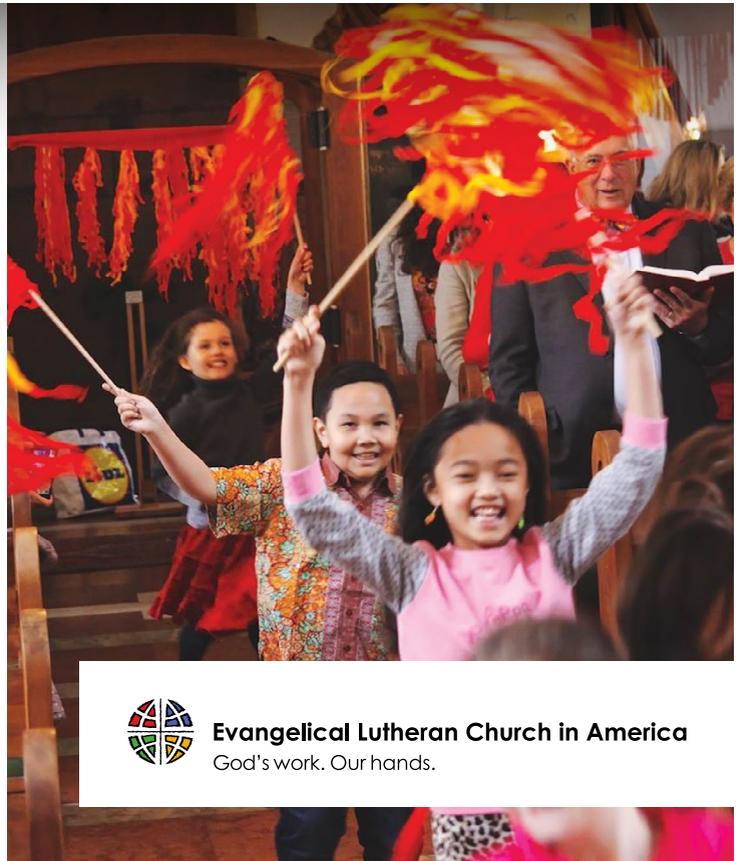
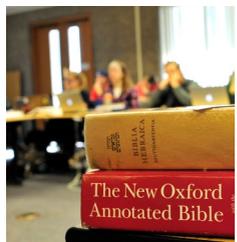


Stories of Faith in Action

YOUR OFFERING AT WORK



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



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A message from **PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON**



Dear friend in Christ,

She was grieving and afraid—her husband had just died and she had a great debt to pay. Worried a creditor would take their two children away as slaves, the widow turned to the prophet Elisha for help. All she had left was a jar of oil—and her faith.

When Elisha told the widow to collect empty vessels from her neighbors, she did so without question. She returned home, and as instructed, poured her last jar of oil into the new vessels. One by one each vessel filled up. Oil was flowing and suddenly she had filled all the vessels to the brim. Not only did the widow have enough oil to pay the creditor, she also had enough to provide for her family for years to come. It was a miracle!

Wow. What an incredible *story of faith in action*—and how God provides. Faced with adversity, the widow turned to God and received more blessings than she ever could have imagined (2 Kings 4:1-7).

Sometimes when we think about our congregations, synods or households, it is easy to view them through a lens of scarcity. But the story of the widow reminds us that when we turn to God in faith, God provides in ways beyond our imagination. In the midst of scarcity, we find abundance. In a world where terror and cruelty proliferate, we discover seeds of hope and love. Lutherans don't withdraw from the world.

This year's Stories of Faith in Action highlights ELCA ministries that span this country and the globe, some of which illustrate the way challenges can lead to God-given opportunities. You'll also notice a new feature this year, faith reflections from ELCA members like you.

You are a part of each of these stories—through your faithful, regular offering, a portion of which is used to fund ELCA ministries beyond the congregation, which is called *Mission Support (for more on this, turn the page)*. Combined with gifts from other ELCA members, Mission Support advances the work of your congregation, your synod and the work we do as a wider church. Thank you for your generosity!

As a member of the ELCA you are part of a much larger story. You are connected with our 9,300 congregations, 65 synods and one churchwide organization. Your church is connected globally to 72 million Lutherans through its membership in The Lutheran World Federation. We are church—together!

And like the widow who was challenged to reach out to her neighbors in a time of need, God is calling us to see and honor our connectedness with the world around us. Your offering is one way to do that.

