



# FROM MINISTRY TO ADVOCACY

A guide to advocacy after visiting Lutheran churches in Central America & Mexico

## WHAT IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

Members of ELCA congregations travel to Central America and Mexico to accompany Lutheran churches, to learn about companion programs, and to be in communion with our brothers and sisters living outside our nation's borders. When they return to their communities in the United States, they are filled with experiences and information that can help shape how the U.S. interacts with the communities they just visited. Through advocacy, they can help ensure that children, families, and vulnerable people from the places they visited can live safe and prosperous lives in their communities.

## WHY ADVOCACY?

Given the media's focus on the number of unaccompanied children and families from Central America who arrived in the United States during the summer of 2014, the U.S. government began rethinking how to engage with governments on this issue. In fiscal year 2016, Congress allocated \$750 million to Central America governments to address the root causes of migration, and to boost strategies for improving governance, security and regional development. In order to receive this money, governments in the region are required to meet certain **guidelines**. As a recent visitor to the region, you have gained first-hand experience and important information from the community members you visited that can help the U.S. determine if Central America governments are truly meeting these guidelines. By telling others about your experience, you can shed light on the realities faced by those you visited and help build bridges between our government and the communities that are affected by our policies!

**In exchange for U.S. funding, Central American governments should exhibit strategies that, among other actions,:**

- » establish a way to consult with civil society organizations (including churches!) to implement plans;
- » establish a plan to create a professional, accountable civilian police force;
- » protect the rights of political opposition parties, journalists, trade union, human rights defenders and other civil society activists; and
- » combat corruption.



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



I feel **strengthened** and **invigorated** *to live out my calling as a Christian ...*  
I plan to **take the stories** that were so **trustingly** and **generously**  
**shared with us** and pass them to others so that  
*the Spirit may work through them as the Spirit has worked in me.*

- Chris Schaefer, seminary student at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg

## GUIDE FOR CONNECTING YOUR EXPERIENCE TO ADVOCACY

### Before you leave ...

- Connect with the ELCA Advocacy office.**  
Email Alaide Vilchis Ibarra at [Alaide.Ibarra@elca.org](mailto:Alaide.Ibarra@elca.org).  
If there is time and interest, a brief overview of relevant advocacy issues can be provided over the phone or Skype.
- Think about how/when/if to involve advocacy in your trip.**  
Have an advocacy-focused conversation with your group and ask these questions:  
Does the group traveling want to meet with local decision makers during the trip?  
Does advocacy fit within the goals for your trip?  
Are there systemic changes needed in the communities that governments could help make?

***How does this actually work?** In 2016, a group of seminarians from Gettysburg, Pa. focused on advocacy during a class trip to Honduras. Specifically, they wanted to learn about forced displacement in the communities they visited. Before their trip, they read materials that would help put the visit into context with current conversations around migration. Then, they met with ELCA Advocacy to discuss their priorities for advocacy with communities in Honduras.*



### During your trip...

- Actively listen and take good notes, making accompaniment your priority.**  
As you interact with communities during your trip, think about how our representations of others might be shaped by our own cultural preconceptions.
- Ask for permission to share a person's story and take pictures when appropriate.**  
To protect those involved, change the names of individuals whose stories you seek to tell. Always honor the wishes of the person to not take or distribute a picture. Because they cannot consent, do not take pictures that show the faces of children or adolescents.

***The ELCA upholds the values of accompaniment - mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment, and sustainability- in seeking to walk together with global communities.***

*It is important that we live into these values when making decisions, sharing resources and expertise, telling stories and building networks together. To do this, we must recognize that our own stories and other's stories are not divided by boundaries, but are both reconciled within God's story.*



## When you return home...

- Gather all notes, pictures and information from your trip in one place.**  
Conduct a debrief conversation with your group to share notes and confirm what you learned.
- Contact ELCA Advocacy to debrief and create a plan for advocacy action.**  
ELCA Advocacy can help you develop a plan of action, whether that is through educating your community about the realities faced by families in Central America, writing letters to your elected officials, or sharing the important stories you heard and realities you are now aware of at meetings with your elected officials.
- Act!**  
Meet with your member of Congress, share your experience with your congregation, write an op-ed and submit it to your local newspaper, or engage in another advocacy-centered activity chosen by your group.  
ELCA Advocacy can help you figure out how to reach out to your elected officials, write an op-ed, and share your experience with the public.

*After returning home, the Gettysburg students wrote reflections about their visit as part of their seminary class. They then met with ELCA Advocacy staff to discuss potential advocacy goals. Together, they decided to share their written reflections and videos with the public.*

***A representative from the group met with one of his U.S. senators to talk about long-term solutions that can help ensure the safety of Central American families. After that meeting, the senator's staff committed to working with faith communities to find solutions!***

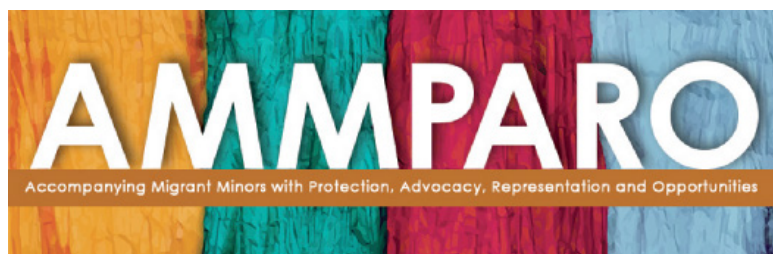
***Check out their reflections on the ELCA Advocacy blog!***



## RESOURCES

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](https://www.elca.org/AMMPARO) for resources and educational materials.



All of the following resources are at [ELCA.org/Resources/Advocacy](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy)

- » **Our Communities in Crisis** – A faithful look at the root causes of Central American forced displacement and the repatriation of children and families after the summer of 2014.
- » **Central American Advocacy: Children and Families** – factsheet about ELCA efforts and priorities in Central America