

Leader's Guide for Discussing **THE JOURNEY**

a video about the Lutheran response to the 2014 border crisis and ongoing immigration concerns for unaccompanied children.



Dear Discussion Leader,

The migration of children and families from Central America to the United States is nothing new. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) has been serving Central American migrants since the 1980s. In 2005, when our current program for unaccompanied immigrant children was established, a few thousand children were arriving alone from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Over the past few years we watched the numbers climb steadily and we advocated for improvements to the system of care. But what occurred in the summer of 2014, the unprecedented numbers of children arriving, could no longer be overlooked by the nation.

Like me, you saw the images on your television and read stories in newspapers: border stations over-run and unprepared, children and teenagers arriving, some having walked and traveled 1,200 miles—all without parents or guardians. I myself went to the border and was shocked by what I saw. I talked with many of the young people and heard their tales. They came because they were fleeing violence, gangs, traffickers, and other atrocities. They were running for their lives.

I am glad to report that Lutherans responded with energy and great humanity. In fact, Lutheran and Catholic agencies were the leading voice, working with the U.S. government and advocating for these children and these families. LIRS and our network of service providers worked tirelessly to provide foster care, family reunification, and other services. That work continues today. Though the media has moved on and the migration may have slowed, the need for that same care has not ended.

In Matthew 25:35-36, Jesus encourages us to care for even the least of these, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” We are called to care for the stranger, the foreigner, the least of these who, as the parable for Matthew 25 tells us, embody Christ.

I know that you share my desire that all of God’s children have the basics of life—with safety from horrific violence at the top of the list. I hope that this short video, *The Journey*, will touch your heart, spark a helpful conversation, and encourage more people to pray for and work for justice.

Yours in Faith,

Linda Hartke
CEO, LIRS



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PREPARING FOR DISCUSSION

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service is grateful for the investment of your time and energy in hosting a discussion about one of the most critical social justice issues of our time. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with the video and the topic. Downloading the video to your computer or media player makes for optimal viewing rather than streaming online. A conducive setting for conversation is a circle or other non-formal arrangement to get people talking to each other. Prepare yourself for a potentially challenging, but very important, conversation with your brothers and sisters in faith. We hope the ideas below and background information on subsequent pages will guide your discussion to a deep and meaningful place.

Contact Matt Herzberg at LIRS for more information and resources. Mherzberg@lirs.org 410-230-2794

Suggested Agenda

1. Open with prayer and commitment to open dialogue

Before the conversation starts, ask participants to keep the following in mind. Post in room if helpful.

- Immigration is a complex issue,
- There are strongly held, differing opinions among us,
- We will seek to understand how best to serve, and
- We will speak respectfully about both immigrants and those who enforce immigration law.

2. Ground the conversation in God's Word with a short devotion

Devotions could center on passages such as Matthew 25: 35-36, the story of Moses in Exodus chapter two, or the story of Ruth and Naomi. You could also focus on real life stories, viewed through the eyes of faith. Mike Rinehart, Bishop of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod ELCA and member of the LIRS board of directors, offered this reflection after visiting the Texas-Mexico border:

“Look into their eyes. These are not cartels smuggling drugs across the border. These are children seeking asylum. They have been battered and mistreated. Who, with a heart, could deny them due process under the law and protection? When a ten-year-old shows up at the border seeking safety, at the very least they need the representation of a lawyer who knows the law to watch out for him.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was once a refugee. He and his family crossed the border into Egypt fleeing for life under the threat of violence by Herod. Jesus welcomed children into his arms when the disciples wanted to turn them away. He said, “Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do unto me.” And, “When I was a stranger you welcomed me.” He told stories like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, in which a victim is shown kindness by a stranger, and neglected by those who should be caregivers.

As it turns out, kindness to strangers is a frequently recurring theme in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. Antiquity bounds with stories of visitations by divine visitors, who come just to test our hearts. In these stories of both Jewish and pagan background, mortals are judged on how they treat these divine visitors disguised as poor ordinary strangers. Fear teaches us to see everyone as an enemy. Love teaches us to embrace strangers, even enemies.

The Christian community has a special calling to welcome strangers and care for the poor.”

Bishop Mike Rinehart, as published on the LIRS Blog August 2014

3. Set up the video

Share the background information provided, invite people to recall what they heard in the news in the summer of 2014 about this issue, and ask what they are hearing in the news now.



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LIRS created this video to help answer questions about the Central American crisis, illustrate how Lutherans are responding, and to invite people to continue responding with us.

4. Watch The Journey

5. Hand out Background information sheet and briefly highlight some points you think are significant for your group to know.

6. Discuss The Journey

Guide your group in a discussion around the video. Use some or all of these questions to prompt reflection from the group.

- If you were a mother or father living in Central America, and feared for your child's life, would you send them on The Journey? Why or why not? What other options might you have?
- Imagine that you were sitting next to some of the children riding the train. What would you have told them about the United States and challenges and opportunities that awaited them here?
- What kinds of things do the children you know have in common with these children, and what are the most significant differences?
- If you could ask anyone in this film a question, who would you ask, and what would you ask them?
- What did you learn from The Journey? What surprised you?
- Two months from now, what do you think you will remember from this video and why?

7. Discuss Faithful Responses

Challenge your group to prayerfully consider all the ways we can share the love of Christ with those making this difficult journey. Write options where people can see them to prompt more ideas.

- How is God calling us to respond?
- What can you do as an individual to respond?
- How are we as a congregation or group equipped to serve?

Set next steps appropriate for your group such as committing to at least one action. And tell LIRS! We'd love to learn how God is calling you to respond.

8. Close with prayer over the lessons learned, over all those involved, and decisions moving forward.

Ways to Take Action with LIRS

Pray

- For people in detention
- For all the detention center(s) in your area and all those whose lives are affected by its presence.

Give the Gift of Family

- Visit lirs.org/fostercare to find out more about how you could potentially provide a safe and comfortable home for unaccompanied children from Central America and across the world.

Volunteer

- Bring the love of Christ to people in detention through visitation ministry. Visit <http://lirs.org/act/visitation/> to find a visitation ministry near you or to start your own using the Bring the Sky guide also accessible from this page.
- If a do not live near a detention center, consider becoming a pen pal of someone in detention. Email visitation@lirs.org to get started.

Stay Informed

- Sign up for Stand for Welcome eAlerts

