



# AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

## 1 Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, 2 Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) Strategy<sup>1</sup>

### 5 1. INTRODUCTION

7 In 2014, media put a spotlight in the humanitarian crisis in Honduras, El Salvador and  
8 Guatemala that led almost 70,000 unaccompanied children and another 70,000 mostly mothers  
9 and children to flee to the United States where they were apprehended by U.S. Customs and  
10 Border Protection.<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year (FY) 2015, after varied government responses, the number of  
11 children arriving in the U.S. decreased by approximately 42 percent.<sup>3</sup> However, in the last three  
12 months of 2015 arrivals of children and families doubled from the year prior.<sup>4</sup> The forced  
13 displacement of these families and children is witnessed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in  
14 America (ELCA) through its historical and personal connections with churches in the region  
15 and calls us to action as the church.

17 Migration from Central America to the United States is not a new phenomenon, and the ELCA,  
18 synods, congregations, companion churches and service partners have been deeply engaged in  
19 efforts to protect, care for and welcome Central Americans seeking safety for decades. There  
20 has been a pattern of unaccompanied children from Mexico and Central America coming to the  
21 U.S. over the past decade. However, FY 2013 was the first year that more Central American  
22 children were apprehended along the U.S.-Mexico border than Mexican children. Between 2012  
23 and 2014, the number doubled each year. In addition, more mothers from Central America have  
24 been traveling with their children recently on the treacherous trip through Mexico, which had  
25 not been the case before. The forced displacement of these families and children hit close to  
26 home for the ELCA, which has historical and personal connections with them through our  
27 companions, synods and regional partners. The ELCA has also supported protection and social  
28 service work for Central Americans in the U.S. through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee  
29 Service (LIRS) and Lutheran social ministry organizations for decades.

<sup>1</sup> The strategy was adopted by the 2016 Churchwide Assembly.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL\\_Draft\\_CBP\\_FY14\\_Report\\_20141218.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FINAL_Draft_CBP_FY14_Report_20141218.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015" <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>.

<sup>4</sup> Solis, Dianne. "Another migration crisis may be looming," The Dallas Morning News. Jan. 14, 2016. <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20160113-another-migration-crisis-may-be-looming.ece>.

30 In 2014, ELCA leadership traveled to the U.S.-Mexico border to understand why vulnerable  
31 children and families were leaving their communities and to get a better sense of the challenges  
32 faced by those seeking protection in the U.S. This visit, and continued reports from LIRS on the  
33 situation, raised major concerns about lack of access to justice and the inhumane treatment  
34 that people seeking protection receive once in the U.S. The trip, followed by President Barack  
35 Obama's declaration that the number of children and families at the U.S. border was an "urgent  
36 humanitarian crisis," expanded the ELCA's understanding of the pressing need to walk  
37 alongside the children and families seeking protection.<sup>5</sup> This information also made evident the  
38 need to accompany these forcibly displaced people in their countries of origin as they make the  
39 treacherous journey to safety.

40

41 In the fall of 2014, an international Lutheran roundtable – in which the ELCA, The Lutheran  
42 Church–Missouri Synod and LIRS participated – brought together partners from the region,  
43 Lutheran leaders, U.S.-based service providers and experts on the subject. The roundtable was  
44 an opportunity to consider the situation in a holistic way, in its many dimensions, and to  
45 understand how efforts in the different regions and different spheres could better complement  
46 each other.

47

48 In February 2015, a delegation of ELCA staff visited Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala to  
49 hear firsthand why so many are forced to leave their communities and how our Lutheran  
50 companion churches are affected by these conditions. The delegation heard numerous stories of  
51 children and mothers fleeing due to **violence, poverty and lack of opportunities**. These  
52 testimonies confirmed the results from numerous studies, including those from the U.N. High  
53 Commissioner for Refugees<sup>6</sup> and the U.S. Government Accountability Office,<sup>7</sup> which cite brutal  
54 and targeted violence as a principal reason for migration out of Central America. Lutheran  
55 churches in the region have seen this violence worsen and frequently witness their young  
56 leaders being forced to flee their communities. Sometimes it results in internal displacement,  
57 while other times it results in children crossing borders to find safety.

58

59 *Angelica's<sup>8</sup> son migrated to the United States unaccompanied a few years ago after gang*  
60 *members wanted to recruit him. He had to stop attending school because he was being followed*  
61 *by gang members. She believes he was targeted because he did not have a criminal record and*  
62 *was young. "He was a child, and here they prefer children because they can do their bidding,*  
63 *and they have the possibility of not going to jail," she said. Because of her son's situation,*  
64 *Angelica made the difficult decision to support her child's escape from the country. "I would*

<sup>5</sup> [Katie Zezima](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-calls-wave-of-children-across-us-mexican-border-urgent-humanitarian-situation/2014/06/02/4d29df5e-ea8f-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e_story.html) and Ed O'Keefe. "Obama calls wave of children across U.S.-Mexican border an 'urgent humanitarian situation,'" Washington Post. June 2, 2014. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-calls-wave-of-children-across-us-mexican-border-urgent-humanitarian-situation/2014/06/02/4d29df5e-ea8f-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/obama-calls-wave-of-children-across-us-mexican-border-urgent-humanitarian-situation/2014/06/02/4d29df5e-ea8f-11e3-93d2-edd4be1f5d9e_story.html).

<sup>6</sup> <http://unhcrwashington.org/children>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668750.pdf>.

65 *rather have him in a place where he is going to be safe than to have him here, where a criminal*  
66 *would already have killed him.”*  
67

68 As part of the journey to understand the implications of this humanitarian crisis, ELCA staff  
69 traveled to Mexico in June 2015 after repeatedly hearing stories of the dangerous journey that  
70 awaits migrants traveling through the country. The delegation found that all migrants are  
71 vulnerable to violence – from kidnapping and extortion rings, human traffickers, police agents  
72 and private citizens – but women, children, people with disabilities and asylum seekers have  
73 special vulnerabilities.

74  
75 Entire families or mothers with their children continue to make the treacherous journey  
76 through Mexico in increased numbers despite being aware of its dangers. This is a reflection of  
77 the generalized violence and economic desperation they face in their home countries. Those  
78 fleeing dangerous or desperate situations today face increased border security in Mexico whose  
79 government now deports more than double the number of Central American children than they  
80 did in 2013.<sup>8</sup> Child protection, trafficking screening and the asylum system have stalled while  
81 immigration enforcement has increased at a rapid rate. The Georgetown Law Human Rights  
82 Institute published a study that confirms that many children go unscreened for trafficking or  
83 other protections, which leads to children being returned to dangerous situations.<sup>9</sup> If children  
84 ask for protection after being apprehended by immigration officials, they will spend months in  
85 Mexican detention centers while their case is reviewed.

86  
87 *Jennifer,<sup>1</sup> a psychiatrist with rare access to one of the detention centers in Mexico, spoke to the*  
88 *ELCA delegation about the conditions in these detention centers. “I could describe the migration*  
89 *stations as barren; they are places where their own structures create a depressive*  
90 *environment.” Although Mexican law calls for children to be put in the custody of their child*  
91 *protection agency, children remain in immigration detention for months. “The first day that I*  
92 *came into the station, I was overwhelmed and couldn’t process my experience at the time. I left*  
93 *with a heavy heart due to the conditions migrants face and the stories that women, boys and*  
94 *girls told me.”*  
95

96 Ensuring the safety and humane treatment of children and families does not stop at any  
97 geographical border. **As brothers and sisters in Christ, the ELCA is called to bear witness to**  
98 **the conditions affecting so many communities and work to find solutions that will**  
99 **acknowledge the humanity in all of God’s children.**

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<sup>8</sup> Secretaría de Gobernación (June, 2015). Estadísticas sobre Niñez migrante devuelta, 2010 – junio 2015. Centro de Estudios Migratorias de la Unidad de Política Migratoria.