How will you share God's gifts with your neighbors in the coming year?

With gratitude,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton,
Presiding Bishop,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

WHAT IS MISSION SUPPORT?

Through God's grace, we are freed in Christ to love and serve our neighbor. By sharing your God-given time, talents and financial resources with your church, you are participating in God's work in your community and around the world.

When you make a financial gift to your congregation, a percentage of that gift is shared with the wider church—with your synod and with your churchwide organization. Each year, during budget season, your congregation pledges to send a portion of the offerings it receives to fund ELCA ministries in your synod and beyond. In the ELCA, we call this Mission Support. Mission Support shows how we are church together—it's essential to who we are as the ELCA.



MISSION SUPPORT = **YOUR OFFERING AT WORK**

YOUR CONGREGATION

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, you designate a portion of your offering to be shared with your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization. These funds are called Mission Support.

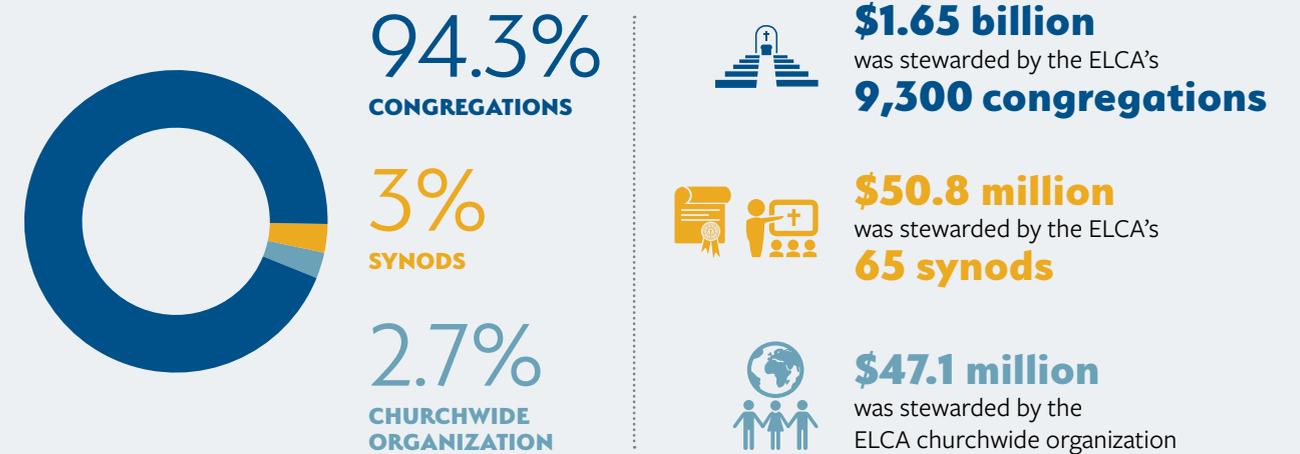
YOUR SYNOD

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 (camps, colleges, seminaries and more) and accompany our global companion churches in their ministry. Synods also designate a percentage of the Mission Support funds they receive to be sent to the churchwide organization.

YOUR CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION

Your churchwide organization uses Mission Support dollars to respond to local and worldwide ministry opportunities. A few of those ministries are highlighted in this publication, but there are many others that together create a strong witness to the gospel.

In 2015, ELCA members gave \$1.75 billion in unrestricted offerings* to support God's mission and ministry through the three expressions of the ELCA.
Thank you for your generosity!



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

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.**

Read on to see how your offering from the past year has made a difference in ELCA congregations, leadership and around the world!

HOPE SPRINGS AT ABIDING MINISTRIES

On Sunday, Aug. 24, 2014, the last hymn was sung, the blessing was said and the doors closed on Bethlehem Lutheran Church, in Pittsburgh, Pa. Bethlehem had merged with another congregation, and its 100-year-old building was scheduled to be torn down.

That is, until a connection was made with Abiding Ministries—a new ELCA faith community in Pittsburgh. Abiding Ministries was in search of a space and found a fit in the vacant church building. But it needed work.

“There were stray cats living in the building, the lights didn’t work, the roof leaked. We came in and got things cleaned up,” remembered Christine Rotella, mission developer for Abiding Ministries.

