ON THE COVER

An early childhood worker connected with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary teaches preschoolers the story of Jesus the Good Shepherd. They are in the predominantly Roma village of Gőrőgszállás, Hungary.

“A lot of these children don’t have books and toys at home. Coming to the children’s house... was also an opportunity to get warm. Many people didn’t have doors and windows,” said Thad Titze, who volunteered there in 2013–14 while serving as an ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM).

For three years, the ELCA has been working with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary through its YAGM program. Read more about this partnership on page 15.

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DEAR FRIEND IN CHRIST,

It was an inconsequential gift—two small copper coins—but to the widow, it was everything. Observing the faithful widow and the rich as they shared their offerings, Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on” (Mark 12:43-44).

What a remarkable story. Every time I read this passage I’m astonished by the widow’s generosity. And every Sunday, when we worship as a faith community and offering plates are passed in ELCA congregations across the country, I am inspired by members who give lavishly and lovingly to do God’s work. Thank you for your faithfulness!

Their offering and your offering matter. Combined with gifts from other ELCA members, your offering strengthens and extends the ministry of your congregation, your synod and the wider ministry of this church. This collection of stories illustrates how a percentage of your offering—called Mission Support—is stewarded by the ELCA churchwide organization to proclaim the gospel and serve others in need, near and far.

Read on and see how God is at work through Christ the King Lutheran Church in Sebastian, Fla. (page 7), the ELCA Advocacy network’s climate justice campaign (page 10), Meile Anqi (Rock of Ages) Christian Church in China (page 12) and more. There are countless other stories to tell, and new stories are being written each day. Each of these stories of faith in action is made possible through churchwide ministries or grants and, just as importantly, through your generosity.

Jesus calls us to steward our time, talents and treasures to share the good news with a world that is longing to hear it. He cared and still cares about what we give. As you learn how Mission Support dollars were used to nurture ELCA congregations, leaders and global mission in the past year, I hope you are inspired to continue giving and living generously in the year ahead, just like the widow.

With gratitude,

Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
As members of the ELCA, we are freed in Christ to love and serve our neighbor, open to the Holy Spirit’s invitation to be active in the world. By sharing your time, talents and financial resources, you are participating in God’s work throughout the United States and around the world.

When you give to your congregation, a percentage of that money is shared with your synod and with the ELCA churchwide organization. The portion of your offering that is shared with the wider church is called Mission Support.

In 2014, ELCA members gave $1.8 billion in regular offerings* to support God’s mission and ministry through the three expressions of the ELCA.

*Regular offerings do not include special offerings (e.g., congregational capital improvements or gifts to ministries like Lutheran Disaster Response).

Read on to see how your offering from the past year has equipped congregations.
MISSION SUPPORT = YOUR OFFERING AT WORK

Why we give
Our financial generosity is one expression of our love for God and our neighbors. Mission Support enables us to do God’s work in ways that no individual, congregation or synod can do alone.

We are church together for the sake of the world.

Your churchwide organization uses Mission Support dollars to support congregations, respond to local and worldwide ministry opportunities, engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and lead churchwide initiatives on behalf of the whole ELCA. A few of those ministries are highlighted in this publication, but there are many others that together create a strong witness to the gospel.

Your offering is stewarded by your congregation’s council to support the work of your congregation. When your congregation votes to adopt its annual budget, your congregation designates a portion of your offering to be shared with your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization. These funds are called Mission Support.

Your congregation’s Mission Support dollars are then stewarded by your synod leaders to support the work of the synod. Your synod uses Mission Support to nurture ELCA congregations and rostered leaders, support local partners and accompany the synod’s global companion churches in their ministry. Synods also share a percentage of the Mission Support funds they receive to be sent to the churchwide organization.

