



Soulforce

2020-21 Program Report

Soulforce works to end the religious and political oppression of LGBTQI people by uncovering the ideologies of white Christian Supremacy and healing our communities' spirits from Spiritual Violence.

We build radical analysis, political education, and spiritual power for activists across all social justice movements wherever the rights and dignities of marginalized peoples are threatened by Christian fundamentalism.

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Soulforce Staff (left to right, top to bottom): Megan Sharkey, Director of Ruckus; Yaz Mendez Nuñez, Co-Executive Director; Rev. Alba Onofrio, Co-Executive Director; Grace Nichols, Kinship Minister; Assata Dela Cruz, Communications Herald.

By the Numbers:

43 partnerships &
movement
collaborations
this year

18 programs &
8 resources reaching
activists &
people of faith in
45 countries

2,000+ followers
of Teología Sin
Vergüenza from
45 countries &
60,000+ views

4,420 politicized
theological
resources delivered to
activists in
48 US states &
44 countries
to date

Planted in Gratitude

At Soulforce, creativity and adaptability are two of our most valuable assets, and 2020 was no exception to this. Since our founding in 1998, Soulforcers have always encouraged one another to push the limits. “What would happen if...?” is a perpetual refrain. This **curiosity helps us innovate programs that break through the foundations of religion-based violence in hostile fundamentalist contexts**, responding to the real-time needs of our communities.

It is this kind of flexibility that has sustained us in our second programmatic year operating in a global pandemic. Our communities have faced many obstacles, grieved many losses, and the people at the heart of Soulforce are not exempt from this turmoil: we have lost loved ones in our communities and families, experienced the toll of isolation and physical distancing, and continue to weather worldwide economic uncertainty.

With the world turning online, we applied our creativity to the digital realm, **nurturing online relationships across borders** and languages with activists, organizations, and people of faith. Our programming has spanned new horizons, from our fiscal sponsorship of the REAP project’s legal advocacy on behalf of LGBTQ Christian college students, to new politicized theological resources for reproductive justice activists as they struggle for bodily autonomy. We are delighted to share with you all that has sprung forth from this season!

As we begin our slow re-emergence into in-person gatherings, we keep close the lessons we’ve learned in this last year: **with community, creativity, and courage, we can weather whatever comes our way**. We thank our donors for sticking with us and supporting this work through collective uncertainty. We thank our volunteers, program partners, staff and board members for their steadfast dedication. And to our whole Soulforce community, we are so grateful to you for seeing this work through to the spring that blooms ahead.

Rev. Alba Onofrio Yaz Mendez Nuñez

Rev. Alba Onofrio & Yaz Mendez Nuñez
Co-Executive Directors

What the Dandelions Know...

Dandelions are able to grow in some of the most hostile of environments, because they are miraculous strategists. Some call them weeds and try to kill them because they pop up wildly and without permission. Some of us call them medicine for the ways they detoxify the soil and act as food and medicine for many living things. We call them miraculous Creation with a lot to teach us about persistence and resilience.

Though it seems impossible for these common flora to sprout up in the middle of asphalt streets and concrete sidewalks, they accomplish this feat in abundance. Not only do they survive: they grow healthy, bloom and set seed.

What we can't see is that while the concrete seems impenetrable, it is actually full of tiny microscopic cracks. As a dandelion moves through its life cycle, it disperses thousands of seeds that make their way into those small cracks in the asphalt. And when those seeds get what they need to grow, they establish plants with hardy root systems that break up the concrete and compacted soil underneath. This makes way for more living things to be nourished by the warmth of the sun above and nurtured by the abundance of the earth below.

For those of us who have had empires built on our bodies and communities, the violent ideologies of white Christian Supremacy can feel a lot like asphalt: a stifling hardened foundation that disconnects us from the richness of the earth below and that which has come before us, and blocks the warmth of hope for the future. But at Soulforce, we know what the dandelions know...**with the right strategies of relentless resistance, we can break through the hardened pavement to flourish and heal together.**



Tending the Roots:

For Latinx communities across diaspora, there are few public Spanish-language models of queer feminist clergy or theologians whose work can counteract the fundamentalist Christian discourses that attack our people and their human rights. Those who are engaged in queer feminist religion work publicly are targeted by political suppression and/or drowned out by the loud resourced platform of Right Wing extremists and their moderate enablers.

In response, we collaborate with Latinx queer feminists to create **Teología Sin Vergüenza (TSV): a North-South queer feminist media project by and for Latinx communities** across the Americas who experience violence from weaponized Christianity in our homes, communities of faith, and in society at large.

TSV's live hour-long conversations in Spanish examine urgent political concerns from a religious perspective – issues like sex & sexuality, transgender experiences of faith & spirituality, feminism, reproductive health access, domestic violence, and more – in queer and feminist theological frameworks through an accessible intimate dialogue between queer and feminist theologians, and with extensive interaction and engagement with our live audience.