<sup>9</sup> Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute Fact-Finding Project. “The Cost of Stemming the Tide: How Immigration Enforcement Practices in Southern Mexico Limit Migrant Children’s Access to International Protection.” April 13, 2015. [http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/centers-institutes/human-rights-institute/fact-finding/upload/HRI-Fact-Finding-Report-Stemming-the-Tide-Web-PDF\\_English.pdf](http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/centers-institutes/human-rights-institute/fact-finding/upload/HRI-Fact-Finding-Report-Stemming-the-Tide-Web-PDF_English.pdf).

100 The ELCA believes that the number of children and families fleeing Central America and Mexico  
101 is of such significance that all expressions of the church and its strategic partners are called to  
102 respond to this situation. As a global church, the ELCA has a local perspective of this migration  
103 situation, both in the U.S. and regionally in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras (also known  
104 as Central America’s Northern Triangle) and in Mexico. This presence across borders provides  
105 us a whole-picture assessment of the migration situation and enables us to anchor our  
106 response activities in the communities where the children originate and where they arrive.

107  
108 Working as “church together,” the ELCA will be children- and family-centered in this work and  
109 will engage across the faith-based community and with agencies and institutions whose  
110 missions align with our commitments. The ELCA will collaborate in an evolving and adaptable  
111 relationship with forcibly displaced children, their families and our partners while adopting the  
112 accompaniment values to build awareness around the issues facing unaccompanied and  
113 migrant children and to advocate domestically and internationally for these children and their  
114 families.

115  
116 In a holistic, whole church response that connects international and U.S. outcomes, the ELCA  
117 has developed this strategy based on the following **commitments**:

- 118 • **Uphold and guarantee basic human rights and safety of migrant children and**  
119 **their families;**
- 120 • **Address the root causes of migration in countries from Central America’s**  
121 **Northern Triangle and Mexico and the treatment of migrants in transit;**
- 122 • **Work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the**  
123 **U.S.; and**
- 124 • **Engage as a church body with all of its companions, affiliates and partners to**  
125 **respond to the migration situation as a whole context and to advocate for**  
126 **migrant children and their families.**

127  
128 In order to fulfill these commitments, the ELCA will work purposefully with companions and  
129 partners, including LIRS, through strategies for ministry with 1) those in the countries of origin,  
130 2) those in countries of transit and 3) those in the U.S., while focusing on three interdependent  
131 guiding principles: **accompaniment, awareness building and advocacy.**

## 133 2. THE CALL TO THE CHURCH FOR ENGAGEMENT

134  
135 In an initial social teaching statement in 1991, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,”  
136 the ELCA affirmed:

137  
138 The proclamation of the Gospel as the good news of God’s salvation given in the life,  
139 death, and resurrection of Jesus distinguishes the Church from all other communities.

140 The Gospel liberates from sin, death, and evil and motivates the Church to care for  
141 neighbor and the earth.

142  
143 The witness of this church in society flows from its identity as a community that lives  
144 from and for the Gospel. Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships  
145 and structures of society. It is in grateful response to God's grace in Jesus Christ that  
146 this church carries out its responsibility for the well-being of society and the  
147 environment.

148  
149 ...The Gospel does not allow the Church to accommodate to the ways of the world. The  
150 presence and promise of God's reign makes the church restless and discontented with  
151 the world's brokenness and violence. Acting for the sake of God's world requires  
152 resisting and struggling against the evils of the world.

153  
154 The ELCA's 1995 social statement, "For Peace in God's World," states:

155  
156 All humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), made for life in  
157 community—with God, with others, and with the rest of creation.

158  
159 ...Faith in the crucified and risen Lord strengthens us to persist even when God seems  
160 absent in a violent and unjust world, and when weariness and hopelessness threaten to  
161 overwhelm us.

162  
163 Through the cross of Christ, God calls us to serve the needs of our neighbor,  
164 especially of those groups and individuals who suffer and are vulnerable. The cross  
165 assures us that even in our vulnerability, suffering, and death, God's power is active  
166 through us.

167  
168 ...Care for the Uprooted. Tens of millions are refugees in foreign lands. At least as many  
169 are internally displaced. In unprecedented numbers people have had to flee their homes  
170 because of persecution or general violence. We support compassionate survival  
171 assistance for refugees and vigorous international protection for them. The world  
172 community has a responsibility to aid nations that receive refugees and to help change  
173 the situations from which they have fled. In our own country, we support a generous  
174 policy of welcome for refugees and immigrants. We pledge to continue our church's  
175 historic leadership in caring for refugees and immigrants.

176  
177 Because we understand each person to be made in God's image – without distinction based on  
178 race, ethnicity, gender, economic class or country of origin – and have heard God's call to serve  
179 the needs of our neighbor wherever she or he may be, we recognize ourselves to be in mission

180 and ministry together for the benefit of all God's people. (See also "Freed in Christ: Race,  
181 Ethnicity and Culture," 1993).

182

183 It is on this basis and the many previous actions taken by the ELCA (see list appended), that  
184 this church now pledges to continue, intensify and sustain its response in relation to the crisis  
185 faced by unaccompanied migrant children and families.

186

### 187 3. BACKGROUND

188

189 After the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the U.S. from Central America  
190 garnered large amounts of media and political attention during the summer of 2014, FY 2015  
191 saw a notable decrease (from 68,541 in FY 2014 to 39,970 in FY 2015) of unaccompanied  
192 children.<sup>10</sup> However, at the same time, there was a significant increase in border enforcement in  
193 Mexico and Central American countries, as well as a large increase in the number of internally  
194 displaced people. Though this change meant less U.S. media attention to the plight of  
195 unaccompanied children and families, ELCA partners in the region continued to alert the  
196 churchwide organization that conditions driving so many to be forcibly displaced had not  
197 changed. Through first-hand witness from ELCA companions, it became clear that the decrease  
198 of children arriving in the U.S. did not mean a decrease in the number of children who were  
199 forced to put their lives in harm's way to make the trip. During a time of incredible need, it  
200 became evident that the ELCA's holistic approach to addressing this displacement –  
201 encompassing their treatment in the U.S., in their countries of origin and in-transit – was  
202 critical to ensure the safety of children and families forced to migrate.

203

204 In February 2014, leaders in the ELCA traveled to Central America to understand the reasons  
205 behind the migration of many children and families and to get a sense of what repatriated  
206 children face after deportation. The findings, outlined in the ELCA Advocacy report, "[Our  
207 Communities in Crisis: A faithful look at the root causes of Central American forced  
208 displacement and the repatriation of children and families after the summer of 2014,](#)" highlight  
209 the complex and interrelated reasons forcing many to migrate and the critical need for  
210 protection of some of the most vulnerable people leaving.

211

212 Although general numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in the U.S. decreased in FY  
213 2015,<sup>11</sup> the Mexican government deported 12,511 Central American children from January to  
214 June 2015, a figure that stands in contrast with the 5,858 deported in 2012.<sup>12</sup> The conditions of

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. "Southwest Border Unaccompanied Alien Children Statistics FY 2015 n." <http://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-border-unaccompanied-children/fy-2015>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Secretaría de Gobernación (June, 2015). Estadísticas sobre Niñez migrante devuelta, 2010 – junio 2015. Centro de Estudios Migratorias de la Unidad de Política Migratoria.



215 violence driving mothers and children to flee continued or deteriorated even further. In El  
216 Salvador, for example, murder rates increased by approximately 70 percent in 2015 from the  
217 year before.<sup>13</sup> Throughout 2015, high numbers of mothers, children and vulnerable populations  
218 continued to be the victims of violence in their communities and throughout their journeys to  
219 safety. Regrettably, impunity, economic and social policies that provide no support, and the  
220 mitigation of environmental changes remain unaddressed.

221  
222 Violence is a critical factor in why many children and families are forced to leave their  
223 communities. This is highlighted not only by the fact that Northern Triangle countries are  
224 among the most violent in the world but also by being aware that from 2008 to 2014 the Office  
225 of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees documented a 1,185 percent increase in asylum  
226 applications from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala that were filed in Belize, Costa Rica,  
227 Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama.<sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> In 2014, they also found that approximately 58 percent of  
228 children making the treacherous journey to the U.S. need international protection, including  
229 asylum. However, access to the channels that could provide this protection is severely lacking in  
230 both Mexico and the U.S.

