



Elizabeth Rhea <erhea@cluela.org>

## UCARE: Unaccompanied Children and Their Families Being Sent to Their Deaths

Rabbi Jonathan Klein, CLUE <jklein@cluejustice.org>  
To: erhea@cluejustice.org

Fri, Jul 14, 2017 at 4:01 PM



*Clergy & Laity United  
For Economic Justice*

Elizabeth --

Last month's Thanksgiving holiday reminded Americans that we are a nation of immigrants, hearkening back to Puritan immigrants who arrived on our nation's shores. In a sense, we are afforded to give thanks, AS DESCENDANTS OF IMMIGRANTS, for the bounty of this land. So while Thanksgiving is over—a holiday shrouded in mystery and perhaps even anguish, a discussion for another day—ongoing questions about our relationship with immigrants remain: Will we “Love the Stranger,” imagine them enriching our lives? Or will we define immigrants as “other” with whom we have no responsibility, turning them into objectified political fodder for fear-mongering candidates for President and ignore their humanity? Will we label the Syrian refugees “ISIS,” even as they flee the crossfire of ISIS in their war-torn homeland? Or will we host them in our communities? Some congregations helped the Vietnamese “Boat People” and Central American immigrants settle into this land of opportunity; will we emulate this great history of hospitality? Or will we hearken back to the *MS St Louis*, a German ship denied entry into Cuba and the United States, ultimately sending hundreds of Jews to the death camps of Europe? Or worse yet, will we allow political figures to get away with utilizing outright xenophobic, anti-Muslim rhetoric to mobilize a racist base?

One need not look further than a couple hundred miles away to find the horrifying experiences of **unaccompanied minors** fleeing from gang-infested Central American nations. In the summer of 2015, CLUE's faith-rooted organizer Guillermo Torres joined an interfaith delegation to the border between Guatemala and Mexico where we witnessed severe human rights abuses at the hand of the “Frontera Sur”, or Mexican Border Patrol, funded by the U.S. Government and the Department of Homeland Security. The Border Patrol is interdicting women and children to prevent them from their internationally protected human right to migrate from a country where one's life is threatened. CLUE has partnered with the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law, and has filed an FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) with the U.S. Department of State asking to release records of the type and amount of direct or indirect U.S. governmental assistance to Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Migracion (INM). CLUE is awaiting the release of these records. The interfaith delegation witnessed **Central American refugee women and children who have been brutally beaten and maimed on their journey through Mexico before reaching the United States.**

CLUE's UCARE (Unaccompanied Central American Refugee Empowerment) Coalition is fighting to get Central American unaccompanied minors refugee status and the necessary resources needed to absorb them safely into society, working with our interfaith and inter-agency allies from CARECEN, Esperanza,

Public Counsel, KIND, Immigrant Defense Project, World Vision, and others. On November 14, UCARE was honored and recognized by **Los Angeles Supervisor Hilda Solis** at the UCARE Resource Event.



Please read below for information on the struggles of these unaccompanied children and ways you can get involved; there are so many ways you or someone you know can provide support. These children are in dire circumstances and really need as much aid as they can get. As Supervisor Solis said at the UCARE event: **“These children cannot wait. Every minute we don’t do anything, they take a step back.”**

Also, please attend the **UCARE Posada on December 21 at Echo Park, 6 P.M.** Please contact [Grecia Reyes](#) for more information.

# ¡Te Invitamos!



## Una Posada Muy Especial

Las Posadas son una tradición que recuerda el peregrinaje de María y José desde Nazaret a Belén buscando un sitio (posada) donde naciera el niño Jesús. El lunes 21 de diciembre celebraremos con niños recién llegados al país. Tendremos villancicos, comida, regalos y piñatas. Y todo es gratis. ¡Únete a nosotros!

## 21 de dic , 6pm

Iglesia Episcopal de San Atanasio  
840 Echo Park Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90026  
www.SaintA.LA (213) 482-2040

---

Saying a great injustice and tragedy has befallen on the lives of innocent Central American children and families does not begin to accurately brand the evil these children have endured and continue to suffer, at even more dangerous and alarming rates. Children from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala -- some of the [most dangerous countries](#) in the Western Hemisphere -- are fleeing their home countries to find refuge in Mexico and in the United States.

Why are they fleeing?

Simply put, they are fleeing for their lives. Some of you may have noticed the very misinformed and

incorrect rhetoric that has been circulating through the media and conversations based on assumptions that these children are fleeing their homes to "illegally" invade the U.S. to take advantage of the system and this country. In reality, though, what permeates the minds of these children and their families is to stay alive and escape extreme gang violence, survival, nothing more (and nothing less). The children and their families face verbal and physical abuse at the hands of horrible gangs. If they do not flee their homes, they must choose between joining a gang or being killed upon refusal. They either kill or end up killed.

**They are forced to leave. Now, it's *forced* migration... because of the gangs, because of the violence. There is no choice. And when people say, ' How can they send their child?' It's that or the child is dead. So we must not judge. So there is tremendous need for public education.**

**-Father Richard Estrada**

In 2014, there was a surge of over 60,000 unaccompanied minors from Central America that flooded the U.S.-Mexico border. Tragically, the response has been to crack down militarily, leading to a decrease in the number of lone refugees at the border. However, it is very clear that this dramatic decrease is not due to a reduction of violence in Central America. In fact, **the violence has only worsened**. An alarming number of children and their families are coming to the border to be apprehended in prison-like detention centers and then sent back to their home countries, which essentially makes them extremely vulnerable to gang violence and essentially [deports them back to their deaths](#).

