

# Transcript

I want to share a little bit about what we lived through in Minneapolis—just the bad, but also some of the wonderful moments of community resilience that came up during the crisis. I'm not here as an expert—I'm here as just one community member—so a lot of what I will be sharing are stories. I learned this work by failing, adjusting, and being held by neighbors who didn't know what they were doing, and I definitely didn't know what I was doing at first.

I patrolled daycares very recently, as recently as last week, trying to enter with great force under the guise of seeking, I guess, trying to press charges for fraud. A lot of this started with the idea that there was some kind of financial fraud happening, specifically with Somali immigrants, and from there they used it as a way of gaining access to the public just for pure terrorism. They would photograph people walking into community clinics, and this made people afraid of seeking health care, of even continuing to attend their immigration appointments.

A man with legal papers who had documentation went back to Ecuador because he was too afraid to stay. Some may say this is ridiculous because he had documentation, but papers don't stop bullets. To him, it wasn't worth the risk of his or his family's safety. A Ukrainian couple in my neighborhood are scraping together money for a lawyer because they don't trust anyone, not non-profits, not the government, or anyone, to keep their legal status in the United States much longer.

Neighbors who offered water to people running from ICE were threatened with charges. Legal observers got detained. To help became suspicious. So a lot of formal service providers pulled back. That left a wide, wide open need for community members to step in to fill. Teachers, baristas, retirees, and parents all stepped in with no training and no plan to take care of each other.

I think a lot of what originally got Operation Metro Surge on the news was the day of January 7th, which was the day that Renee Good was murdered. That day was so much more than the murder of Renee Good. At about 7am that day, one of the teachers from a Spanish immersion daycare outside of my neighborhood was violently taken in front of all the kids, toddlers, and infants being dropped off for daycare that day. At about 9am, a lot of us were mobilizing to provide patrol for the rest of the day. While we were at the daycare is when we found out Renee Good had been killed. Later that day, Roosevelt High School, which is a public school, was tear-gassed by ICE. Students and teachers got into altercations, and thank goodness for the public library right across the street and the librarians that were able to take in the students to protect them.

This was clearly a lot of violence to just say that it was about fraud. It was clearly a guise to just inflict terror. We stopped waiting for institutions to save us. As a matter of fact, at one of our neighborhood meetings, we had elected officials specifically say that the government could not move quickly enough to save us. We were empowered by people who we put in power to take matters into our own hands, to take care of each other. And I see a lot of nods because I think a lot of people in this room have learned that that is what is necessary in times like this. We keep us safe.

As a faith leader, I watched my own ministry transform. It evolved into more of a community presence, mostly in the form of aftercare. So when people who were either legal observers or people who were being sought after by ICE would encounter agents, I would step in to help them calm down and to help process the trauma and also to be connected to resources as needed.

Three things seemed to make the biggest difference in our work.

One was neighborhood protection pods. We organized by block and made sure that people who were physically close to each other knew one another. So a lot of what wound up coming from this is now our neighbors know each other and share meals together and share music together. We patrolled together with no leader, no ideology necessarily beyond just protecting each other.

Another thing that was important was civilian documentation. I firmly believe that's the only reason any of this made the news in the first place, was because there were civilians who were very, very thorough in documenting by photos or videos or live streams of what was going on. And we still saw the federal government try very hard to twist every story possible. And so I really think that as much civilian documentation as possible was very, very important. Because we knew this might never lead to court, right? The ICE agents were told that they had complete impunity and would never face any kind of consequences for their actions. But impunity hides in the dark, so our goal was to turn on the lights.

And as I mentioned, the third thing that was really effective was providing emotional after care during the crisis. We decided that keeping people sane is quite literally a form of fighting. A terrified person can't organize. A person in survival mode can't advocate. So we made rest and dance and music and sitting together a semi-weekly practice. A lot of those practices have continued even after the surge ended.

For me personally, I have been working on a toolkit for people who get thrown into a crisis like this with no prior organization experience with no prior connections to NPOs and NGOs. This toolkit includes really practical starting points such as a template for a community meeting agenda and an inventory assessment for skills to offer the community as well as boundaries to set based on one's personal needs. During Metro Surge, we had no playbook. There were a lot of people in the community who were using their experience from 2020 after George Floyd was murdered and kind of renewed those connections and grew it in a way that became applicable to this federal occupation. This toolkit is for the next city, the next operation, the next group of neighbors who suddenly realize no one is coming to save them. I hope to share it soon because I unfortunately believe that this will happen again. I think that Minneapolis was just an example of what they believe that they can get away with. I also think it was an example proving that they can. I'm not an expert, I just kept showing up week to week to work alongside my neighbors and I wrote about what we learned together.

