity in the Bible this year, accompanied by a digital campaign centering the stories of people living outside of the gender binary throughout different times and contexts. The response we got from our Latin American audiences to this content was greater than we could have imagined! **In just three months, it has become our second-most-downloaded resource in Spanish**, just behind our book on Spiritual Violence (which by the way, we are currently working to release in English, adapted to US audiences!)



INSTITUTE ON SPIRITUAL VIOLENCE, HEALING, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Our fight to counteract Spiritual Violence has continued to grow over our 25 years of change work. In 2022, **we officially launched the Institute on Spiritual Violence, Healing, and Social Change** with the aim of creating an interdisciplinary working team that brings together social scientists, activists, religious leaders, and other sectors of civil society across the region to confront the various forms of violence based on spirituality and religion, and how that work has flourished this year!

Just as a well-tended garden shows diversity and interdependence, our collective struggles thrive when we honor the wisdom and strength found in different contexts. Because of this, we designed this project to be fully **bilingual and transnational** from the beginning. We understand that white Christian Supremacy operates all around the world and benefits from imperialist and colonialist systems to export its messaging and resources to the Global South, and we also know that our partners on the ground are the most prepared to analyze, strategize, and confront it effectively.



With that in mind, we released this year our 'Unyielding Spirits / Espíritus Inquebrantables' Blog. In this **newest addition to Soulforce's digital ecosystem**, each blog post is lovingly tended in both English and Spanish to encourage readers to explore the multifaceted ways in which white Christian Supremacy operates across different geographies, fostering the **cross-pollination of knowledge** and shedding light on the nuanced ways in which communities confront oppression and heal the wounds of Spiritual Violence.

This year we also started a new phase in our work against Spiritual Violence in North America by adapting some of the content that we have developed with our partners in Latin America to reach audiences in the United States (particularly Latinx communities in the South). In the beginning of 2023, we officially inaugurated this work with a series of workshops at Creating Change, the nation's foremost political, leadership, and skills-building conference for the LGBTQ movement, and two for the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) for therapists and practitioners in West Virginia and North Carolina.

Soulforce's **accompaniment work in East and South Africa** for the last decade has reached a critical juncture this season, in the wake of multiple new laws that violently target LGBTQIA+ people. This newest wave of attacks is seeded by international interests and watered by religious narratives, political support, and financial resources crafted and exported from the Global North. These initiatives disseminate quickly and get repeated by government after government, and **threaten every aspect of life for our people**. This past March, the Ugandan parliament approved the Anti-Homosexuality Act in record time, one of the world's most restrictive anti-gay bills in contemporary history, and countries like Kenya and Tanzania are closely following in its path.

It is crucial for us to address the topic with honesty, acknowledging the severity of the violence and cruelty that our people are experiencing. Visiting our partner organizations and listening to their stories while the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill was being debated in parliament this year was a grim reminder that **this work is urgent and critically underfunded**.

These types of policies not only **threaten the basic human rights** of individuals but also exacerbate the deep-rooted social stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQIA+ community, creating an atmosphere of fear, persecution, and isolation. Our partners on the ground asked for help with access to affirming theological education. In response, we are collaborating on the **translation of four of our most strategic theological resources** to get them into the hands of people who use Luganda, kiSwahili, French, and Kinyarwanda.

Just as pollinators are essential to ecosystems, **we believe in interconnectedness that requires allies to play a crucial role in safeguarding the well-being of our people in the midst of structural violence**. Stay tuned as these beautiful partnerships mature into blossoms of hope and gardens of love for the nourishment of our community in East Africa in their unwavering **commitment to justice and equality**.