In less than a year, the new congregation has become an important part of the neighborhood, offering a meal and worship on Sundays and financial workshops during the week. Abiding Ministries has become a source of hope where many experience extreme poverty: “God has provided me with a new spiritual and physical energy here,” said Moses, a member there. **Another member, Patrick, added, “[This church] has restored my faith, something I had given up on since I was a child.”**

Children are even showing up after school for fellowship, snacks and support in a safe space. Once Rotella came across a group of five boys caught in a street fight with adults and pulled them inside the church. That afternoon ended with songs in the choir



loft instead of violence. Two of boys came back and sang in worship that Sunday, and they have been visiting the church on and off ever since.

“One asked if his funeral could be in the church and if I would do the prayers,” said Rotella. “He tried to talk about needing a casket for bodily resurrection but did not have words. We are right where God wants us.”



*A portion of your offering is used by your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization to **support new congregations like Abiding Ministries** and the mission developers who lead them.*



Reflection:

Preserving the collective memory of this church

At the ELCA Archives, we routinely receive phone calls or emails from ELCA congregations or their members. The requests are varied but members are usually seeking guidance, advice or information about either their congregation’s history or its own records and archives. The reasons they contact us are as varied as the questions they ask: their congregation is celebrating a milestone anniversary and needs information on its history; a congregation is merging or closing and has questions about what to archive; staff call with questions about recording information in the parish register or how long they need to retain offering envelopes. On occasion, a member has a historical record—a book, pamphlet or photograph—to donate because it’s something that documents the history and ministry of one of the ELCA’s predecessor church bodies.

Connecting with ELCA congregations is one of the best aspects of my work. Providing information, advice or guidance, or accepting a donation of historical material to add to our collection represents a partnership we have with congregations and their members. I see us working toward the same goal—to preserve the collective memory of this church. **These records are a witness to our joys and sorrows, our faith stories, our mission at work in the world, our beginnings and endings, and ultimately our hopes and aspirations for this church. Together we continue our work of sharing a message of God’s grace.**

— Cathy Lundeen, ELCA archivist, Chicago



*A portion of your offering supports the work of the **ELCA Archives**.*



OPEN SPACE, OPEN ARMS

There aren't many ELCA congregations with a graffiti mural covering one side of their building, but that's just what members of San Juan Bautista, Tucson, Ariz., asked for when they agreed to host a live graffiti art show for Open Space, a new ELCA congregation in Tucson.

"Open Space is a small group, but about half of our members are graffiti artists, and very good ones at that," said Lars Hammar, Open Space mission developer and pastor of Lord of Grace Lutheran in Tucson.

Open Space started in 2013 and since then members have organized two graffiti shows in partnership with other ELCA congregations in Tucson to spread the word about their ministry.

Citizen Klown, as he is known by his graffiti crew, painted the mural at San Juan Bautista and has become a regular at Open Space, despite his initial reluctance to attend.

"I was never really comfortable in a traditional church setting," Klown said. "Being a graffiti artist, most of society doesn't see a difference between us and gang members, so they usually judge us. But after my first night at Open Space, I felt like I was welcomed."

Open Space members get together for a Bible study on Tuesday nights, and Hammar said they dream of owning a storefront to use as gathering space and as a place to sell art.



"There are guys at Open Space with immense talent, and this church gives them a legitimate place and way to do their art."

Lars Hammar

"There are guys at Open Space with immense talent, and this church gives them a legitimate place and way to do their art," Hammar said. "This is a place where they're told they aren't pariahs." All are welcome and cared for there.

Klown said Open Space has become a home for him and he wants to see it grow: "I want Open Space to be a place for people who avoid church because they feel they don't fit in and give them a chance to re-establish their personal relationship with God."



Like Abiding Hope, Open Space is a new congregation and is supported in ministry by a portion of your offering.



Reflection:

A mission as deep as Jacob's well

In our fifth year of congregational renewal, Salem Lutheran Church, Flint, Mich., ministers to a transient neighborhood where more than 42 percent of residents live in poverty and most live in rental homes. People come and go. It's normal.

There are no grocery stores in our community but plenty of liquor stores that sell expensive and often outdated foods. The city of Flint has not recovered from the economic exodus of the automotive industry decades ago and our tax base cannot cover the most basic public services that most Americans expect from government.

Now with the Flint water crisis, which started in April 2014 with an emergency declared in January 2016, pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under age 6 are still instructed to use only bottled water. All residents must filter their water.

