

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

Video Conversation Guide

Dios es nuestro amparo y fortaleza, ... (God is our refuge and strength, ...)
– Psalm 46:1

The word “amparo” in Spanish means the protection of a living creature from suffering or damage. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America’s (ELCA) strategy to Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) was envisioned after witnessing the plight of children who are forced to flee their communities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Due to our connection to companion churches in the region, including companion synod relationships, and existing ministries in the U.S., the ELCA is well-positioned to help ensure that these vulnerable children are protected.

In 2014, almost 70,000 children and another 70,000 families arrived in the U.S., most from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. Although the number of Central American children and family arrivals reflected an overall decrease in 2015, the number began climbing again in August 2015. As of early 2016, conditions that caused the forced displacement of these vulnerable families had not changed. Deported children still lack government services that will ensure their well-being or, more importantly, guarantee their safety.

FINDINGS FROM AN ELCA LEADERSHIP TRIP TO CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO:

- Children and families continue to leave because of complex and interrelated reasons, including chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement and lack of opportunities. These problems are exacerbated by the failure of governments to address these issues, leaving many with no choice but to flee.
- Gang and others forms of violence greatly affect faith communities in the region. For example, Lutheran churches have reported a dramatic loss in youth leadership because young people have been forced to flee or are unable to leave their homes to participate in church activities because of gang violence.
- Central American children and families seeking asylum in Mexico are detained for extended periods of time. Children are deported from Mexico without being screened to ensure that they are not trafficking victims or that they will not be harmed if returned to their communities. The U.S. government has financed and expressed support for Mexico’s enforcement-only approach to vulnerable children and families.

OUR FAITH AND THE AMMPARO STRATEGY:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. – Romans 13:8

Jesus professed love for our neighbors as a fundamental reflection of our identity. The ELCA is a church with migrant roots that recognizes we are all made in God's image and have the right to dignity and respect. In its social message on immigration, the ELCA declares that, "The presence of newcomers in our church and society ... deepens our belief that 'all people are God's creatures, sinners for whom Christ died,' and call for respect of the human dignity of all."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Before this discussion, what had you heard about children and families seeking safety in the U.S., and how did the video change your perspective?
2. What causes people to leave their communities?
3. What are significant perils in the journey?
4. What do migrants, refugees and asylum seekers face in the U.S.?

HOW CAN YOU GET INVOLVED?

- **Coordinate with your synod or congregation** to see how this initiative fits with the work that is already happening and discuss how this initiative is or can be a part of your mission.
- **Build awareness** through participating in immersion experiences in Central America, Mexico and the U.S. border and local learning events.
- **Sign up for the ELCA Advocacy Network** (ELCA.org/advocacy) to receive advocacy updates and actions to protect children and families from Central America.
- **Accompany migrant children** and families through the Welcoming Congregations program.
- **Provide spiritual support** through the ELCA Guardian Angels court watch program for unaccompanied and migrant children and families.
- **Pray for migrant children and families** and for guidance for the ELCA in all its expressions to be faithful to God's call.
- **Give to support work with unaccompanied migrant children and families** at <https://community.elca.org/ammparo-donation-form>.