

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION | 2009

Be Not Afraid!

Camden, New Jersey

Andrea is an average 13-year-old. She likes talking on the phone and hanging out with friends. Her family doesn't have much and lived in a small community near one of America's poorest cities. **Like many undocumented immigrants they worked hard and hoped to find a path to citizenship.** That is, until Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents raided her house and arrested her father. Andrea fled to the basement. Their pastor, the Rev. Giselle Coutinho, later found her hiding in a large trunk.

Coutinho ministers to families affected by immigration issues. When some of her congregants became too fearful to attend Sunday services, they began meeting in the woods.

Coutinho is not alone. Across the country church leaders are finding their faith communities suffering and families being torn apart by raids and other enforcement actions. Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) hears many stories of immigrants being too afraid to attend worship services, suburban congregations feeling fearful of immigrants, and pastors feeling unsure of how to respond.

In response, LIRS is offering the Be Not Afraid Project, a program to equip congregations to respond to immigration issues. Resources include "Be Equipped," which helps congregations learn about immigration issues and discuss responses; "Be Prepared," which helps congregations prepare for immigration raids and other enforcement actions; "Be Informed," which helps immigrant families understand their rights and how to create a family safety plan; "Be an Advocate," which helps individuals and congregations advocate for immigration policies.

Although other organizations offer immigrant rights presentations and safety planning workshops, **LIRS provides training and support to congregations struggling to respond to immigration issues.** The program can be customized to meet local needs.

This project is partly funded by an ELCA grant.



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