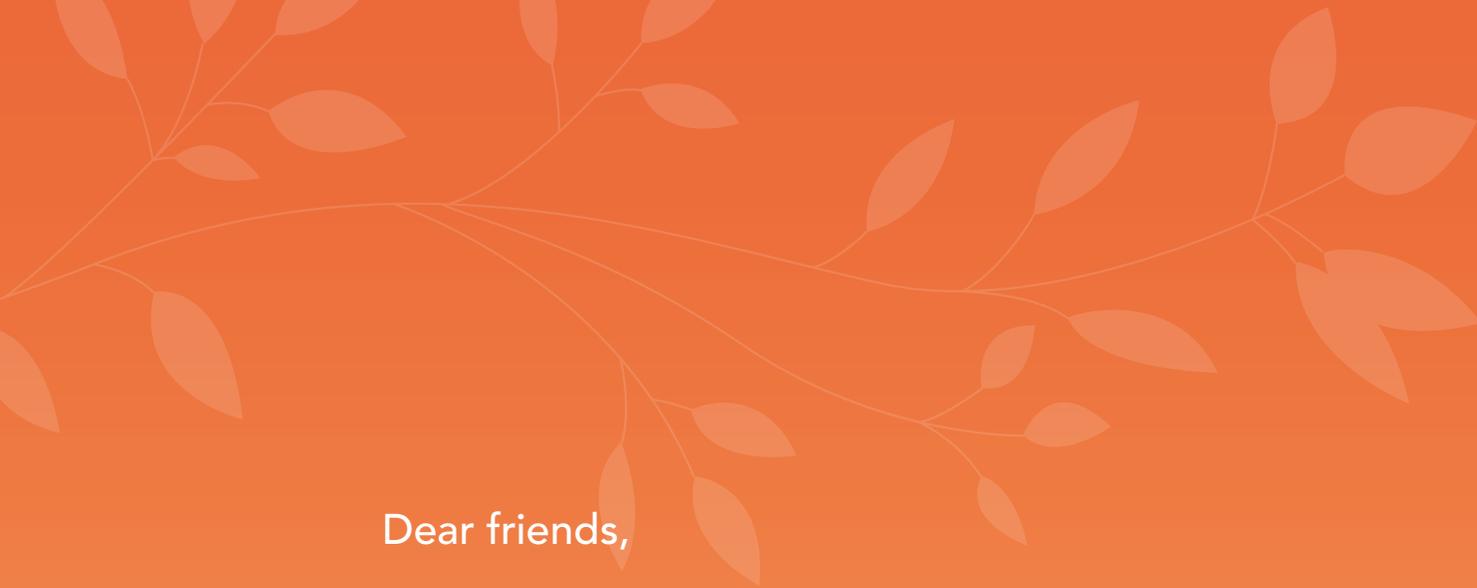
A close-up photograph of a diverse group of young children from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They are all smiling broadly, showing their teeth, and looking towards the camera. The children are of various ethnicities and are dressed in simple, everyday clothing. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the children's faces.

gather

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO



Lutheran Immigration
and Refugee Service



Dear friends,

Thank you for joining us and hundreds of communities across the United States to celebrate Gather: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Together we honor the journey of the migrant and the refugee. Together we seek to understand the global realities that our brothers and sisters face. Together we respond to fear, pain, and persecution with compassion, generosity, and open arms to welcome the stranger.

This year, we will be celebrating the lives of the Ashimwe family from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who came to the United States in 2016. We share their story along with a number of resources to equip you, your family, and your community to intimately engage in the lives of our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters.

Peace,



Director for Outreach

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

In this toolkit, you will find a variety of resources to help guide your group through the Ashimwe family's story for a fun and engaging experience. You can use these resources to host a special evening or afternoon for your immediate household, a close group of friends, or community group. We recognize that this year has brought many challenges to being together in person, so we encourage you to think creatively about how to connect with your friends and family through video platforms and outdoor spaces to fully enjoy this experience in a safe and comfortable way. We recommend reading through the whole toolkit before planning your event.

Additionally, you will find a few concrete ways you and your group can take action to support migrant and refugee families.