All that we have and are comes from God. Many ELCA members fill out forms pledging their commitment to give a percentage of their income to their congregation each year. Similarly, ELCA congregations and synods pledge a percentage of their income for Mission Support.

for ministry, raised up leaders and grown the Lutheran church around the world.
A portion of your offering is used by your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization to support new congregations and the mission developers who lead them.
The seeds of Parroquia Emaús, a new congregation in Racine, Wis., were planted 15 years ago when its partner, Emmaus Evangelical Lutheran Church, started after-school and summer camp ministries for children in the congregation’s inner-city neighborhood. Participants came from largely working-poor families where 80 percent of the children live at or below the poverty line.

When pastor and mission developer Jhon Freddy Correa was called to start Parroquia Emaús, he built up the new faith community through Emmaus’ existing ministries. Through their children, parents became involved with Correa’s home Bible studies and prayer groups. Over time, people asked for a more formal worship experience, so Correa organized all-Spanish services on Sundays after Emmaus held its morning worship.

These services are important to the largely Latino new start because some Latinos felt rejected in Racine, Correa said. At Parroquia Emaús, “Latinos feel included—they feel like family,” he said. “They feel God’s love, mercy and forgiveness. They feel listened to. Some felt rejected [in their community] but now feel at home.”

As part of its ministry, Parroquia Emaús partners with two local colleges to provide courses for the Latino community. The results are paying off. More than 70 community members worked through Parroquia Emaús to complete the GED exam. And the neighborhood ministries for children continue. About 30 children are enrolled in the after-school program. About 30 children attend the congregation’s five-week summer camp.

Emmaus’ pastor, Mary Janz, said the new congregation “has been a huge asset to Emmaus Lutheran. The kids of Parroquia Emaús bring a lot of life. The parents are people of strong faith—to hear their stories is inspirational.”
**Fitness, fellowship and faith**

Catch members of The Intersection, an ELCA congregation in Dorchester, Mass., on a Sunday after worship and you’ll notice something unusual about their fellowship hour.

For starters, there’s not a coffee cake to be found and folks don’t linger near the church doors. Instead, they stroll right through them for a walking fellowship hour.

“We [walk] right after worship and get to be together in a way that reinforces positive healthy behavior that everybody can participate in,” said Tiffany Chaney, who has served as mission developer of the congregation for three years.

Walking fellowship hour is just one of the healthy living offerings at The Intersection, a family-friendly congregation whose mission is to “connect faith and life.” There’s also Zumba, Bible study and cooking classes, all held in the church building.

These opportunities, which are free and open to the public, fill a need in the diverse Boston neighborhood. That need was community. “We formed a faith community through the desire of people who were looking to engage community in other ways,” Chaney said. “People who were interested in Zumba started coming a little earlier for Bible study and eventually came to worship.”

Zumba classes brought Rita Shuler to The Intersection. “My girlfriend invited me to church [for Zumba] and I haven’t left since,” said Shuler, who is now a regular at Zumba, Bible study and worship. Since joining two years ago, she said she’s lost 15 pounds, lowered her blood pressure and learned things about the Bible she never knew. “This church has a good vibe,” she added.

Zumba instructor Terry Alves-Hunter agrees. She said the congregation is down-to-earth, family-friendly and lively: “I love the ladies, and I look forward to [teaching] class. They’re upbeat and always on time.” She’s not a member, but has been to The Intersection’s cooking classes and hopes to start walking on Sundays.

There’s something special happening at The Intersection—lives are changing through fitness, fellowship and faith. These activities, which Chaney describes as “front doors to ministry,” bring new people into the church and help them connect caring for one’s body with caring for one’s spirit.

“It’s God’s work, our hands, our energy, our feet, our ability to do the work we’re called to do,” Chaney said. “We are able to engage our faith as part of our physical caring for ourselves.”

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A portion of your offering is used by your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization to support new congregations and provide grants for congregations undergoing renewal.
A milestone worth celebrating

For Ruben Duran, the message is quite clear—“the church is not dying.” That’s a different message, he says, than what has been widely reported in recent years about the decline in membership among U.S. mainline denominations like the 3.8 million-member ELCA.