OFFENSES AND PENALTIES UNDER THE UGANDAN ANTI-HOMOSEXUALITY ACT

LIFE IN PRISON

20 YEARS

10 YEARS

6 MONTHS

20 YEARS

20 YEARS

DEATH

FAILURE TO REPORT SOMEONE SUSPECTED OF HOMOSEXUALITY

PROVIDING IN KIND OR CASH SUPPORT TO ENCOURAGE HOMOSEXUALITY OR THE NORMALIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

AN ACT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

COMMUNICATIONS THAT PROMOTE, ENCOURAGE OR NORMALIZE HOMOSEXUALITY

ATTEMPTED SAME-SEX CONDUCT



AGGRAVATED HOMOSEXUALITY INCLUDING CONSensual ADULT SAME-SEX RELATIONS IF ONE IS A "SERIAL OFFENDER", HAS HIV, OR HAS CONSensual SEX WITH A PERSON WHO HAS A DISABILITY OR WHO IS "OF ADVANCED AGE"

If this is a project that you feel called to support financially, please be in touch, as this project is not financially supported by our current funders.

Highlights

83 events (40 online and 43 in person) in **11** countries

12,953 total participants in Soulforce events

710 downloads of English theological resources from **25** countries

1,048 downloads of Spanish theological resources from **29** countries

1,010 physical theological resources distributed

55 collaborations with organizations from **12** different countries

10,407 people accessing our podcasts and newsletters

117,120 people reached over Facebook and Instagram

23,508 followers across Facebook and Instagram

"I've learned that the Divine does not belong to any institution. If you feel restricted or unwelcomed somewhere, you are allowed to leave."

- Participant of the workshop "Spiritual Violence: paths of healing and resistance" in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, September 2022

"No! I have earned this and I am going to my graduation today! I will NOT live in fear!"

-From a Wawa Aba leader in Uganda the day after the Anti-homosexuality law was approved in Congress in response to a neighbor who suggested she stay home and hide due to her sexual orientation.

"This was an amazing presentation. This is a topic that never came up in grad school and I had not exposure to it because I never went to church. The concepts of Spiritual Violence and Religious Abuse make so much sense. I appreciate having been able to watch this and will use the info learned for sure! Excellent presentation."

- Participants of the workshop "Impacts of Spiritual Violence and Religious Abuse on the lives of LGBTQIA+ people: An Interdisciplinary Reflection" at the National Association of Social Workers of North Carolina's Clinical Conference 2023

"Thanks to Teología Sin Vergüenza I was able to name the different types of violence that I experienced at church without knowing. I believe that all faith communities should question the power dynamics within themselves. Unfortunately, it's easier to stay quiet and normalize abuse than to face it and deal with the ruptures that can create."

- Participant of our Sinvergüenza movie club

Soulforce is a small bilingual team that **never works alone.**

The purpose of our highly-collaborative work is to **seed our social justice movements with an understanding of white Christian Supremacy and how to combat it** so that we may build bridges across single-issue silos, support allyship between secular activists and progressive faith communities, and interrupt the Spiritual Violence that spurs burnout and suicidality among organizers.

This past year alone, we have collaborated with **56 organizations** to offer strategic support, educational resources, and education on how religion gets weaponized against LGBTQIA+ people and women in hostile Christian contexts and what to do when it happens.

The work that we do is unique in the field for its design and approach. We **embrace the complicated nature of intersectional social justice**, by highlighting the diverse voices of people working on many social issues: trans rights as connected to ecofeminism, the intersections of bodily autonomy for girls/women and sexuality for LGBTQIA+ people, the diasporic connections of Afro-Latinx peoples, and other manifestations of white supremacy and imperialism at the intersections of gender and sexuality. We have come to work extensively with Queer Latinx people, a group historically overlooked by LGBTQIA+ organizations, racial justice movements, and immigrant rights groups.

