



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Addressing forced displacement in Central America through advocacy

The arrival of almost 70,000 unaccompanied children to the U.S. in 2014 – most from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala – shed light on the displacement of children and families from their home communities. As the number of child arrivals decreased in 2015, national focus on this humanitarian crisis faded. Due to our accompaniment of churches and faith partners in the region, the ELCA has strong connections with young people and families in communities facing conditions that force many to leave. Thanks to these relationships, our church knew that a decrease in children arriving in the U.S. did not mean fewer are leaving their communities or are in need of protection. This was confirmed when the number of child arrivals again increased in 2016.

In 2015, a delegation of ELCA staff visited communities in Central America to better understand why so many are forced to leave their homes and to learn how our Lutheran companion churches are affected. The delegation heard stories about children and mothers fleeing due to violence, poverty and lack of opportunities. These testimonies confirmed results of studies by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and the U.S. Government Accountability Office, which cite brutal and targeted violence as a principal reason for migration out of Central America. Lutheran churches in the region have seen this violence worsen and frequently witness their young leaders being forced out of their communities in order to seek safety.

The ELCA is called to bear witness to the conditions affecting so many communities and work to find solutions that will acknowledge the humanity in all of God's children. ELCA Advocacy continues to lift up and amplify the voices of ELCA congregants, partners, children and families, and Lutheran churches in Central America with a goal of ensuring the safety and protection of all our brothers and sisters.

ELCA ADVOCACY CAN HELP YOU

- » **Advocate for the safety of children and families.**
- » **Learn about legislation affecting displaced children and families.**
- » **Find ways to involve your congregation in honoring God's call to love our neighbor.**

OUR LUTHERAN VOICE

"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 own 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 our 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."

ELCA ADVOCACY ADDRESSES...

MIGRANTS IN THE U.S.

The United States has a long history of protecting vulnerable people seeking safety and calling on other countries to protect those fleeing danger. However, children and families forcibly displaced from Central America encounter detention, lack of appropriate legal representation, and the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will be returned to a dangerous situation. Family unification and the safety of children are basic values the U.S. government must uphold in its immigration policies. **We collaborate with U.S. partners, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, to advocate for fair and compassionate policies toward vulnerable migrants, children and families.**

MIGRANTS IN-TRANSIT

Children and families from Central America flee their communities to find safety and hope for a better future. In their journey, they face drug traffickers, corrupt law-enforcement agents, and miles of dangerous terrain. With support from the United States, all three countries have increased border and migration enforcement without also ensuring that those in fear of returning to their country are safe. **We advocate for enforcing international, regional and national laws that exist to protect children and people fleeing persecution.**

ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION

Addressing the increased forced displacement of children and families arriving in the United States effectively and responsibly can only be done by focusing on the conditions forcing people to flee, while ensuring the immediate protection of those who need it. As children of God, all people deserve a unified family, food on their tables, and safe homes no matter their geographical location. **We advocate for U.S. policies that honor the humanity and voices of our Central American brothers and sisters.**



LEARN MORE

- » [ELCA social message on "Immigration"](http://ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Immigration)
ELCA.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Immigration
- » ["Our Communities in Crisis"](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Advocacy)
A faithful look at the root causes of Central American forced displacement and the repatriation of children and families after the summer of 2014. ELCA.org/Resources/Advocacy
- » [Department of Homeland Security CBP Border Security Report](http://cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016)
cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2016
- » [WOLA Commentary on migration enforcement in Mexico](http://wola.org/2015/11/mexicos-migration-crackdown-creates-spike-in-apprehensions-dangerous-shifts-in-migrant-routes/)
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AMMPARO is a holistic, whole church commitment by the ELCA, as a church in the world, to accompany children today and in the future.

Visit ELCA.org/AMMPARO for resources and educational materials.