As director of ELCA new congregations, Duran believes the ELCA “is not dying. We are changing,” particularly as this church reached a significant milestone this spring.

Since the ELCA began in 1988 as a result of a merger, more than 500 new congregations have been “planted, organized and [have] joined the ELCA. That is a milestone worth celebrating,” Duran said. The “changing part,” he added, is that 56 percent of all ELCA new starts are in ethnic-multicultural communities, and 27 percent in communities where people are living in poverty or low income. Another 26 ministries started with leaders whose congregations left the ELCA in recent years.

Put that all together, he said, and “we have 10 percent of the denomination in the growing stages. This is a good moment to celebrate. [The typical new congregation] is a fusion of many nations being welcomed into the ELCA. It reflects the country that we’re becoming. We are not dying. We are changing.”

The little church that could

“Over time it’s become known as ‘the little church that could,’” said Karen Leedahl, describing Christ the King Lutheran, a renewing congregation in Sebastian, Fla.

When Leedahl first arrived as part-time pastor in 2010, she found a small congregation of about 68 members with a big heart for serving their community. She also discovered a congregation that was “pretty distraught.”

“Their despair was so great that they just thought the next step was closing,” Leedahl said.

Bearing a large mortgage, the congregation was financially strapped with no money in the budget for a full-time pastor or to support their outreach. But that didn’t stop members from serving a community that was experiencing a challenging economy. Contributions to the local food pantry and preparing and delivering meals to homeless veterans were an integral part of the life of this congregation.

“They very much had it in their heart to be outward,” said Leedahl, who believes this is why Christ the King was chosen as an ELCA renewing congregation.

An ELCA renewing congregations grant made it possible for Leedahl to be called part time to encourage the congregation in their ministry and help move them toward hiring a full-time pastor.

Through Leedahl’s encouragement, members learned to share not only their gifts but also their faith with people they meet on a daily basis. The congregation even started a ministry of handing out bottles of water to people on a local walking path.

“Pastor Karen is helping everyone look for ways that they see God at work in their life. I think we’re growing in learning how we can serve God,” said member Doris Kilbane.

As their ministry grew, so did their numbers. By 2014 the average worship attendance had grown to 105 people. In July 2014 the renewing congregation was financially able to call Leedahl as their full-time pastor.

Two months later, on “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday, members of “the little church that could” gathered to continue the work they do every day—serving God and their neighbors.
A portion of your offering is sent to the ELCA churchwide organization to fund expenses for the Young Adults in Global Mission program that are not covered by individual fundraising.
As the daughter of an ELCA pastor and church musician in Sioux Falls, S.D., Sarah Rohde grew up thinking about ministry as a career. But it wasn’t until she traveled to Mexico through the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program that Rohde felt called to be a pastor.

Rohde had just graduated from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn., as a Spanish, music and religion major when she committed to the 11-month journey to Cuernavaca, Mexico, which began in August 2007. “I was craving an experience that took me to the limits of my understanding of who I am, who God is and how the world works,” Rohde said.

Mexico did exactly this. “The experience of living in a foreign country and culture was a big turning point for me,” she said. “During my year of service, I got to touch some of the foundations of Christianity—like rigorous love of one’s neighbor, reliance on community, trust in a strength beyond my own and the power of story.”

Rohde spent much of her time traveling to Cuentepec, an indigenous rural community, to meet with the women who lived there, most of whom spoke little Spanish (second to their native language Nahuatl) and practiced an indigenous religion. She says her purpose was not to bring God to them but to listen, learn and notice how God’s Spirit was already present and at work in that place and in the people.

“In the midst of forming relationships with these amazing women, I realized that the vocation of pastor would call me to do much the same thing—to listen to people’s stories, to notice where God’s life-giving Spirit is at work, and then to discern together how we’re feeling led to live our lives,” Rohde said.

