Compassionate Communities In Action!

#ChildrenAreSacred

Healing the Wounds

NATIONAL INTERFAITH ACTION PRAYER

WWW.ALIANZA AMERICAS.ORG
http://thepowerofthepen.net/
Dear brothers and sisters,

A Humanitarian crisis demands a response focused on human well-being. The exodus of unaccompanied minors from Central American has many interconnected roots, and further militarization of borders is not the solution; it will only lead more violence, where the victims will continue to be the children. During today’s National Interfaith Action Prayer we seek to address the following areas of concern:

• Pray for migrant children well-being and their families in and out of the border,
• Pray for our absolute commitment to embrace migrant families & shelter them,
• Be a source of comfort and means for their needs,
• Make our lives revolve around their well-being even at self-discomfort,
• Pray for members of Congress to recognize that this is a humanitarian crisis, which requires a coherent, compassionate and multidimensional policy response, focused in saving lives and getting people back on their feet as soon as possible. We must not detain and deport children back into conditions of violence and insecurity,
• Pray for members of Congress and the Obama Administration to collaborate with Central American elected officials and civil society to formulate a timely, coordinated assessment and analysis of the needs of affected people, before formulating policies,
• Empowerment of people of faith to speak out more boldly for immigrants’ rights, and
• Pray for the strength of volunteers and everyone who has been called to provide assistance and support to Central American migrant children and their families.

The National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC) have included some educational materials in this Prayer Action Toolkit, on the humanitarian crisis that can be distributed during your prayer event, in addition a sample press release can be provided as per request. Faith leaders are encouraged to bring materials for distribution.

Thank you for your support,

National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
www.nalacc.org
SUGGESTED PROGRAM STRUCTURE:

Welcome and introduction
Have our key speaker or vigil leader present the focus of the prayer vigil. He or she can do the opening prayer (or introduce the person who does) and review the vigil program. The leader can review the purpose of the vigil and explain why people of faith care about the current humanitarian crisis. You should make sure to consciously refer to those affected by the issue and why this vigil is important to them.

Scripture and Sacred Texts
Ask religious leaders and congregants read scriptures and sacred texts to illustrate the moral framework of the humanitarian crisis and the need of solidarity and compassion with migrant communities and their allies.

Reflection
Participants who share reflections from scripture and sacred texts provide a framework for the real-life situations that are the central focus of the prayer vigil. We can invite religious leaders to offer short reflections on the text or on the situation. (Make sure all faith leaders have the chance to share sacred texts representing their faith)

Prayer and Meditation
If possible have one person pray or multiple people pray. Those who offer prayer or meditation should do so from their faith perspective. This is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of those who stand with us in the struggle for justice. Consider having people pray in languages other than English and remember to be inclusive in terms of age, gender and denominational diversity. If there are multiple prayers, people can lead prayers in the way they are most comfortable.

Music and Song
Music can bring people together and bolster our commitment to justice. In addition, the presence of music makes the event fun and creates a memorable experience.

Testimonies
Personal stories have the biggest impact. Invite members of our community who are directly impacted by the broken immigration system. We may also invite community advocates and faith leaders. Make sure we don’t have too many speakers.

The End
The end is the beginning! Make sure to thank everyone who attends and have a way to collect names and e-mails to keep them updated on the issues, including any victories. Distribute any educational materials and let everyone know about follow-up activities that have been scheduled. A closing prayer, song or chant signals that the event has concluded and allows participants to exit feeling uplifted.
PRAYER ACTION PLAN

A prayer action event can give powerful expression to the prophetic voice on the humanitarian crisis. It is an opportunity to join together and lift up the sacred texts of our faith traditions, offer prayers, reflections and songs as a way to stand in solidarity with the struggles of immigrant children and their families. This resource is designed to assist us in planning a prayer action event to support meaningful policy solution to the humanitarian crisis and the protection of migrants, regardless of immigration status. Now comes the planning...

Location
- Is the location available and appropriate for your event?
- Is there parking and/or public transportation?
- Is it handicapped accessible?
- Do you need permits to use the space (especially common for city and other government spaces)?
- Is there electricity and sound equipment available (important if you expect large numbers)?
- Is the location an appropriate size for your event?
- If the venue is outdoors, do you have a plan for inclement weather?

Coordination
- Have you identified faith leaders to attend the event?
- Is there someone who can act as the vigil leader?
- Who is responsible for inviting faith and other community leaders to the event?
- Is there a role for non-clergy participation?
- Have you been inclusive in recruiting participants, including age, gender, religious, ethnic and denominational diversity?
- Will there be music? Who will lead it?

