

AMMPARO

Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

ELCA AMMPARO Quarterly Report

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BORDER IMMERSION: ELCA Chinese pastors in San Diego

By Mary Campbell, Director, ELCA AMMPARO

AMMPARO and Asia Pacific Islands desk sponsored a border immersion experience in San Diego for ELCA Chinese pastors and leaders from October 7-10, 2024. The group, all immigrants over the last 30 years, was not only able to share their immigration stories with each other but prayed at the border wall and a border crossing station for justice for vulnerable new arrivals. Bishop Dave Nagler led a bible study on 1 Kings 17 in which we talked about the gifts of migrants, environmental factors that cause them to leave and corruption. Participants visited Casa Cornelia where they learned about the current context at the Tijuana/San Diego border, learned some basics on asylum law and heard about the amazing legal work being done by the staff at Casa Cornelia. A visit to Survivors of Torture's San Diego office helped participants to learn of the great psychological needs



A group photo by the border wall in San Diego



Praying by the border wall

faced by new migrants. A visit to Chicano Park to view the beautiful murals created by the Chicano community to demonstrate their resilience as a community gave participants the chance to reflect on their experience and begin to think about their congregational action plans.



The most important result is that participants shared their migrant ministry work with each other and AMMPARO and left with new plans and connections to strengthen that work. Plans for a similar border immersion in the fall, 2025 are underway.

AMMPARO in the Americas:

By Stephen Deal, Central America Regional Representative

The common thread running through this report are the impacts of three elections that recently took place in Latin America and the upcoming U.S. elections on Nov. 5.

A New President and Congress in Mexico

On June 2, national elections were held in Mexico. Claudia Sheinbaum, the candidate of the Morena party, was elected president and her party won a commanding majority in both chambers of the Mexican Congress. Weeks prior to the June 2 elections, the Working Group on Migration Policy (GTPM), together with more than 20 civil society allies in Mexico and Central America, began working on migration policy recommendations for presentation to the transition teams of the new Mexican government – in both the executive and legislative branches. These policy recommendations – grouped into 11 key topics – were completed in July.

Our AMMPARO companions in Central America assumed the lead responsibility for the chapter entitled “Improvements in Mexico’s Foreign Policy on Migration & Asylum”. These recommended improvements focus on respect for the human rights of Central American migrants who pass through or settle in Mexico and on regional initiatives that would be more effective in addressing the principal drivers of emigration in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. Following Pres. Sheinbaum’s inauguration on Oct. 1, efforts began in earnest to identify and approach key actors in both the Executive & Legislative branches of the Mexican government who will have a role in deciding and implementing Mexico’s immigration policies for the next six years.

Efforts of Panama’s New President to Close Its Southern Border

After taking office on July 1, Pres. Jose Raul Molino announced measures to close its southern border to in-transit migrants, particularly those who have been transiting from the Colombian side of the Darien Gap into Panama. With financial help from the U.S. government, the Panamanian government announced plans to step up deportation flights, a crackdown that has been difficult to implement given the large number of migrants fleeing countries whose governments aren’t willing to accept deportation flights from Panama. That diplomatic complication, plus the less-than-anticipated U.S. aid to cover the costs of stepped-up flights (reported at \$6 million), has meant that the actual number of deportation flights has been less than originally projected.

On Oct. 25, Pres. Molino signed a new executive decree which establishes stiff fines (as much as \$1000/person or

more) for all migrants who enter Panamanian territory in an irregular manner. This policy change will apply to migrants who enter Panama via the Darien Gap – a population of more than 520,000 in 2023 with comparable figures thus far in 2024. According to the text of the executive decree, migrants who are unable to pay this fine will not be allowed to continue their journey north into Costa Rica and beyond. What isn’t clear is what will happen to the large number of families who will be detained in Panama while they figure out how to come up with the money to pay these new fines levied by Panamanian immigration.

News of this policy change has undoubtedly reached in-transit migrants who currently find themselves in Colombia and is likely to increase the number of migrant families who will opt to suspend their plans to cross the Darien Gap, at least temporarily, and remain in Colombia in places like the Turbo area. There, the Colombian Lutheran Church (IELCO) and its ecumenical partners have been working for nearly a year, and will continue doing so, accompanying the number of migrant families who have suspended their plans to cross the Darien Gap.



Migrants lining up to receive humanitarian assistance in Turbo

July 28 Presidential Election in Venezuela

Notwithstanding the credible evidence of fraud presented by the opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez and his supporters, and the diplomatic isolation of Venezuela by its Latin American neighbors and beyond, Nicholas Maduro was declared the winner of the July 28 presidential election. To date, Venezuela’s National Election Council (CNE) has failed to publish a detailed breakdown of the overall vote by individual voting centers.

