



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service

LEADER'S GUIDE FOR DISCUSSING

LOCKED IN A BOX



Dear Discussion Leader,

I want to thank you for your willingness to screen "Locked In A Box" and lead a discussion in your church, school or community group.

As Americans, we need opportunities and safe places to have challenging conversations and to learn together.

The United States has long been a beacon of welcome, and an international symbol of justice and freedom. Our Lutheran faith tradition also calls us to welcome the stranger and seek mercy and justice for the sojourners residing in our midst.

Every day, people fleeing violence, persecution and economic hardship are forced to make harrowing journeys to seek safety.

Compared to countries close to conflict like Jordan or Lebanon, or European countries like Germany, the United States receives relatively few people at our borders seeking asylum and protection. However, instead of safety and due process, many are literally "locked in a box".

In 2016, on any given day, the United States government held approximately 42,000 migrants in more than 250 facilities where individuals and families are incarcerated for civil violations of immigration law. Asylum seekers, survivors of torture and victims of human trafficking and violent crimes are among those detained, locked in a box indefinitely, while their immigration case is processed and the very real potential of deportation hangs over them.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and our supporters are national leaders in advocating for the reform of the U.S. immigration detention system. We believe that a community-based alternative to detention is a more humane and effective way to treat those caught up in our immigration enforcement system.

However, we recognize that attitudes towards immigration enforcement can also be a deeply personal and divisive one.

Members of your congregation may have spent time in immigration detention, while others may rely on enforcement-related employment as their vocation and to provide for their family. There are certainly no easy solutions.

As Lutherans, we stand firm in our commitment to love our neighbors with compassion, while opening our hearts and our homes. In Hebrew's 13:2-3, Jesus reminds us, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."

We hope this film and discussion create the opportunity to explore the issue of immigration detention from multiple perspectives, find common areas of concern, and identify opportunities for collective, faithful and compassionate action.

However you and your congregation choose to become involved, we value your partnership in our mission of welcome. We will be walking alongside and praying for you each step of the way.

Yours in faith,

Linda Hartke

President and CEO

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service



PREPARING FOR DISCUSSION

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is so grateful for the investment of your time and energy in hosting a screening of the film “Locked in a Box” and having a discussion about one of the most critical social justice issues of our time.

“Locked in a Box” is an educational video that shines a light on the realities and impacts of the U.S. immigration detention system through lifting up the voices and experiences of former detainees and visitation ministry volunteers. LIRS produced “Locked in a Box” in collaboration with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Lutheran Social Services of Georgia in 2015 to educate the public on the harmful effects of our immigration detention system, illustrate how communities are responding in faith and love, and to invite people to join in our ministry.

As a facilitator, you are tasked with setting the stage for a respectful dialogue and thoughtful reflection. Here are a few tips to help ensure the conversation runs smoothly:

- Preparation is key. You don’t need to be an expert, however watching the film and reviewing the discussion guide in advance will help you feel more comfortable with the material. Be sure to reach out to LIRS at visitation@lirs.org with any questions.
- Set a date well in advance and advertise widely. Consider including an announcement in your church bulletin. Identify an accessible venue with a large screen and comfortable seating.
- Download the film onto your computer or media player ahead of time to avoid the technical difficulties that come with streaming online.
- Identify a note taker in advance, tasked with recording the conversation and the agreed upon next steps.



Blessings on your discussion! If you have any further questions or concerns, please email visitation@lirs.org or call 410-230-2772.



SUGGESTED AGENDA (60-90 mins)

Part 1: Introductions (15 mins)

1. Open with a prayer
2. Introduce LIRS and the film

Take a few moments to introduce LIRS and the film, and to contextualize the U.S. immigration detention system. Ask participants to stay after the screening for a brief discussion and Q&A.

Sample talking points:

- LIRS is a national organization established by Lutheran churches in 1939 to serve uprooted people and promote welcome for migrants and refugees. In partnership with Lutheran congregations and more than 60 grassroots, legal and social service partners across the country, LIRS has welcomed more than 500,000 refugees, unaccompanied minors, refugee children and migrants impacted by immigration detention.
- Immigration detention is the process of detaining non-citizens (men, women and families) in jails or jail-like settings while their immigration case is processed. In 2016, on any given day, the United States government held approximately 42,000 migrants in more than 250 detention facilities. Detention separates families and inflicts unnecessary pain and suffering on immigrants and their families.
- LIRS is committed to providing hope, strength and a voice for the detained, through supporting the creation and expansion of immigration detention visitation ministries.
- LIRS produced *Locked in a Box* in collaboration with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance and Lutheran Social Services of Georgia in 2015 to educate the public on the harmful effects of our immigration detention system, illustrate how communities are responding in faith and love, and to invite people to join in our ministry.
- The 18 minute film shines light on the U.S.'s broken immigration detention system through lifting up the voices of individuals formerly detained in the Stewart Detention Center in Lumpkin, GA, and highlighting the experiences of the volunteers who visit them. *Locked in a Box* will help your congregation explore the rich connection between our faith and the Biblical command to welcome the stranger and visit those in prison, while also offering next steps for your congregation to engage in faith-filled action.



