

STORIES OF FAITH

IN ACTION

2018 • 2019

YOUR MISSION SUPPORT GIFTS AT WORK



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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Cover photo

Mark Rollenhagen, pastor of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries in Lakewood and Rocky River, Ohio, shares a story with children during a special outdoor worship service. Turn to page 8 to learn how two congregations merged to become Good Soil.



A message from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

A miracle sparked the Christian movement.

It was the Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, and the disciples were gathered in a house. Without warning and with the sound of rushing wind, the heavens opened. Flames crowned the disciples' heads, the Holy Spirit filled their hearts and they began speaking other languages. The phenomenon drew a crowd, and the people were bewildered. These disciples were speaking in the people's native tongues—how?

Surely these men were drunk, they thought. But Peter corrected them, going on to preach the first sermon. He declared Jesus died and rose to save them from their sins. He called on them to repent. Then he said, "For [this] promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:39). Grace—God's love freely given—is for everyone. The crowd heard this and believed; 3,000 were baptized.

Centuries later, we are still astonished by God's gift of grace. And as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we continue to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to share the gospel message and serve our neighbors.

Through this church's Future Directions 2025 initiative (ELCA.org/future), we're drawing inspiration

from the early church as we cultivate new leaders and revitalize congregations. You'll see lots of examples in this edition of *Stories of Faith in Action*, including Santuario Luterano (page 6), a young faith community with a passion for service; a churchwide commitment to elevating women (page 12); Nate Berkas (page 13), a leader who pursued God's call in the great outdoors; and the work of our companions in Colombia (page 17) as they strive for peace and reconciliation.

These stories are your stories too. You've made them possible through your generous gifts of Mission Support, a small percentage of your offering set aside by your congregation and synod for funding ELCA ministries on a local, national and global level. These stories are an example of all the ways we are church, we are Lutheran, we are church together, and we are church for the sake of the world.

Thank you for your faithful commitment to this church and for helping us create new stories of faith in action every day. My prayer for this church is that we continue to heed God's call: building up leaders, energizing congregations and serving as agents of grace in the Christian movement.

With gratitude for your faithfulness,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

How your offering becomes Mission Support

As Lutherans, we believe that Christ has freed us from sin and death, even from ourselves, so that we can love and serve our neighbors. One way we put our faith in action is by making a financial gift—an offering—to our congregations.

Each year, ELCA congregations pledge to send a portion of the offerings they receive to fund ELCA ministries in their synods and beyond. In the ELCA, we call these funds Mission Support.

Mission Support enables the ELCA's 9,300 congregations and 65 synods to pool resources to love and serve our neighbors in ways that no individual or congregation can do alone. **Mission Support is one way we are church together—it's essential to who we are as the ELCA.**

Through Mission Support, we participate in God's life-changing work in our communities and around the world.

How Mission Support works

Your congregation

Your congregation stewards your offering to support your congregation's vital presence in your community. When your congregation votes to designate a portion of your offering to be shared with your synod and the churchwide organization, your congregation is sharing Mission Support for the ministries stewarded by the wider church on your behalf.

Your synod

Your congregation's Mission Support dollars are stewarded by your synod leaders to nurture and equip ELCA congregations and rostered ministers. Synods support area ministry partners (camps, colleges, seminaries and more) as well as build relationships with companion churches around the world. Synods designate a portion of the Mission Support funds they receive from congregations to be shared with your churchwide organization for ministries across our church.

Your churchwide organization

Your churchwide organization stewards Mission Support dollars to lead and support ministry on behalf of the whole church. This includes accompanying ELCA congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission, equipping leaders and building the capacity of this church for witness and service in the world.



In 2017, ELCA members gave

\$1.8 billion

in unrestricted offerings* to support God's mission and ministry through the three expressions of the ELCA. Thank you for your generosity!

94.6%

\$1.7 billion was stewarded by the ELCA's 9,300 congregations.

CONGREGATIONS

2.9%

\$52.4 million was stewarded by the ELCA's 65 synods.

SYNODS

2.5%

\$44.4 million was stewarded by the ELCA churchwide organization.

CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION

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

*Read on for stories of faith in action
made possible by Mission Support!*

VITAL CONGREGATIONS



Mission developer Ángel Marrero leads worship in Spanish for members of Santuario Luterano, Waltham, Mass.