In the wake of this election debacle, there were predictions that more Venezuelan families would decide to emigrate, especially those who had lodged their hopes for better economic times on the election of Edmundo Gonzalez. Initially, there were signs that a new wave of Venezuelan out-migration was materializing. Nevertheless, two factors may be moderating the predicted exodus. **The first is the Oct. 25 decree announced by Panama’s president** on fines that in-transit migrants now must pay if they enter Panamanian territory in an irregular manner

(see previous section of this report). This action by Panama came on the heels of **the Biden Administration's Oct. 4 announcement to close the legal pathway of humanitarian parole** for Venezuelans, Cubans, Haitians and Nicaraguans.

Thanks to the on-the-ground presence of our AMMPARO companions in South America (Colombia, Peru and Chile), we continue to receive timely information on changes in the migrant flows since Venezuela's 2024 elections. In addition, I will be spending the first week of November with the Peruvian Lutheran Church (IL-P) whose migrant ministry continues to accompany Venezuelan families who have settled in the greater Lima area, many in neighborhoods of Lutheran congregations that actively participate in IL-P's migrant ministry. Later in November, I will be visiting our AMMPARO companion in Colombia – IELCO – where they accompany recent arrivals from Venezuela along the established routes that Venezuelans have used when they enter Colombia at the beginning of their migrant journey.



Weekend activities for neighborhood Children

Perceptions of U.S. Presidential Elections from El Salvador

As I complete this report, only a few days remain before Election Day in the U.S. Of course, all are wondering what the result will be in the presidential contest between Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump – not only in the U.S. but also in Latin America in places like El Salvador where I heard the concerns of pastors and lay leaders during my visits to communities of the Salvadoran Lutheran Church (ILS) in early October. One of the encounters that made the biggest impression was a workshop that I facilitated on Oct. 1 with local congregational leaders in the western part of the country. After providing them with some basics on U.S. presidential elections, the electoral college and an explication of what constitutes a “swing” state, workshop participants broke into small groups. Their task was to draw up a list of the questions that they would pose to both Harris and Trump, if they were reporters and had the chance. Here are the questions which appeared in the lists generated by all the groups:

- If elected president, will you respect the human rights of undocumented immigrants?
- For immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for years, what opportunities can they expect from your government?
- What's going to happen to Temporary Protected Status (TPS)? Will TPS for Salvadorans be renewed or eliminated?
- When an immigrant is detained, will their rights be respected?
- (For Harris) Will you make the legalization process easier for immigrants already living in the U.S.?
- If a mother or father is deported but not their children, what will happen to the children who are left behind in the U.S.?
- Why do you dislike immigrants so much if they are the ones who keep the U.S. economy going by accepting whatever jobs are available?
- (For Trump) Is it true that you plan to eliminate family remittances?
- If you win the election, what sort of relationship will you have with Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele?



Workshop participants working in small groups

As you can see, the questions reflect a high degree of concern for Salvadoran immigrants already living in the U.S. and their relatives who remain in El Salvador. They also reflect the very real concerns of the Salvadoran community about the human and economic impacts of drastic anti-immigrant measures such as mass deportations of undocumented immigrants which have been a central message in pro-Trump campaign rallies and ads. Finally, more than pertinent questions that should be asked of candidates during the final days of the 2024 election campaign, they offer key points for an advocacy agenda starting in 2025, regardless of which candidate becomes the next U.S. president and which party controls one or both chambers of Congress.

Migration Advocacy

By Giovana Oaxaca, Program Director of Migration Policy

On September 17th, ELCA Witness in Society, Global Refuge and the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) had the privilege of hosting the Young Adult Migration Advocacy Day, a unique virtual event drawing together young adults to advocate for justice for immigrants with their elected representatives. Thirteen meetings were scheduled with congressional offices across eight states, including California, Colorado, Indiana, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to share their stories and highlight, “principles and legislation for a just and humane response to the situation lived by migrants, border communities, and communities all throughout the United States.”

Participants were retained from the border immersion trip hosted by the ELCA and Global Refuge in collaboration with Border Servant Corps in April 2024. Participants met with humanitarian organizations, border officials, and community leaders in Las Cruces, NM, and El Paso, TX.

Over the last few months, there have been numerous administrative actions taken. While Congress has been away for a period of in-district work, the administration has taken notable actions on DACA, TPS, asylum, asylum and border enforcement. Many of these administrative actions have faced subsequent legal challenges, discussed in depth below.