Logistics
- Do you have sound and lighting equipment in necessary?
- Do you have banners and signs?
- Do you have candles, flowers or other materials for the event?
- Is there a printed program?
- Do you need songbooks?
- Do you need a podium, chairs or water?
- Have you assigned someone to take photos?
- Do you need translation?

Press
- Who will create a press list?
- Who will write the press release and make follow-up calls?

Promotion and Turnout
- Do you have a flyer?
- Do you have a Facebook event page?
- Have you sent out an e-mail blast?
- Have you sent out text messages to increase turnout?

Please email varias@nalacc.org if you have any questions about the logistics of planning your vigil.

Protecting Children Across Borders--National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
www.alianzaamericas.org
SAMPLE PRAYERS (you may edit to fit your interfaith event)

Prayers of Intercession

Response: God of all people, lead us on the road to peace.

For our church that we will be a welcoming community, we pray....
For our nation that we will be a welcoming country, we pray....
For the many refugees struggling around our world, we pray....
For migrants who have left their lands to find new homes and work, we pray....
For all peoples that they may learn a way to welcome and respect new people into their lands, we pray....
For effective dialogue to replace the fighting and barriers between peoples, we pray....
For an end to the persistent sighting between ethnic groups all over our world, we pray....
For those who are victims of human trafficking or modern day slavery, we pray....

A prayer for migrant Children

Loving Father, in your infinite compassion, we seek your divine protection for refugee children who are often alone and afraid.
Provide solace to those who have been witnesses to violence and destruction, who have lost parents, family, friends, home, and all they cherish due to war or persecution.
Comfort them in their sorrow, and bring help in their time of need.
Show mercy to unaccompanied migrant children, too, Lord.
Reunite them with their families and loved ones.
Guide those children who are strangers in a foreign land to a place of peace and safety.
Comfort them in their sorrow, and bring help in their time of need.
Show us how we might reach out to these precious and vulnerable children.
Open our hearts to migrant and refugee children in need, so that we might see in them your own migrant Son.
Give us courage to stand up in their defense against those who would do them harm.
For this we pray through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

An Inter-faith prayer for peace

God, you are the source of life and peace.
Praised be your name for ever.
We know it is you who turn our minds to thoughts of peace.
Hear our prayer in this time of crisis.
Your power changes hearts.
Muslims, Christians and Jews remember, and profoundly affirm, that they are followers of the one God, children of Abraham, brothers and sisters.
Enemies begin to speak to one another; those who were estranged join hands in friendship; nations seek the way of peace together.
Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these truths by the way we live.
Give to us: understanding that puts an end to strife; mercy that quenches hatred, and forgiveness that overcomes vengeance.
Empower all people to live in your law of love. Amen.

A prayer for Immigrants
Merciful and loving Father, you provided for your people Israel in their exodus from slavery a promised land that you established for them, and in Jesus Christ you provide welcome refuge for all in need.
We ask for your divine protection for all migrants who have left their homes in search of new opportunity in another land.
For refugees, who are forced from their homes due to threats of violence, we beseech you to provide them a safe haven.
For migrants trafficked into slavery, grant them rescue, healing, and the strength to start again.
For immigrants, who so often leave their family and friends behind; grant them a better life and greater opportunity elsewhere.
We pray in particular for your protection over migrant children who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse at the hands of others.
We implore you to grant all migrants your protection and lead them to a place of safety.
Be with all those in need with your power to save. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Oración por los Inmigrantes
Padre de amor y misericordia, proveíste a tu pueblo Israel en su éxodo de la esclavitud la tierra prometida que estableciste para ellos, y en Jesucristo provees un acogedor refugio para todos los necesitados.
Te pedimos tu protección divina para todos los migrantes que han abandonado sus casas en busca de nuevas oportunidades en otro país.
Por los refugiados, que se ven obligados a partir de sus casas por las amenazas de violencia, te imploramos que les proporcione un refugio seguro.
Por los migrantes víctimas del tráfico de esclavos, concédeles el rescate, la sanación y la fuerza para empezar de nuevo.
Para los inmigrants, que a menudo dejan atrás a sus amigos y familia, concédeles una vida mejor y más oportunidades en otros lugares.
Te rogamos en especial por tu protección sobre los niños migrantes que son vulnerables a la explotación y al abuso en manos de otros.
Te imploramos que otorgues a todos los migrantes tu protección y los guíes hacia un lugar seguro.
Acompaña a todos los que necesiten tu poder salvador.
Por nuestro Señor Jesucristo, tu Hijo, que vive y reina contigo en la unidad del Espíritu Santo, Dios, por los siglos de los siglos. Amén.
RESOURCES ON THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), 52,193 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the southwest border between October 1, 2013, and June 15, 2014. The largest percentage increases came primarily from three Central American countries: Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador (known as the Northern Triangle). From fiscal year 2011 to fiscal year 2103, the number of children from these countries increased by:

- Honduras: 606 percent increase,
- Guatemala: 413 percent increase, and
- El Salvador: 328 percent increase.

During the same period (FY 2011 to FY 2013), the numbers of Mexican unaccompanied children being apprehended only increased slightly (by 44 percent). This represents a significant shift in the makeup of unaccompanied children coming to the border—prior to 2012, more than 75 percent of these children were from Mexico (now that number is closer to 25 percent). Additionally, in the same time period the total number of all entries from Mexico (children and adults) decreased significantly.

Push Factors

- The conditions pushing children to flee Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador include violence, high homicide rates, gangs, and the inability of their home states to protect them.
- Between 2008 and 2013 UNHCR documented a 712% increase in the number of asylum applications from citizens of these three countries in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Belize, combined. In 2012 alone, the number of requests for asylum increased by 432% in these countries.
- The many compelling narratives gathered in the UNHCR Children on the Run report “demonstrate unequivocally that many of these displaced children face grave danger and hardship in their countries of origin. There are significant gaps in the existing protection mechanisms currently in place for these displaced children.”
- UNHCR concluded that no less than 58% of 404 children it interviewed were forcibly displaced because they suffered or faced harms that indicated a potential or actual need for international protection. Only 4 children in total expressed a reason for coming that related to some knowledge of the U.S. immigration system.
- The Women’s Refugee Commission asked unaccompanied children who had come to the United States from Central America if they would risk the dangerous journey north through Mexico all over again now that they had direct knowledge of its risks, most replied that they would. They said that staying in their country would guarantee death, and that making the dangerous journey would at least give them a chance to survive. Many of them expressed a longing for their homelands, stating that they would not have left but for fear for their lives.
Violence, not economic factors, is main driver of increase in children fleeing.

- Other countries in the region, such as Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Panama had a total of: just 1,881 murders, at a rate of only 13 per 100,000. Nicaragua is particularly useful as an example: It is the second-poorest country in the region—behind only Haiti—and yet, with far lower rates of violence than the three main sending countries, it has not seen an uptick in unaccompanied children leaving.
- More than half of the top 50 Central American cities from which children are leaving for the United States are in Honduras. Virtually none of the children have come from Nicaragua, a bordering country that has staggering poverty, but not a pervasive gang culture or a record-breaking murder rate.

Northern Triangle homicide rates are the highest in the world.

- A recent report by the Assessment Capacities Project (ACAPS), citing 2012 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) data, highlighted that Honduras had a homicide rate of 90.4 per 100,000 people. El Salvador and Guatemala had homicide rates of 41.2 and 39.9, respectively. In comparison, the war-torn country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from which nearly half a million refugees have fled, has a homicide rate of 28.3 per 100,000 people. The United States homicide rate is 4.8 people per 100,000.
- According to Pew Research analysis of DHS Statistics Pedro Sula in Honduras is the world’s murder capital, with a homicide rate of 187 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2013 driven by a surge in gang and drug trafficking violence. For the entire country Honduras’s murder rate was 90 per 100,000 in 2012, the highest in the world.
- In 2011, El Salvador was not far behind, at 70 per 100,000, ranking second in terms of homicides in Latin America then. Even with a significant drop in the murder rate from 70 in 2011 to 41 in 2012, El Salvador is only surpassed by Honduras, Venezuela and Belize in the entire world.
- Honduran children are increasingly on the front lines of gang violence. In June, 32 children were murdered in Honduras, bringing the number of youths under 18 killed since January of last year to 409, according to data compiled by Covenant House, a youth shelter in Tegucigalpa, the capital.
- In Honduras, the National Observatory of Violence reported that violent deaths of women increased by 246 percent between 2005 and 2012. The national observatory recorded 323 homicides of women as of June.

In these Northern Triangle countries violence and gangs dominate society and states are unable to protect their citizens.