231  
232 Responses by the U.S. and Mexican governments to the increased levels of children and families  
233 seeking safety in the U.S. have been varied.<sup>16</sup> Detention enforcement strategies that target these  
234 populations have expanded since 2014. Most recently in the U.S., the Department of Homeland  
235 Security began operations to track and deport Central American families that arrived in the U.S.  
236 after Jan. 1, 2014.<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, a reported 5,000 new agents with military training were moved to  
237 the Mexico-Guatemala border in 2014 as part of Mexico's controversial Southern Border Plan  
238 (Plan Frontera Sur), a program supported by the U.S.<sup>18</sup> Along with enforcement measures,  
239 however, the Obama administration created a program for Central Americans who might  
240 qualify as refugees and be reunited with their families in the U.S. that will be expanded in  
241 2016.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Partlow, Joshua. "Why El Salvador became the hemisphere's murder capital." Washington Post. Jan. 5, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Cristina Eguizábal, Matthew C. Ingram, Karise M. Curtis, Aaron Korthuis, Eric L. Olson, Nicholas Phillips. "Crime and Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle: The U.S. Policy Responses are Helping, Hurting, and Can be Improved." Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

<sup>15</sup> U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees. "Children on the Run." <http://unhcrwashington.org/children>.

<sup>16</sup> For a deeper look into government responses, see below the subsections "Ministry with migrants in-transit" and "Ministry with migrants in the U.S."

<sup>17</sup> Department of Homeland Security. Statement by Secretary Jeh C. Johnson on Southwest border security. Jan. 4, 2016. <http://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/01/04/statement-secretary-jeh-c-johnson-southwest-border-security>.

<sup>18</sup> Langer, Ana. CIDH, preocupada por acciones vs migrantes. El Economista. <http://eleconomista.com.mx/sociedad/2015/06/10/cidh-preocupada-acciones-vs-migrantes>.

<sup>19</sup> Central American Minors Refugee/Parole Program – This program began accepting applications in December 2014. It allows parents in the U.S. with legal status to apply for refugee status or parole into the U.S. while their child remains in their country of origin.

242 Those who fear returning to their countries of origin and may want to apply for international  
243 protection do not have effective access to legal representation in Mexico or the U.S. Although  
244 many nonprofit organizations have rallied and are providing free or low-cost legal services, the  
245 levels remain inadequate. Making a case for international protection requires proving that an  
246 individual has fears grounded in the legal refugee definition,<sup>20</sup> which requires a careful  
247 articulation of the case and supporting evidence. Legally, Mexico and the U.S. have different  
248 definitions of “refugee” because Mexico is a signatory to a declaration that expands the basic  
249 definition to include generalized violence. Immigration law is highly complex, and asylum-  
250 seekers often do not carry with them documents that would prove their case. Without legal  
251 help, asylum cases fail at high rates. Lack of legal representation or appropriate systems result  
252 in children having to navigate complicated immigration systems alone or choosing not to  
253 pursue an asylum claim even if that means returning to danger.

254  
255 The arrival of children and families from Central America also resulted in a new look at U.S.  
256 policy toward Central American countries. The U.S. Congress in late 2015 allocated \$750 million  
257 for FY 2016, which included funding to support an international commission to fight impunity in  
258 Guatemala. However, concrete details about other parts of this plan, in relation to security,  
259 development and protection, are yet to be prepared by the State Department.

260  
261 Responses that fail to recognize the complex and humanitarian natures of the forced  
262 displacement of unaccompanied children and families put those vulnerable populations at risk.  
263 Women and children in poverty, the same population that is likely to be displaced, are the most  
264 trafficked population around the world.<sup>21</sup> In addition, these already vulnerable populations also  
265 face, among other things, kidnapping, murder, disappearance and sexual violence.<sup>22</sup>

266  
267 a. Ministry with uprooted people

268  
269 *The root causes of migration and safe repatriation of children and families*

270  
271 The conditions forcing children and families to flee their homes have complex social, political,  
272 and environmental layers. Multiple studies, including “Our Communities in Crisis,” cite extreme  
273 violence, poverty, lack of access to educational and employment opportunities, and  
274 environmental displacement, all of which are exacerbated by the failure of governments to

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<sup>20</sup> The legal definition of “refugee” in the 1951 Refugee Convention is: A person “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

<sup>21</sup> Phinney, Alison. “Trafficking of Women and Children for Sexual Exploitation in the Americas. Organization of American States and Pan American Health Organization.”

<sup>22</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. “Human Rights Situation of Refugee and Migrant Families and Unaccompanied Children in the United States of America.”

<http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Refugees-Migrants-US.pdf>.



275 address these issues, as the fundamental reasons behind the flight of so many young people in  
276 these countries. The reasons that citizens of the Northern Triangle countries flee their  
277 communities are varied and interconnected, leaving children and families especially vulnerable  
278 and in need of special attention and protection by their own governments and those that  
279 encounter them as they migrate. Although this document outlines important background on  
280 each root cause, it is incredibly important to understand that these issues are connected at  
281 multiple levels and that each person's decision to migrate might include all, one or a few, of the  
282 identified issues. In addition, it is important to highlight that gender, sexual orientation,  
283 economic status, age and other factors play an important role as each person experiences each  
284 of the root causes highlighted below.

285  
286 Numerous studies have shown the critical need for protection of unaccompanied children. In  
287 2014, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees found that at least 58 percent of unaccompanied  
288 children traveling from the Northern Triangle “were forcibly displaced because they suffered or  
289 faced harms that indicated a potential or actual need for international protection.”<sup>23</sup> A study by  
290 the American Immigration Council, focused only on Salvadoran children, shows that 59 percent  
291 of boys and 61 percent of girls listed crime, gang threats or violence as the reason for the  
292 migration.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. Government Accountability Office also found that violence  
293 plays a significant role in the forced displacement of children in interviews with government  
294 officials stationed in these countries.<sup>25</sup> The sharp increase in asylum applications to the U.S. and  
295 other countries illustrates the critical and immediate need for protection of those fleeing. Since  
296 2009, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize jointly documented a 712 percent  
297 increase in the number of asylum applications from Northern Triangle countries.<sup>26</sup>

298

299 Among the reasons children and families leave their communities are:

300

301 ● Extreme violence and insecurity

302

303 The protracted insecurity in the Northern Triangle goes beyond widely reported gang violence  
304 and seeps into all facets of community life. This small region is home to four of the most violent  
305 cities in the world, and San Pedro Sula in Honduras has the unfortunate standing as the world's  
306 homicide capital. The different actors feeding and creating the astonishing level of violence are  
307 known and categorized differently in each country. Generally, people in the region are faced  
308 with violence from organized crime groups (including gangs, narco-traffickers and non-affiliated  
309 criminal groups or individuals); individuals contracted to kill, extort or mug; family members (in

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<sup>23</sup> [http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/1\\_UAC\\_Children%20On%20the%20Run\\_Executive%20Summary.pdf](http://www.unhcrwashington.org/sites/default/files/1_UAC_Children%20On%20the%20Run_Executive%20Summary.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/no\\_childhood\\_here\\_why\\_central\\_american\\_children\\_are\\_fleeing\\_their\\_homes\\_final.pdf](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/no_childhood_here_why_central_american_children_are_fleeing_their_homes_final.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/668749.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.wola.org/commentary/3\\_myths\\_about\\_central\\_american\\_migration\\_to\\_the\\_us](http://www.wola.org/commentary/3_myths_about_central_american_migration_to_the_us).

