



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



# Disability Ministries

## Announcing new grants for Accessibility Reinvestment Grants

We celebrate that at Churchwide Assembly 2019 there was overwhelming support by ELCA voting members offering guidance and solidarity for the future direction of the denomination.

Authentic diversity and being a sanctuary body demonstrate our care and concern for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. While we are saddened that individual racism exists, we are acknowledging that ignoring the past is painful and that our collective sin can do substantial harm in systemic ways that are uncalled for. I'm thankful for our practice of corporate confession and believe the entire church will benefit.



In response, ELCA Disability Ministries introduces a new grant opportunity for ELCA congregations in diverse and divested communities for an Accessibility Reinvestment Grant. Applications will be accepted through Oct. 15, 2019, at <https://elca.fluxx.io> for up to \$25,000 for small-scale property and large-impact programmatic plans. Questions can be directed to [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org).

## What is a divested community, and what do persons with disability and ethnic members of the ELCA have in common?

(by Carol Josefowski, coordinator for ELCA Disability Ministries)

I'd like to share a personal story about what is meant by a divested community...

As a child, I grew up in Harvey, Ill., a diverse yet segregated town 20 miles south of Chicago. Each week on my way to church I passed by a weathered historical marker honoring Amanda Berry Smith, an African American woman freed by her formerly enslaved father. Smith relocated to Harvey after joining the AME Church and losing her husband in war and three children to unexpected deaths. She was sometimes referred to as the "Singing Pilgrim" and felt called to preach, evangelize, foster-parent and author a newspaper prior to 1893, when she founded the first orphanage in Illinois for black children. This sign in a vacant lot caused me to reflect

about another special home close to my grade school that had yellow tape around it; some referred to it as the halfway house. People with disabilities, often veterans, lived there temporarily until they were independent enough to find adequate and affordable housing, but sometimes there were strong warnings in the front yard stating, “Persons preparing for release from prison or mental hospital reside here.”

My curiosity continued to grow when I entered seventh grade. A mile-long walk to Lowell Longfellow (from my quiet, residential white neighborhood) took me through an industrialized area where large Latinx families lived in small apartments, then under a viaduct of freight and commuter railways to my schoolyard, surrounded by boarded-up windows, a vacant fire station, sidewalks with holes and roads with clogged sewer drains causing frequent flooding. While my family and church tried to prepare me for such disparities and taught me appreciation for culture and ethnicity, there was a spirit of discontent by neighborhood friends walking to school with me. Privileged parents eventually resorted to driving children to school, rallying for weekly excused-tardy notices for white children arriving 30 minutes late and voicing distrust toward Dr. Bluford, a black male principal, whom I admired. Another eye-opener was entering high school, where I was bused in the opposite direction to a more affluent, newly built building; my grade school was 99.8% white, junior high was 70% black and high school was initially 100% white. I was shocked by gym classes introducing me to golf, archery, swimming and bowling three days a week — a stark contrast from the two years of one-day-a-week calisthenics in recycled gym uniforms experienced the prior two years. I remember wondering about former classmates whom I seldom encountered again.

As a college student, I heard some ask, “Isn’t Harvey a blighted South Side city?” I had difficulty trying to share what I liked about my community or explaining what I now know as “white flight.” Between 1975 and 1990, Harvey housing values dropped as much as 75%. Between 1985 and 2015, there was a 30% decline in population. Upon returning to Chicago after seminary (2008), I learned that Detroit, St. Louis and Gary, Ind., had similar histories. Shifts in industry and deregulation of banking laws such as the Community Reinvestment Act (1990s) exacerbated neighborhood divesting in disproportionate ways. Such communities continue to experience ongoing business, church, school and social service organization closures contributing to greater economic downfall that especially impacts people of color and people with disabilities.

People living in divested communities share common life experiences — simply finding a grocer, library, pharmacy or medical office nearby is problematic. Residents in divested communities become isolated, more reliant upon government subsidies or generous givers, and subject to low-income, part-time jobs without insurance, whose employers are at risk of going out of business themselves. While poverty hits many areas of the country, I suspect you would not be surprised to learn that most impoverished (small, medium and large) urban communities are predominately black and brown residents, some of whom live with disabilities. Congregations are not unaffected; in response the church opens its doors wider, pays village taxes and utility bills despite slow emergency-response times, and serves many



neighbors coping with unreliable transportation and some police surrounded by colleagues who racially profile and disregard traffic signals in pursuit of so-called suspects of crime. Divestment can lead to relocation by some, concentrated poverty preventing relocation for others, and depression and compassion fatigue for many.

