In the book of Genesis, we read of generations of people who only by the sweat of their face were able to eat bread (Genesis 3:19). But the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve are quickly drawn to hold on to their own and hold out on others.

Barriers are built between families and peoples. Divided, some are in plenty and some in want. It is an apt description of the world, even to our day. The symptom is a distribution of resources in which hunger flourishes for some. The dis-ease is the way in which some are excluded. The book of Genesis also offers an alternative narrative. It is one of the Garden, where we are drawn to see that all of humanity arises from a common ancestry.

I have a friend who says, “My feet are planted in this world, but my vision is drawn to Eden.” She says it when she sees situations like the emerging famine in South Sudan. She says it as well when those of faith help communities to claim the promise from which they have been shut out.

In this LifeLines you will read about the traditional activities for which ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response are known. At the heart of each of these accounts, you will see that there are a people who have been shut out. In each story, they are working to reclaim their future.

We will never be able to overcome hunger until communities are able to act as their own agents to fulfill the basic needs of all. We can feed a person for today, but hunger will not end until all are able to both feed themselves for a lifetime and share with their families and neighbors in a spirit of abundance.

Thank you for the ways in which you support this work that brings those who have been left out and pushed off into renewed hope. Thank you for your financial support to the work we share in ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. You will see in our financial record a story of strong and growing support. You are also invited to continue to support this work in 2017. Our work is made possible by the support that you and others provide each year.

We invite you to catch a glimpse, in the mirror of the work, toward a shared vision of Eden.

With gratitude for you and all you do to live in faith,

The Rev. Daniel Rift, Director
ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Appeal
ELCA World Hunger is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America creatively and courageously working toward a just world where all are fed.

Through a comprehensive approach and an unparalleled, world-wide network of individuals, congregations, companion churches and partners in more than 60 countries, ELCA World Hunger walks alongside individuals and communities to help break the cycle of hunger and poverty – for good.

The cycle of poverty and hunger can often be complicated and exacerbated by the onset or presence of a disaster – natural or human-caused. The work of ELCA World Hunger is complemented by Lutheran Disaster Response along a continuum of relief to sustainable development. With partners and companions, we walk the long road from risk to recovery to sustainability.

In this issue of LifeLines, you’ll read about people who are breaking down barriers set in place by factors beyond their control; who are finding renewed hope and empowerment as they engage in the transformative work of building sustainable communities and livelihoods through partnership with ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. These stories offer just a small snapshot of how, in 2016, our holistic approach supported innovative solutions that addressed the root causes of hunger and poverty and worked for systemic change.

For Lutherans, this work of reconciliation starts with love. For Martin Luther, our love and service begins at the Eucharist table and compels us out into relationship and community:

“Here your heart must go out in love and learn that the [Holy Communion] is a sacrament of love. As love and support are given to you, you in turn must render love and support to Christ in his needy ones. … For the sacrament has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that [they] are made one with all others” (Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods,” 1519).

Congregational and individual donors make it possible for ELCA World Hunger to “go out in love” throughout the world. We give thanks for the many gifts shared over the past year, and we are grateful to our donors who have faithfully supported this work through prayer, time and financial gifts. And yet, there is much more to do. We hope you will continue to partner with us as we support these life-saving ministries in the U.S. and around the world.
Community gardens and agricultural programs help families grow food to nourish themselves and build safer, healthier communities for the long term. These are some of the ways ELCA World Hunger accompanies communities as we work to put an end to hunger – for good.

Agriculture

On his parents’ large plot of land in Tapah in northwestern Malaysia, Haslan Chong harvests a batch of ginger alongside his relatives and neighbors. The work is hard and, at times, tedious. But according to Benson Yeoh, head of Lutheran Church in Malaysia’s (LCM) Orang Asli Committee, this work also signals to Haslan that his “dream has finally come to pass.” Together, the farmers are part of the Orang Asli Community Project of the LCM.

The Orang Asli are an indigenous people of West Malaysia. In recent years, they have been the focus of “development” by the government. This fraught process is tied closely to the Islamization of the Orang Asli and has left them without access to land and traditional lifestyles.

In contrast to this inequitable model, LCM is accompanying Orang Asli communities in several regions, working together to promote stability in their lives and enact changes that have a positive, sustainable impact.