Teología Sin Vergüenza

Since TSV's debut in March 2020, we have aired **49 episodes over three seasons with 42 theologians who are rooted in 16 countries and territories.** Our episodes rapidly grew a large following, reaching over 60,000 views on Facebook and YouTube without advertising.

The heart of this project is our community of viewers:

Las Sinvergüenzas (loosely translates to "Those Without Shame").

Over 2,000 of us are following the project on Facebook, watching and listening from 45 countries, including every Spanish-speaking country in Latin America and the Caribbean. Las Sinvergüenzas share resources, dialogue with one another, and make personal connections. We learn together about queer and feminist affirming Latinx theologies, and many of us volunteer our their time and expertise to grow the community.

In May 2021, we completed our third season of TSV with 14 episodes and 14,000 views on Facebook alone. Our live audience watched from as many as 11 different countries simultaneously.

"I want you to know that today, thanks to you, I have found my place in faith. I have had a mental block around this for several months now. Although I do not belong to the LGBTQI community, I feel a moral obligation to fight for this community because I realize all the attacks they are under, the attacks on this community that I once repeated. I am a feminist, and this is what I need: Feminist Theology."

-TSV listener & feminist Latinx artist

REAP What You Sow:

We are proud to fiscally sponsor the Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP). This groundbreaking program empowers queer, trans and non-binary students at more than 200 taxpayer-funded religious schools that actively discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity/ expression. Through civil rights litigation, documentary film, oral history, research and public policy, **REAP works towards a world where LGBTQI students on all campuses are treated with safety and respect.**

This work continues Soulforce's legacy of intervening at Christian colleges where LGBTQI students are victims of discrimination and violence. We forged this work through decades of Christian college advocacy such as the Equality Rides and the GiveBack IX campaign.

This spring, **REAP made waves across the country by filing a class action lawsuit against the US Department of Education on behalf of 35 plaintiffs** from 25 evangelical & LDS colleges in 18 states. The lawsuit, *Hunter vs. Department of Education*, calls on the government to nullify the religious exemption to Title IX that allows widespread discrimination against LGBTQI students at faith-based colleges and universities.



REAP

Religious Exemption
Accountability Project

Religious Exemption Accountability Project

REAP also commissioned a study of 3,000 students currently enrolled in taxpayer-funded Christian colleges and universities that explicitly discriminate against LGBTQI students. This precedence-setting report documents the rampant discrimination, abuse and mistreatment faced by LGBTQI students at taxpayer-funded religious colleges. The study serves as an advocacy tool for challenging the power and influence of these Right Wing institutions that scapegoat LGBTQI youth as a means to build political power and encourage white Christian nationalism.

Since its launch, the project and the plaintiffs' stories have been featured in over 100 media spotlights, from the Chicago Tribune and the Washington Post to local small-town papers around the United States. Through this lawsuit and its accompanying documentary, we believe REAP will make waves through the national political consciousness, exposing the ways white Christian Supremacy is enshrined into our culture, laws, and taxpayer-funded institutions.

“I am raising my voice to protect all LGBTQ+ students at Nyack College and religiously-affiliated colleges across the country. Thank you Soulforce and REAP for helping us share our stories.”

-REAP plaintiff

Breaking New Ground:

Bodily autonomy and self-determination are twin visions for liberation that lie at the heart of many social justice movements: LGBTQI activists, feminists, racial justice organizers, and so many other groups are fighting an ideological battle for the ability to make the best possible choices for their bodies, lives, families, and communities.

In hostile Christian contexts, these **movements are up against a wall of moral arguments constructed by the Right**, which weaponizes religious language to assert a paternalistic worldview and denies the right to choice for marginalized communities. One of the most blatant examples of this is the Right's platforms on reproductive healthcare and abortion. For decades, the Right has propagated the widespread myth that there is nothing in the Bible or in the Christian faith that supports a pro-choice position. For many people invested in Christianity, this makes it impossible for some of us to hold even baseline curiosity about the pro-choice movement.

In an effort to provide tools to gender justice activists seeking resources to defend reproductive health against moralized attacks from the Right, we have developed **two new resources for activists and people of faith to transform public religion-based narratives around bodily autonomy.**

“Soulforce’s superpower is encouraging us to **fearlessly approach topics we were told we aren’t allowed to touch.** This resource will give more people the confidence to address Christianity and the Bible in their pro-choice position.