ACT: Host a virtual Gather: Democratic Republic of the Congo event with your friends, family, and community.

DONATE: Help individuals and families from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and beyond.

ADVOCATE: Contact your Members of Congress now and urge them to include a path to citizenship for immigrants and refugees.

PRAY: Lift your voice for our brothers and sisters who seek safety and protection with guided prayers.

TEACH: Learn more about the DRC and share the story of the Ashimwe family.

Act

Use the following resources to host an evening with your family, friends, or community group celebrating Gather: DRC.

In this section, you will find resources that incorporate your five senses—touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. These resources will allow you to fully immerse yourself in the culture of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Resources include:

TOUCH: Partake in arts and crafts to make your own Congolese mask and try your hand at a Congolese board game.

SIGHT: Watch movies and YouTube videos that showcase the DRC's culture and read books that take place in the DRC and discuss its history.

HEARING: Listen to Congolese music, former refugee's stories, and poetry readings.

SMELL: Read former refugee's recollection of Congolese scents and focus on the smell of spices and herbs when cooking Congolese dishes.

TASTE: Follow along to Congolese recipes to taste traditional food of the DRC.

For more information on the history and overview of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and for the Ashimwe family story, please see the Teach section on page 13. We recommend either having friends and family read the section and watch the video prior to the event or taking time at the beginning of your event to read this section and watch the video before engaging in the discussion questions.



TOUCH

Art is an important element of culture, as it spans across ages and serves an important role in daily life. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, masks are an important part of rituals, ceremonies, worship, and entertainment. The history of Congolese masks dates to its early inhabitants, but its culture importance continues today. The Songye people make kifwebe masks, which include animal traits, such as the stripes of zebras, teeth of crocodiles, eyes of chameleons, and more. The Kuba people make *mwaash ambooy* masks, which is an ancestor mask and represents the founder of the Kuba Kingdom, Woot. The Yaka people make *ndeemba* masks, which is an ancestor mask that symbolizes fertility. Ethnic groups across the DRC continue to practice the artform of masks in daily life and special cultural events.

Learn more about Congolese Masks by watching this [video](#) or viewing the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art's [collection of DRC art](#).

As you host your Gather: DRC event, we encourage you to view the traditional masks and participate by creating your own in [this craft project](#), perfect for all the ages to engage in.

SIGHT

Media is a great source of entertainment, but it can also be used as a powerful tool for information. We encourage having a viewing party of Congolese-focused films, including *This is Congo* (2017), *City of Joy* (2016), and *Virunga* (2014). Some films may contain mature content regarding violence in the DRC and may not be suitable for young audiences. More films can be found at the [Friends of the Congo](#).

Literature, like media, is an important part of culture and provides insight into Congolese culture and history. Books by Congolese authors include *Tram 83* by Fiston Mwanza Mujila, *Memoirs of a Porcupine* by Alain Mabanckou, and *How Dare the Sun Rise: Memoirs of a War Child* by Sandra Uwiringiyimana.

To learn more about the history of the DRC, books such as *King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hochschild and *Congo: The Epic History of a People* by David Van Reybrouck recount the country's history from its colonial past to the present.

For younger audiences, we have book recommendations in the additional resources section on page 16.

We have also specially curated a **YouTube playlist** that showcases Congolese culture in short videos. We encourage watching these videos to see firsthand the culture and history of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

HEARING

What we hear is often as impactful as what we see, whether it be through music, podcasts, or simply listening to people tell their stories. Music acts as a form of expression and is a vital part of culture. There are many genres of Congolese music, including Soukous, Rumba, and Kwassa kwassa, which accompanies the Kwassa kwassa dance. Famous Congolese musicians and groups include **Papa Wemba, African Fiesta, Pepe Kalle**. Outside of dance music, the **Kinshasa Symphony** is the only symphony orchestra in the Congo and perform composers such as Beethoven and Verdi.



For auditory learners and podcast lovers, podcasts provide information in a manner that is accessible and easy to understand. Podcasts such as the **Democratic Republic of the Congo** by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Question of the Day's **episode on the DRC** are quick ways to learn about the country.