A passion for justice —and Jesus

A simple pot of rice and beans originally brought Eidas Rivas to Santuario Luterano, Waltham, Mass. Rivas, who is 34, made them at her mother's request for a potluck following evening worship. She hadn't planned on getting involved at Santuario; her intention was to "just come that Sunday and be done with it."

But it was the way the community embraced her three children—all with special needs—that kept Rivas coming back. Today she's deeply invested in the new ELCA congregation and so are her children, who serve as acolytes there.

For Rivas, belonging to Santuario is important because "we do a lot of social justice." This passion for service is a common thread among the congregation's young Latino membership, said Ángel Marrero, pastor and mission developer there.

Members lead a variety of outreach efforts, including a free food pantry, GED classes and more. Last fall, in the wake of Hurricane Maria, Rivas and two other young adults at Santuario organized a donation drive for Puerto Rican families whose lives were devastated by the disaster.

Rivas remembers the constant flow of people and donations and calling Marrero to announce that a 24-foot truck had arrived—full of canned food for the people on the island.

"I was expecting 10 boxes," Marrero said of the effort. "We filled two airplanes (of donations) out of this mission church!"

He said the event was a turning point in his ministry with Santuario. New young people had found the congregation through it and asked him: "What's keeping you all together?"

Marrero answered,
"We do this
because of Jesus."

Now 78 people—and counting—are involved in Santuario's life and ministry, a reality that wouldn't be possible, Marrero said, without Mission Support.

Mission Support from the ELCA New England Synod and the ELCA churchwide organization fund Marrero's work with Santuario, which shares space and a partnership with First Lutheran Church of Waltham.

"The dollars you put in your offering ... is what allows me the freedom to work in Waltham [with the Latino community]," Marrero said. "Through the partnership with the larger church, it is possible to do ministry among them."



Two become one

On a recent Sunday, Mark Rollenhagen noticed something special as he looked out at the worshipers of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries. The youngest among them was 6 weeks old; the oldest was 90. To the pastor, it represented "the fullness of a healthy community."

Born from the consolidation of Faith and Our Savior's—both ELCA congregations two miles apart in suburban Cleveland, Ohio—**Good Soil is a new congregation that receives funding through Mission Support.**

Rollenhagen was originally called to Faith in 2011. In 2016, Our Savior's contracted with Faith to share his ministry.

Sharing a pastor intensified discernment in both congregations on whether to consolidate. The two churches began joint worship in 2016 on Pentecost Sunday.

At the 2017 ELCA Newly Organized Congregation Gathering, also funded by Mission Support, Rollenhagen and three members met leaders from other congregations who are being church in new ways. One speaker, Fred Nelson, served a growing two-campus congregation in Illinois.

"For us, it gave support to the idea that you can be a two-campus church and grow," Rollenhagen said.

On Feb. 1, 2018, Faith and Our Savior's merged to become Good Soil Lutheran Ministries. Rollenhagen said the name reflects the purpose—not "to prop up two small congregations" but to "strengthen and expand" Lutheran ministry in greater Cleveland.

Faith and Our Savior's are now two campuses of Good Soil Lutheran Ministries, with worship held at each during alternate weeks.

Members and guests were reminded of the new schedule through signage on both buildings; maps and schedules are posted online.

"The biggest challenge was for people to grow beyond the identities of Faith and Our Savior's," Rollenhagen said. But he thinks worshipping together Sunday after Sunday has aided in this transition.

Attendance has grown, with younger families.

"The energy is being directed toward living into the future instead of trying to save the past," Rollenhagen said.



Sharing space, growing in faith

A growing, new worship community—ELCA Batak—is sharing space with First Lutheran Church in Redlands, Calif., and leaders say both groups are enriched by the experience.

“It’s working,” said Kamser Siahaan, president of Batak’s council. “We have a good relationship.”

The partnership began last fall, and members even celebrated Christmas together.

Siahaan’s faith community, with about 60 people, is awaiting a new pastor from ELCA companions in Indonesia, where the Batak have their roots. They have been worshipping together in Southern California for more than 10 years, originally part of a larger Batak group, said Tom Goellrich, director for evangelical mission in the ELCA Pacifica Synod.