310 the case of domestic and gender-based violence); and the police and military. The Salvadoran  
311 Lutheran Church has seen multiple cases of young people who are threatened and must flee  
312 with only a few hours to prepare as well as entire families having to leave their communities.  
313

314 This violence is experienced by local communities not only as direct threats but also in the  
315 form of extortion. Business owners or young people who have to cross gang territory to go to  
316 work or attend school must pay a “fee” to ensure their safety. These “fees” are so common that  
317 local media openly report on how the fees affect the population. The Honduran newspaper, La  
318 Prensa, reported that the “war tax,” the term used in the country to describe these fees, weighs  
319 heavily on taxi and bus drivers who must budget for them as they would for new tires or fuel.<sup>27</sup>  
320 This violence stifles economic growth by making people with successful business targets,  
321 making it difficult for people in poverty to move about or start a business due to added costs.  
322 Due to the sophisticated ways criminal organizations extract money from those in the Northern  
323 Triangle attempting to make their lives better, viewing poverty and lack of opportunities without  
324 a lens that addresses the violence in these communities, leaves many at risk.  
325

326 A common response from governments in Central America to organized intimidation and  
327 violence has been increased militarization and an “iron fist” approach. However, over reliance  
328 on this approach, in which the government threatens to respond to violent actors with violence,  
329 only perpetuates the systemic societal issues that lead to additional brutal violence.<sup>28</sup> This  
330 became evident, for example, in El Salvador, where gangs forced a stoppage of public  
331 transportation by killing drivers who defied their instructions after the government took a hard  
332 line approach to gangs.<sup>29</sup>  
333

### 334 ● Poverty and lack of opportunities

335

336 Northern Triangle countries have significant rates of poverty and most of their citizens have  
337 little access to services. Official statistics in Honduras show that more than half of the  
338 population lives below the poverty line and over 1 million people are undernourished.<sup>30</sup> In El

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<sup>27</sup> La Prensa. 5 de September de 2013. “L 20 millones pagan al año por ‘impuesto de guerra.”  
[http://www.laprensa.hn/especiales/381808-273/l-20-millones-pagan-al-a%C3%B1o-por-impuesto-de-guerra.](http://www.laprensa.hn/especiales/381808-273/l-20-millones-pagan-al-a%C3%B1o-por-impuesto-de-guerra)

<sup>28</sup> Council on Hemispheric Affairs. May 22, 2014. “Hernandez’s ‘Mano Dura’: An Enduring Barrier to Reform.” Council on Hemispheric Affairs: <http://www.coha.org/hernandezs-mano-dura-an-enduring-barrier-to-reform/>

<sup>29</sup>[http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/07/150729\\_america\\_latina\\_el\\_salvador\\_maras\\_pandillas\\_par\\_o\\_transporte\\_aw.](http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/07/150729_america_latina_el_salvador_maras_pandillas_par_o_transporte_aw)

<sup>30</sup> U.N. World Food Programme. (s.f.). WFP Honduras: Brief. U.N. World Food Programme: [http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp269059.pdf.](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp269059.pdf)

339 Salvador, 29.65 percent of the population lives in abject poverty.<sup>31</sup> Over half of Guatemalans live  
340 in acute poverty, and an alarming 49.8 percent suffer from chronic malnutrition.<sup>32</sup>

341  
342 Poverty affects the citizens of each Central American country in various ways. In Guatemala, 40  
343 percent of the population self-identifies as indigenous,<sup>33</sup> a population that has been and  
344 continues to be marginalized and has less access to services, in addition to a complicated  
345 relationship with government institutions.<sup>34</sup> In all three countries poverty affects young people  
346 the most. In Honduras, roughly half of all unemployed people in the country are less than 24  
347 years old.<sup>35</sup> Although programs exist in theory for people who are unemployed or  
348 underemployed in these areas, such programs either suffer from woeful underfunding or have  
349 not succeeded in being effective.

350  
351 ● Environmental issues

352  
353 Drought and coffee rust, an aggressive fungal disease that kills coffee leaves, have contributed  
354 to additional internal displacement and migration of rural populations in parts of Central  
355 America. The drought has affected more than 2 million people in El Salvador, Guatemala,  
356 Honduras and Nicaragua, while the coffee rust has affected another 2 million.<sup>36</sup> The World Food  
357 Programme of the United Nations found that 5 to 12 percent of people affected by drought had  
358 at least one family member who migrated in search of job opportunities.<sup>37</sup> Environmental  
359 displacement is often characterized by individuals in terms of poverty or another push factor. It  
360 is also important to mention that industrial projects and mining activities displace many people  
361 from their communities.

362  
363 In critical moments, U.S. foreign policy and interactions with Northern Triangle countries have  
364 had a devastating impact on living conditions for people in these countries. These conditions  
365 have been caused in part by devastating civil wars and political shifts in the region in the 1980s,

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<sup>31</sup> U.N. World Food Programme. (s.f.). WFP El Salvador: Brief. U.N. World Food Programme:  
[http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp2\\_72160.pdf](http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp2_72160.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. May 1, 2015. The World Factbook: Guatemala.  
<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gt.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala. (Feb. 26, 2014). Caracterización: República de Guatemala.  
Instituto Nacional de Estadística Guatemala.  
<http://www.ine.gob.gt/sistema/uploads/2014/02/26/L5pNHMXzxy5FFWmk9NHCrK9x7E5Qqvvy.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Hall, G., & Patrinos, H. A. (2005). "Latin America's Indigenous Peoples. Finance  
and Development."

<sup>35</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Resumen Ejecutivo: XLIV Encuesta Permanente de Hogares de  
Propósitos Múltiples- EPHPM- Mayo 2013.  
<http://www.ine.gob.hn/images/Productos%20ine/encuesta%20de%20hogares/EPHPM%20mayo%202013/Resumen%20ejecutivo%20mayo%202013.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> World Food Programme. Dec. 12, 2014. Central America Drought: Situation Report #2.  
<http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/Public/documents/ep/WFP270873.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

366 both influenced by U.S. foreign policy, and the mass deportation of migrants with gang  
367 affiliations from the U.S. to Central America in the 1990s.

368  
369

### 370 **The ELCA response**

371

372 In response to the recent surge in unaccompanied and migrant children and families from  
373 Central America, the ELCA and its partners have implemented or strengthened ministries to  
374 assist Central American migrant children and their families in their countries of origin.

375

#### 376 **Honduras:**

- 377 • An emergency grant was made to the Mennonite Social Action Committee (CASM) in  
378 Honduras for two to three months of humanitarian and psychological assistance to  
379 returning child migrants during the repatriation process in San Pedro Sula.
- 380 • Project grants went to CASM and The Lutheran World Federation World Service program  
381 for community-based educational and economic initiatives with repatriated children, youth  
382 and their families in the two geographic areas of Honduras – one urban, the other rural –  
383 with the country’s highest incidences of child migration.

384

#### 385 **El Salvador:**

- 386 • A project grant was made to the Salvadoran Lutheran Church to accompany and provide  
387 key resources for the economic reinsertion of children, adolescents and their families after  
388 they have been apprehended and sent back from Mexico and the U.S.

389

#### 390 **b. Ministry with migrants in-transit**

391

392 Children and families from Central America are seeking refuge in all neighboring countries, not  
393 just the U.S. As a result, the lines between sending countries and in-transit countries are  
394 blurred. Mexico, for example, is both a sending country – occupying the top position in the list  
395 of countries whose unaccompanied minors arrive in the U.S. until recently – and an in-transit  
396 country for many children and families traveling to the U.S. Countries surrounding the  
397 Northern Triangle also have felt the impact of forced displacement. The U.N. High  
398 Commissioner for Refugees reports that there has been an increase of approximately 1,200  
399 percent in asylum applications of people from the Northern Triangle in countries other than the  
400 U.S. since 2008.<sup>38</sup> Migrants in transit face drug traffickers, corrupt law enforcement agents, and  
401 miles of dangerous terrain. With support from the U.S., all three countries from the Northern  
402 Triangle have increased border and migration enforcement without also ensuring that those in  
403 fear of returning to their country have access to protection.

404

---

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication. July 29, 2015.

