



# Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Someone needs help. A call goes out for volunteers. The person or persons you are being asked to help can never repay you for the time and effort you might give. You don't even know these people. Why would you do this? There must be others with more free time, greater ability; others better qualified to serve than you are. Why would you even consider volunteering to help?

Just like the work of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, this call for volunteers comes from the perspective of Christian faith. So the best answers to the question "Why would you even consider volunteering to help?" will also come from the heart of faith and the stories from scripture that help to build our faith.

Two biblical stories are particularly important. The first is the story Jesus told about a man who was on a journey, when he was attacked by robbers and left for dead beside the road. A number of people came along that way, but no one stopped to help. Then a Samaritan arrived and cared for the one badly injured. Ironically, the one from Samaria and the Israelite bleeding beside the road would, by religious law, have had no dealings with each other. Normally they would be strangers forever, aliens to each other. But the compassion of the Samaritan overwhelmed customs and prejudices. If we are going to follow the law of God and love our neighbors, Jesus said, this is how it will be. Our neighbor is simply the one who needs us. **(Luke 10:25-37)**

The second story is from the Gospel of John. In the night before Jesus was crucified, John says that Jesus got up from the table of the last supper, took a towel and a basin, and began to wash the feet of his disciples. That image of Jesus, the Son of God, on his knees serving, literally volunteering himself for them, lifts serving others to a treasured place in memory and faith. "I have set an example for you," Jesus said, "that you also should do as I have done to you." **(John 13:15)**

Now here is the most remarkable part of these stories. What seems at first only to be a call to Christian duty actually pulls us into the very grace of God. It is in giving ourselves away that we so often find ourselves. It is in sharing for the sake of the happiness and well-being of another, that we find joy in our own hearts. The meaning in life for which our hearts yearn is surprisingly discovered in making a difference in the life of someone else. These are all gifts of God's amazing grace to us!

The identity of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service embraces these stories and the gifts to which they lead us. So we declare the heart of who we are in this way:

*"Lutheran theology finds its deepest source in God's grace freely received through faith in Jesus Christ. The Lutheran response to such grace is to reflect the unconditional love of Jesus Christ in lives that manifest Christ's compassion, mercy, welcome, and passion for justice. To love God who first loves us, and to love the neighbors God gives to us, is the free and joyful duty of Lutheran Christians."* **(Bylaws of LIRS, Article 1.2 Identity)**

It is in this spirit and out of this faith that we are called to serve, giving our hearts and hands to the work of receiving the newcomer and creating just and welcoming communities. Thank you for your partnership in this mission of mercy and transformation!

**-- Rev. E. Roy Riley, former LIRS board chair and retired bishop of the NJ Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**