Upon returning from Mexico, Rohde enrolled in the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, one of eight ELCA seminaries. She completed her studies in May 2013 and in August of that year began her first call as associate pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in St. Charles, Ill.

Rohde is involved in a project at Bethlehem called “Discipleship 24/7,” an effort to help members “explode their faith” beyond weekly worship and into their daily routines—their jobs, marriages, parenting, etc.

“My experience in Mexico has made me all the more passionate about the connections between Christian faith and daily life,” Rohde said. “Ultimately my call at Bethlehem is to continue the practice of accompaniment—to show up, to listen and to help our community discern how God is moving us to live and serve.”
Speaking out in faith

The signs are right in front of us: extreme weather, changing temperature patterns, the increase in the number of droughts. Our climate is changing due to global warming, and human beings are largely responsible for this, said Jim White, a professor of geological sciences at the University of Colorado Boulder.

“Once you’ve studied the issue, you realize there is no debate about climate change,” said White, who also directs the university’s Institute of Arctic and Alpine Research. “The notion of debate is a false narrative that people have put forward to delay action.”

Speaking out to inspire action in response to climate change has been a significant part of White’s work and life. White, a member of Trinity Lutheran Church in Boulder, said his faith informs his perspective on climate change and how we steward God’s creation. In July 2014 he stood with other Lutherans and offered testimony at an Environmental Protection Agency public hearing in Denver, where he argued that there are ethical implications that must be considered as we address climate change.

“The poor of the world are disproportionately being impacted [by climate change],” he said. “Faith and our moral compasses need to be considered when dealing with this problem.”

The event was one of four major hearings across the country.

Peter Severson, director for Lutheran Advocacy Ministry–Colorado of the ELCA Rocky Mountain Synod, organized the advocates. By participating in the public hearing, these leaders were able to “live their faith in a real way,” he said. “The participation of ELCA members in the process itself was a transformative experience for all involved.”

The local advocacy taking place in the Rocky Mountain Synod is part of a unified effort led by the ELCA churchwide organization’s advocacy office in Washington, D.C., as part of its “Clean Air for All” campaign. The ELCA advocacy office, working with the ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod, also encouraged members to participate in the People’s Climate March in September 2014. The march brought together thousands of people in New York City to raise awareness of climate change.

Mary Minette, ELCA program director for environmental policy and education, was there alongside other members of the ELCA advocacy network. In a blog leading up to the march, Minette described the harrowing effects of climate change that are predicted in the coming years, including destructive heat waves and flooding. “In the face of these sobering predictions, some may lose hope,” she wrote. “We march…to demonstrate God’s love and hope for each of us and for the world. We march, marked by the cross, saved by grace, out of love for our neighbors and God’s earth.”

The ELCA Advocacy staff continues its efforts to organize Lutherans to speak out for “clean air for all” through testimony, marches, letters and more. Through membership in the ELCA’s advocacy network, ELCA members can be leaders in the public square and speak out for ethical political action.
Preparing future leaders

Ask today’s new pastors about the call to serve this church, and you might be surprised by their answers.

In addition to preaching and pastoral care, they know that training in leadership, technology and finance is key to fostering a thriving congregation in our increasingly fragmented, complicated and tech-savvy world. Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) in Berkeley, Calif., has crafted programs and workshops to answer the needs of today’s worshipers. The seminary’s merger with California Lutheran University (CLU), Thousand Oaks, and funding from the ELCA churchwide organization help advance this work.

“It’s critical that pastors get this training that they haven’t usually had in seminary,” said Leanne Neilson, CLU’s provost and vice president for academic affairs. “In many ways, pastors are running a business, and they need to know how to run the finances, how to do strategic planning and how to use necessary technology.”

For the past three years, CLU has offered a weeklong continuing education program called “Executive Skills for Pastors.”

Faculty from the School of Management explore a variety of themes for the students, including stewardship, leadership and marketing. Education in these skills has now become available to seminarians at PLTS.