- **Asylum & Border:** The Biden Administration published the “Securing the Border” Final Rule, which entrenches asylum restrictions at the southern border. The Final Rule is open to public comment until [November 6, 2024](#). The final rule also proposes to extend the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Rule, which the ELCA led a public comment campaign in 2023 to oppose. Despite the fact that, between December 2023 and September 2024, border crossings between points of entry were reduced by more than [70 percent](#), and that FY 2024 is projected to see the lowest number of border apprehensions between points of entry since before the Biden administration took office, perceptions of chaos at the border have dominated news headlines and strongly swayed public policy.
- **DACA:** On October 10, a federal court heard arguments over the Biden administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) regulation, a case that is most certain to go to the Supreme Court. While awaiting a decision, DACA recipients can benefit from recent administrative actions to enroll in [ACA healthcare plans](#) and clarified process for applying for



Giovana Oaxaca and members of the Advocacy team in DC

- waivers of inadmissibility to obtain [certain temporary visas](#).
- **Spouses of U.S. Citizens:** In August, the Keeping Families Together process was implemented, enabling the adjustment of status process for thousands of spouses of U.S. citizens who would otherwise have to leave the country to apply for a green card. However, a federal court halted the program through Nov. 8, 2024. After the initial announcement, Bishop Briner, of the Southwest Texas Synod said, “I am glad to have conveyed my support [for this process] during a visit with administration officials in Washington D.C. ... We must continue to uplift the dignity of all individuals, and recommit to common-sense, fair, and generous immigration reform from Congress.”
- **Humanitarian Parole:** On October 24, the Biden administration announced that it will not be providing re-parole under the CHNV program, which means that people who lawfully entered under the program will need to find an alternative status to remain in the country. More information about CHNV program can be accessed at [USCIS.gov](#).
- **Temporary Protected Status:** On October 17, the Biden Administration announced a new Temporary Protected Status (TPS) designation for Lebanon, as well as more details of Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) announced earlier this year. A federal register

notice is expected soon.

- **USRAP:** The U.S. Refugee Admission Program (USRAP) hit a major milestone, resettling more than 100,000 refugees in FY24, the most in three decades. In September, the Administration announced a goal of 125,000 for next year. Read a response from the Program Director for Migration Policy [here](#).

Throughout the elections, the claims of non-citizens engaging in large-scale unlawful voting have been widespread, but they lack evidence. Nevertheless, the impact has been swift and far-reaching. This widespread claim is an emerging voter challenger being used as a [pretext](#) for illegal voter purges. ELCA AMMPARO's latest resource, "Sacred Crossroads: The Intersection of Faith and Immigration in the 2024 Election" is a non-partisan resource discussed these baseless claims, as well as lifts up key facts about immigrants in the U.S. It is available for download [here](#).



SACRED CROSSROADS

The Intersection of Faith and Immigration in the 2024 Election

Action Alerts:

As the latest deadline for Fiscal Year 2025 approaches, raise your voice to call for robust funding for migration and refugee programs [here](#) and international assistance for displaced people [here](#).

S&J and CCL visit to Chile

By Mary Campbell, Director, ELCA AMMPARO

Service and Justice and Christian Community and Leadership executives visit the Iglesia Evangelica Luterana en Chile (IELCH) and EPES to see AMMPARO-supported Ministries

In October, Pastors Khader El-Yateem and Phil Hirsch had the opportunity to travel to Chile together to see AMMPARO supported ministries as well as get to know the ELCA accompaniment with these long-term companions. They were accompanied by Paulina Dasse, Senior Leader for Global Mission, Pastor Jaime Dubon, Director of the Latin America desk and Mary Campbell, Director of AMMPARO. Bishop Izani Bruch and the Church Council of the IELCH met with the group initially to give an overview of the church, its history, its congregations and its very strong diaconal ministry. Visits were made to several congregations and church schools and childcare centers operated by the church through its congregations. These included Buen Samaritano, Belen, El Sembrador, La Trinidad and Reconciliacion. Bishop Izani and Church Council members accompanied the group during the visits. We celebrated Reformation Sunday together in La Trinidad.



The church has four ministries known as pastorales that focus its diaconal ministry. One of these is the migration ministry that is part of the AMMPARO network. The church has two offices, one in church at Belen and one in Concepcion both located where there are large migrant communities where assistance is offered in filling out the necessary paperwork to secure status in Chile, case management support through social services and psychological trauma counseling are available as well as spiritual support. Educational workshops are offered both to congregation members to better understand the challenges facing migrants in Chile as well as "know your rights" orientations. But even beyond this work, the team makes visits to all the schools and childcare centers, both within the IELCH as well as public schools,

to provide education for teachers on migration and to talk with migrant families to assist them with the services they need. One school of the IELCH, Colegio Belen O'Higgins is made up of 27% migrant students. But all the others, including the childcare centers, have at least some migrant students so it is most valuable for them to be connected with this migrant ministry.



