

## **Al Green Helps Others Get Asylum While He Waits For it Himself**

By Izzy Koyama

WORCESTER, MASS – Three years ago, Alford Green offered to be the new ministry director of the Hadwen Park Congregational Church’s LGBT Asylum Task Force because no one else would take the job.

Green had been on the hiring committee with the church’s pastor, Judy Hanlon. After the candidate they selected turned down the job’s low salary, Pastor Hanlon realized that the perfect fit had been sitting next to her the whole time. She turned to Green and asked, “Do you want to do it?” He responded, “You know, I’ve thought about it.”

Green stepped down from the committee. Not long after, he was hired for the role. “He fit the minister profile,” said Hanlon of Green. “He’s an extraordinary preacher.”

Green often sermonized from the HPCC pulpit; but after becoming director of ministry, he started visiting churches to speak about their task force’s mission of supporting LGBTQI asylum seekers in the United States. His even, baritone voice washed over church halls across New England, where congregations of awestruck people lined up after Sunday services to chat with him over cookies and lemonade. Many of these churches became recurring donors, writing the task force into their yearly budgets.

Under Green’s leadership, the task force has doubled in size and incoming donations have tripled. In August, the church bought their first triple decker house in Worcester in order to house 10-12 asylum seekers. Throughout COVID shutdowns, Green has continued to speak at online services. This month the ministry will livestream its biggest annual fundraiser, an evening gala.

“We are the only group that is doing this comprehensive level of work,” Green said during a virtual town hall last Thursday. Since its inception in 2008, the task force has provided more than 300 LGBTQI asylum seekers from 20 countries with housing, a monthly stipend, and access to resources like healthcare, pro bono attorneys, and bank accounts – not to mention a church community led by an openly gay pastor.

Unlike agencies that offer temporary support, the task force commits to asylum seekers from the moment they enter the program to the day they’re able to provide for themselves. But as Green knows firsthand, getting asylum in the US is a legal process fraught with delays.

Green has been waiting for his own asylum case to be heard for four years. “It’s frustrating... having that unknown hanging over your head, and not being able to get some closure on that part of your life,” Green said (without a hint of frustration). “I know folks who have been waiting almost seven [years].”

Green grew up in Kingston, Jamaica, where Christian churches were ubiquitous, and being openly gay, unforgivable. His mother immersed him in their church community. He attended services every Sunday, joined church trips and stuffed himself at harvest fairs. “I did that even whilst having quite a bit of self-hatred... Here is a place where you find some support and some community, but they’re also rejecting certain aspects of you, that – as much as you might try to suppress it and to stop – [are] just a part of you,” Green recounted.

As a child, Green spent all of his unstructured time swimming. He swam in every pool he could find, from public pools to Kingston’s best sports complexes. In high school he competed. Now, at 30, he coaches swimming in Worcester and still decompresses by doing laps twice a week. And gliding through the pool, like waiting for asylum, takes endurance.

When he came to the US in 2008 to attend college at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Green stopped going to church. “I stopped going for four to five years because I just couldn’t reconcile what I was being told with who I am,” Green said.

Green hasn’t been back to Jamaica since he applied for asylum, though he keeps up with the daily news and often cooks Caribbean food for his fiancé, Marvin Nunez.

Hanlon recalled when Green’s mother once came to Worcester from Jamaica to visit her son. Hanlon took her out to dinner and tried to convince her to accept her son’s sexuality. “I started talking to her. I talked and talked... and at the end she goes, ‘you can believe what you believe, and I’ll believe what I believe.’ But then she told me this story of Al’s birth. It was a little bit hard for her to get pregnant, and ...when she got pregnant, her mother said, ‘this is a special child. Maybe he’ll be in the ministry or in the church.’”

Green’s grandmother was right. He found his way back to the church and became a leader in his community through the task force. But this time, he didn’t have to mute parts of himself: “It wasn’t until I was introduced to Hadwen Park Church that I kind of rekindled my faith... because I saw a denomination that truly accepted me as God’s creation,” Green said.

When Green and Nunez get married in the future, Hanlon will officiate the ceremony. “We’re hoping the mom will come, but Al isn’t crying at night. He’s not beating the table,” says Hanlon, making a point about Green’s impenetrable calm attitude. “He says ‘I hope she’ll be there. That’s her choice. She’s invited.’”

Nunez, an American citizen, knows that if he and Green get married, Green could live here legally. Still, the two aren’t rushing. “Maybe after all of this covid stuff ends,” Nunez said.

**Sources:**

1. Alford Green: [algreen@lgbt asylum.org](mailto:algreen@lgbt asylum.org)
2. Judith Hanlon: [gracelift@aol.com](mailto:gracelift@aol.com)
3. Marvin Nunez: [nunezmarv@gmail.com](mailto:nunezmarv@gmail.com)