On-the-job training is also crucial for candidates for ministry. Lutherans have for decades required a year of internship in a congregation as part of preparation for ministry. PLTS has taken this on-the-job learning a step further in its Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program. Created in response to the ELCA’s commitment to increase the number of church leaders of color, TEEM has evolved into a practical leadership certificate program for all people preparing to serve as pastors, said Moses Penumaka, the TEEM director.

The program couples a candidate for ministry with a mentor senior pastor. The student takes new learned skills and shares them with the pastor and the congregation. The TEEM student, mentor pastor and congregation all grow from this process.

Through these partnerships and other new offerings, the seminary is equipping emerging Lutheran pastors for the 21st century.

“A portion of your offering is sent to the ELCA churchwide organization to fund grants for the eight ELCA seminaries. PLTS is an ELCA seminary; CLU is one of the 26 colleges and universities of the ELCA.”
A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund global ministry projects, relationships and associated support—including the construction of Meile Anqi Christian Church and evangelism training.

“Together we can go to all the world to tell about the new life we have in Jesus.”

Photo by Franklin Ishida
Built on a rock

Under the golden rock face of the mountains in the northern Yunnan province of China is nestled a small white church with a tile roof. More than 200 Lisu worshipers and their international guests, including ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton, marched outside the church singing in Chinese: “Come friends, to the little church on the mountain. For the blessing of eternal life is more than silver and gold, for here we meet God.”

Seventy percent of the Lisu people, one of China’s 55 ethnic minorities, are Christian. The gospel was first introduced to them some 100 years ago. Even today the Lisu live and farm in rugged mountain terrain, where some walk for hours to attend worship on Sunday.

The ELCA first connected with a Lisu community north of Lijiang after a 1996 earthquake, helping renovate houses and build schools, said He Wen-qin, director of the Lisu Cultural Association. ELCA support continues today: schoolchildren receive computers; farmers receive goats and walnut seedlings; and churches are built.

The newly dedicated Meile Anqi (Rock of Ages) Christian Church is the most recent development. “This is the best facility in the province for the people,” Wen-qin said. The small complex includes the church building, a community center, a kitchen and outhouses. Its architectural elements both preserve and celebrate the Lisu culture.

In Lijiang, the Yulong County Bible Training Center houses 21 students. Ranging in age from 14 to 26, they study the Bible, music, Christian education, preaching and other skills to equip them to be lay leaders and evangelists. They will serve alongside the current two pastors to meet the needs of some 50 congregations and worship points in the region.

Many of these young church leaders will continue to farm as they work with the church. They will rise to meet the challenges of contemporary society that take many newly baptized away from the church.

Through it all, the ELCA is committed to accompanying the Lisu community in its journey of faith and life.

In her message at the Meile Anqi church dedication, Eaton said, “We depend on you to preach the gospel here. And we promise to you, the Lisu people, that we will preach the gospel back in America. And together we can fulfill the command of Jesus, who told his disciples to go to all the world to tell about the new life we have in Jesus.”
Young reformers around the world

“I am freed from church walls and freed for service in community,” said Monica Villarreal, pastor redeveloper of Salem Lutheran Church in Flint, Mich.

Answering the questions, "What are you freed from? What are you freed for?" was Villarreal’s introduction to the Global Young Reformers Network. Launched by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the network is one component of the organization’s observance of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. The ELCA is the only U.S. member church of the communion.

Villarreal and other under-30 pastors and lay leaders on the Global Young Reformers Network steering committee—from Namibia, Sweden, Ethiopia, Germany, Latvia and Singapore—are inviting young Lutherans into this new network to celebrate their roots, claim their identity and continue the Reformation.

Under the theme “Freed by God’s Love to Change the World,” young leaders from many countries are gathering through online platforms and face-to-face events. In the U.S., discussions about freedom and faith animated participants at the 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering in Detroit.