There are two things I hope you take with you this week into the IMRF and your return home.

One is the importance of funding emotional infrastructure, not just legal fights. Legal fights take a long time. Lawsuits do matter, but the people I serve needed someone to sit with them after violence in the immediate aftermath. This work is starving for resources while being asked to do everything. Financially supporting community members who can provide care on the ground on a neighbor-to-neighbor basis could be absolutely critical for another community that experiences this. There are a lot of us that are still facing lost income either because we were afraid to go to work or because we were unable to work because the community became more important. Now there are people facing evictions because of that loss of income because they were not able to pay rent or mortgages.

The second thing that I think is really important is that this being a leaderless messy non-ideological movement are real partners in this whole global movement for human rights. I think a lot of times it's easy to think of human rights organizations as being the leaders in things like this but I really think there was something important about just regular community members coming together to take care of each other. I think that's also a reason why Operation Metro Surge made so many news stories. We don't have a board, right? We don't have a budget line, but we kept people alive. I would say with how much violence we faced and how many times guns were walked in our faces—for us to have only lost two community members is pretty incredible. So, if you want to support human rights in a tangible way, find ways to support and resource movements like ours without forcing us to become something we're not, such as a 501(c)3 in the US or a non-governmental organization elsewhere.

I also want to share some actions that were taken by churches as I am a faith leader in the area. A lot of churches were involved in food banks and other means of providing resources to people whether it was “off the record” medical care, “off the record” therapy, as well as child care and elderly care. Just the basic necessities. There were also churches in the area who were housing migrants, making sure that they were safe. Making sure that there were hidden areas in the church that could not be accessed by the general public. This is where there wound up being this funny kind of, I guess, silver lining to the separation of church and state in the United States. Churches can say that the federal government cannot enter because there are certain protections. And it was really wonderful to see churches take full action based on that, taking advantage of that legal separation.

I also want to share all of the joy that came from this. Personally, theologically, I believe that joy is the fuel for resistance movements. As much as we were facing constant violence and separation from our neighbors—some of which still haven't been returned, and we don't know where they are—we sang and we danced. I'm really excited to hear that later today, actually, we will be singing some of the songs that came from Minneapolis during all of this. So, just remember that joy and people coming together, as probably all of you inherently know, is necessary to make it through movements like this. So don't discount it as frivolous, please.

I hope this perspective from Minneapolis gives insight on the current state of affairs in the U.S. I think it has been the recent big headliner for the type of violence and unfairness that migrants

and their protectors are facing here in the U.S. The U.S. government has shown what it's willing to do. We've shown that we're capable of rising up to meet it as well. The question is whether global human rights spaces will stand with us, not as saviors, but as co-conspirators, and as people who refuse to look away.

Thank you.

# Rally statement

Friends, neighbors, and fellow believers in justice,

My name is Audrey, and I come to you as a Unitarian Universalist faith leader and community organizer from Minneapolis, a city that knows what it means to face state violence and refuse to bow. When Operation Metro Surge and thousands of masked federal agents came for our communities—when they tried to terrorize and criminalize our migrant neighbors—Minnesota did not back down. We doubled down. We said loud and clear: Migrant rights are human rights, and human rights are non-negotiable.

Today, we stand here—across from the United Nations—not because we want to be here, but because we have to be. Because the rollback of migrant rights is accelerating. Because criminalization is spreading. Because those who provide food, shelter, and love to people on the move are being treated like criminals.

We have tried the usual way. Meetings with delegates. Town halls. Policy briefs. Position statements. All of that still matters—but it is not enough. Not now. Not when lives are on the line.

I want you to take a moment to look around and see each other. See the many humans standing in solidarity. This is what power looks like when it comes from the ground up. Organizers from New York, from Minneapolis, from migrant networks around the world. Humanity, united.

We are here to reclaim dignity. To resist erosion. To build a world where migration policy is rooted in justice, humanity, and hope—not fear, not borders, not brutality.

They need to see us. They will see us. And they will remember: When history asked if we stood up for migrant rights, we did not flinch. We doubled down.

Because we know:

Migrant rights are human rights. And human rights are non-negotiable.