Working with consultants and local farmers, Haslan and his Orang Asli neighbors were trained in sustainable agriculture, allowing them to learn while earning a sufficient income for themselves and their families.

The project has been a learning experience for everyone involved, beginning with the choice of which crop to grow. Because of its long shelf life and popularity, the participants chose to grow ginger, a spice often used in Malay cuisine. First, they planned to grow the crops along the slopes of local hills to take advantage of the rich soil in the area. Local farmers, however, pointed out that ginger depletes the soil of nutrients, making it unusable for several years.

Drawing on this local expertise, the project organizers began using coco peat instead of soil, which replenishes the lost nutrients through drip irrigation and lays the foundation for sustainable practices into the future.

With support from a no-interest microloan from LCM – made possible by gifts to ELCA World Hunger – the project began in July 2016 with preparation of the land and installation of drip irrigation.

Seeds were sown and the farmers were ready to see the results of their labor. The first harvest, however, was disappointing. The plants had to be harvested early because of some technical missteps along the way and yielded only 65 kilograms of ginger.

Working and learning together from this experience, the farmers improved their techniques. Their next harvest yielded 350 kilograms of ginger, most of which will be sold to LCM members in the region. Each kilogram can be sold for about $3.38 (U.S. dollars).

The 900 plants in the next batch of ginger will be ready for harvest soon. LCM has made connections with local market vendors and a nearby restaurant in the town of Tapah. Benson Yeoh says the “mutual trust” between LCM and Orang Asli farmers like Haslan has helped both learn valuable lessons throughout their work together. As they load heavy bags of coco peat, plant new seedlings, and harvest and clean mature plants, their accompaniment and work together has built a bridge for sustainability – of the land, of household income, and of relationships in their community for years to come.

‘Root’ solutions

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Refugee Resettlement

More than 65 million people have been forced to leave their homes due to war, conflict and disaster. Helping newcomers resettle in a new country, through our congregations and partners, is one way ELCA World Hunger is pursuing a world of justice where all are fed.

A one-in-a-million ministry

Mary Grace Asuncion takes pride in accomplishing tasks that some may consider just ordinary working, managing money and paying bills. But those everyday responsibilities remind Mary Grace of how far she has come since getting connected with DeafCAN! - the human service program of Christ the King Deaf Church in West Chester, Pa.

This life-changing ministry serves deaf refugees and immigrants from 15 countries, with support from your gifts through an ELCA World Hunger domestic hunger grant.

Refugees and immigrants are often vulnerable to hunger and poverty as they rebuild their lives. When this vulnerability intersects with the challenges often created by a lack of services for people with disabilities, the risks can be more severe.

Since 2010, Christ the King Deaf Church and DeafCAN! have accompanied disabled immigrants and refugees to turn this risk into opportunity - to build community and break the cycle of hunger and poverty.

“I’ve learned how important it is to develop my own skills and to be self-sufficient,” said Mary Grace, who emigrated from the Philippines four years ago. “I have a bicycle to help me get to and from work. I am learning American Sign Language (ASL), and studying for my citizenship and driver’s license. I look forward to becoming a citizen and voting someday.”

When Beth Lockard, pastor and executive director of DeafCAN!, first met Mary Grace, she was at risk of experiencing poverty and hunger. She had just left an abusive relationship, was unemployed, and lacked a support network in her new country. She was cut off from community and resources - a precarious situation in a new place.

Through DeafCAN!, Mary Grace received case management services, and she enrolled in a variety of classes. She also learned how to access resources, such as ASL interpreters, assisted listening devices, video cell phones and other technology.

“We see our ministry as holistic: to help people satisfy their physical, emotional and mental needs, so they can then understand spiritual aspects of life,” Lockard said. “Throughout the process, they grow and understand those deeper issues. They learn to navigate the world as they become more independent and productive.”

That has been true for Mary Grace, who now calls Christ the King Deaf Church her “church family.”

She volunteers at church and joins Lockard and other members in reaching out to individuals who are deaf and deaf-blind, living in nursing homes and other facilities.

“Now I see that I am giving back,” Mary Grace said. “I’m in a community now, I have new friends and a family at church. There are games and socials. We share the same stories and culture. Today I have a life.”