Goellrich helped match the Batak community with First and provides support. [Mission Support from the synod and churchwide organization sustain his work.](#)

“They’re a very enthusiastic, very energetic group who have a great faith and a great love for Jesus,” he said.

While they await a pastor, the Batak community calls on outside help to preach on Sundays, sometimes from other pastors who speak the Indonesian language. Having an Indonesian pastor helps older people in the congregation who can’t understand English as well as younger members, Siahaan said.

Kim Krogstad, pastor of First, also helps. She recently presided over the wedding of Siahaan’s daughter.



As with any new relationship, there was some “stepping on each other’s toes,” mainly involving scheduling, Goellrich said. The congregations worked it out.

First has worship services on Sunday mornings and the Batak congregation worships in the afternoons, with singing, dancing and a meal afterward.

“We have a lot of growing because members of the congregation live around here,” Siahaan said. “We’re hoping to have more than 100 people.”

Krogstad said she hopes the youth groups in the congregations can share activities. A new group of people with a different background is bringing life and joy to their congregation, she said, and the experience “has really been a delight.”





Deacon Ryan Hostler oversees the music program at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Vero Beach, Fla.

“Nurturing the song of the church”

ELCA Deacon Ryan Hostler sees his life’s calling as one that involves equipping others with the tools they need to sing and worship God.

As minister of word and service for music and worship at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Vero Beach, Fla., Hostler oversees the church’s music program, plans services and serves as cantor. As a leader in the church, he draws on his music training and educational experience, particularly those gained at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio.

Trinity is one of the ELCA’s seven seminaries; each receive annual Mission Support grants to sustain their work in training leaders like Hostler for service in the church. For Hostler, seminary “provided a solid foundation for future growth and learning.”

Moreover, Hostler counts the experience as one of the best decisions of his life. “[It] allowed me to grow immensely in my theological depth and understanding,” he said.

After seminary, Hostler began working in the ELCA under the title associate in ministry and became a deacon when the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly brought together the roles of associate in ministry, diaconal minister and deaconess under the umbrella of deacon. “I’m thrilled [the church] put us all on equal footing,” he said.

Hostler said being a deacon means opportunities to bring his unique talents to the church. “It’s wonderful because I’m able to focus on worship and what that means to our congregation.” Every deacon brings something different to the table based on their skills. “You have deacons that deal with finances and deacons that deal with worship and deacons that deal with social justice,” he explained.

“We’re able to let those gifts that we bring grow and broaden the church.”

God’s call to become a deacon took hold within Hostler when he “fell in love with the idea of serving with the gifts that God gave to me.”

As he uses his gifts to lead music and worship at Our Savior, Hostler keeps this mission statement close to his heart: “My simple but profound calling is nurturing the song of the church.”



Made in God's image: ELCA initiatives elevate women

When the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly authorized the development of a social statement on women and justice, issues related to the topic weren't dominating the headlines. Today national conversations on sexual misconduct, gender justice and institutional sexism have taken hold in a way that suggests a lasting cultural impact.

The ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ (ELCA.org/womenandjustice) has been at work since 2012, bolstered by Mission Support funds. The social statement draft the task force helped shape—which examines gender-based violence, workplace discrimination, economic inequality, gender role expectations, and use of Scripture and theology—will be edited with reference to public feedback and presented as a proposed social statement for a vote at the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

In her work with the task force, Fern Lee Hagedorn came to see “sexism not just as a women’s issue but one that harms women and girls, men and boys, as well as those who don’t fall into set gender categories.”

Hagedorn also realized that race, economics, education, immigration status and age add to the complexity of issues facing women. “I am grateful to be part of a church that speaks up on behalf of all who are made in God’s image,” she said.

Another important ELCA initiative elevating women is the ELCA rostered women of color project (ELCA.org/rwoc), led by Wyvetta Bullock, ELCA executive for administration, and Cheryl Pero, emeritus professor at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

“God’s Faithfulness on the Journey,” a resource created by the project’s committee and partially funded by Mission Support, highlights reflections from 42 women leaders of color in this church.

“God has called and continues to call women of color as leaders in this church, yet their ministry experiences are often characterized by discouragement and lack of support,” wrote Bullock and Pero in the introduction to that resource. “We initiated [the rostered women of color project] to change this.”