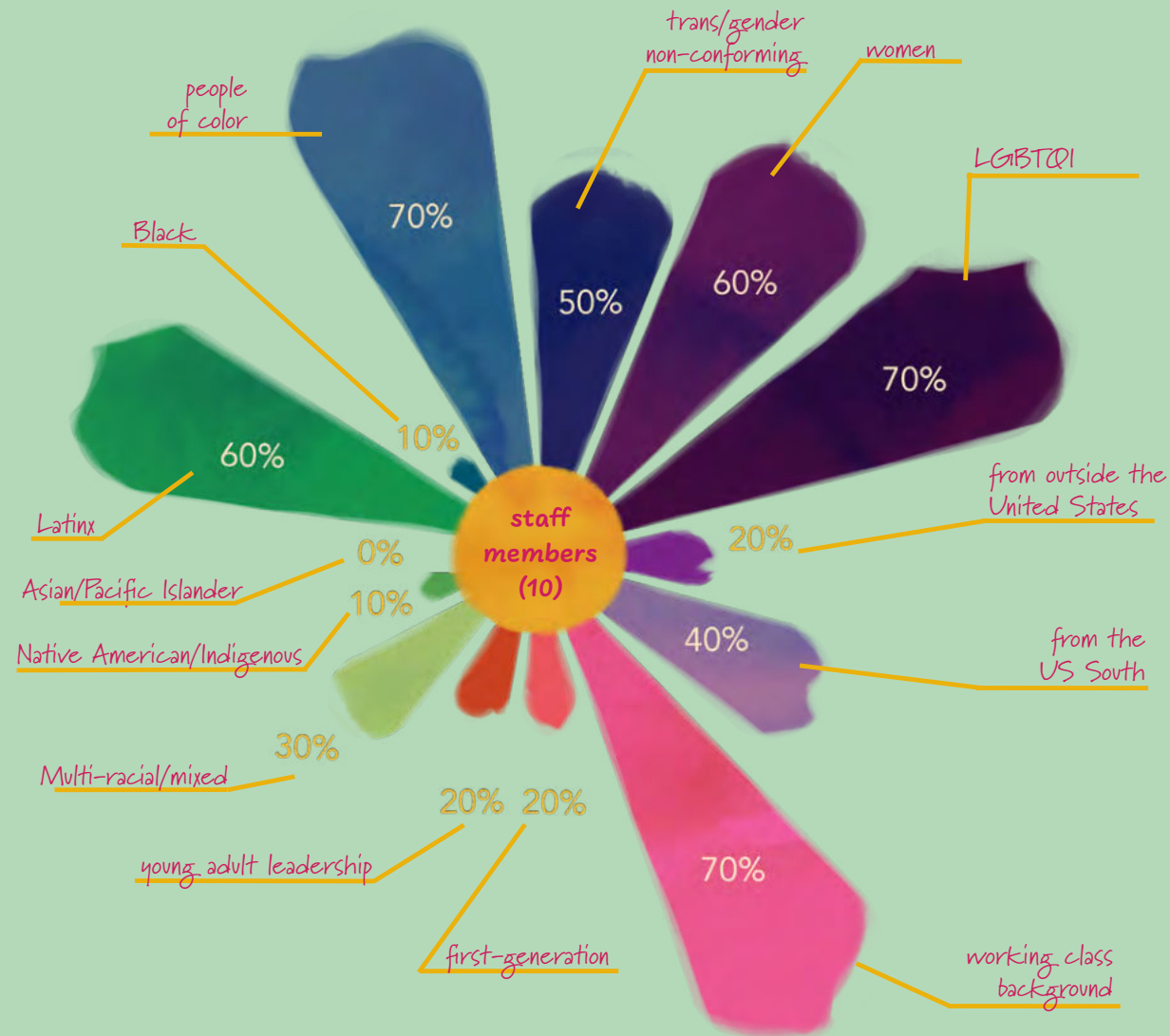
Just like the interdependent relationships between species that nurture and protect ecosystems, our resistance and healing work is done through **reciprocal strategies of knowledge production and healing** between the US South and the Global South (specifically Latin America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Eastern Africa, and South Africa). Through our ideological research and education work, we get at the foundations of right-wing frameworks that are the basis for dangerous legislation, institutional policies, and cultural movements in the US and everywhere the US exports its fundamentalist doctrines.