Eventually the network will include representatives from every member church of the LWF. Drawing on their gifts, voice and passion, the young reformers will create and lead “Living Reformation” projects that demonstrate ecclesia semper reformanda—the church in ongoing reformation.

“Our vision is to grow communion in the community of young people grounded in the Lutheran tradition,” Villarreal said. “Our church may have started in Germany, but it is a global expression today.”

As Villarreal has watched her Flint congregation open up to newcomers and welcome change, she has seen the connection between reformation and renewal.

“Seeking the work of the Spirit does mean change,” she said. “I think the LWF is open to challenging itself around the Reformation, and this is a chance for young people to shape that on a worldwide level.”
Walking with the Roma

Many residents of the Western Hemisphere aren’t familiar with the Roma, but this population (also known as gypsies) migrated from Northern India to Europe and is the largest ethnic minority group there. Throughout history they have been subjected to persecution, oppression and genocide.

Today they continue to face discrimination from the dominant cultures in Europe. For three years the ELCA has been working alongside the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary to break down barriers between Roma and non-Roma. Young leaders from the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission program help carry out this work.

One of the more serious social questions in Hungary is the relationship with the Roma and non-Roma population, said Bishop Tamás Fabiny of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary. “Roma live in very dire circumstances, where their everyday experience is poverty and hostile treatment from [the] majority of [the] population. The Hungarian Lutheran church is trying to do her best to help those in deep crisis.”

The young adult leaders connect with Roma people in a variety of ways, including ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, which is one of the ELCA’s global companion churches. Through their placements, young adults work with community projects, including education, after-school activities, youth work and church-based programs.

Wherever they are, they are charged to make connections with Roma and non-Roma Hungarians, said Miriam Schmidt, an ELCA pastor and former country program director.

Thad Titze served in the program in 2013–14 and assisted with childhood education ministry in the Roma village of Görögszállás. The ministry, which took place in the children’s house, was connected to the local Filidelfia Lutheran Church in Nyírtelek. Serving preschoolers and their parents, the children’s house offered toys and activities to kick-start early childhood development and a warm meal each weekday.

“A lot of these children don't have books and toys at home,” Titze said. “Coming to the children's house... was also an opportunity to get warm. Many people didn’t have doors and windows.”

Because Titze lived just five minutes from the children's house, he was often able to build deeper connections with his Roma neighbors who came there with their children.

“The deep brokenness and sadness in this community [prodded] at me every day,” Titze said. “I needed to accompany them in their brokenness and sadness. It was the hardest part of the year and the hardest thing to walk away with at the end of the year.”

Titze developed special relationships with his Roma host family and his supervisor Mihály “Misi” Győrfi, who became both friend and spiritual adviser. Since he returned home to the U.S., he has kept in touch with his host brother, Little Sani, through Facebook, and new volunteers have come to serve in the village.

The relationships ELCA young adults are building with both Roma and non-Roma Hungarians continue beyond their year of service and through the young adults who serve after them. “They are a presence in [Hungary] who care about connecting in whatever way across all the language barriers,” Schmidt said.

“At the end of the day, the Young Adults in Global Mission program is about building relationships,” she added. “And that’s part of what our church is saying: There is something to be had in building relationships and finding a way to come together, and we do that in and through Christ. We find communion across all these differences that could keep us separate. That changes the communities that are here and the young adults who take part in this program.”

The Hungary program welcomes its fourth group of young volunteers in fall 2015.

A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the livelihood of missionaries who coordinate the ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission country program throughout the world.
What is Mission Support?

Mission Support is the portion of your congregation’s regular financial offering that is shared with your synod and the churchwide organization. It is an undesignated gift to ELCA ministries that goes beyond your congregation. These gifts are used where the need is the greatest, and they also make it possible for the ELCA’s 65 synods and the churchwide organization to maintain ongoing commitments to ministry partners.