Thulie Beresford, an ELCA chaplain, was among those who shared their stories.

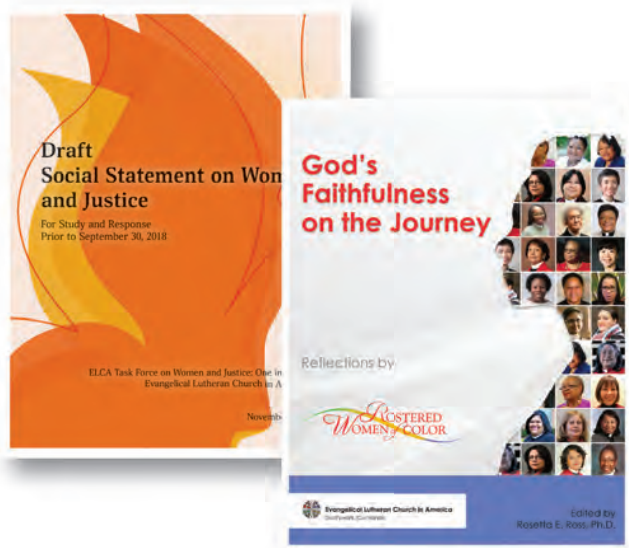
At 18, Beresford knew she wanted to be a pastor, but her home church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, was not yet ordaining women. After graduating from college, she received a scholarship to complete her master’s at Ohio University in Athens, where she attended Christ Lutheran Church.

“There I met for the first time a female Lutheran pastor, Patricia Lull, and my heart began to burn within me knowing I could be a pastor,” Beresford wrote.

Two years later, with support from Lull, Beresford enrolled at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. Now Beresford serves at Franke at Seaside, a continuing care retirement community in Mount Pleasant, S.C., a ministry of the ELCA South Carolina Synod.

“Yes, there have been challenges,” she recalled. “What has strengthened me are the words of a mentor: ‘If you feel like quitting at least three times a week, then you are being faithful to your call.’”

By showcasing stories of hardship, hope and courage, “God’s Faithfulness on the Journey” joins the ELCA in its work of breaking the silence and celebrating women of color.



A camp-call connection

The summer before Nate Berkas started high school, he went on a camping trip that would change his life. Berkas said his faith journey began in earnest on a five-night visit to the Boundary Waters with Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry, an ELCA camp in Cook, Minn.

"It was the first opportunity for me to feel and see and experience God in a really tangible way," Berkas said.

He went on several more trips to the area throughout high school before becoming a camp counselor in college, when he spent four successive summers working with youth at camp. "I realized through that experience that I was really passionate about outdoor ministry and really interested in pursuing that as a profession," Berkas said.

The next step in his journey came through acceptance into the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program, which is funded in part by Mission Support. Berkas, who grew up in Madagascar while his parents served as missionaries there, applied for YAGM because "it was my own opportunity to see God at work in various ways around the world and to be formed and transformed by our companions."

A highlight of Berkas' YAGM year serving alongside companions from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa was a weeklong camp in Cape Town. The experience affirmed in Berkas the importance of "outdoor ministry and creating space for young people to come that's outside of their normal context ... and to send them back renewed and refocused."

After returning home, Berkas served for five years at the ELCA churchwide organization, stewarding the relationships between ELCA missionaries and their sponsoring congregations. His experience with the many facets of nonprofit management would later be an asset when he accepted his current position. "While I loved so much of what I was doing [to support churchwide global ministries], where I feel most called is going back to that canoe trip after eighth grade and thinking about how formative that was for my life," he said.

Today, Berkas is site director at Wilderness Canoe Base—another ELCA camp in the Boundary Waters—where he gets to give young people the same experience he had as a camper. "I feel a deep call to this type of ministry," he said. "I'm grateful for the way that all of this has worked together to shape where I am."





The Lutheran Office for World Community is housed in the United Nations, New York City, and led by Dennis Frado and Christine Mangale.

