

2014-2015 Mission Focus: "Crisis at the Border: What Could We Do?"

You've likely seen it in the news: children arriving in unprecedented numbers at the U.S. borders and seeking asylum. It may seem like it just started happening yesterday. The reality is, however, that unaccompanied minors have arrived at U.S. borders for decades from all over the world, but there has been a surge in the last two years of children and youth escaping violence and poverty in Central American countries and Mexico and seeking asylum in the United States.

From 2004-2011, the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the U.S. averaged 7,000-8,000 annually. In 2012, that number rose to over 13,000 children; in 2013, it was over 24,000. In 2014, the projection is that over 60,000 children will attempt to find refuge in the United States. What the numbers don't reveal, however, is that the population of unaccompanied children arriving in the United States is changing: now there are more girls, more younger children, and more victims of trauma.¹

This has often been billed in the media as an immigration issue, but it is actually a refugee issue. The vast majority of the children are from the "Northern Triangle" of Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, where violence and transnational organized crime has made their schools and streets outside their homes increasingly dangerous. From 2005-2012, Honduras has seen a 292% increase in the murders of men and boys and a 346% increase in the murders of women and girls. Children as young as five are forcibly recruited into gangs, and vigilante death squads indiscriminately execute children and youth in neighborhoods known for gang activity. Women and girls are victims of sexual violence in increasing numbers. Governments have been unable to prevent violence and ensure safety.² There are other factors as well, including lack of economic and educational opportunity in countries where deep poverty is prevalent. Of course, once the children and youth decide to leave their homes, the journey itself is rife with risk of violence and death. If they are fortunate enough to reach shelter in another country, trauma has become part of their lives.

Romans 12:9-21 calls Christians to a most radical love. We are to extend hospitality to all, reaching beyond our own comfort zones and fears. We are to outdo one another in showing honor and mutual affection, and we are to overcome evil with good. Scripture tells us again and again to defend those who are unable to defend themselves, and to show our love of Christ through loving others. The children seeking asylum need us desperately; our faith compels us to respond.

American Baptist Women's Ministries is focusing in 2014-2015 upon this critical issue. Information and resources will be available by email and on this website to help you study to this issue in your women's and girls' ministry groups, your congregation, and personally. The crisis at the border demands our immediate attention and response. Children need our help; families need our support and advocacy; nations—including our own—need our prayers.

To receive monthly emails for "Crisis at the Border: What Could We Do," subscribe to the Leader's Reader newsletter.

¹ "Discussing Unaccompanied Children—An Advocacy Guide," U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops PowerPoint presentation, <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/2014/06/16/unaccompanied-children-advocacy-resources/>, accessed August 12, 2014.

² "Myths and Facts on Central American Migration Surge," Jesuits Washington Office on Latin America, <http://www.jesuits.org/Assets/Publications/File/Myths%20and%20Facts%20on%20Central%20American%20Migration%20Surge.pdf>, accessed August 12, 2014.