405 Human trafficking, including labor, sex and other kinds of exploitation, remains a critical  
406 problem affecting the Americas.<sup>39</sup> Human trafficking is the third largest illicit industry in Latin  
407 America, with women, children, undocumented migrants and indigenous people being especially  
408 vulnerable.<sup>40 41</sup> According to figures from the U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime’s “Global Report  
409 on Trafficking in Persons,” 40 percent of trafficking victims in North America, Central America  
410 and the Caribbean are subjected to sexual exploitation while 55 percent are forced into labor.  
411 Because unaccompanied children and women face a greater risk, laws and judicial structures  
412 that actively screen all vulnerable populations are an important tool to prevent trafficking.  
413

414 The ELCA delegation to Mexico in June 2015 met with a Guatemalan woman who was forced  
415 into debt bondage working at restaurants after having agreed to travel to Mexico under the  
416 (false) promise of work. Although Mexican authorities are aware of this practice, these women  
417 are not viewed as victims of human trafficking, and the restaurants continue to operate with  
418 impunity.  
419

420 Although people from Central America are being forcibly displaced to many countries, the  
421 principal country deporting children back to Central America is Mexico. Children and families  
422 in Mexico face a dangerous journey that begins with the need to avoid police and migration  
423 officials that might use excessive force or bribe them. As security increases along the  
424 traditional migration routes, children and families are forced to find alternatives that conceal  
425 them and their stories and put them in even more danger. Stories of disappeared or dead  
426 migrants are incredibly common in Mexico<sup>42</sup> with families never knowing what happened to  
427 their loved ones. The ELCA delegation met with several young migrants who had been  
428 kidnapped for three days and had been made to contact their families to pay a fee for their  
429 release. Thus, migrants have become a source of income for criminal organizations, money  
430 transfer companies, officials asking for bribes and individuals charging them to use their  
431 services. In addition, for many migrants there are disincentives to applying for protection due to  
432 the long months in detention and little support from any governmental entity.  
433

434 Mexico relies heavily on the detention of all migrants, including those seeking asylum,  
435 unaccompanied children and families. Unaccompanied children and families are detained in  
436 immigration stations in poor conditions despite international and national laws outlining their  
437 release to, at least, shelters in custody of the Mexican child-protection agency. Those who fear  
438 returning to their countries of origin and may want to apply for international protection do not  
439 have access to legal representation. Lack of legal representation results in children having to  
440 cope with complicated immigration systems alone and, if unsuccessful, having to return to the

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<sup>39</sup> [https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP\\_2014\\_full\\_report.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/GLOTIP_2014_full_report.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/latin-america-success-unodc-human-trafficking>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33200.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/160-Migrants-Feared-Dead-in-Mexico-after-Being-Attacked-20150618-0001.html>.

441 country they fled. Immigration agents, who are largely unskilled in child welfare, are tasked  
442 with protecting the best interests of children, which, unsurprisingly, results in children  
443 becoming at risk.<sup>43</sup>

444  
445 In all three Northern Triangle countries, the treatment of migrants in-transit and the lack of  
446 enforcement of policies that ensure children's best interests was a concern of the ELCA leaders  
447 after conversations with government officials, civil society organizations and migrants. The  
448 ELCA delegation verified media accounts that unaccompanied children are sent in buses from  
449 Mexico with adult men and families, with only the bus driver present and no personnel  
450 designated to ensure the children's safety. This continues to occur despite the existence of  
451 regional agreements and international guidelines that call for the contrary, including the 2009  
452 Regional Agreement for the Attention of Unaccompanied Migrant Children and Adolescents in  
453 Case of Repatriation. The 2009 repatriation agreement includes a mandate to return children  
454 without requiring a long and tiring trip, in order to ensure their wellbeing. However, the ELCA  
455 delegation found several instances in which this agreement was not honored by the Mexican  
456 government. Repatriation centers in Honduras and El Salvador reported children traveling for  
457 up to 11 hours without a break. Governmental institutions and civil society organizations both  
458 articulated instances in which they have attempted to improve coordination with Mexican  
459 government officials but were met with little interest.

460  
461 c. Ministry with migrants in the U.S.

462  
463 The United States has a long history of protecting vulnerable people seeking safety and calling  
464 on other countries to protect those fleeing danger. However, children and families forcibly  
465 displaced from Central America encounter detention, lack of appropriate legal representation,  
466 and the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will be returned to a dangerous situation.  
467 Family unification and the safety of children are basic values that the U.S. government must  
468 uphold in their immigration policies.

469  
470 In response to the arrival of unaccompanied children and families from Central America, the  
471 administration expanded the use of family detention. A ruling in June 2015 stated that family  
472 detention violates a 1997 legal agreement that sets standards for the treatment of children in  
473 immigration detention, but the U.S. government has continued to push back against it.<sup>44</sup>  
474 Although alternatives to detention exist that are much more cost effective and humane ways to  
475 enforce U.S. immigration laws, Congress still requires 34,000 beds be available for migrant  
476 detention every day in addition to the 3,000 spaces that hold families.<sup>45</sup> Faith, human and civil

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<sup>43</sup> Georgetown Law Human Rights Institute Fact-Finding Project. op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> American Immigration Lawyers Association. Documents relating to Flores v. Reno settlement agreement on minors in immigration custody.

<sup>45</sup> <http://lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Family-Detention-Backgrounder-with-Flores-Updates-11.16.15-Final.pdf>.



477 rights organizations advocating to improve the immigration detention system face private  
478 companies spending millions of dollars pushing policies that keep people in detention.<sup>46</sup>

479  
480 Children and asylum seekers in the U.S. also face multiple barriers attempting to tell their  
481 stories before an immigration judge. Asylum seekers, including children, do not have a right to  
482 legal representation and, therefore, are not provided lawyers to help, which has resulted in  
483 young children representing themselves in court. Making a case for international protection  
484 requires proving that an individual has been targeted and the country of origin cannot protect  
485 them, usually requiring paperwork only available in the countries of origin. Although children  
486 are some of the most vulnerable populations, they often are not properly screened for  
487 trafficking or other humanitarian protections. In the U.S., Mexican children can be screened  
488 only by Department of Homeland Security officials, most of whom do not have child welfare  
489 expertise. As a result, many children who may qualify for protection do not have access to a  
490 system that will evaluate their needs.<sup>47</sup>

491  
492 In response to the recent increase in the number of unaccompanied and migrant children from  
493 Central America entering the United States, the ELCA and its partners have implemented or  
494 strengthened ministries to assist Central American migrant children and their families who  
495 arrive in the U.S.

496  
497 **Synods:**  
498 Several ELCA synods and their congregations have started ministries, held events or joined with  
499 partners in their communities to assist unaccompanied and migrant children who arrive in the  
500 United States. Activities have included donation drives, fundraisers to send proceeds to a  
501 Lutheran social ministry organization or other faith-based partner, and working with Lutheran  
502 Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) or other faith-based organizations to advocate for and  
503 provide a place of welcome to the children and families arriving in the U.S.

504  
505 Much of the synod activity has taken place in synods that are in companion relationships with a  
506 country in the Northern Triangle, synods that are on the border of the U.S. and Mexico, and in  
507 synods where there is a high number of children being placed after being processed.

508  
509 The Global Mission Companion Synod program has brought nine synods into deep relationships  
510 with churches in the Northern Triangle countries. These relationships have provided  
511 considerable efforts to walk with migrants in a variety of ways, including through advocacy and  
512 direct accompaniment of migrants through the Welcoming Congregations and Guardian Angels  
513 programs.

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/04/28/how-for-profit-prisons-have-become-the-biggest-lobby-no-one-is-talking-about/>.

<sup>47</sup> "Unaccompanied Alien Children: Actions Needed to Ensure Children Receive Required Care in DHS Custody." July 14, 2015. U.S. Government Accountability Office. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-15-521>.

514 **Lutheran Disaster Response:**

515 Lutheran Disaster Response first started working with unaccompanied and migrant children in  
516 the summer of 2014. Representatives of Lutheran Disaster Response have participated in site  
517 visits in Texas, California, El Salvador and Honduras to learn about the situation and to  
518 determine potential responses. Several grants have been disbursed to Lutheran Disaster  
519 Response social ministry organization affiliates for work with unaccompanied and migrant  
520 children entering the U.S. from Central America.