Disability Ministries is walking the 60-day journey toward justice with the ELCA, and its first steps include reinvestment in divested communities and congregations. If you'd like to join us, email [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org) and visit <https://elca.org/disability>.

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### **Companionship Workshop (sponsored by Interfaith Mental Health Coalition)**



Learn how to support the individuals in your community who live with mental illness, insecure housing or chemical dependency, and move from a transactional exchange to relational engagement, enabling substantive change with Companionship:

A three-hour course that provides an effective approach to the practice of mental health ministry through which any caring human being can reach out and help another who is in

distress.

#### **Participants will learn:**

- The five practices of Companionship
- Skills to listen consciously and with openness
- Skills to maintain an awareness of limits and boundaries
- Skills to ease the isolation these difficulties often bring

#### **Who should take a Companionship course?**

Any secular or faith-based communities that are engaged with and support those who are disadvantaged, using the practice of Companionship, through ministries of hospitality and outreach.

#### **Companionship Workshop**

**Date: Wednesday, Sept. 25, 2019**

**Time: 8:30-9 a.m. registration, 9 a.m.-noon**

DoubleTree by Hilton Chicago — Oak Brook

1909 Spring Road

Oak Brook, IL 60523

Fee: \$25 (normally \$84/person, but is subsidized by IMHC)

**Registration is limited to 20 people, so register early!**

For more information, contact Robert Skrocki at [bpskrocki@comcast.net](mailto:bpskrocki@comcast.net).

### **Companionship Instructor Training**

**Date: Wednesday-Thursday, Sept. 25-26, 2019**

**Time: 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. both days**

DoubleTree by Hilton Chicago — Oak Brook  
1909 Spring Road  
Oak Brook, IL 60523

Fee: \$1,000 per person. Prepare to lead others by applying and registering here:  
<https://www.thecompanionshipmovement.org/train-the-trainer-application>.

**Registration is limited to 20 people, so register early!**

For more information, contact Carol Josefowski at [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org).

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### **CWA 2019**

#### **We Are the Church Together**

**(by Rev. Lisa Heffernan, ELCA Disability Ministries advisory team member)**

At the beginning of August, I attended the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Milwaukee, Wis., as a voting member from South Dakota. I'd seen the assembly over livestream in years past, but I still wasn't sure what to expect. Long hours, motions, and tough conversations filled most of our days. But so did grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the commitment that "We Are Church." It was a good, hard week.

Highlights for me were meeting and committing to support our interfaith siblings, declaring ourselves a sanctuary church (certainly a tough topic, that will take time and intentional conversation to understand most fully) and issuing a statement of apology to our members of the body of Christ who are of African descent. We are and were church! And for that I am thankful.

As a member of our disability advisory team, I also did my best to pay attention to things such as accessibility, representation, and a lifting up of this ministry. Sometimes I was disappointed by the lack of representation or inclusion. However, that only tells me that we have a great opportunity to be intentional in the future about making sure the voices and gifts of persons with disabilities are on task forces, teams and planning groups. I was frustrated at times, yes, but I am hopeful.

The most impactful thing for me was the celebration of the 50th anniversary of women's ordination, the 40th anniversary of the first ordination of a woman of color, and the 10th anniversary of ordaining LGBTQ+ pastors who are married or in long-term partnerships. Wow, was that a worship service!! Processing in with more than 300 of my ordained sisters in Christ is something I will never forget. I will never forget the joy, the tears and the thankfulness for the word proclaimed.

I went into that day thinking I wouldn't get emotional. But I did, as I reflected about my own journey and the journeys of all persons with disabilities who are called to be

leaders in this church. We ARE called, friends. Denominations across the board have a ways to go in order for this to happen, but we're getting there. Do what you can; have the hard conversations with your churches, call committees, seminaries, and future ministries. You are gifted; you are called. You are an important part of this body. I needed some help from a friend to get across that carpet to the worship hall, but then I took myself into that assembly. She supported me, and we then supported one another. How wonderful an image of being the body of Christ is that?!

