

## FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH IS AN ELCA AMMPARO WELCOMING CHURCH AND HAS GUARDIAN ANGELS



There is always a human face to immigration. There is always a story that tells why a person or a family becomes a resident in a foreign land, flees their homeland because of persecution or general violence, or seeks asylum. Human faces and emotional stories of immigration are as fresh as those we hear from new arrivals to Lincoln and as familiar as the biblical stories of Abraham, the Levitical laws, and Joseph, Mary and Jesus becoming refugees because of Herod's angry genocide.

In the early years after the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) formed, there was the recognition that as a national church, we care for people who have been uprooted and support compassionate survival assistance for refugees. Our care is a response to Jesus' self-identifying call to care for 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..." (Matthew 25:35).

In 2014, at the height of the public awareness of the global human migration crisis, several ELCA synods decided to partner and declare a joint commitment to welcome and minister to migrant guests, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Through their efforts, a network was formed of ELCA congregations who wanted to play a role in being a safe religious community and work together as Welcoming Congregations: welcoming migrant families in worship, listening respectfully to their stories, praying for and sharing the gospel, providing emotional, pastoral and spiritual support, helping facilitate local resources and services as needed, staying up-to-date on current situation of migrant children/families, and advocating for justice for and with migrants, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

The commitment of those synods in collaboration with the national ELCA offices, created the AMMPARO strategy (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunity).

In March of 2017, First Lutheran Church joined the network of Welcoming Congregation because our welcoming is grounded in scripture, it is consistent with our Welcome Statement adopted in 2015 (below), and we already have a history of being a church home for refugees and immigrants. Joining the network is us being who we already are, just in a publicly recognized way.

In January of 2018, ten members of First Lutheran Church were trained as Guardian Angels, which is a program that provides spiritual and physical accompaniment to unaccompanied migrant children

and families through their immigration court process. Guardian Angels also monitor and document the court process, especially if there are violations of the process and if requested, they can provide information about local resources.

You can also learn more about the AMMPARO initiative and the Guardian Angel Program at <http://www.elca.org/ammparo>. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Pastor Justin Eller at [pastorjustin@flclincoln.org](mailto:pastorjustin@flclincoln.org).

**About First Lutheran Church:** We believe that each person is a unique creation of God and, through grace, is a child of God. The people of First Lutheran Church welcome all because God welcomes all, without regard for race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity or relationship status, physical or mental challenges, imprisonment, addictions, socio-economic circumstances, or anything else that too often divides us. First Lutheran Church is a spiritual community that celebrates the gifts of God that can empower us to engage in the struggles of life, to care for each other, and to serve Christ where we work and live. Our unity is in Christ.