-Theological Resource Advisory Board member



New tools in the collective struggle for bodily autonomy

Our two newest politicized theological resources, developed in collaboration with activists, educators, theologians, healthcare professionals, and faith leaders in hostile Christian contexts around the world, **focus on key issues of abortion and consent.**

Mary's Choice: A New Model for Biblical Motherhood is a strategic Bible-based intervention that explores the concept of consent by examining the story of Mary and highlighting her choice in pregnancy and motherhood. **Breaking Open the Myths of the "Pro-Life" Movement** is an activist resource that debunks some of the most virulent Christian Right moral arguments against abortion access through ethical, theological, and historical lenses.



Detoxifying the Soul

Many of the beliefs that undergird oppression are planted in our childhoods. The toxic theologies of white Christian Supremacy are not only the foundation of institutional violence; they sink into the spirits of our marginalized bodies and spirits. It takes great effort to break through these immense, long-established cultural frameworks and thought patterns. And this is why we accompany people in hostile contexts to do the hard work of unpacking and healing from Spiritual Violence.

When we launched Soulforce Vacation Bible School (VBS), our goal was to create spiritual healing space online where queer youth isolated in hostile contexts could gather to **confront and heal from religion-based violence with vulnerability, laughter, and play**. Since seeding the ground for VBS in 2017, we have had hundreds of registrants of all ages to our VBS digital courses and in-person workshops.

This July, our team reworked our curriculum to be accessible in an online class in partnership with the Transform Network alongside weekly live group sessions. Our month-long course lead 22 learners in a deep dive through the “wild, wonderful world of God’s Queer Creation”, where we paired Bible stories and examples of animals who naturally defy fundamentalist narratives about gender, sex, and sexuality. Participants came away with **new confidence and inspiration in their own dignity as Queer and Trans people**.



Unpacking Spiritual Violence Together

In February, we piloted a series of **workshops and peer-support space on Spiritual Violence and Religious Abuse for Latinx queer feminist activists** who have experienced religion-based trauma. In collaboration with volunteer theologians and feminist activists from Teología Sin Vergüenza, 40 activists and faith leaders from 11 countries gathered weekly for a Spanish-language virtual space to name, process, and validate experiences of Spiritual Violence, Religious Abuse, and support each other in the process of healing.

Facilitators offered our community **new frameworks for understanding religion-based trauma** as it connects to patriarchy, colonialism, and patterns of abuse. Over the course of four weeks, our community shared deep conversations of healing, reclamation of self and spirituality as LGBTQI people, women, and other people uniquely impacted by toxic theologies and religion-based violence.

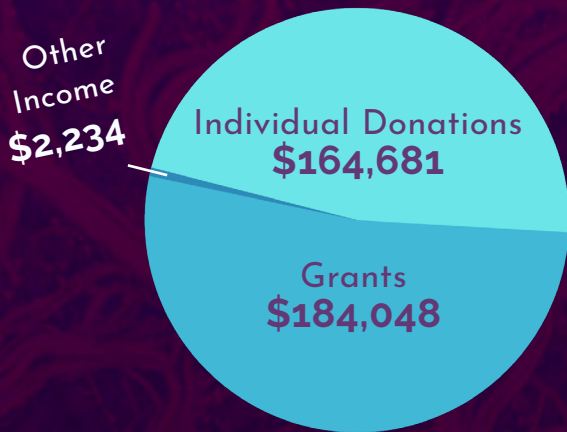
“This was an oasis in the desert. Having access to the phrase ‘Spiritual Violence’ and being able to explore it within the culturally-sensitive and multi-contextual framework that you have designed is transformative beyond measure.