Today our mission is as deep as Jacob's well. With the prayers and financial support of ELCA congregations, we are living water for the people of Flint. We distribute nearly 120,000 pounds of water weekly and offer multiple nutrition programs. Salem is making a difference in the lives of the city's most vulnerable citizens. Every day we strive for justice, give hope to the hopeless and comfort the afflicted.

— Monica Villarreal, pastor of Salem Lutheran Church, Flint, Mich.



A portion of your offering is used by your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization to provide grants for congregations like Salem that are undergoing renewal.



COMFORT IN PRAYER

After a long, exhausting day training with a group of U.S. Marine Corps Reserve members, Cris Frigm, pastor of Trinity Lutheran in Taneytown, Md., and a Reserve U.S. Navy chaplain, handed out prayer books and led night prayer in the field. Following worship, members turned in for the night, leaving not one prayer book behind.

“Every time I train with the group, I try to lead a service out of the prayer book,” said Frigm. “Sometimes they take the books with them, and sometimes they don’t. This particular night, it seemed they really needed the time for worship. Not one book came back to me.”

Now in his sixth year as a Reserve U.S. Navy chaplain, Frigm has developed a long relationship with a group of residents at Oakwood Lutheran Ministries in Wisconsin who, inspired by the Green Bay Packers, call themselves the Oakwood Packers. During the third Friday of each month, they pack boxes of prayer books and ship them to pastors like Frigm.

“My first deployment was to Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, Africa. That was the first time I received the books,” he said. “They have been a great resource especially with the Marine Reservists because they don’t get a lot of support outside their drill weekend. It’s helpful for them to take that book with them and have that extra support.”

Ron Mach, a retired pastor and Oakwood resident of 14 years, said he has spent the past nine of those years volunteering with the packing group. “This opportunity for serving our sons and daughters in the military with food for the spirit as well as food for the body was the right mission for our Oakwood Packers,” said Mach. “We have a joyful sense of partnership with the ministry of Chaplain Frigm who provides pastoral care in the name of Christ and the ELCA.”

To date, the group has packed approximately 1,000 boxes to send to various ministries throughout the world, and they hope to continue their ministry long into the future.



*A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund **ELCA chaplain ministry**, including the creation of the prayer book for the armed services.*



ELCAvotes ENCOURAGES CONGREGATIONS TO SPEAK OUT

The ELCAvotes initiative was in full swing as ELCA Ecumenical Advocacy Days took place.

Lutherans have a unique voice, and it’s one that should be heard.

That’s why ELCAvotes was created, to empower church members to become civically engaged—in local campaigns, the presidential election in November and beyond—by providing faith-based resources regarding voting and public issues.

“The point of this initiative is not to tell people who to vote for ... [but to get them] voting on the local level or national level or serving on [their] school board, [so] that we don’t live in seclusion in a little cave somewhere, that we’re active in our local communities,” said Jennifer Manis, a campus minister at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, N.C., and an ELCAvotes ambassador.

ELCAvotes is not about pitting one candidate against another, said Kwame Pitts, pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in South Holland, Ill., and one of the leaders of the movement. It’s about educating yourself on public issues and having open, faith-filled conversations about advocacy and justice.

The initiative, spearheaded by ELCA Advocacy, ELCA Racial Justice Ministries and ELCA Young Adult Ministry, launched in February, though work that started in fall 2015.

Pitts, who wrote the ELCA’s social policy resolution that calls on churchgoers to protect the voting rights of all citizens, already has written a Bible study that examines what the Bible says about injustice.



The study is one way to participate in ELCAvotes, but congregational

members also can make sure their church is a polling place, contact their representatives in Congress about issues they feel strongly about, or join churches that are doing advocacy work, Pitts said.

“When people just come to church, sit in the pew, hear that God loves them and then go home and don’t do anything, that’s when everything ceases,” she said. “Whatever your [comfort] level is, do something.”

To learn more, visit ELCA.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/ELCAvotes.