In addition to serving differently abled immigrants and refugees, DeafCAN! also advocates for systemic change to help build bridges out of poverty and hunger for good. For example, DeafCAN!’s Support Service Provider program for people with both vision and hearing impairments has become the model for a new program launched by the state of Pennsylvania. This will allow more Pennsylvanians to receive assistance with shopping, going to medical appointments, banking, handling mail and other tasks.
Clinics and community health programs provide health education and medical assistance for people living in poverty and work to reduce the burden of HIV and AIDS, malaria and water-borne diseases.

“HIV and AIDS used to be this very big secret that we all witnessed but no one spoke about, but now we talk about it openly.”

– Ellen Dlamini, Ezulwini HIV and AIDS Project caregiver

When a Lutheran network of door-to-door caregivers for people living with HIV in Swaziland was started three years ago, its staff were ostracized in much the same way as the people they were supporting.

The Ezulwini HIV and AIDS Project is made up of caregivers who offer in-home care to people living with HIV and AIDS. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support this life-saving ministry.

“When we started the project, there was no love for us, and we were rejected by most people in the community,” one of the caregivers, Ellen Dlamini, said. “The minute we opened our mouths to say we were there to talk about HIV, we would be shunned and shown the door.”

However, the success of the program and the gradual change in attitude toward the disease has led to acceptance. “Now we are welcomed and people speak freely to us about their condition and the struggles they face. We are helping each other to cope,” Dlamini said.

In addition to the provision of food and materials, participants also are invited to learn a more sustainable skill: gardening. Thembisile Mncina, a caregiver, said, “We teach the affected families how to create backyard gardens so that they are not solely dependent on food handouts but can eat fresh vegetables from their own labor.” Gardens ensure patients have the food that must accompany treatment.

Stigma and discrimination remain the greatest drivers of the HIV epidemic, but the Ezulwini caregivers see increasing awareness that people living with HIV can lead healthy lives, if the disease is managed well.

From food security through gardening to increased testing and treatment through community conversation about HIV and AIDS, the Ezulwini community has made many strides and helped many people. Every day, there are success stories of patients who were once bedridden but have now returned to work. These stories serve as beacons of hope that help the community strive for a better, healthier future.

For its population, the rate of HIV infection in Swaziland is high – one of the highest in the world. According to the United Nations, in 2015 some 200,000 people of the country’s 1.1 million were living with HIV.

However, a seed of hope has been planted by the Ezulwini caregivers, a group of selfless women who serve their community.

Run by the Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa – a companion church of the ELCA – the Ezulwini caregivers, trained by government nurses, visit about 180 people at least three times a week.

Going door to door, they speak to all the families in their community about health. The women encourage everyone to visit the nearest clinic for testing for HIV and tuberculosis and, if necessary, treatment.

They also provide families who are affected by HIV and AIDS with food parcels and hygiene packs, teach primary caregivers how to tend their patients, and directly observe patients taking medication. With a mobile clinic, people no longer have to travel great distances to get medical assistance or testing. “We even have the youth asking us about testing,” Dlamini said.

From Lutheran World Information, a publication of The Lutheran World Federation, a global community of churches of which the ELCA is the sole North America member.
By removing barriers, children and adults can attend school and secure better opportunities for their future. Programs like literacy training and vocational education also help teens and adults secure jobs and increase their earning potential.

**Hope and opportunity in Honduras**

Miguel*, 18, is the oldest of six brothers. He lives in Honduras with his mother and stepfather in a city riddled with gang violence. Because of this violence, and because of the lack of opportunity that existed within his community, Miguel decided to leave Honduras. He left home with a friend, both of whom were in search of a better future in the United States. Traveling much of the time on foot and relying on the occasional kindness of strangers, Miguel and his friend made it to Mexico.

It was here that their attempt to migrate would come to a terrifying end. One day, Miguel and his friend were abducted by a group of armed men. They were locked in a room, where the men demanded – under the threat of violence – that they provide their families’ phone numbers. These men planned to extort money in exchange for the two boys’ safe release. Miguel and his friend were held for several days until the men received the money from their families in Honduras.