We can also learn firsthand about the country through listening to refugees share

their experiences. Poet JJ Bola fled DRC at the age of six and can be heard **reading his poem *Refuge***. Former refugee Jean Claude Ashimwe shared his family's story on page 13.

SMELL

Our sense of smell helps us recall memories and make new ones. Strong scents that help understand the culture of the DRC include spices, herbs, and smoke that are commonly found when cooking. A common spice mix is *pili pili*, which includes paprika, chili flakes, chili pepper, lemon peel, oregano, ginger, and bay leaf.

TASTE

Food is an essential part of life and therefore, a crucial part of culture. Recipes are passed down from generation to generation and remind us of our roots. We have curated two menus that showcase Congolese cuisine, as well as a video tutorial for Makayabu Peanut Butter created by Bantu Tastes. We encourage you to try these recipes and compare them to your own family recipes. Food allows us to learn about other cultures, while celebrating the similarities and differences we share with others.

MENU ONE:

Main: **Poulet à la moambé, the DRC's national dish**

Side: **Saka-Saka, Cassava Leaves**

Side 2: **Mchuzi wa Biringani, Eggplant Curry**

Dessert: **Ndizi Wa Nazi, Plantains with Coconut Milk**

MENU TWO:

Main: Makayabu Peanut Butter, Cod in a peanut sauce
Fumbwa (Congolese Wild Spinach Stew)

Side 1: **Fufu**

Side 2: **Dongo-Dongo, Okra Soup**

Dessert: **Mikate, Fried Congolese Beignets**

MAKAYABU PEANUT BUTTER **Ingredients:**

- 1 red onion
- 2 white onions
- 5 cloves of garlic
- 2 tomatoes
- 3 peppers
- 4 green onions
- 1 cup of peanut butter
- Cod
- Chikwangué
- Fumbua
- Safou
- Oil
- Cayenne

For more recipes and ingredients, visit [Bantu Tastes](#).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use these questions to spark conversation at your event. Encourage your friends and family to expand on their answers and ask other questions!

Take some time to share about a time when you felt out of place. It could be joining a new school or job, moving to a new city, or traveling around the world.

-  *What were some things you felt during that time?*
-  *What was new or strange to you? What was familiar?*
-  *Was there anything that helped you feel more comfortable?*

What do you first think of when you think of the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

-  *What has informed those thoughts or ideas? What images do you see about the DRC?*
-  *What surprised you or stood out to you most about the history of the DRC?*

What role does music play in your life?

What ways would you maintain creativity and artistic expression?

*Does the Ashimwe family fit into what you think of DRC?
Why or why not?*

 *Do you see any similarities or differences between your family and the Ashimwe family?*

 *What parts of U.S. culture do you think you would be most surprised about if you moved here for the first time?*

What ways do you see yourself engaging in the story of migrants and refugees in your community?

 *Do you have any experience working with people from other cultures in your community?*

Think about the food you are eating.

 *What kinds of foods are part of your family traditions?*

 *What food do you enjoy most during holidays?*

 *What is your favorite comfort food?*

 *What flavors are familiar to you?*

 *What flavors are new to you?*

 *Which foods would you make every day? Which would you save for special occasions?*

 *What ingredients or tools were challenging to find?*

 *How do you think refugees feel when they can't find those ingredients in their new community?*

 *If you were forced to migrate to a new country, what ingredients or tools would you miss the most?*

Donate:

Together, we can make a difference.

With the help of our amazing partners and communities, LIRS is able to help refugee and migrant families like the Ashimwe family.

Your contribution will help us continue to provide intensive support to newly arrived refugees, to place vulnerable children in safe, loving homes, and to empower new Americans to become successful, contributing members of their communities.

Visit lirs.org/gather to donate or send your contribution to:

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
PO Box 17467
Baltimore, MD 21297-1467

Memo: Gather: DRC



Advocate

Each year, in honor of Citizenship Day, Americans reflect on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and what it means to be a U.S. citizen. At LIRS, we celebrate refugees and immigrants who have overcome tremendous obstacles to start a new life in the U.S. and have become U.S. citizens. We also recognize people who are taking steps to become U.S. citizens. This year, we would like to highlight immigrants who have been living in the U.S. and enriched our communities with their talents and skills, yet do not have the opportunity to become U.S. citizens because of Congress's failure to act.