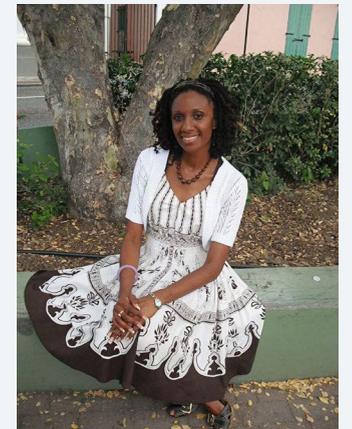
*A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund **ELCA advocacy work in Washington, D.C.***



A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to **fund Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministry, including leadership events like Elisha's Call and the Multicultural Summit.**

 **Reflection:**
One body, belonging to Christ

In January I attended Elisha's Call, a gathering of young adult leaders of African descent hosted by ELCA Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministry. It was refreshing and exciting to be with so many other enthusiastic young leaders. To be able to engage in thoughtful conversation with my peers gave me hope about things we could rebuild in my community and congregation, especially where the youth and young adults were concerned. My home congregation is the historic Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, where we are humbled to be celebrating our 350th anniversary of worship and service in October.



My May visit for the Multicultural Summit gave me the feeling that so much can be accomplished if we just come together and work as a team. Even though everyone at the summit was from a different area, the sense of belonging and welcome I felt was almost overwhelming. We are all one body, belonging to Christ and that easily overcomes all the things that make us different.

One part of the "body" is no more or less important than another and we need every part in order to accomplish that which God has set us apart to do. We need only ask God to help us and keep us all of one mind, for where we are gathered and agree, there God is also and nothing can stand in our way.

— Arlene Williams, Frederick Evangelical Lutheran Church in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands



"It is very difficult, but I know that the ELCA is my backbone—my prayer support and financial support."

Wal Reat

RETURNING HOME WITH A MESSAGE OF HOPE

"The Lutheran church is growing here," said Mawien Ariik, an ELCA missionary serving in South Sudan.

As ethnic conflict abates in the country, ELCA missionaries Ariik and Wal Reat are finding new opportunities to proclaim the gospel.

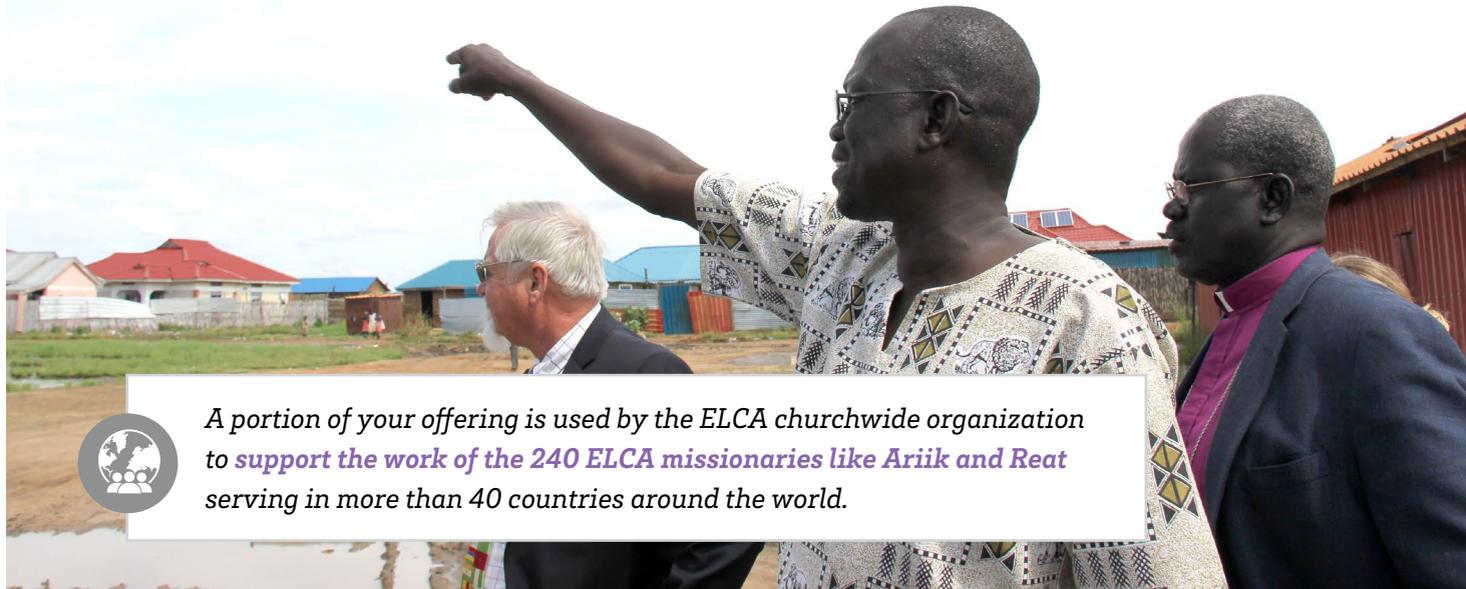
Getting from place to place is still tough for Reat as he evangelizes in the refugee camps where 1.5 million displaced Sudanese live. Ariik, who facilitates outreach and proclamation in the emerging Lutheran church, encounters many who were wounded by inter-ethnic violence.

