

Sharing the Good News

from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



June 6, 2021, Volume 5

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

The plight of migrants and refugees around the world is frequently in the news. Since the beginning of 2021, the numbers of people arriving at the U.S. southern border has increased dramatically as those who have been detained indefinitely in refugee camps hoped that with a new administration in power, their plight might be dealt with. Sheer numbers around the world are appalling, and how those displaced people are treated in the areas in which they seek safety and resettlement is often equally appalling. Today for the first time since World War II there are more than 60 million people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, violence, persecution, and climate change. That's roughly twice the entire population of Texas! Yet Lutherans, while challenged, are not discouraged. Through **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS)** we continue to meet refugees and those displaced by violence with God's love.

In partnership with Lutheran congregations and Lutheran social ministry organizations, **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service** has helped resettle more than a half million people since 1939, welcoming nearly 400,000 to the United States. This ongoing partnership and work is driven by God's love for all people and a vision for congregations to be welcoming and generous centers for mission and ministry. The work of the ELCA through **LIRS** includes responding to people caught in conflict, facing persecution, advocating for their needs and interests, helping people access resources for basic human needs, working with foster care programs for minors, legal assistance, developing new and innovative service programs and partnerships, and much more.

Because United States governmental programs have in recent years become less welcoming, at times even hostile, toward those who seek refuge here, the workload of agencies like **LIRS** has decidedly increased. For several years immigration detention in the U.S. became "big business," with money, rather than humane treatment, being the bottom line. As much as 70% of federal funding for dealing with refugees went to private companies to incarcerate immigrants. It will take a long time for the majority currently in power in Washington to turn that trend and restaff processing centers and other agencies to deal with so many seeking refuge. The result leaves asylum-seekers with very few rights and little recourse. **LIRS** works with other groups to support these individuals both during and following detention.

We are a church that does God's work in the world and in local communities pursuing justice, peace and human dignity for and with all people.

During the next several weeks, this column will continue to discuss the work of **Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service**, focusing on history and specific programs. For more information go to elca.org/ourwork/relief and development.



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