- Guatemala’s police (and military) were so thoroughly infiltrated by organized crime that in 2006 the United Nations had to set up a special agency, the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (which goes by its Spanish acronym, CICIG), to help fight the pervasive abuses committed by "clandestine groups." CICIG has enjoyed some recent successes, but nearly three in four killings committed in Guatemala still go unpunished.
- According to United Nations Office of Drug and Crime (UNODC), in 2012, there were an estimated 20,000 gang members in El Salvador, 12,000 in Honduras, and 22,000 in Guatemala.
- The major gangs operating in Central America are the 18th Street gang (also known as Barrio 18) and their main rival, the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13.) These two particular gangs, or “Maras,” have been prevalent in Honduras and El Salvador for years and, until recently, were loosely structured and largely operated at the local street level. In recent years both of these gangs have expanded geographically (moving into some areas of Guatemala in addition to intensified presence in El Salvador and Honduras) and have become more organized and sophisticated both in terms of operation (from low-level robberies and extortions to becoming guards and transporters for large lucrative narcotics shipments) and execution.
- The Center for Gender and Refugee Studies found that in 2011 El Salvador had the highest rate of “femicide,” or gender-motivated killing of women, in the world. In 2012 alone, groups report 731
FAITH GROUPS REACT TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Conference of Catholic Bishops, Press Statement (7/7/14)
“Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, auxiliary bishop of Seattle and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Committee on Migration, called upon the Obama Administration, July 2, to reconsider their proposed request to Congress for “fast track” authority to expedite the removal of unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America. Current law permits children from non-contiguous countries to remain in the country until their request for asylum or immigration relief is considered by an immigration judge.”

“As a nation which has traditionally offered safe haven to those who are persecuted, this proposed policy undercuts our values as a nation,” Bishop Elizondo said. “The prospect of the United States sending vulnerable children back into the hands of violent criminals in their countries raises troubling questions about our moral character.”

Presbyterian Church (USA) Response to Unaccompanied Children Crisis (7/7/14)
“I know that God went with the children on their journey. Though subjected to harm and often in the hands of smugglers, these children are alive and in the U.S. because of the prayers of parents and friends and persons like you and I, who read about them and knew they were coming though we did not know their names.”

“In the Presbyterian tradition, the congregation as a whole covenants with a family to nurture their children in the faith. We look after one another’s children. We corporately tend to their safety and growth. The children arriving at our borders are no less in need of nurturance and no less bearing the likeness of God.”

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA): “ELCA advocates for unaccompanied children entering the United States.” (6/10/14)
“We are committed to helping the thousands of unaccompanied children coming to the United States to escape violence and difficult situations in their home countries. To address this crisis, ELCA members are working through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service to help find foster care for these children.”

“As people of faith, we are reminded that among the children who had to flee across borders because of threat of life was our very own Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. When children flee across two international borders alone, the community of Jesus – the church – must accompany them,” said the Rev. Stephen Bouman, executive director, ELCA congregational and synodical mission.

National Association of Evangelicals: “Humanitarian Aid, Pastoral Care for Unaccompanied Minors Needed” (letter to DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson). (6/24/14)
“Moreover, as Christian leaders we have a Biblical and moral imperative to provide a pastoral and compassionate response even while we seek long-term solutions to the root causes of this crisis. Our churches, parishes, and relief agencies have a long history of compassionate service and ministry during the most challenging times. Moreover, we have historically been at the forefront of ministry to children from juvenile detention centers to refugee camps. We request that we be able to provide the same type of aid in the case of these unaccompanied minors.”

“Our Christian commitment to provide a faithful response during natural disasters, prolonged famines, or civil unrest is what now compels us to advocate for the Department of Homeland Security to allow us to provide humanitarian assistance to these children being detained at the Southwest border and elsewhere.”

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www.alianzaamericas.org
SAMPLE FLYER

NATIONAL INTERFAITH ACTION PRAYER
Compassionate Communities, Healing the Wounds
Join us in Solidarity with Unaccompanied Minor from Central America and their Families

- Pray for migrant children well-being and their families in and out of the border,
- Pray for our absolute commitment to embrace migrant families & shelter them,
- Pray for members of Congress and the Obama Administration to find a compassionate and humane policy solution.

Date: August __, 2014
Time:
Place:
More information: [insert point person per locality- example: Yanira Arias yarias@nalacc.org 917-575-1124]

Organized by: INSERT ALL FAITH BASED COMMUNITIES AND NALACC’S NAME