"It is not bad to have different tribes, but to love others as one body of Christ—it is a big challenge for us to convey that," he said.

Civil war drove both men to seek asylum in the U.S., where they attended seminary and were ordained as ELCA pastors. After several years pastoring Sudanese congregations in Minnesota, they wanted to share God's message of grace and forgiveness in their native country. The ELCA called Ariik as a missionary in 2012 and Reat in 2015.

With no worries about their daily living expenses—because ELCA Mission Support covers the majority of their support costs—they can focus more on responding to the gifts and challenges around them.

"It is very difficult [work], but I know that the ELCA is my backbone—my prayer support and financial support," said Reat.



A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the work of the 240 ELCA missionaries like Ariik and Reat serving in more than 40 countries around the world.

A BROADER AND DEEPER PERSPECTIVE

Pastor, when he leaves, will you come visit me?

That was what Raheel asked Dione Miller while she was visiting him in jail. A Pakistani exiled in Bangkok for religious reasons, Raheel had been arrested just two days ago and had tears in his eyes. A seminary student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Miller had just started her year-long Horizon internship in the city when her supervisor announced he was leaving. Until that point, Miller wasn't sure she'd stay either.

Without hesitation she answered him, "Yes, of course."

Working with displaced people like Raheel was a highlight of Miller's ministry while she interned with the International Church of Bangkok that year. In Pakistan, Christians like Raheel face persecution because of their religion. Raheel came to Bangkok in search of safety, but because of Thailand's strict laws, he was considered an illegal immigrant rather than a refugee seeking asylum.

That Christmas, Miller came back to visit Raheel. They spent time talking about Christmas traditions and sing-shouting carols to one another across the hall due to the jail's unusual confines. **"It was this wonderfully strange, very holy moment," she said. "(I realized) why I'm here; that's why I'm meant to be a pastor."**

Today Miller still keeps in touch with Raheel and others she met, many refugees, while participating in the Horizon internship program. Heading into her first call a year later, Miller said she now really appreciates how much she learned from everyone she met in Bangkok. Her biggest takeaway?

"Being able to take a step back and recognize and understand my own faith while respecting and seeking to understand the faith of other people that varies and is different than mine," Miller said. "It seems very obvious and very important to me now, the value of this experience. My perspective had broadened and deepened at the same time."



A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the Horizon internship program connecting ELCA seminary students with international internships.



MISSION WORK—MULTIPLIED!

A church starting another church has been a mission norm since the early church. This also is the experience of the Lutheran Church in Malaysia (LCM).

Born through the work of Lutheran missionaries long ago, the LCM initially grew among the ethnic Chinese population. Soon the church began reaching out beyond its original areas to include the Orang Asli, indigenous peoples scattered in the hills and forests in the north. A key to the growth among the Orang Asli people has been to develop leadership from within, a challenging prospect for people who have traditionally been hunter-gatherers and have little formal education.

A passion to share the gospel also led the Malaysian church to see itself in mission beyond its national borders. A former Anglican priest from neighboring Myanmar

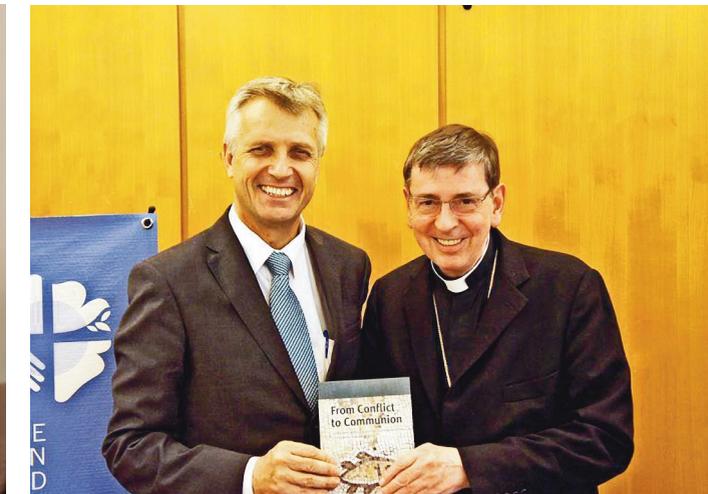
got connected to the LCM and, with their assistance, established the Myanmar Lutheran Church. The LCM has cultivated the growth of this new church by nurturing and supporting pastors from within Myanmar.