521

522 Work and projects supported by Lutheran Disaster Response include:

- 523 • Grant to Upbring (formerly Lutheran Social Services of the South) for existing children's  
524 shelter, construction of new shelter, support for two transitional foster care programs,  
525 one community manager
- 526 • Grant to Lutheran Social Services of New York for legal services and clothing for  
527 unaccompanied migrant children
- 528 • Grant to Southwest California Synod for intern for Guardian Angels program
- 529 • Grant to Church World Service for legal services in the Miami area
- 530 • Grant to LIRS for International Roundtable, National Mobilization of Congregations,  
531 community outreach to parents of Central American children, and resource guide on  
532 family reunification

533

534 **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service:**

535 LIRS is working through more than 30 partners and providing millions of dollars to serve more  
536 than 20,000 Central American children and their families in the United States. It also has  
537 provided leadership in advocacy to advance more effective protection solutions, to roll back  
538 family detention, and to expand legal services. The long-standing and deeply committed  
539 partnership between the ELCA and LIRS is acknowledged with gratitude on both sides, as  
540 together they have been able to make a much greater impact on the lives of migrants and  
541 refugees in the United States.

542

543 Key accomplishments in this partnership include:

- 544 • Provided transitional or long-term foster care for unaccompanied children without  
545 family in the U.S.
- 546 • Provided post release services (holistic case management) to assist unaccompanied  
547 children and their families with needed services, addressed identified risk factors, and  
548 provided extensive referrals including legal services.
- 549 • Provided additional services to recently immigrated youth and families using a holistic  
550 case management, support group and trauma-informed mental health service model.
- 551 • Advocates for the Central American Minor Affidavit of Relationship Program, which  
552 allows qualifying families in the U.S. to apply for their children to come with legal status,  
553 and for an alternative to detention for families.

- 554 • Shared stories of our brothers and sisters, of children in need, and of communities that  
555 welcome; [“The Journey”](#) video produced by LIRS in cooperation with the ELCA and a  
556 [study guide](#) highlights the human story.
- 557 • Facilitated conversations and trainings on best practices with the aim of finding stable,  
558 resource-sustainable housing for immigrant families by engaging church partners,  
559 exploring finance tools, and identifying potential areas of collaboration.
- 560 • Makes maps of immigration legal services available through the LIRS network as a  
561 resource for referral and connection.

562

563 **Lutheran Services in America:**

564 Several agencies of Lutheran Services in America, an alliance of the ELCA and The Lutheran  
565 Church–Missouri Synod, are engaged in services with unaccompanied and migrant children.  
566 The agencies involved in this work are in areas where high numbers of children are being  
567 placed after being processed. Agencies providing services for unaccompanied and migrant  
568 children and examples of their engagement include:

- 569 • Upbring:
  - 570 2 transitional foster care programs
  - 571 2 Office of Refugee Resettlement children’s shelters
  - 572 1 community manager to liaison between a shelter in McAllen, Texas, and others
  - 573 involved in the work in McAllen
- 574 • Lutheran Social Services of New York:
  - 575 Legal services
  - 576 Office of Refugee Resettlement children’s shelter
- 577 • Ascentria (formerly Lutheran Social Services of New England):
  - 578 Free and low-cost legal services
- 579 • Lutheran Social Services of National Capital Area:
  - 580 Foster care

581

582 **Welcoming Congregations:**

583 In obedience to Matthew 25:35, Welcoming Congregations agree to welcome migrant children  
584 and families, listen to their stories with respect to receive the divine blessings that they bring,  
585 pray for and share the gospel, provide emotional and spiritual support, accompany migrants to  
586 access local and institutional services as needed and advocate for justice for and with migrant  
587 families and children.

588

589 **Guardian Angels:**

590 The Guardian Angels program is a court-watch program started by the Southwest California  
591 Synod. English-speaking and Spanish-speaking volunteers go to court for immigration hearings.  
592 English-speaking volunteers sit in the courtroom to take notes and document proceedings to  
593 watch for inconsistencies. Spanish-speaking volunteers meet with families outside the  
594 courtroom to pray together, help answer questions, provide information on legal assistance, and

595 provide emotional support. The Guardian Angels program was replicated and implemented at  
596 the ELCA churchwide organization in Chicago.

597  
598 In December 2015, the Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, presiding bishop of the ELCA, visited the  
599 Chicago Immigration Court of the Executive Office for Immigration Review to witness the  
600 Guardian Angels program at work. After her visit, she reaffirmed the ELCA's commitment to  
601 work as "church together" to bear witness and respond to the significant number of children  
602 and families fleeing Central America and Mexico.

603  
604

## 605 4. STRATEGY

606

607 While the ELCA, its synods, its companion churches, its partner agencies and other related  
608 groups have been responding to the situation in the countries of origin, in the countries of  
609 transit and in the United States, it is now proposed that a churchwide initiative be undertaken  
610 that better coordinates and intensifies this work.

611

### 612 I. Strategy for ministry with those in the countries of origin

613

#### 614 a. Accompaniment

615 1. To accompany companions in Central America and Mexico who have identified the root  
616 causes of thousands of children and families fleeing their communities and have developed  
617 programs addressing them:

618 – Global Mission will continue to fund three programs that have been identified to  
619 address root causes through community-based economic development in El Salvador  
620 and Honduras, will support the development of similar proposals for 2016, and provide  
621 funding; and

622 – Global Mission will financially support programs of emergency relocation assistance  
623 for children and families displaced by generalized violence in El Salvador and Honduras.

624 2. To accompany companions in Central America and Mexico, who are actively responding to  
625 the immediate and long-term needs of returned migrants in their communities:

626 – Global Mission will continue to support emergency responses on behalf of returnees  
627 and those displaced by violence in El Salvador and Honduras and will add programs in  
628 Guatemala with similar objectives.

629 3. To enhance the capacity of companions to develop strategic alliances with organizations in  
630 the countries of origin and with outside organizations that are working on the issues of  
631 migration, detention, deportation, repatriation and reinsertion in Mexico and the Northern  
632 Triangle and to develop plans of action:

633 – Global Mission will extend new relationships in the countries in the Northern Triangle  
634 and will identify new relationships in Mexico for strategic alliances on behalf of  
635 unaccompanied and migrant children.

636 **b. Awareness building**

- 637 1. To mobilize and enhance the participation of the nine synods and constituents in  
638 companionship with churches in the Northern Triangle of Central America:
- 639 – Global Mission and, where possible, synods will keep leaders updated on the latest  
640 developments in the region with respect to migration through quarterly conference calls  
641 between companions, Global Mission and synods; and
  - 642 – Global Mission and, where possible, synods will offer root causes immersion  
643 experiences – in collaboration with the ELCA Advocacy Office and, where feasible,  
644 AMEXTRA<sup>48</sup>, LWF, Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance and civil society – and  
645 delegations to assist ELCA members in understanding the issues.
- 646 2. To enhance awareness of the situation:
- 647 – ELCA Advocacy, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will pull together  
648 supporting resources (including the creation of a webpage), documents and materials to  
649 assist ELCA members, partners and the general public in understanding and advocating  
650 on the situation;
  - 651 – Global Mission and Congregational and Synodical Mission will focus on four principle  
652 areas of engagement: protection, advocacy, representation, and opportunities; and
  - 653 – ELCA Advocacy and Global Mission, in consultation with LIRS, will further investigate  
654 the challenges of Mexican children fleeing to the U.S. (who are treated differently under  
655 U.S. law) and create awareness in congregations.

