

# Daily Journal

NOVEMBER 4, 2020

## Top **WOMEN LAWYERS** 2020

### Deborah Mallgrave

**L**ong litigation experience and a deep commitment to social justice led Mallgrave late last year to open Greenberg Gross's innovative practice targeting sexual abuse and human trafficking. Her marquee case is the current high-profile civil RICO case and trafficking against the global religious sect La Luz Del Mundo, but since her new practice began last year Mallgrave has filed about a dozen others involving childhood sexual assault and similar painful offenses.

She brings to her work her experience with intellectual property and class action litigation along with her role as president and board chair of the pro bono committee at Orange County's Public Law Center. The nonprofit offers free legal services for low income residents.

"I transitioned to this arena when I realized my career had hit a spot where I could use my 20-plus years of complex civil litigation and my pro bono work with vulnerable clients to do a project that has grown more important to me over time," she said.

In August 2019 Mallgrave met Sochil Martin, the woman who would become the plaintiff in the effort to hold accountable La Luz Del Mundo for allegedly sexually abusing children and adults, using members for forced unpaid labor and engaging in money laundering and other crimes. "She was looking for an attorney to tell her

story," Mallgrave said. "She'd met a few, but she allowed me the privilege of representing her."

The result was a civil complaint that made headlines with explosive claims that the Guadalajara, Mexico-based church, its "Apostle" Naason Joaquin Garcia and other church officials subjected Martin "to a lifetime of rape, beatings, sexual servitude, forced labor and other abuse" as part of a long pattern "of institutionalized child abuse and human trafficking." The church claims five million followers worldwide. *Martin v. La Luz Del Mundo*, 2:20-cv-01437 (C.D. Cal., filed Feb. 12, 2020).

The litigation has been slowed by the court system's pandemic response cautions and by a parallel criminal case, filed by the California Department of Justice, that includes more than two dozen felony counts against Joaquin Garcia and the other church officials. Garcia remains jailed in Los Angeles on \$50 million bail.

On Aug. 31, Mallgrave filed her opposition to the church's motion to dismiss itself from the case. U.S. District Judge Otis D. Wright II has that and other matters under submission.

"Since we filed there has been a momentum effect," Mallgrave said, "as other witnesses and survivors have come forward, as we had hoped. Most request not to be named at this point, due to the church's



**GREENBERG GROSS LLP**  
COSTA MESA

**Practice Type:**  
Litigation

intimidation techniques. Many are waiting for the outcome of the criminal case and this litigation. There is fear out there."

— John Roemer