"We might be small in Malaysia, but our hearts must be big for God in God's mission and love for the world. In response to God's calling and the Great Commission to go and share God's love with the Myanmar people—our sisters and brothers in Christ," said Aaron Yap, LCM bishop.

Today the Myanmar Lutheran Church, serving in a predominantly Buddhist country among the Khumi Chin people, is one of four Lutheran church bodies in Myanmar. This church is a direct result of mission from Malaysia, which in turn was planted through U.S. missionaries.



A portion of your offering is used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund **global ministry work, including support for the Lutheran Church in Malaysia's Orang Asli ministry and its mission work in Myanmar.**



JOURNEYING TOWARD UNITY

As the 500th anniversary of the Reformation approaches in 2017, Christians in the U.S. and around the world are taking steps toward unity. In the U.S., "Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry and Eucharist"—an ecumenical document that marks a pathway toward greater unity between Catholics and Lutherans—was released in October 2015.

"Five hundred years ago wars were fought over the very issues about which Lutherans and Roman Catholics have now achieved consensus," said ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. **"The declaration is so exciting because it shows us 32 important points where already we can say there are not church-dividing issues between us, and it gives us both hope and direction for the future."**

The statements in the "Declaration on the Way" were received and affirmed by the ELCA Conference of Bishops, the ELCA Church Council and the Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In January 2016 The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity invited Lutheran churches across the world to use a jointly developed Common Prayer in preparation to commemorate the Reformation anniversary in 2017.

The piece is the first jointly developed liturgical order prepared by a liturgical task force of the Lutheran Catholic Commission on Unity of the LWF and the Pontifical Council. It is based on the recent study report "From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017" and is calling Catholic and Lutheran communities to joint prayer in this commemoration.

"This common prayer marks a very special moment in our common journey from conflict to communion," wrote Martin Junge, LWF general secretary, and Kurt Koch, Pontifical Council president, in a joint letter to church leaders. "We are grateful for being able to invite you to participate in this journey in witnessing to the grace of God in the world."



A portion of your offering supports **national ecumenical work as well as the work of The Lutheran World Federation, a global communion of 145 churches in the Lutheran tradition representing more than 72 million Christians in 98 countries worldwide. The ELCA is the communion's only member church from the United States.**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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 undesignated gifts to ELCA ministries that go 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 strategic priorities include accompanying the nearly 9,300 ELCA congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission and building 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 returns back 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. 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 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.

A NEW TEAM FOR MISSION SUPPORT



Nick Kiger (left), Associate Director, Mission Support and Victoria Flood, Director, Mission Support

Dear partner in ministry,

I am excited to begin this adventure as your new director for Mission Support. For the past 15 years, I served the churchwide expression of the ELCA through its Research and Evaluation department. Through this work I have come to know many of the opportunities and challenges facing all of us in this church. I am convinced that we are at our best when we are united as church together.

The former director for Mission Support, the Rev. Margaret G. Payne, retired at the end of 2015. We give thanks for her ministry and witness to the gospel.

In addition to myself, I am pleased to introduce the new associate director for Mission Support, Nick Kiger. Together, we look forward to serving this church. Nick and I firmly believe it is our deep faith in God and strong relationships with others that inspire our financial giving decisions, including Mission Support giving.

Mission Support isn't just about money—it's about the commitment we share, as interdependent ELCA expressions (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization), to support ministry in places where we physically cannot be. Mission Support helps extend the impact of every ELCA member, funding ministries that are local, national or global in scope. I hope you've seen how you've made an impact—through the stories captured in this publication, and countless others waiting to be told.

Thank you for continuing to support God's work!

In peace and partnership,

Victoria Flood
Director, ELCA Mission Support



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

Stories of Faith in Action

Y O U R O F F E R I N G A T W O R K

2016

Order free copies of this resource at
ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action
or call 800-638-3522.

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