We work on issues of religion and spirituality with activists and faith groups, not as a faith-based organization but as one that approaches faith respectfully. Because we are not affiliated with any denomination or institution, we are not beholden to any faith tradition or denomination. Not only do we value the unique nature of our work that is transnational, intersectional, ecumenical, and interdisciplinary, but our partners value it too; it allows us to be flexible and responsive to the needs of each individual group we work with.

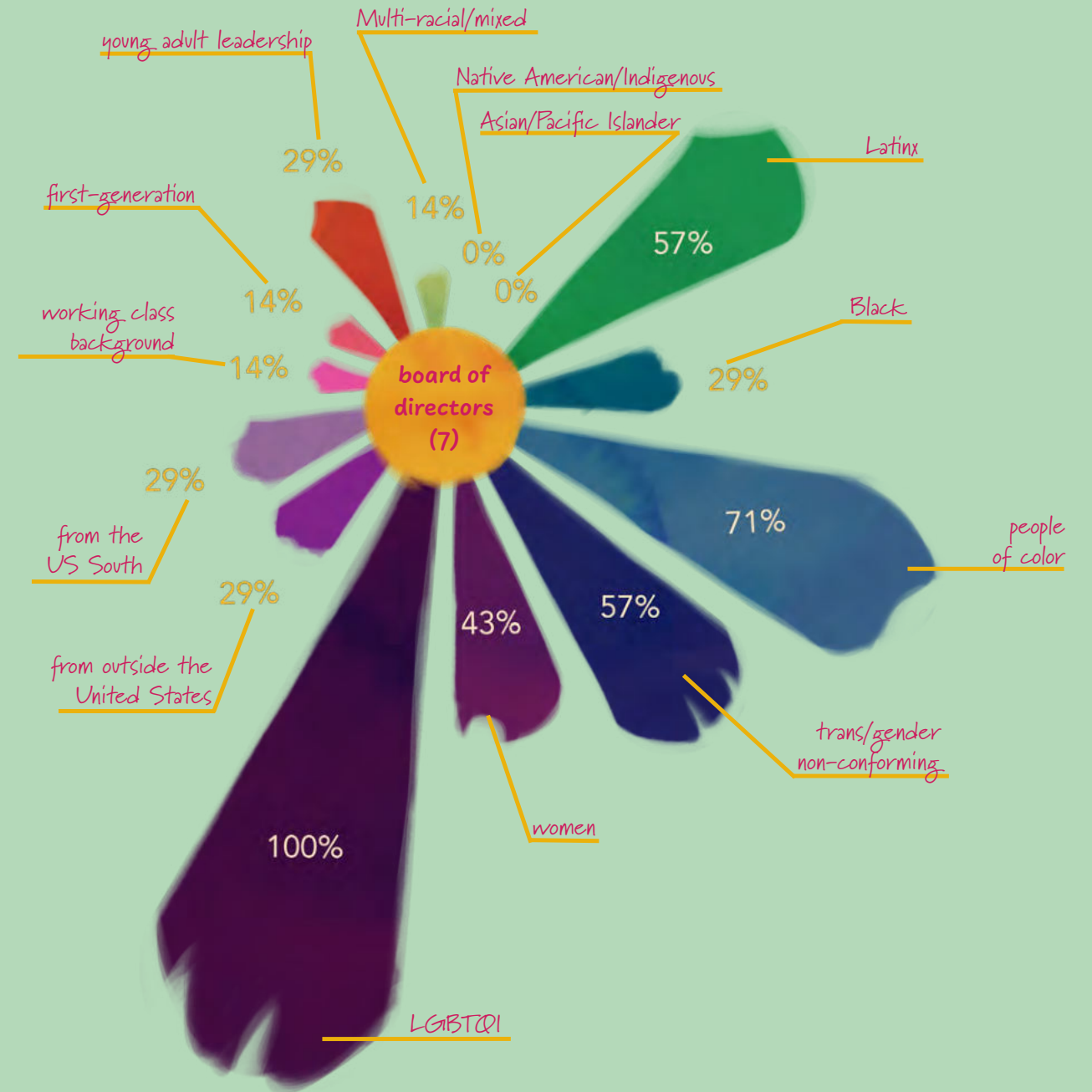
Accidental Tomatoes Podcast – West Virginia, USA
Afro Diverso – Cuba
Alza tu Voz – Costa Rica
Brisa Fresca – Costa Rica
Comunidad Luterana Santisimo Redentor – Mexico
Disciplines LGBTQ Alliance (“Alliance Q”) – Illinois, USA
Diversidad Guanacasteca – Costa Rica
Ecumenicas por el Derecho a Decidir – Honduras
El Centro Hispano – North Carolina, USA
Evangelicxs pela Diversidade – Brazil
Faith in Public Life – USA
Fe Sin Violencia – Argentina
Foro de Mujeres
Puntarenenses – Costa Rica
French Is Mexican – California, USA
Fundacion Josias – Mexico/Chile/Ecuador
Fundación VASTI – Chile
Funders for Reproductive Equity – USA
HEART Woman & Girls – Illinois, USA
Iglesia de la Comunidad Metropolitana – Cuba
Inner Strength Network – UK
Instituto sobre Migración y Refugio
LGBTIQ para Centroamérica – Costa Rica
Kairos Fellowship – USA
Kaleidoscope Ministries – New York, USA
King and Breaking the Silence – USA
LGBT+ Rights San Luis Potosi – Mexico
LGBTQ Religious Archives Network – USA
Libres en Cristo – El Salvador
National Association of Social Workers – North Carolina & West Virginia, USA
National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission – Kenya

