



## Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Greetings siblings in Christ of the Montana Synod,

It has been a difficult year for all of us. Despite restrictive policy changes and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, LIRS has remained committed to our biblical mandate to welcome the stranger.

In the last year:

- 2,782 refugees were welcomed through LIRS affiliates in 23 states.
- 440 unaccompanied migrant children were served through our foster care services and placed in loving homes during and after legal proceedings.
- 9,500 asylum seekers received Safe Release and Post Release services at our Southern border.

Even in these darkest of days, thousands of people from across the country partnered with LIRS to express their support for migrants and refugees through our annual programs and advocacy efforts. The compassion of our neighbors gives us hope, and we are proud to report that in the last year:

- 16,000 holiday cards and 500 gifts were sent to migrant children and families in detention through our annual Hope for the Holidays program.
- More than 600 ELCA clergy and lay leaders signed a letter drafted by the ELCA and LIRS urging Congress to work collaboratively to advance comprehensive immigration legislation.
- LIRS' work was featured on national platforms like *NPR*, the *Washington Post*, *Center for American Progress*, *Religion News Service*, *The Christian Century*, and *Sojourners*.

We are especially grateful for the congregations and communities in the Montana Synod who have continued their generous and prayerful support. We could not do this work without you.

Now, that work is expanding. In the coming year, the U.S. expects to welcome 125,000 refugees to our shores. LIRS is actively looking to congregations and faith leaders to partner with us in ways big and small, including donations, volunteer work, and participation in our annual programming. **Emmaus: Congregational Discernment Network** launches this spring for congregations to discern how they can best walk alongside refugees and migrants in their community, and **Stand Up Speak Up**, coming in Pentecost, is a new interfaith prayer vigil focused on advocacy. We encourage you to stay up to date on opportunities for individual and congregational engagement at the **LIRS Action Center**, found at [www.lirsconnect.org/get\\_involved](http://www.lirsconnect.org/get_involved)

With your support, we will continue to live our mission: witnessing to God's love for all people, standing with and advocating for migrants and refugees, and transforming communities through ministries of service and justice. Thank you for accompanying LIRS and our migrant and refugee siblings through 2021 and beyond. God bless you.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Witte".

Dr. Kristin Witte  
Director for Outreach

## Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service 2019 Annual Report

*“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” Ephesians 2: 19*

### Rich Legacy Shapes Current Work

In 2019, LIRS marked its 80<sup>th</sup> year of welcome in the name of Christ. Luther speaks of the "left hand kingdom of God" as our involvement in God's care for the world. The Board of LIRS affirmed its commitment to be on the front lines of public engagement with the world, as it welcomed a new President and CEO, Krish O'Mara Vignarajah.

Through partnership with community based social services, LIRS resettled refugees; placed unaccompanied children and youth in foster care; arranged for asylum seekers in immigration detention to receive comfort from pen pals and visitors; assisted congregations and individuals to understand current immigration issues and discern ways to get involved.

Respite and Welcome Centers in Phoenix and Albuquerque received asylum seekers as they were released from detention visitation and provided one- or two-nights shelter, food, clothing, and coordination of travel to their final destination.

“Hope for the Holidays” card campaign resulted in congregations and individuals submitting 14,000 cards and \$30,000 for gifts for children spending the Christmas holidays in detention with their families.

On World Refugee Day, 10 Migrant and Refugee Leadership Academy alums joined 5 ELCA synod bishops in making 40 visits to members of congress to ask for higher refugee admissions and more funding to help refugees make a good start in the United States.

### Blessing of Partnership Empowers Us to Continue

We are living through the largest refugee crisis the world has ever seen. Extreme weather, poverty and violence are pushing people in various parts of the world to leave their homes in search of food, safety, and welcome. In these challenging times, *LIRS relies on congregations to support our work; and offers assistance as people of faith discern their call to welcome the stranger*

Congregations prayed and preached and learned about migrants and refugees through the wealth of resources available on the LIRS Migrant and Refugee Sunday web page.

(<https://www.lirs.org/migrant-refugee-sunday/>)

Lutherans called and wrote letters to Members of Congress urging higher refugee admissions and proper care for children at our southern border

Congregations proclaimed God’s presence to families and children held in immigration detention by sending Christmas cards and money for gifts through LIRS’ Hope for the Holidays campaign; and volunteered as pen pals or detention visitors.

Lutherans wrestled with God’s call to welcome all as members of the household of God through “Entertaining Angels” training events, and discernment of their role in a sanctuary church body

Lutherans supported the work of LIRS with offerings and individual donations.

As members of the household of God, we encourage you and your congregation to explore how you will welcome the stranger in the coming year, and to contact LIRS for information and resources to assist you.