656  
657 **c. Advocacy**

- 658 1. To address the root causes of migration:
- 659 – a comprehensive ELCA advocacy strategy will be developed, in consultation with key  
660 companions and partners, which will outline needed U.S. policy changes that, among  
661 other things, addresses the root causes of migration;
  - 662 – a comprehensive strategy will be developed to bring together, where possible, ELCA  
663 synods in relationship with the Northern Triangle churches, ethnic-specific ministries,  
664 partners, the Immigration Ready Bench, synods on the Mexico border and other  
665 communities serving migrants to advocate for fair and compassionate migration  
666 policies;
  - 667 – ELCA Advocacy will increase the participation of actors in the countries of origin in  
668 decision-making in Washington, D.C., such as through pastoral letters and the creation  
669 of alliances; and
  - 670 – ELCA Advocacy will develop positions and an advocacy strategy to advocate for the  
671 treatment of all migrant children and families in the U.S., including Mexican children  
672 treated differently under U.S. law. This strategy will benefit from Lutheran and faith

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<sup>48</sup> The Mexican Association for Rural and Urban Transformation (AMEXTRA) is a non-profit organization that generates transformative solutions to the poverty that many families face living in rural and urban areas of Mexico. See also: <http://www.amextra.org/en/>.

673 partners in the region, including Lutheran World Relief and The Lutheran World  
674 Federation.

675

676 **II. Strategy for ministry with those in countries of transit**

677

678 **a. Accompaniment**

679 1. To enhance the capacity of companions to develop strategic alliances with ecumenical and  
680 inter-faith partners as well as organizations working on the issues of migration and  
681 deportations in Mexico, focusing on its southern border with Guatemala, and other countries of  
682 transit to develop plans of action:

683 – Global Mission will provide resources for companions as they engage in strategic  
684 alliances with faith-based and other civil society in the Northern Triangle and Mexico on  
685 the migration route;

686 – Young Adults in Global Mission will continue to accompany programs in Mexico that  
687 work with Central American migrants in transit through Mexico with the possibility of  
688 expanding relationships on the southern border of Mexico:

689 – Global Mission will seek companion relationships with the Lutheran Church in Mexico:  
690 and

691 – Global Mission, ELCA Advocacy, and Congregational and Synodical Mission will  
692 provide resources to build capacity among companions for the programmatic response  
693 of the church, including addressing root causes, expanding relationships with  
694 organizations with similar objectives, and strengthening alliances.

695

696 **b. Awareness building**

697 1. To mobilize and enhance the participation of the nine synods and constituents in  
698 companionship with churches in the Northern Triangle of Central America:

699 – Global Mission, and where possible synods, will keep leaders updated on the latest  
700 developments in the region with respect to migration through quarterly conference calls  
701 between companions, Global Mission and synods: and

702 – Global Mission and, where possible, synods will offer immersion experiences focusing  
703 on the root causes and treatment of migrants in-transit – in collaboration with the ELCA  
704 Advocacy Office, companions and, where feasible, AMEXTRA – and delegations to assist  
705 ELCA members and leadership in understanding the issues.

706 2. To enhance awareness of the situation:

707 – ELCA Advocacy, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will pull together  
708 supporting resources (including the creation of a webpage), documents and materials to  
709 assist ELCA members, partners and the general public in understanding and advocating  
710 for children;

711 – ELCA Advocacy will build awareness of different governmental positions on  
712 definitions of migrants and refugees benefiting from the expertise of partners such as  
713 LIRS and the LWF;



714 – ELCA Advocacy will work with all ministries in the church to raise awareness for  
715 implementation of protocols for adequate treatment of children in Mexico, whether  
716 accompanied or unaccompanied, using national and international resources like the  
717 Inter-American Commission for Human Rights; and

718 – Global Mission, Congregational and Synodical Mission, and ELCA Advocacy will ask  
719 those with migration stories to teach us and share their stories.

720

721 **c. Advocacy**

722 1. To address the situation of migrants in transit we will advocate for laws and policies that  
723 protect children and people fleeing persecution,

724 – A comprehensive ELCA advocacy strategy, in consultation with key companions and  
725 partners, will be developed which will outline needed U.S. policy changes that, among  
726 other things, addresses the situation of migrants in transit (This strategy must have a  
727 focus on the southern border of Mexico and have the flexibility to change focus  
728 depending on need);

729 – The comprehensive strategy will be developed to bring together, where possible, ELCA  
730 synods in relationship with the Northern Triangle churches, ethnic-specific ministries,  
731 partners, the Immigration Ready Bench, synods on the Mexico border and other  
732 communities serving migrants to advocate for fair and compassionate migration  
733 policies;

734 – The ELCA Advocacy office will encourage local advocacy by companions as well as  
735 solidarity advocacy by international companions (e.g. ELCA) in a coordinated and  
736 collaborative way, using an accompaniment approach and methodology;

737 --The Lutheran Office for World Community will advocate with regard to the treatment  
738 of Central American children in transit in migration forums with governments, promote  
739 the ratification of relevant human rights treaties (including the Convention on the Rights  
740 of the Child and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All  
741 Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families) and engage in monitoring and  
742 reporting with respect to states parties' compliance with those treaties; and

743 – ELCA Advocacy will build a collection of resources for synods in companion  
744 relationships.

745

746 **III. Strategy for ministry with those in the U.S.**

747

748 **a. Accompaniment**

749 1. To help ensure that children and families have appropriate legal representation:

750 – Global Mission, the Office of the Secretary, and Congregational and Synodical Mission  
751 will work with the ELCA Attorneys Association and, as appropriate, LIRS to identify a  
752 group interested in focusing on immigration (similar to Immigration Ready Bench)

753 where lawyers will be trained to handle unaccompanied and migrant children's asylum  
754 cases and will connect migrants to pro bono lawyers through partners, first in areas

- 755 where the largest number of cases exist (Florida, New York and Illinois) and expanding  
756 to other areas where synods are organized around the issue, building on mapping and  
757 existing referral networks; and
- 758 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will expand the Guardian  
759 Angels program and will accompany synods and national churches that want to and  
760 have the capacity to carry out the program.
- 761 2. To assist children who do not have a sponsor:
- 762 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will support LIRS and social ministry  
763 organizations in recruiting foster parents and placing children in foster care with a  
764 family.
- 765 3. To ensure that children and families are better assisted and accompanied:
- 766 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will encourage  
767 congregations to foster personal relationships between migrants and non-migrants to  
768 better understand the multi-faceted challenges faced by migrants;
  - 769 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will urge congregations to  
770 become Welcoming Congregations for migrants and volunteers in collaboration with  
771 LIRS and social ministry organizations;
  - 772 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will encourage congregations to develop service  
773 centers that focus on social services that need to be provided and will create “welcome  
774 kits” that provide resources about local organizations that offer services for migrants  
775 and how to find local legal aid, in collaboration with LIRS and social ministry  
776 organizations;
  - 777 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will encourage social ministry organizations to  
778 take steps to ensure that children will have access to “wrap-around services”<sup>49</sup> during  
779 their time in the U.S.; and
  - 780 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will urge congregations to work with LIRS,  
781 which has developed a national program to organize visitation services for those in  
782 detention and assist those recently released from detention.
- 783 4. To facilitate the formation of and participate in a web of church and community support:
- 784 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will encourage Lutheran Services in America,  
785 LIRS, social ministry organizations and colleges to assist migrants by providing  
786 thorough case management services to help migrants realize their assets as well as  
787 possible resources available to them in the community drawing upon the expertise of  
788 groups such as La Frontera;
  - 789 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will urge congregations,  
790 through the Welcoming Congregations program, to initiate community committees to  
791 assist migrants with services and resources to advance local integration into  
792 communities;

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<sup>49</sup> Such services would include education, life-skills training, legal assistance, vocational training, safety and health care (physical, psychological, emotional and pastoral/spiritual).

- 793 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will accompany congregations (specifically  
794 ethnic-specific ministries) that are already serving migrant families – both Lutheran and  
795 ecumenical; and  
796 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will connect communities  
797 that are already serving migrant populations with communities that wish to.  
798

799 **b. Awareness building**

800 1. To help children and families connect with an ELCA congregation or a full communion  
801 partner congregation:

- 802 – Lutheran Disaster Response and Global Mission, with companion synods and other  
803 synods where possible, will promote and expand the Guardian Angel and Welcoming  
804 Congregation programs;  
805 – The ELCA as a church will continue to partner with LIRS in its programs with this  
806 same objective; and  
807 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will emphasize the mobilization of ethnic-  
808 specific ministries toward this objective.