National LGBTQ Task Force – USA
OUTFront Minnesota – Minnesota, USA
PRIDE in the Pews – USA
PRISM United – Alabama, USA
Queer Christian Fellowship – USA
Queer Theology – USA
Red Ecuatoriana de Fe – Ecuador
Red TEPALI – Latin America and the Caribbean
Rights, Faith & Democracy Collaborative – USA
Secretaría de Asuntos Religiosos – Mexico
Seminario de Intersecciones de lo Religioso – Mexico
Sistersong – Georgia, USA
Somos Voces – Mexico
Soñemos con Crecer – Costa Rica
Teólogas e Investigadoras Feministas de México – Mexico
TFAM (The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries) – Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda
The Center for Global Experience and Study Abroad, Augsburg University – Minnesota, USA
Transmission Ministry Collective – Minneapolis, USA
Universidad Biblica Lationamericana – Costa Rica
Universidad Estatal a Distancia of Costa Rica – Costa Rica
Universidad Iberoamericana – Mexico
Vanderbilt Divinity School – Tennessee, USA
Vanguardia Popular – Costa Rica
Wawa Aba Womanist Leadership Group – Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda
West Virginia Faith Coalition “Justice and Jubilee” – West Virginia, USA

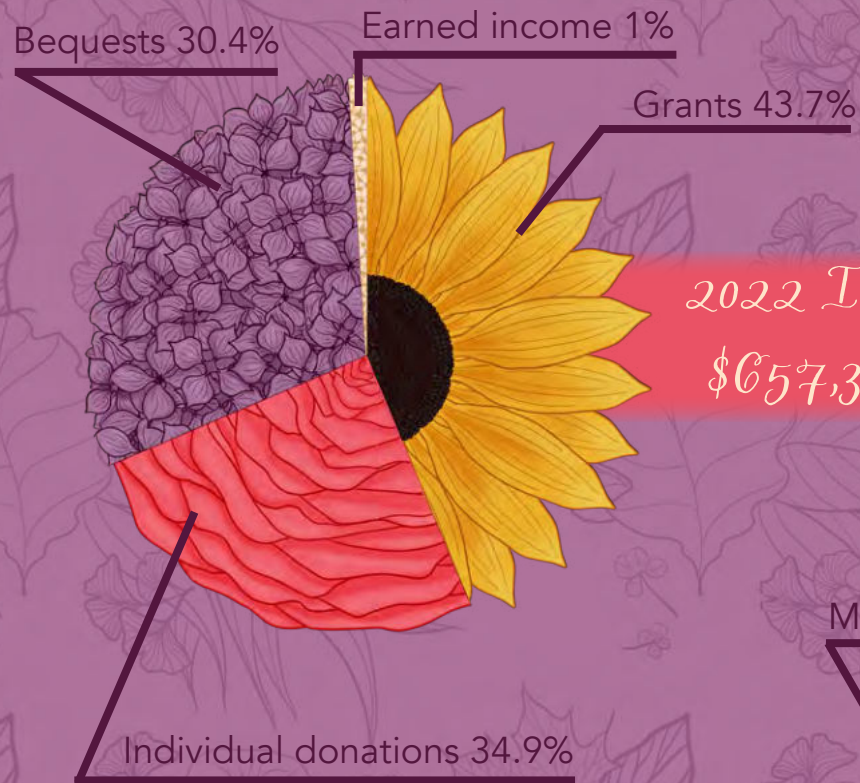
Our Team



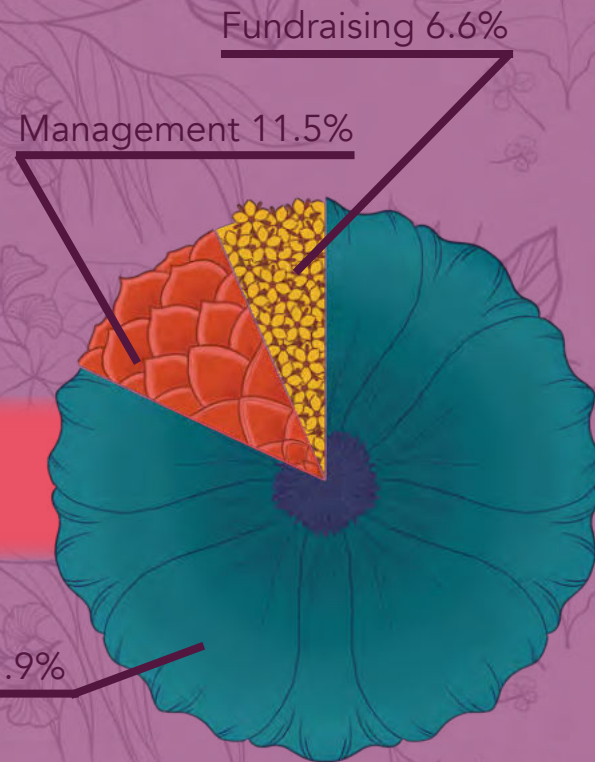
Our team has grown to 11 people this year (7.5 FTE)! We are led by-and-for People of Color, LGBTQIA+ people, women and gender diverse people, and survivors of sexual violence and religious abuse.