Just days after being released by their captors, Miguel and his friend were taken into custody by immigration officials in Mexico and deported back to Honduras. Miguel’s story is just one of many that define the humanitarian crisis that is sweeping through Central America and the U.S. – a wave of unaccompanied and migrant youth that began in 2014 and continues today. According to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the number of children and youth who attempted to migrate had reached nearly 170,000 by the end of 2016.

These children and youth have fled already dangerous homelands to begin the equally dangerous journey from Central America in search of safety in the U.S. While many of these children remain in the U.S. to seek asylum, many others – like Miguel – are deported back to their home countries, back to the unsafe and unstable communities that compelled them to migrate in the first place.

Upon returning home, Miguel encountered the Mennonite Social Action Commission (CASM), an ecumenical partner of the ELCA whose mission is based on “a Christian ethic with a focus on human development of the poorest families and communities in Honduras.” In 2015-16, CASM’s ministry was supported, in part, by gifts to ELCA World Hunger.

During this period, more than 1,200 returned migrant youth received assistance from CASM during their repatriation process in Honduras; 339 of these young people participated in CASM’s Reinsertion Into Community program, which provides young people with the vocational training and psychosocial support they need to successfully restart their lives.

“This is the work that keeps youth from feeling the need to migrate, the kind of work we can support no matter what our opinion might be on immigration,” said Mary Campbell, director of the ELCA’s AMMPARO program. “The best solution to this issue is for these young people to find a sense of safety and purpose in Honduras.”

Of the 339 children in the program, 75 percent said they would not migrate again because of the new perspectives they had found through this ministry. A total of 175 migrant youth who went through the reinsertion program are working – 55 of whom have started independent businesses in the areas of food, cosmetology, hair cutting, refrigeration and cell phone repairs.

For Miguel and his friend, their vocational training took the form of refrigeration repair. They expect to start their own repair business in their community upon completing CASM’s program.

CASM’s ministry provides hope and purpose in the lives of young people in the wake of extreme trauma. For Miguel and young people like him, it creates a path toward a future of self-reliance and stability – in the very place they call home.

*Name changed to protect privacy*
Your gifts at work
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

UNITED STATES AND CARIBBEAN
Alabama
Alaska
Arizona
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
District of Columbia
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Iowa
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Maryland
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New Mexico
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Ohio
Oregon
Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico
Rhode Island
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Virginia
West Virginia
Wisconsin

INTERNATIONAL
Angola
Argentina
Bangladesh
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Central African Republic
China
Colombia
Costa Rica
Czech Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
France
Franklin
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel/Palestine
Japanese
Jordan
Kenya
Libya
Mali
Malawi
Malaysia
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Mothers
Namibia
Nepal
Niger
Nigeria
New Guinea
Nicaragua
Niger
Nina
North Korea
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Senegal
Serbia
South Africa
South Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Thailand
Uganda
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Honduras (multiple communities)
Vocational training and psychosocial support for returned migrant children throughout Honduras

West Chester, Pa.
American Sign Language classes and case management for refugees and immigrants who are deaf or deaf-blind

Ezulwini, Swaziland
In-home care for the people of Ezulwini living with HIV and AIDS

Mišar, Serbia
Rehabilitation projects within Roma communities following heavy rains, flooding and landslides

Tapah, Malaysia
Sustainable agriculture training with the Orang Asli, indigenous people of West Malaysia

Mišar, Serbia
Rehabilitation projects within Roma communities following heavy rains, flooding and landslides

Lutheran Disaster Response
28 countries, 10 states

Central African Republic
Central America
Drought
Cuba
Hurricane Matthew
El Salvador
Unaccompanied and migrant children
Ethiopia
Drought
Gaza and the West Bank
Conflict
Haiti
Hurricane Matthew

Honduras
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Hungary
Migrant/refugee crisis

Indonesia
Disaster preparedness

Italy
Earthquake

Japan
Earthquake

Jordan
Migrant/refugee crisis

Liberia
Ebola

Madagascar
Drought

Malawi
Drought

Malaysia
Disaster preparedness

Mexico
Hurricane Patricia

Migrant/refugee crisis

Nigeria
Conflict

Sierra Leone
Ebola

Slovakia
Flooding

Tanzania
Migrant/refugee crisis

Tonga
Flooding

United States
California
Unaccompanied and migrant children and wildfires

Florida
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Illinois
Tornadoes

New Jersey
Hurricane Sandy

New York
Hurricane Sandy

North Carolina
Flooding

Missouri
Flooding

New Mexico
Flooding

New York
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Ohio
Oklahoma

Oklahoma
Oregon

Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico

Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Tennessee

Texas
Vermont

Virginia
Washington

West Virginia
Wisconsin

ELCA World Hunger
63 countries, 48 states

The highlighted countries on the map show where we are supporting one or more new projects through our companions in 2017.