This past summer, members of CLUE's UCARE Coalition, led by **Father Richard Estrada**, went down to the Mexico-Guatemala border at Tapachulas to verify firsthand whether the accounts of the unaccompanied Central American minors were true. CLUE Organizer **Guillermo Torres**, who also made the trip to Central America, states:

**All the stuff that we saw and we heard were verified. It has verified the reasons why the [migrant] children we are helping in Los Angeles came. It was the fact. It's true. They are not coming here to take advantage of the system. They are not coming here for the DACA. They're actually coming here, fleeing extreme, extreme violence from their county and the possibility of death.**

The UCARE delegation team also recognized the militarization of the already risky, traditional routes that migrants previously utilized. This effort at deterring migrants, however, has resulted in them making even more perilous journeys -- exponentially more exposed to gang violence, machete attacks, rape, human trafficking, and even murder.



Torres met Giraldo, a young man at a refugee home called *Albergue Jesus en Buen Pastor de el Pobre y el Migrante A.C.* in Chiapas, a home that shelters refugees who have lost limbs on their journey. Giraldo had broken his arm when he was migrating by train. Believing that the young man was traveling for refuge, Mexican immigration agents—government officials—physically threw him off the train; Giraldo almost died and lost his limb. Stories of migrants being tossed off and under trains by immigration agents is not uncommon, the damaging result of short-sighted policies intended to curb immigration altogether but instead exacerbating the horrible reality that children are running away from gang violence, only to suffer horrific violence, this time at the hands of Mexican officials.

To make matters worse, US aid to Mexico, under the cloak of secrecy, may actually be funding these death squad-like attacks against children! The [Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law](#), after challenging the holding of Central American refugee mothers and children for extensive time periods in jail-like centers in the federal courts, is now demanding financial transparency from the US government. Congress provided the Mexican government \$79 million to secure their southern border. The Center is trying to identify the way US tax dollars are being utilized to prevent its misuse by Mexico's *Instituto Nacional de Migracion*. US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests are being used to gather evidence that the US is providing financial support to recruit immigration agents in Mexico to act as murderous thugs. A new information emerges, we will report back what is uncovered.

These children, like all children, need safety and security, wherever they live. Instead, US foreign policy has left these minors—ranging in age from pre-teens to 18 year-olds—vulnerable to violence in Central America (where the longstanding history of US intervention has damaged their local economies), to violence in Mexico, and even to violence in the United States, where gang injunctions, incarceration, and even deportations undermine a generation's prospects for the future. Underlying all this suffering is the root issue: decades of poverty inflicting immigrant communities. "[Yesterday's policy has become today's problem](#)," say gang experts. Our government's solution? Pressuring the Mexican government to initiate mass deportations of Central American refugees. In the past year, Mexico has more than doubled deportations.

These unaccompanied minors are some of the most vulnerable and destitute people on the globe, yet they are denied basic human rights, possibly at taxpayer's expense, through Mexican detention/migration centers. They are also denied information for how they can seek asylum and international protection in the

midst of their journeys. This systemic denial of protection every step of their journey is creating a generation of desperate Central American children whose bleak futures are a desecration of all our highest ideals as people of faith. We must help them!

**We are not asking for sympathy. We're just asking for what is right – justice. We're asking that the United Nations step in because they are really the Arm of Justice of human rights and it looks like Mexico is not respecting human rights nor are the other countries in Latin and Central America.**

**-Father Richard Estrada**

Once the migrant children and their families enter the U.S., their troubles are far from over. Many of these children and their families have to go through confusing and grueling processes in the US courts, not to mention the cultural disorientation, resource insecurity, and frequently Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). **These refugee children in the United States don't only need prayers, they need action, and they need it now.**

**Here are a list of ways to get involved and volunteer:**

(Otherwise mentioned, please contact [Guillermo Torres](#) for information on specific opportunities below)



- **Guardian Angels** (Southwest CA Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) locates the children and their families by sending bilingual teams of volunteers to immigration court. The Angels also document violations of the children's legal rights. The Angels work with in collaboration with the National Lawyer's Guild (LA chapter) and are trained to do all of the required court-related proceedings.
- **Acompañaros** (Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles) is a program that trains expert volunteers to accompany children and their families in search of various services. Training will start in January.
- **UCARE Coalition** member and/or [donate to the "UCARE fund"](#)
- **Central American Interdiction Working Group**, as mentioned before, this group will be working with The Center for Human Rights & Constitutional Law. Please contact [Carlos Holguin](#). Carlos can also be reached at [\(213\) 388- 8693](#) x 309.
- **Transportation** – minors and family need rides to court hearings, resource events, etc.

- **Host an item drive**, which can consist of clothes, grocery gift cards, non-perishable food, etc.
- **Volunteer at a law office** that provides legal services to the unaccompanied children. Please contact [Roy Valdez](#) from Esperanza.
- **Host a presentation** at your congregation.



Rabbi Jonathan Klein, CLUE

<http://www.cluejustice.org/>

CLUE: Building a Just and Sacred Society · 464 Lucas Ave, Suite 202, Los Angeles, CA 90017, United States

This email was sent to [erhea@cluejustice.org](mailto:erhea@cluejustice.org). To stop receiving emails, [click here](#).

You can also keep up with Rabbi Jonathan Klein, CLUE on [Twitter](#).