

CONGREGATIONS

# Witness at the border

Energy flows to a congregation when it's involved in an invaluable ministry among God's people. That's the case for *Iglesia Luterana Cristo Rey*, El Paso, Texas. Situated near the border with Juárez, Mexico, the congregation has found purpose in accompanying Latin American migrants and offering visitors border immersion experiences, said Rose Mary Sánchez-Guzmán, its pastor.

Their Lutheran faith inspires their work. "[The migration crisis] is what I believe Christ is putting in front of us," she said. "This is urgent."

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our congregation."

For two Tuesdays each month, *Cristo Rey* opens its doors to receive migrants. The congregation feeds them and provides them with overnight shelter and an opportunity to call their families so they can buy a bus or plane ticket to get to their court date on time. By Friday, most visitors are gone. In the interim period, the congregation works to educate its community about immigration issues and migrant rights. "Asylum seekers are legal in [this] country ... they have the right to ask for asylum," Sánchez-Guzmán said. "They are legal until the court decides [otherwise] for them."

Immersion program participants meet undocumented migrants, U.S. Border Patrol officers, immigration lawyers and others involved in border culture. Through the chain-link fence on the border, they listen as their Mexican neighbors share their joys and challenges.

"Spiritually, it has changed our congregation," she said, adding that although *Cristo Rey* is small and its members aren't wealthy, they've generously opened their hearts to their migrant neighbors. *The congregation receives an annual grant, funded by Mission Support from the Rocky Mountain Synod and the churchwide organization, to bolster outreach.*

*Cristo Rey* also finds support as a member of the ELCA Welcoming Congregations Network, an initiative of the ELCA's AMMPARO strategy (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). There are 112 ELCA congregations involved.

"Jesus told us to help," said Sánchez-Guzmán of *Cristo Rey*. "He didn't say just help people with documents. He just says feed the hungry and clothe the naked."

To find a video story about *Cristo Rey*, visit [ELCA.org/SOFIA](http://ELCA.org/SOFIA).