I N T E R N A T I O N A L
Angola
Argentina
Bangladesh
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Central African Republic
China
Colombia
Costa Rica
Czech Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
France
Franklin
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel/Palestine
Japanese
Jordan
Kenya
Libya
Mali
Malawi
Malaysia
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Mothers
Namibia
Nepal
Niger
Nigeria
New Guinea
Nicaragua
Niger
Nina
North Korea
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Senegal
Serbia
South Africa
South Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Thailand
Uganda
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Zambia
Zimbabwe

UNIVERSITY OF EUCLIDEAN STATES

United States
California
Unaccompanied and migrant children and wildfires

Florida
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Illinois
Tornadoes

New Jersey
Hurricane Sandy

New York
Hurricane Sandy

North Carolina
Flooding

Missouri
Flooding

New Mexico
Flooding

New York
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Ohio
Oklahoma

Oklahoma
Oregon

Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico

Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Tennessee

Texas
Vermont

Virginia
Washington

West Virginia
Wisconsin

Lutheran Disaster Response
28 countries, 10 states

Central African Republic
Community reconstruction

Central America
Drought

Cuba
Hurricane Matthew

El Salvador
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Ethiopia
Drought

Gaza and the West Bank
Conflict

Haiti
Hurricane Matthew

Honduras
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Honduras
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Hungary
Migrant/refugee crisis

Indonesia
Disaster preparedness

Italy
Earthquake

Japan
Earthquake

Jordan
Migrant/refugee crisis

Liberia
Ebola

Madagascar
Drought

Malawi
Drought

Malaysia
Disaster preparedness

Mexico
Hurricane Patricia

Migrant/refugee crisis

Nigeria
Conflict

Sierra Leone
Ebola

Slovakia
Flooding

Tanzania
Migrant/refugee crisis

Tonga
Flooding

United States
California
Unaccompanied and migrant children and wildfires

Florida
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Illinois
Tornadoes

New Jersey
Hurricane Sandy

New York
Hurricane Sandy

North Carolina
Flooding

Missouri
Flooding

New Mexico
Flooding

New York
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Ohio
Oklahoma

Oklahoma
Oregon

Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico

Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Tennessee

Texas
Vermont

Virginia
Washington

West Virginia
Wisconsin

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Argentina
Bangladesh
Bolivia
Botswana
Brazil
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cambodia
Cameroon
Central African Republic
China
Colombia
Costa Rica
Czech Republic
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
France
Franklin
Guatemala
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel/Palestine
Japanese
Jordan
Kenya
Libya
Mali
Malawi
Malaysia
Mauritania
Mauritius
Mexico
Mothers
Namibia
Nepal
Niger
Nigeria
New Guinea
Nicaragua
Niger
Nina
North Korea
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Panama
Paraguay
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Romania
Russia
Rwanda
Senegal
Serbia
South Africa
South Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Thailand
Uganda
Ukraine
Uzbekistan
Vietnam
Zambia
Zimbabwe

UNIVERSITY OF EUCLIDEAN STATES

United States
California
Unaccompanied and migrant children and wildfires

Florida
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Illinois
Tornadoes

New Jersey
Hurricane Sandy

New York
Hurricane Sandy

North Carolina
Flooding

Missouri
Flooding

New Mexico
Flooding

New York
Unaccompanied and migrant children

Ohio
Oklahoma

Oklahoma
Oregon

Pennsylvania
Puerto Rico

Rhode Island
South Carolina

South Dakota
Tennessee

Texas
Vermont

Virginia
Washington

West Virginia
Wisconsin

The highlighted countries on the map show where we are supporting one or more new projects through our companions in 2017.
2016 Financial Highlights
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

