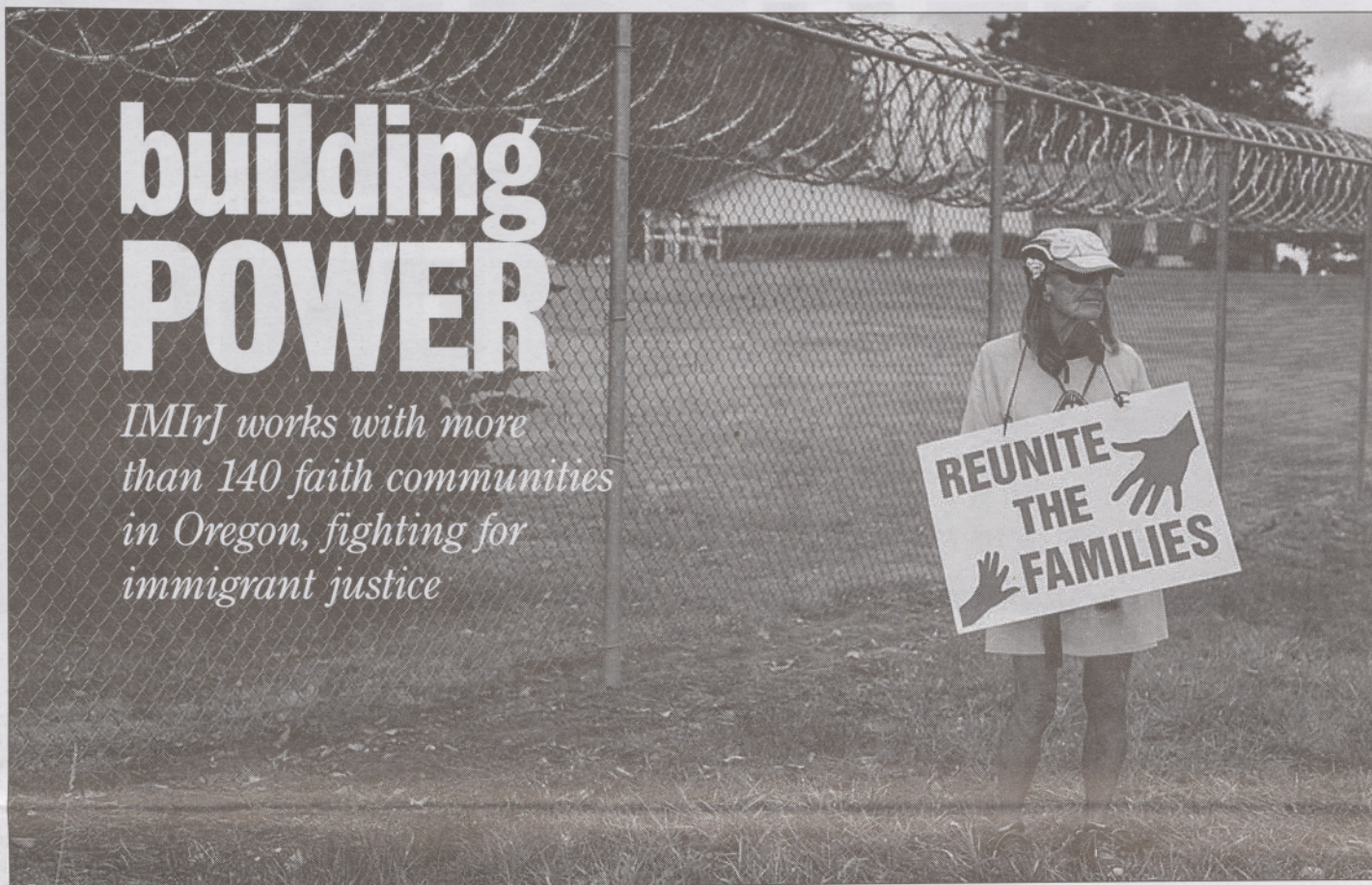


# Faith & Justice

*A series highlighting the role of religious leaders and groups in Portland's resistance movement*