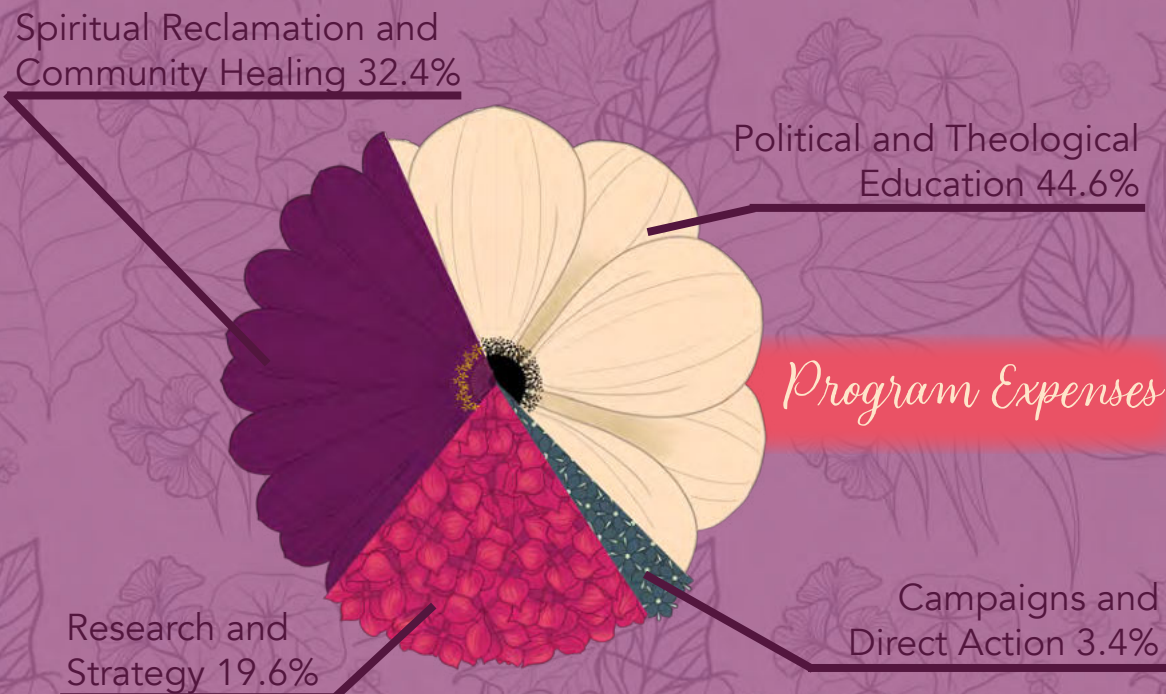
Soulforce is a Southern-rooted organization, started in Lynchburg, VA. Our US staff are exuberant Southerners, based in North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas. All of our staff members come from Christian fundamentalist contexts, and while most of us hold some form of Christian faith, experiences of faith are diverse and a number of our team members also practice earth-based religions. As for social commitments and community rootedness, our board and staff are consistently dedicated to activism through arts and culture work, ministerial and spiritual leadership training, and popular education for local organizing. Sixty-five percent of our board and staff are also Spanish-speakers, and we hold special expertise in the concerns and experiences of Latinx diasporas.



2022 Income:
\$657,340.98



2022 Expenses:
\$631,205.07



Program Expenses

"From the whistling of birds, from the moaning of wild animals, from the sobbing of trees (dumbirgessu), from the whisper of Ologwadule (Mother Earth), we learn to live in harmony. We learn from what we see, from what we smell, from what we feel. We learn with the senses. Each story, each dance, the language, the food, the relationships, the silence and much more, form or deform a nation. The grandparents in the Gunadule nation know that well. So, since ancient times, they have worked so that the new generations can continue singing, and we don't die. The great importance of spirituality lies in the fact that our political actions emanate from it, which are reflected in daily life. We do not separate public from private life. And we do not disentangle the life of the sacred, from the life of the secular. Total life is sacred. Every act, no matter how small, is a political act."

- Jocabed R Solano Miselis, indigenous activist and theologian, daughter of the Gunadule nation, Panama. Teología Sin Vergüenza guest in season 3, episode 2

"Del silbido de las aves, del gemido de animales silvestres, del sollozo de los árboles (dumbirgessu), del susurro de Ologwadule, aprendemos a vivir en armonía. Aprendemos de lo que vemos, de lo que olemos, de lo que sentimos. Aprendemos con los sentidos. Cada relato, cada danza, la lengua, la comida, las relaciones, el silencio y mucho más, forman o deforman una nación. Eso lo saben bien las y los abuelos en la nación gunadule. Así que, desde épocas antiguas, han trabajado para que las nuevas generaciones podamos seguir cantando, y no muramos.

La gran importancia de la espiritualidad radica en que de ella emanan nuestras acciones políticas, que se reflejan en el diario vivir. No separamos la vida pública de la privada. Y no desintegramos la vida de lo sagrado, de la vida de lo secular. La vida total es sagrada. Cada acto, por pequeño que sea, es un acto político."

- Jocabed R Solano Miselis, activista indígena y teóloga, hija de la nación Gunadule, Panamá. Invitada en el episodio 2 de la tercera temporada de Teología Sin Vergüenza