**REVENUE** $21,922,250

- **48%** Synods and Congregations
  - $10,469,798
- **38%** Individuals and Others
  - $8,523,154
- **11%** Bequests and Miscellaneous
  - $2,346,006
- **3%** Endowment and ELCA Donor Advised Funds
  - $683,293

**EXPENDITURES** $21,406,310

- **71%** International Relief and Development
  - $15,250,296
- **11%** U.S. Relief and Development
  - $2,437,732
- **9%** Fundraising and Administration
  - $1,872,899
- **5%** Advocacy
  - $1,071,560
- **4%** Hunger Education and Networking
  - $773,823

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

**REVENUE** $6,526,486

- **48%** Individuals and Others
  - $3,126,800
- **42%** Synods and Congregations
  - $2,747,186
- **10%** Grants
  - $652,500

**EXPENDITURES** $5,291,309

- **55%** International
  - $2,924,716
- **42%** United States
  - $2,092,337
- **10%** Communications and Administration
  - $274,256

2016 HIGHLIGHTED EXPENDITURES

**INTERNATIONAL**

- **Asia** (Earthquake, disaster preparedness, flooding, food and livelihood security) $1,433,368
- **Africa** (Conflict, drought, Ebola, migration) $433,685
- **Middle East and Europe** (Conflict, earthquake, flooding, migration) $425,204

**U.S.**

- **Capacity Development and Consultation** $623,441
- **Program Management and Preparedness** $471,601
- **Severe Storms** $306,541
- **Hurricane Sandy** $288,272
- **Flooding** $202,000
- **Migrant Minors** $188,482
- **Wildfires** $10,000

**Note:** All financial references are to the fiscal year that ended on Jan. 31, 2017, in order to provide remittance for all end of calendar year gifts.
Lutheran Disaster Response brings God’s hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters in the United States and around the world. When the dust settles and the headlines change, we stay to provide ongoing assistance to those in need.

Re-building with the Roma

The Roma people have a rich history and culture dating back nearly 1,000 years in Europe. Much of their history is unknown, but what is known are stories of survival amidst persecution, enslavement and genocide. In Serbia, Roma are among the most marginalized and vulnerable groups, facing discrimination, a lack of infrastructure in their communities and poverty. The World Bank estimates that more than 70 percent of Roma in Eastern Europe live in “deep poverty.” These challenges can leave Roma communities vulnerable to the long-lasting effects of disasters. They can also mask the assets of Roma people, especially the resourcefulness and resolve that can help them recover from disasters.

Both the assets and the challenges of the Roma community can be seen in the work the people have done with the help of Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) in the Roma settlement of Mišar, Serbia. EHO is a Christian organization working on poverty reduction, the development of inter-church cooperation and the promotion of human rights in Serbia. Its work is supported in part by your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response.

When heavy rains hit Serbia in May 2014, causing landslides and flooding, the Roma were particularly vulnerable. In the small fishing village of Mišar, 17 homes were damaged or destroyed. Because of the difficulty in reaching their settlement, the Roma received little assistance as they faced a long recovery.

Lutheran Disaster Response is committed to accompanying communities most vulnerable to disaster, like the Roma of Mišar. With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, EHO began a rehabilitation project with the Roma residents.

Relying on a “dweller driven” model, EHO provided building materials and technical advice, while the Roma arranged for re-building and repair. This model of accompaniment empowers the local community to use their own gifts, take ownership over the process and ensure a sustainable recovery.

By the summer of 2016, the Roma and EHO rebuilt four homes and repaired and upgraded 13 others, ensuring that each home had a bathroom and reliable access to water. Many families that participated also received a grant to help them diversify income generation, an important step in building resilience to future disasters. Lutheran Disaster Response continues to accompany the Roma in Serbia through our trusted partner, EHO.

Thanks to the work of EHO and the Roma community leaders, and your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response, housing conditions in this Roma community are improved, families are better able to support themselves, and Roma men and women are empowered to advocate for their rights and the interests of the entire community.
Last year marked ELCA World Hunger’s year-of-emphasis in Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA. We are both amazed and humbled by the tremendous generosity of our donors, congregations and synods. Because of this outpouring of support, ELCA World Hunger is more than halfway to reaching its $115 million campaign goal. We hope you will continue to walk with us in the last two years of the campaign – as together, with generous, loving hands, we work for a world in which all are fed.