Part 2: Screen the film (20 mins)

For more information on LIRS, immigration detention and the film, please visit lirs.org/lockedinabox and lirs.org/visitation.

LOCKED IN A BOX



Part 3: Discussion (15-30 mins)

Facilitate a brief debrief following the film to reflect on new information learned and address lingering questions.

Possible guiding questions/prompts include:

- What image, story or quote stood out to you?
- Please share something that surprised you or something new that you learned from watching the film.
- How, if at all, has your personal view of immigration changed or shifted?
- While watching the film and reflecting on the stories shared, can you make any connections to scripture?
- What are the benefits of visitation ministry from the perspective of the volunteer visitor and the detainee?
- What questions do you still have?

If you have additional time, consider exploring 1-2 of the following topics in greater depth.

Topic 1: Forces driving people to flee their homelands and seek asylum

In the film, we heard from two former detainees who came to the United States to seek asylum.

- Why did they decide to come to the United States?
- What are some other reasons individuals and/or families might make the dangerous journey? Are there any larger forces and/or systems driving migration?
- How do the migration stories in the film compare to the stories, rhetoric and images in the media?
- What is your own family's immigration story? How is it similar and/or different from the stories in the film?
- Do the stories in the film parallel any migration stories found in the Bible? If so, which story?



Topic 2: U.S. Immigration Detention System

- What was your initial impression of the Stewart Detention Center and other detention facilities featured in the film? What were you surprised to see, hear or learn?
- Did you notice any violations of human rights or human dignity?
- Immigration detention can be a divisive issue. Can you think of any arguments for and against detaining individuals in prison-like conditions? Can you think of any alternatives?
- How does the Bible challenge us to treat those in prison?

Topic 3: Visitation Ministry

During the film, both volunteer visitors and former detainees spoke about the impact of visitation ministry.

- What are the benefits of visitation ministry from the perspective of the volunteer visitor and the detainee?
- What do you imagine is required of volunteer visitors? What might be challenging?
- How might engaging in visitation ministry be an expression of your faith?
- How do you define hospitality? How is hospitality portrayed in the Bible? How have you or do you hope to show hospitality to migrants and refugees?



Part 4: Action Planning/Conclusion (10-25 mins)

Challenge your group to reflect on the impact of immigration detention on their community and brainstorm ways to get involved. We would love to hear from you! Please complete the brief survey found at LIRS.org/lockedinabox to share how the event went and to outline any additional support LIRS can offer.

1. How has our community been impacted by immigration detention?
2. What can you do to support individuals and families impacted by immigration detention? What can we do as a community? Remember to think creatively!
3. From the list below, identify 1-2 activities your group would be interested most in pursuing. Draft a follow-up plan with 1-2 next steps.
4. Visit LIRS.org/lockedinabox to complete and submit the brief Action Plan outlining your commitment, next steps and request for support.
5. Close with prayer over the lessons learned, over all those involved, and decisions moving forward.

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION WITH LIRS

Individual Actions:

- Learn more about immigration detention through reading "Bring the Sky" LIRS' five part detention visitation guide found at lirs.org/visitation.
- Share what you learned with family, friends and members of your community.
- Pray for individuals, families and communities impacted by immigration detention.
- Become an advocate:
 - Sign-up for the LIRS Stand for Welcome eAlerts at <http://lirs.org/act/campaigns/sfw/>
 - Call your local representatives. Visit the LIRS Action Center for sample scripts.
 - Write an op-ed or letter to the editor.
- Volunteer:
 - Be a pen pal to someone in detention (lirs.org/act/visitation/pen-pal-ministry/).
 - Host someone in your home following their release from detention.
 - Visit someone in immigration detention (lirs.org/visitation).

Community Actions:

- Join or launch an immigration detention visitation ministry (lirs.org/visitation).
- Host a Know Your Rights or Family Safety Planning workshop at your congregation to inform undocumented immigrants of their rights and provide guidance on what to do if there is a raid or other enforcement action that separates family members (<http://lirs.org/be-not-afraid/>).
- Organize a prayer vigil outside of a local immigration detention center.
- Host Refugee Sunday at your congregation (lirs.org/refugeesunday).
- Contact local representatives to schedule an in-person meeting, or participate in a town hall during the next recess.
- Participate in LIRS' Hope for the Holidays campaign (lirs.org/hopefortheholidays).
- Raise money to help replenish a detainee's commissary account or cover the steep cost of bond.
- Serve as a community presence and human rights monitor by attending immigration court hearings.
- Invite a former refugee or detained immigrant to speak in your congregation on a Sunday morning.

For more information on ways to get involved, please email visitation@lirs.org.