LIRS urges Congress to prioritize the inclusion of a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, farmworkers, essential workers, and their families in any economic recovery legislation including through budget reconciliation. Providing a path to citizenship for these individuals and their families not only recognizes the sacrifices they have made for all Americans over the past year as our nation confronted one of the most challenging periods in modern history, but also the important role they continue to play in America's economic recovery and long-term global competitiveness.

As Congress considers budget reconciliation measures, we must remind them of immigrants' contributions to the nation. Studies that have found legalizing a group comprised of Dreamers, TPS beneficiaries, and farm workers would result in no less than a \$1.5 trillion increase in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), on top of creating some 400,800 new jobs in the coming decade. **Contact your**

Members of Congress now and urge them to include a path to citizenship for Dreamers, TPS holders, farmworkers and essential workers in any economic recovery legislation including through budget reconciliation.

To advocate, go to lirs.org/gather.



PRAYER

FACT: In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 70% of the population identifies as Christian. The Congolese refugee caseload is overwhelmingly (96%) Christian.

If your congregation or faith group is looking for more resources, check out our Congregation Resources on page 18.

A PRAYER OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

For a Peaceful Heart for DRC Refugees
(provide candles to those praying together)

JESUS CHRIST "IS OUR PEACE" (EPH 2:14)

God of Strength and Peace, you banish fear and bring light. As we light these candles, we affirm our passion for serving as your light in the world. We ask you to show mercy and grant our neighbors from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Our siblings from the Democratic Republic of the Congo have witnessed to their country's painful and war-torn history.

We ask you to strengthen the voice to those whose grief and pain is unspeakable; give compassion and strength to those who would hear so that they might serve and heal.

Empower those who dare to speak the truth to power. Inspire those who challenge prejudice and envision new ways of relating. Nurture health and hope and peace in a land torn by violence and war.

We bring before you the people whose story we have witnessed and the families that will be joining us to begin a new life.

May God who offers hope to the world, offer that hope through our actions and prayers.

We ask it the name of Jesus, our brother and our friend.

Amen

AN INTERFAITH PRAYER

God of Hope and Peace,

We welcome our siblings from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). We acknowledge the truth that the DRC is the scene of some of the world's worst violence and human rights abuses in recent years. We know that the refugees that arrive have been forced by war and unrest to flee their homes. Throughout history, the Congo has experienced exploitation of the poverty and chaos in the country to plunder Congo's rich natural resources, especially its minerals. Our Congolese siblings have watched as millions of lives have been tragically claimed by often preventable or treatable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, HIV, and COVID-19.

Taking steps toward healing and rebuilding reconstruction, peacebuilding,

We join in prayer so that we are open to caring for each other and ourselves to the healing and guiding power of God.

God of peace, justice, unity, and hope, we ask these things.

Amen



Teach

The Ashimwe family came over in 2016 and was resettled in Omaha, Nebraska. They fled from violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They have found a community in Omaha, where Jean Claude served as a community liaison. They help newly resettled refugees adapt to life in the United States.

In an interview, Jean Claude Ashimwe graciously shared what it was like to come to the United States, a few things that surprised them about U.S. culture, and how they find ways to maintain their identity while building a new home in the United States.

What has surprised you about American culture?

Until now, for me, I still have a problem eating some food. American food- it's, it's sweet. Even the meat here is sweet. We're not used to eating sweets. For example, if you drink tea, it's okay but for the other food, normally we like not sweet. Like meat, like everything is sweet, so it's really hard for some, for me, to integrate.

What has been a positive experience you've had working in your community?

Oh, there are too many. The first Congolese students who came here, six have graduated from high school. It really helped me because I always helped those students. I'm very, very proud to see that now, I have about six students and they can speak Swahili and English at the same time and help the community. Another thing is helping families become homeowners. I started a program myself with one of the estate agents, so that everyone who wants to buy a house can. Now I have 10 families that are homeowners.

What reminds you of home in the United States?