We also had the opportunity to visit EPES which stands for Popular Education in Health. This organization was founded within the IELCH, but is now an independent non-governmental organization. EPES receives funds from ELCA World Hunger for its ground-breaking work on women's health and human rights issues and because of the complex migration situation In Chile has been working with Haitian women in Spanish as a second language classes. Often these women are more confined to their homes to care for their families and children with little opportunity to socialize with others in their community and much less to learn Spanish. These weekly classes offer the women not only Spanish language instruction but the chance to share their common struggles and receive support from each other. The language classes include learning about women's health issues and other topics of interest to them. They decide what issues they want to learn about and discuss in their classes. This year a cohort of 31 women finished first year instruction and will continue to meet next year on a monthly basis to continue their language learning and to support each other as a new class begins. The class is team-taught by three women, one of whom is a Haitian migrant herself! This has insured the cultural competence of the teaching. One important lesson learned is that popular education methodology addresses the cultural and language gap with migrant communities.

In order to better understand the history and context of the IELCH, we visited the Museo de Memoria to learn about the Pinochet coup which happened on September

11, 1973 and the ensuing dictatorship for 17 years. There was a split in the IELCH between those who supported the coup within the government and those who worked in resistance to it, fighting for the human rights of the vulnerable communities who were suffering torture, death and disappearances of loved ones. The majority of church members of the IELCH remained and many were part of this resistance. So to this day, advocacy and respect for the human rights of each person are fundamental to the IELCH, not only regarding migrant rights, but gender justice and LBGQ plus.

As Chile has one of the largest populations of Palestinians in the world, the president of Chile has spoken out against the genocide by Israel in Gaza and the churches in the ecumenical and interfaith community are engaged in advocacy for justice. Our ELCA and IELCH leaders had the opportunity to meet with Ambassador Vera Baboun to learn about the latest developments and to speak about our advocacy efforts both in Chile and in the US.



The most important aspect of this visit was the opportunity for these ELCA leaders to get to know the IELCH through visits to the congregations and ministries and build strengthened relationships with the leadership of the IELCH through dialogues with Bishop Izani Bruch and the IELCH church council on several occasions. We appreciated being able to each share about the strong aspects of our ministries as well as our challenges. Despite the differences in culture and size between the ELCA and the IELCH, we share common some challenges and as we wrapped up our visit, there was a commitment to continue in dialogue with each to seek paths forward in these challenges, certain that we can learn from each other if we do so. We are definitely stronger together.

US Network Update

By Raed Aburries, Program Manager, AMMPARO US Network, Education and Communications

The AMMPARO US network has been growing in varying rates since the beginning of the ministry. We continue to be joined by congregations committed to welcoming migrant families and asylum seekers and living out their calling as good neighbors and inspiring examples of hospitality.



Our goal is to continue to grow and encourage more congregations and communities throughout the country to join our network and continue to advocate and pray for just and humane policies and work towards changing the realities for new comers.

And while we are encouraged by all the efforts of the network, we see the potential for bigger impact and more participation. One of the initiatives we are currently working on is “Who is My Neighbor?”. We are conducting a study to understand the needs, barriers, and goals of ELCA congregations as they relate to migrant ministries and the AMMPARO network. Our goal is to leverage these insights to guide the future direction of the AMMPARO program and to develop effective strategies and activities that help us accompany our neighbors.

So far, we have held listening sessions with several congregations and communities and the conversations have been extremely helpful and insightful. So, I would like to invite the entire network to start thinking about some of the issues being discussed and we would be very grateful if you could share some of your thoughts and responses.

1. What motivated your community to join the AMMPARO network and engage in migrant ministry work?
2. If you could share any advice with other ELCA leaders that are ministering to migrants or refugees, what might you offer?

3. In what ways can we, as the AMMPARO team, better support congregations involved in this work?
4. Are there resources provided by the ELCA that have been important for you and your congregation, or are there resources that you wish were more readily available?
5. Has your worshipping community experienced any changes because of your engagement with migrant ministries?
6. From your own experience and context, what are the largest challenges to congregational vitality?
7. What inspires you to continue to do ministry in this time?
8. How well equipped do you feel in supporting migrant communities? What additional support do you need?

As AMMPARO expands globally and the ministry faces new challenges and changing political and environmental realities, it becomes increasingly important to fortify the US network and develop a strong structure for the ministry to build on.

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