

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE SUPPORT OF REFUGEE ADVOCACY EVENT AT CONGREGATION BETH ELOHIM

On November 19, 2017, from 3 to 6 p.m., the Refugee Advocacy Task Force at Congregation Beth Elohim will host a book event/volunteer fair, at 274 Garfield Pl, Brooklyn, NY. The headline speaker will be **VALERIA LUISELLI**, author of [Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay In 40 Questions](#).



Valeria Luiselli is a gifted 33-year-old Mexican writer who knows the migratory experience first-hand. Born in Mexico City to an Italian family, Luiselli spent her childhood in South Africa, her teens in Mexico and now lives in New York with her husband and their kids. Her writings focus on dislocation and national identity. Her latest book - [Tell Me How it Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions](#) - is based on her experiences as interpreter for dozens of Central American child migrants who risked their lives crossing Mexico to escape their fraught existence back home

From 2013-2016, approximately 140,000 young people sought asylum in the U.S. from Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras). To stay, each child had to be vetted. Aid organizations created a 40 question intake questionnaire to help them triage the children for possible pro bono legal representation. Whether a child qualified for representation almost always made the difference between staying and leaving: Nine out of ten children assigned an attorney are able to obtain some form of immigration relief, while nine out of ten without an attorney are deported. The questionnaire, therefore, was critical.

Using the questionnaire as her memoir outline, Ms. Luiselli reviews each question and the typically shaken responses. For instance, Question 7 asks, "Did anything happen on your trip to the U.S. that scared you or hurt you?" Luiselli says that children rarely give an honest answer, not to lie or evade, but because the truth is too awful: 80% of migrant girls and women crossing Mexico to the U.S are raped en route. "When I have to ask that seventh question," Luiselli writes, "All I want to do is cover my face and ears and disappear." The book presents Luiselli's shame and rage at the gap between American ideals and actual treatment of undocumented children. She shows how the U.S. and Central America are an integrated socio-economic system: The street gangs migrant kids flee in El Salvador emerged during the American-backed civil war there. They began in L.A., their members got deported back to San Salvador, and now have branches on Long Island that menace refugees who left Central America to get away from them. But Luiselli never loses sight that, fundamentally, the great dream of migration is an expression of hope.



After Ms. Luiselli's talk, there will be a panel with various refugee aid organizations. A volunteer fair follows, where individuals may volunteer to assist numerous advocacy organizations. St. Boniface Social Justice Committee supports this event and encourages parishioner involvement.