## building POWER

*IMIrJ works with more than 140 faith communities in Oregon, fighting for immigrant justice*



PHOTOS BY SARAH CLARK

*A demonstrator participates in a rally Oct. 5 at the park adjacent to the Federal Correctional Institution in Sheridan. The event, coordinated by the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice and Rural Organizing Project, was a call for immigrants' release from detention centers such as FCI.*

**BY SARAH HANSELL**  
STAFF WRITER

“Unshackle Oregon. Let our people go!” It was one of the chants that could be heard through the rain on the first Friday of October at a rally in Hood River, the sixth leg of a pilgrimage from Sheridan to The Dalles.

The pilgrimage – organized by the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMIrJ), the Rural Organizing Project and other organizations – had specific demands: an end to Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s contracts with two Oregon correctional facilities where immigrants and asylum seekers are being detained.

About 40 people made the entire 150-mile trek, with many others joining along the way. They slept in churches and a farm, rallied and canvassed against Measure 105, which would reverse Oregon’s sanctuary-state status. They stood outside the facilities where immigrants were being detained, holding worship services and calling for the immigrants’ release.

This pilgrimage is the culmination of a coordinated effort by IMIrJ against Measure 105, which would repeal Oregon’s sanctuary law; for ICE to end their contracts with Federal Correctional Institution at Sheridan and Northern Oregon Regional Correctional Facility, known as NORCOR; and for getting asylum-seekers released from these institutions. In what the organization dubbed “August of Action,” IMIrJ organized a month of demonstrations and vigils focused on the release of immigrants in detention. “September of Mobilization” was about voting no

on Measure 105. And the “October Pilgrimage” was the final leg of the journey.

Since then, one of the goals of the campaign has been reached. In the spring, 123 immigrant men were transferred from the border to FCI Sheridan. Now, only seven remain.

IMIrJ has been engaging faith communities in Oregon since 2006, when it was a subcommittee of the Portland Immigrant Rights Coalition called the Oregon New Sanctuary Movement. Back then, the moment that galvanized local faith communities into action was the 2007 raid of the Del Monte Fresh Produce food processing center in North Portland, when ICE detained 168 immigrants. At that time, IMIrJ was working with 25 to 30 congregations in the Portland metro area.

The galvanizing moment for IMIrJ’s work today was the 2016 election.

“We had so many congregations and people of faith who called us and said, ‘Hey, we want to become a sanctuary church. What do we do?’” said Sarah Loose, IMIrJ senior lead organizer.

Many churches would call the organization, eager to make the renovations necessary to create a functional living space for those seeking sanctuary, such as building showers. However, that wasn’t what the immigrants in their congregations and communities were asking for.

“Our message back to many of the congregations and people of faith, in what felt, and was in many ways, a crisis moment, was to say the best thing that we can do right now is not to just up and build showers, but rather to build

power,” Loose said.

Their work since then has been focused on building that power. They now work with more than 140 faith communities throughout Oregon, from the Portland metro area to the Gorge to Central and Southern Oregon. In addition, they partner with immigrant-led organizations and other groups fighting for immigrant justice.

“It’s not just the faith leaders; it’s organizing with the local organizing group that is also fighting for immigrant rights,” said Insil Kang, director of communications and community connections at Village Church and an IMIrJ board member.

Kang is the daughter of Korean immigrants. She grew up seeing her parents struggle with the language barrier, with not understanding the unspoken rules of culture, and with the xenophobia and racism of strangers.

“I was always seeing that there was another group coming through, having to start from scratch and figuring out their American way of life when it came to the immigrant life,” Kang said. “So it’s always been very close to my heart to be seen not just as an advocate but as someone who was doing something about helping people be citizens and have access to everything.”

Though IMIrJ has always been an interfaith organization, it was most weighted toward Christian communities in the beginning. It since has increased its work and partnership with non-Christian faith communities, including Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim.

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