What guides the churchwide organization in its decisions regarding Mission Support?

Voting members from across the ELCA meet as a churchwide assembly every three years to guide and direct the work of the churchwide organization. The ELCA Church Council functions as the interim legislative authority between assemblies. The churchwide organization’s two strategic priorities are to accompany the nearly 10,000 ELCA congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission and to build the capacity of this church for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.

How does my congregation benefit from Mission Support?

Every congregation benefits as an active partner in our church’s mission to share God’s love with the world. “Stories of Faith in Action” is filled with examples of how lives have been changed because of the generosity of ELCA members and congregations through Mission Support. This money funds the work of the synods, and some of the portion of Mission Support that is shared with the churchwide organization goes to your congregation and synod in the form of services, programs, resources or grants. Typically more than 90 percent of a congregation’s offering remains in the congregation to help pay for ministries, outreach, salaries, utilities and the building—ensuring your congregation’s vital presence in your community.

What is the distinction between Mission Support and Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA?

Mission Support is one way we act as a church together; we count on one another for the mutual work that Mission Support makes possible. However, many ELCA members and congregations are called to give in other ways as well, and this is what Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA offers. The Campaign for the ELCA is a way for us to do more, together, through designated gifts to the ministry priorities we are most passionate about, above and beyond regular offerings through our congregation. Campaign gifts are tracked and spent separately from the Mission Support budget. The Campaign for the ELCA is an investment in the future of the ELCA and an extension of our mission and ministry together.

Strengthening ecumenical relationships

For more than 25 years, the ELCA has been committed to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. In an endeavor to continue that tradition, ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton led a delegation of leaders across this church to meet with religious leaders in China, Geneva, London, the Middle East and Rome in 2015.

In these various pilgrimages one message became clear, particularly in meetings with staff of the Lutheran World Federation: We must strive for a deeper understanding of how we as the ELCA are part of a global communion that witnesses to the gospel and serves neighbors.

“While we should be mindful of our context in North America, and while we must be able to engage our particular culture, we should remember that the way we tend the gospel treasure entrusted to this part of the church has implications for the rest of the church. It’s not just about us. It’s not just about now,” Eaton said.

Addressing Pope Francis at the Vatican was also a significant highlight for the ELCA delegation. In addition, Eaton and the delegation met with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and shared the agreements and work that had been done in the United States by Roman Catholics and the ELCA on a Declaration on the Way (to Unity).

“One of the priorities of the ELCA has been ecumenical relations,” said Donald McCoid, director for ELCA ecumenical and inter-religious relations. “We see our ministry as being a shared ministry with other Christians. The Declaration on the Way (to Unity) is an example of how mutual dialogue provides closer relationships and a movement toward what Christ wills for his followers.”
DEAR PARTNER IN MINISTRY,

You play an important role in making “Stories of Faith in Action” possible as you give generously to your congregation. Your offerings first support your congregation and then are multiplied when a portion of them is passed along to be shared with the wider church. This sharing beyond local ministry is a witness to the self-giving that Jesus teaches, and it accomplishes many kinds of service and outreach that no one congregation could do alone. God is able to use us in miraculous ways when we work as church together for the sake of the world.

Staying strong, and growing, in our giving to Mission Support is one way to defy the individualism and materialism that is rampant in our culture. When we share resources so our witness to the gospel is widespread and strong, then we declare a different story from the one the culture tells—it is the story of love beyond self-interest that transforms us and embodies God’s kingdom of love and justice in the world. It is a much-needed story of forgiveness and joy, and the ELCA is a powerful narrator of that story.

Together with many partners, your generosity will enable us to reach even more places that need to hear and learn the story of God’s grace. Thank you for your gifts that make ministry possible, and may God bless you as you continue to join us in strengthening the powerful witness of the ELCA!

In the peace of Jesus,

Rev. Margaret G. Payne
Director, ELCA Mission Support

We are part of a global communion that witnesses to the gospel.