When I go to an Africa store, I buy you some fufu and then I cook it here in the United States. I remember home every time because it is one of my favorite foods. Also, big festivals like Christmas and New Year or when we have to be together. We remind each other of home. I went to a Congolese bar in Kansas City and I started hearing Congolese music. I think that night, I was very happy when I saw people dancing a Congolese dance.

If you could share one message, what would it be?

Wherever a refugee comes from, I need people to try to understand their culture. Even if someone you don't have the same belief or worry the same but consider him as a person, respect him and help him. These are the people who come to this country, some of them are brave people who have struggled all their lives. They need hope. They need support to grow.

HISTORY OF CONFLICT:

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has a complex history plagued with violence, corruption, and conflict. Formerly the Kingdom of Kongo, the area suffered during the Atlantic Slave Trade. The DRC was established as the Congo Free State in 1885 by Belgian King Leopold II to be his private property. Belgium relied on the DRC's resources of rubber, minerals, and oils. Under Belgian rule, Congolese people were forced to work for the King, and many died as a result of exploitation and disease. Many atrocities were committed against the Congolese people, specifically involving forced labor. In 1908, King Leopold II declared the DRC to belong to Belgium, instead of his own private ownership. The Congolese people suffered under Belgian rule until 1960, when they achieved independence.

Following independence, the Democratic Republic of the Congo experienced instability and change. Joseph Kasavubu became the first President and Patrice Lumumba became the first Prime Minister, yet the two were frequently at odds. Issues such as feudalism, tribalism, and ethnic nationalism led to political instability. Joseph Mobutu, an Army Commander, led the coup and caused Lumumba to be arrested and assassinated. Mobutu later conducted a second coup and proclaimed himself President. Under Mobutu's rule, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was renamed Zaire. Mobutu maintained his position for around 32 years. He oversaw periods of economic flourishing as well as extreme deterioration. His administration was known for rampant corruption and human-rights abuses before he was deposed, leading to the First and Second Congo Wars.

Conflicts in other countries have led to migration and interference in the DRC's politics as well. The Rwandan Genocide led to a massive flow of refugees fleeing conflict in their home country. Rwandan and Ugandan troops participated in removing Mobutu from office. From 1998 to 2003, a rebellion against Laurent-Désiré Kabila, the man who replaced Mobutu, evolved into the Second Congo War, also known as Africa's Great War. It caused millions of people to become refugees and displaced them from their homes.

It is estimated that there are 4.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPS) from the DRC. Following the Second Congo War, armed groups would target civilians and the people were left unprotected due to weak and ineffective governance. Kabila was assassinated in 2001, but his son, Joseph Kabila served as President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the next eighteen years.



The first peaceful transfer of power in recent history occurred in 2019, after Félix Tshisekedi won the 2018 election, however, that election has since been highly contested. During the election, acts of voter suppression and violence against peaceful protestors, political opponents, and pro-democracy activists occurred. Tshisekedi came into power at a time when there were a number of crises occurring simultaneously, including an Ebola outbreak and armed militant groups. The UN estimates that there are currently more than 800,000 DRC refugees in other nations.

For a more in-depth look at the history and conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, check out:

Center on Foreign Relations

Migration Policy Institute

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN:

The Day War Came by Nicola Davies

My Name Is Not Refugee by Kate Milner

What Is a Refugee? by Elise Gravel

The Treasure Box by Margaret Wild

BOOKS FOR ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL AGE STUDENTS:

Who Are Refugees and Migrants? What Makes People Leave Their Homes? and Other Big Questions by Michael Rosen and Annemarie Young

Give Me Shelter: Stories About Children Who Seek Asylum by Tony Bradman

Stormy Seas: Stories of Young Boat Refugees by Mary Beth Leatherdale

A Refugee's Journey from the Democratic Republic of the Congo by Ellen Rodger

Where Is the Congo? by Megan Stine

Refugee by Alan Gratz

KIDS RESOURCES:

[Coloring Page](#)