809 2. To better understand the root causes of migration:

- 810 – immersion programs and tours for ELCA members, colleges, universities, seminaries  
811 and other networks and agencies that are engaged in work around this issue will be  
812 conducted in collaboration with companions in Central America and Mexico with a  
813 capacity to receive such visits;

814 – Congregational and Synodical Mission, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will  
815 develop toolkits for congregational use that include testimonies, theological reflections,  
816 myths and facts, prayers and elements for worship services, etc.;

817 – Global Mission will provide resources so that the experiences of other countries in  
818 addressing issues of migrants and refugees may be shared with congregations and  
819 others;

820 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will seek to enhance synod  
821 to synod exchange and peer to peer programmatic engagements, create volunteer  
822 programs along the border for congregations, link with the efforts of Women of the  
823 ELCA, lift up human trafficking issues, and suggest other actions by congregations, such  
824 as writing Christmas cards for detainees, distributing Spanish Bibles, holding Mother’s  
825 Day activities, etc., in collaboration with LIRS; and

826 – ELCA Advocacy, Global Mission, and Marketing and Communications will pull together  
827 supporting resources (including the Latino blog and the creation of an inclusive  
828 webpage that contains links to our partners), to assist ELCA members, partners and the  
829 general public in understanding and advocating for the well-being of all children and  
830 families.

831 3. To better understand the journey of migrants:

- 832 – Congregational and Synodical Mission, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will  
833 raise awareness about the various aspects of their journey, e.g. detention, release, family

834 reunification, legal proceedings, naturalization for repatriation, etc., collaborating with  
835 entities such as Upbring, La Frontera and the LIRS network;  
836 – ELCA Advocacy and others will provide resources, such as from LIRS, to help  
837 congregational members work through divisive issues relating to migrants in  
838 congregational gatherings;  
839 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will work with the Lutheran Association of  
840 Hispanic Ministries to engage and build awareness; and  
841 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will support partners, such as LIRS, to create  
842 public awareness about the annual Refugee Sunday.

843 4. To reach children and youth:

844 – Mission Advancement, in collaboration with other units, will create a vacation Bible  
845 school curriculum on migrant issues; and  
846 – Mission Advancement will create social media campaigns around the issue to engage  
847 the younger generations across racial, economic and cultural groups.

848 5. To mobilize and enhance the participation of the nine synods and constituents in  
849 companionship with churches in the northern triangle of Central America:

850 – Synods will be encouraged to promote the Welcoming Congregations program to  
851 increase ELCA members understanding of the migration issue and prepare them for  
852 participation, with a heightened sense of awareness, in advocacy issues; and  
853 – Mission Advancement will provide resources and other information to synod  
854 communicators so information gets to all ELCA members.

855

856 **c. Advocacy**

857 1. To enhance advocacy with migrants, the ELCA will collaborate with U.S. partners to advocate  
858 for fair and compassionate policies toward vulnerable migrants, children and families so that:

859 – A comprehensive ELCA advocacy strategy will be developed, in consultation with key  
860 companions and partners, which will outline needed U.S. policy changes that, among  
861 other things, addresses the U.S. situation, both nationally and on the state level;  
862 – The comprehensive strategy will be developed to bring together, where possible, ELCA  
863 synods in relationship with the Northern Triangle churches, ethnic-specific ministries,  
864 partners, the Immigration Ready Bench, state public policy offices, synods on the Mexico  
865 border and other communities serving migrants to advocate for fair and compassionate  
866 migration policies;  
867 – Synods will be encouraged to promote the involvement in advocacy issues of U.S.  
868 voters who are active in the Welcoming Congregations programs; and  
869 – Synods and individuals will be encouraged to advocate for appropriate government  
870 funding.

871 2. To enhance advocacy efforts:

872 – ELCA Advocacy and Mission Advancement will provide language that will assist ELCA  
873 members and staff in talking about migration in an inclusive way that addresses divisive

874 issues but unifies everyone in faith. (This will be informed by materials already  
875 produced by the ELCA such as the “Our Communities in Crisis” report.);  
876 – Congregational and Synodical Mission will place emphasis on supporting, learning  
877 from and joining communities affected by migration in congregations in their leadership  
878 on this issue;  
879 – Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission will provide sufficient  
880 staffing to implement advocacy strategies around this issue to ensure there are enough  
881 people to carry out the work;  
882 – ELCA Advocacy will include collaborating with national partners that are interested in  
883 immigration issues;  
884 – ELCA Advocacy and the Lutheran Office of World Community will explore  
885 opportunities for advocacy around these issues with full communion partners;  
886 – Congregational and Synodical Mission, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will  
887 use key recommendations from “Our Communities in Crisis” in creating materials for  
888 advocacy;  
889 – ELCA Advocacy and Global Mission will provide advocacy information and action  
890 items to synod communicators to get such information to all ELCA members; and  
891 – Congregational and Synodical Mission, Global Mission and Mission Advancement will  
892 make sure youth and young adult networks have access to advocacy information  
893 through social media tools.

#### 894 895 **IV. Coordination and funding**

896  
897 While a number of aspects of the strategy, especially those already underway will be able to  
898 continue to use existing staff and funding, new work may require additional resources and  
899 some current work may require a longer-term commitment or adjustments to current staff  
900 responsibilities. Based on prior experience with similar churchwide strategies and to enhance  
901 efficiency and effectiveness in implementing the strategy, several coordination groups would be  
902 desirable.

903  
904 It is recommended that:

- 905 1. A small staff team be designated within the churchwide organization to maintain day-  
906 to-day coordination and follow-up on the strategy;
- 907 2. A somewhat larger coordination group be established that could meet semi-annually  
908 (using telecommunications technology as appropriate for at least one of the meetings)  
909 and would include all relevant churchwide units, as well as representatives of  
910 companions and partners that have been identified in the strategy, including LIRS, the  
911 companion churches, LWF, social ministry organizations and possibly others;
- 912 3. Consideration be given to inclusion of programmatic aspects related to the  
913 implementation of the strategy in future iterations of the churchwide operational plan;

- 914 4. Churchwide units review their current budgets to ascertain what adjustments will be  
915 necessary for FY 2016 and beyond to continue current commitments identified in the  
916 strategy; and
- 917 5. Churchwide units review their current budgets to ascertain what adjustments will be  
918 necessary for FY 2016 and beyond to undertake new programmatic aspects of this  
919 strategy. Such a review should seek to identify those financial sources necessary to  
920 manage and carry out program activities.



921	<b>APPENDIX 1:</b>	
922		
923	<b>Actions by the ELCA in relation to immigration and Central America</b>	
924		
925	<u>1989</u>	
926	Central American Refugees	Assembly resolution
927	A Churchwide Blueprint for Action on Central America	
928	and Caribbean Concerns	Church Council resolution
929		
930	<u>1993</u>	
931	“Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture”	
932	(social statement)	Assembly resolution
933		
934	<u>1998</u>	
935	“Message on Immigration” (social message)	Church Council resolution
936		
937	<u>1999</u>	
938	“Message on Immigration”	Assembly resolution
939	Youth Violence	Assembly resolution
940		
941	<u>2002</u>	
942	Refugees	Church Council resolution
943		
944	<u>2003</u>	
945	Immigrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers	Assembly resolution
946		
947	<u>2005</u>	
948	Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Immigrants	Assembly resolution
949		
950	<u>2009</u>	
951	Comprehensive Immigration Reform	Assembly resolution
952	Toward Compassionate, Just, and Wise	
953	Immigration Reform	Church Council resolution
954		
955	<u>2011</u>	
956	Dream Act	Assembly resolution
957	Immigrant Welcome	Assembly resolution
958		
959	<u>2013</u>	
960	Immigration Reform	Assembly resolution
961	Uniting American Families Act	Assembly resolution

962	Immigration Detention	Assembly resolution
963	“The Church and Criminal Justice:	
964	Hearing the Cries” (social statement)	Assembly resolution