-Spiritual Violence
Workshops participant



Financial Resources: A Snapshot

Income FY2020

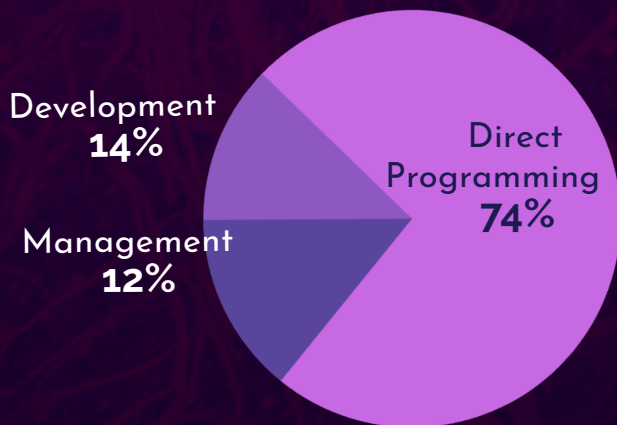


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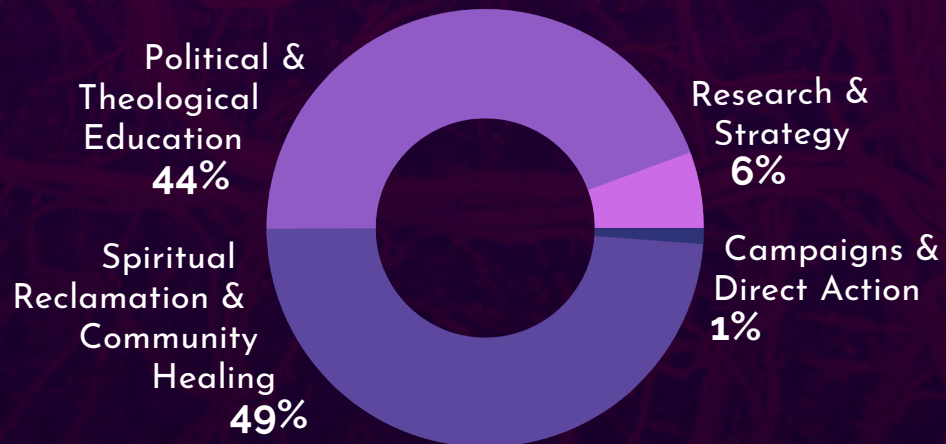
of gifts are made monthly, quarterly, or annually



Expense FY2020



Total 2020 Organizational Expenses: \$264,826



Expense Breakout by Program Area

This fiscal year was a challenging one, as the financial effects of the pandemic have been felt across our donor base. We weathered the hardships of this fiscal year through temporarily reducing staffing hours and applying for federal and foundation grants. After four tough months, we were able to return to previous staff levels, and our development efforts yielded new relationships with foundations who are excited to see our capacity grow. Today, we are expanding our staff and growing our programs. We thank all our community for your continued investment of treasure, talent, and time: you are the people who power Soulforce.

Community-Grown Resistance

For 23 years, Soulforcers have offered their gifts and talents to this work because we believe that **together, we can collectively end religion-based oppression against LGBTQI people.**

Our staff, based in North Carolina, Texas, and Alabama, creates and directs all of our programs and resources. We cultivate Soulforce community through beauty and intention alongside sharp political analysis.

We are backed by our Board of Directors and by a small group of specialized volunteers & consultants who bring their expertises to political & theological education programming like Teología Sin Vergüenza.

Soulforce is accountable to our community members and our values, NOT to any religious institutions, governments, or private corporations.

This year, we have focused our flourishing on **ensuring that all Soulforcers feel connection and belonging with our community.** This includes:

- **hiring our Communications Herald**, a staff member whose work is dedicated to growing our communications strategies and maintaining our social media platforms with radical, liberatory Soulforce content;
- **starting a monthly email newsletter** to keep you up-to-date on new programs, campaigns, and updates; and
- **launching a Soulforce podcast**, Go With Grace, a monthly podcast where our people can learn more about how to respond to white Christian Supremacy with courage and resilience.

We do this because we want you to be a part of our community of activists advocates, healers, and people of faith around the world. Join us:

- Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at @SoulforceOrg.
- Visit our website at www.soulforce.org
- Join our email newsletter
- Follow Teología Sin Vergüenza on Facebook & Instagram at @TeoSinVerguenza
- Follow the Religious Exemption Accountability Project at @REAPlgbtq
- Follow our new Go With Grace podcast on Podbean and Spotify
- Make a donation to our life-giving programs at www.soulforce.org/donate

In It Together

We are so honored to be trusted by these strategic partners and friends:

The Freedom Center of North Carolina • Political Research Associates • Southern Vision Alliance • Transform Network • Political Research Associates • Haüswitch • Bend the Arc • Southern Crossroads • Vanderbilt Divinity School Carpenter Program for Religion, Sexuality, and Gender • McCormick Theological Seminary • Center for American Progress • Duke University Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity • The Law, Rights, and Religion Project at Columbia Law School • Center for American Progress • Proyecto Encuentros de Gracia y Bienvenida UCC • TEPALI • Purisqa Warmikuna, Peru • El Ministerio Latino, Plymouth United Church of Christ Oakland • ICM Libres por Amor, Mexico • Grupo Espiritual Cuir de Puebla, Mexico • Abriendo Brechas de Colores, Cuba • Q de Cuir Revista, Cuba • NARAL-NC • Anti-Racist Research Collective (led by BluePrint NC) • OURs Coalition • Q de Cuir Revista, Cuba • Groundswell Fund • Anti-Racist Research Collective (led by BluePrint NC) • OURs Coalition • Urgent Action Fund • Ecumenicas por el Derecho a Decidir, Honduras • Comunidad Luterana Santísimo Redentor, Mexico • Akira Media • Paul Southwick Law, LLC • ACCEDER Costa Rica • ICM Matanzas, Cuba • Universidad de Costa Rica • Borealis Philanthropy • E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation

Soulforce

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