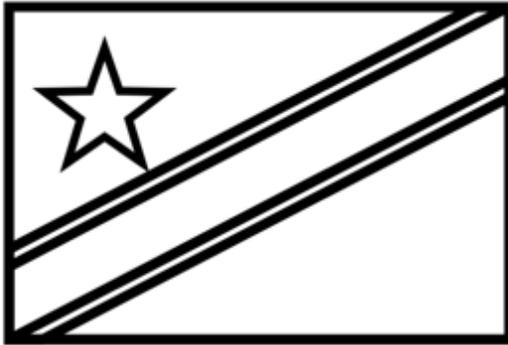
[Congo And Congo-Lukasa Memory Board Game](#)

[DRC Kwassa Kwassa Dance-Along](#)

[DRC Geography Information](#)

[Meet the Children of DRC](#)

The Democratic Republic of Congo

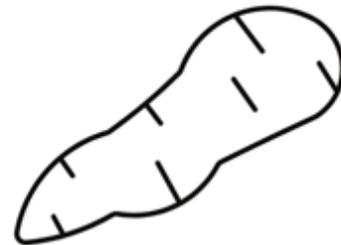


The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country located in the center of Africa. 105 million people live in the Democratic Republic of Congo.



The peacock is the Congo's national bird.

Soccer is a popular sport in the Congo.



Cassava is a root found in Congolese food.



Africa



The Democratic Republic of Congo

Can you find the Democratic Republic of Congo in the map of Africa? Color it in!

CONGREGATION RESOURCES

ORDER OF WORSHIP

Gathering Song

Greeting

L: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.

Prayer

(see page 11s)

Scripture Reading

Reflection – a time to reflect on God’s call to welcome our neighbor.

Activities might include:

-  *Provide sermon or brief meditation on one of the scripture readings*
-  *Listen to the Video Sermon by Pastor Emmanuel Jackson*
-  *Discuss the Teach materials about Democratic Republic of the Congo*
-  *Engage in Reflection on Questions in the Act section*

Litany

Sharing of the Peace

Lord’s Prayer

Blessing

L: The God of steadfastness and encouragement us to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus.

C: Amen.

L: The God of hope fill us with joy and peace in believing, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

L: The God of all grace bless us now and forever.

C: Amen.

Sending Song

Dismissal

L: Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.

C: Thanks be to God.

Litany

P: Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For the people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo registered as refugees who await welcome in a new country. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For good government, led by legislators and other policy makers who place common good above self, and who pursue peace and justice with integrity and wisdom for displaced people throughout the world. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For an end to policies that restrict refugees from finding safe haven in new homes. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For compassion and courage to speak on behalf of our brothers and sisters displaced from their homes by war and unrest. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For the Ashimwe family, building a new life and envisioning a future where they make a difference in the world. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For communities and congregations who accompany refugee families as they explore new opportunities and integrate into their new home. Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For leaders of all faith communities, that they continue to be bearers of the Good News and serve as examples of the peacemakers we are called to be, Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For all government and political leaders, that they work to end the violence and struggle in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and that their decisions and actions lead to a future of peace, Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

P: For the Democratic Republic of the Congo, that they understand the importance of their role and do what they can to ensure justice and peace, while protecting the most vulnerable, Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

For all communities, help us to be bearers of peace in our own communities as we walk with our sisters and brothers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, so that we all will be called peacemakers and children of God, Gracious God,

C: Christ's peace for the world. Peace to our siblings in Christ.

MESSAGE OF GRATITUDE:

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking this journey with us as we seek to better understand our calling to welcome the stranger and share in the journey of our migrant brothers and sisters.

CALENDAR FOR UPCOMING EVENTS

YEARLY CALENDAR 2021-2022

ANNUAL PROGRAMS

August 2, 2021 through September 24, 2021

Gather: Democratic Republic of the Congo

October 1, 2021 through December 3, 2021

Hope for the Holidays

Spring of 2022

Stand Up, Speak Up

If your congregation is interested in learning more about the work of LIRS and how to join us, you should look into **EMMAUS: Congregational Discernment**. **EMMAUS: Congregational Discernment** is an opportunity for congregations to discuss and pray over the work of LIRS and explore ways they can walk alongside migrants and refugees. It also offers helpful prompts to guide discernment and create space to listen for how God is calling us to respond.