We are church. Let's continue to support one another with mutual love, so that WE may share the love of Christ all the way from the assembly to our churches and homes.

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### **Lutheran Suicide Prevention Ministry "Restoring Hope/Inspiring Action" GONE!**

Imagine 490 ELCA members lost to suicide in 2017! Based on national averages and the number of Americans who are ELCA members, 490 represents the number of members who may have died and will die each year to suicide.

The number, 490, seems more impactful when stated in terms of losing an entire congregation — for example, Bethlehem Lutheran in St. Charles, Ill. But when you add to that the impact on the entire community, suicide deaths are devastating! And, realize, the ELCA lost that same size “congregation” to suicide last year — and will lose the same size congregation next year. When does the tragic toll begin to turn downward?



Because suicide deaths are singular and not mass events, their impact tends to become normalized as something we expect and can't do anything about. If you happen to be impacted by the death of one of those 490 ELCA members lost to suicide, that death completely blows your life apart. Time for you is henceforth marked as before the suicide or after the suicide.

Suicide deaths in the U.S. reached a record high in 2017. Over 47,000 people died by suicide — about 14 people for every 100,000. All our cumulative prevention efforts of the last 40 years failed to turn downward the ever-increasing number of suicide deaths!

In a recent video, Presiding Bishop Eaton challenged the ELCA to “break the silence” surrounding suicide. The stigma attached to suicide has prevented us from even talking about suicide. It is time for this silence to end!

The Suicide Prevention Ministry, an independent Lutheran organization, is implementing in the Southeastern Synod a “no cost/low cost” congregational suicide-prevention program titled “Breaking the Silence.” It consists of the following three parts:

1. Pastors preach on suicide in September and on mental illness, alcoholism or substance abuse in the spring.
2. Congregation members ask their doctors to routinely screen for depression, which is present in about 90% of completed suicides.
3. "Talk Saves Lives," a suicide-prevention educational program offered by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), is offered to congregation members at no cost.

Join the growing ELCA suicide-prevention movement by contacting the Suicide Prevention Ministry at [jerryweyrauch@gmail.com](mailto:jerryweyrauch@gmail.com). Be a lifesaver in your corner of the world. Reach out to an at-risk person before another life ends in suicide! You can make a difference.

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### **\$10,000 awardees of Mental Health Ministry Grants**

Abiding Christ Lutheran Church, Fairborn, Ohio (Southern Ohio Synod)  
Alpine Lutheran Church, Rockford, Ill. (Northern Illinois Synod)  
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minn. (Minneapolis Area Synod)  
Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Staunton, Va. (Virginia Synod)  
Community Lutheran Partners Inc., Wheeling, W.Va. (West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod)  
First English Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio (Southern Ohio Synod)  
Fox River Valley Initiative, Glen Ellyn, Ill. (Metropolitan Chicago Synod)  
Gethsemane Lutheran Church, Austin, Texas (Southwestern Texas Synod)  
Gloria de Cristo Lutheran Church, Yuma, Ariz. (Grand Canyon Synod)  
Grace Lutheran Church, State College, Pa. (Allegheny Synod)  
Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church, San Jose, Calif. (Sierra Pacific Synod)  
IntegrArte and the Caribbean Synod, Dorado, Puerto Rico (Caribbean Synod)  
King of Kings Lutheran Church, Fairfax, Va. (Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod)  
Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, N.C. (North Carolina Synod)  
Luther College, Decorah, Iowa (Northeastern Iowa Synod)  
Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence, Burke, Va. (Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod)  
Lutheran Counseling Services, Orlando/Winter Park, Fla. (Florida-Bahamas Synod)  
Mount Olive Lutheran Church, Dallas, Texas (Northern Texas–Northern Louisiana Synod)  
Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Duluth, Minn. (Northeastern Minnesota Synod)  
Pella Lutheran Church, Sidney, Mont. (Montana Synod)  
St. James Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas (Texas–Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod)  
Southeastern Synod, Atlanta, Georgia (Southeastern Synod)  
Southwest California Synod, Glendale, Calif. (Southwest California Synod)  
Tikkun Farm, Cincinnati, Ohio (Southern Ohio Synod)  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Mason City, Iowa (Northeastern Iowa Synod)  
Tu Puedes, Cataño, Puerto Rico (Caribbean Synod)



**Find additional information on Disability Ministries or [contact us](#).**  
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Editor: Chris Ludwig

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