Lutheran witness, global reach

The ELCA is a church of three expressions: the churchwide organization, synods and congregations. However, Rafael Malpica Padilla, executive director for Global Mission, maintains there is another relationship that binds us together—the ELCA’s connection to the global Lutheran church through its membership in The Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

To help support the ELCA’s outreach on global social issues, the church maintains an office at the United Nations in New York City, in partnership with the LWF. **Called the Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC), it is the voice of the ELCA and the LWF at the United Nations. Its work is funded through Mission Support.**

LOWC’s director is Dennis Frado, a member of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Manhattan, who is assisted by Christine Mangale, program director, who is from the Kenya Evangelical Lutheran Church in Africa. They often attend the U.N. General Assembly when it’s in session from September to December and Security Council meetings.

“Our main objective is to convey the social policy views of the ELCA and The Lutheran World Federation to the U.N.,” Frado said. “On the other hand, we keep ELCA [congregations] informed about what the U.N. is doing on those issues. Beyond that, we bring to their attention emerging global issues.”

LOWC works, in large part, on issues related to fundamental human rights, justice, respect for international law and better standards of living for all people. It has focused recently on global migration problems.

Earlier this year, it sponsored a panel discussion on “Perspectives on Migrants: Lived Realities in Different Contexts,” which featured three experts from countries dealing with migrant issues.

Events like this define the work of the LOWC.

LOWC monitors issues of concern to the ELCA, LWF and their partners. One of the most gratifying projects, Frado said, has been working with the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, which is dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Formed in 1973, the LOWC is rooted strongly in the ELCA’s heart for humanity, working closely in regions where human rights have been violated.



Filled with the Malagasy spirit

On her first night in Fianarantsoa, Madagascar, Minnesota native Erika Storvick felt overwhelmed by her decision to serve there through the ELCA's Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program.

"It's probably the place that is most different from Minnesota," she said of Madagascar.

Through YAGM, Storvick answered a call to spend a year volunteering alongside Malagasy companions teaching English to primary, secondary and deaf students, and growing in faith. But that night she asked herself, "Why have I chosen to live on the other side of the world for an entire year?"

Though she didn't have an answer at the time, Storvick knows now that the experience helped her become more open-minded.

While teaching was fulfilling, the Malagasy spirit—being intentional with others, to the point where time and schedules take a back seat as one focuses on relationships—really filled her heart.

"I was a very overscheduled, overinvolved person before, so at first, my life felt empty if I didn't have something scheduled for every minute of every day," she said. "[But] you have so many more opportunities to grow if you don't schedule every minute."

The challenges of living alone, walking an hour one-way to the deaf school where she taught arts and crafts, and overcoming a language barrier were at times daunting, Storvick said.

But she stuck with it, said Kirsten Laderach, an ELCA pastor and YAGM country coordinator for Madagascar. **Laderach's work with YAGM is primarily funded through Mission Support.**

"She ... just kept doing the work that you do when life's not easy, which I really appreciate about her," Laderach said.

Storvick said the community spirit she was shown by people she met helped make her year abroad one of lasting importance.

"I think I'm a better person because I did YAGM," she said. "It's taught me that [from] the places and people I least expect, you can grow friendships, and even in very humbling situations ... [when] you know nothing or none of the answers—those are the places I saw God."



Peace and reconciliation in Colombia

At the House of Peace and Reconciliation in Medellín, Colombia, Lutherans strive to bring peace to a community torn by conflict for many years. Founded by Misión Luterana Emaús, a mission start of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO), the House focuses on equipping people in the Comuna 13 neighborhood to resolve conflicts peacefully. **The IELCO receives grants from the ELCA to support this work through Mission Support.**

Since 1964, armed conflict in Colombia has left more than 600,000 people dead and has displaced nearly one of every 10 Colombians. While the recent peace agreement between the government and the main guerilla group holds promise, former combatants need to be reintegrated into everyday life.

“Our vision is not only to preach the gospel but to live the gospel in our community,” said John Hernandez, pastor of Emaús. “The gospel gives us a special language to talk not only about peace but also reconciliation. Generally, in the Comuna 13, the need is to learn to coexist, to accept those that think differently.”

Last year, the House of Peace and Reconciliation hosted a multi-session certificate program on peace and reconciliation that attracted 25 students from Comuna 13, and other faith communities and human rights and peace-focused organizations in Medellín. Students committed to replicating at least some of what they learned in their communities and organizations.

In the House’s theater group, young participants use theater as a creative tool to process experiences and heal. This year they are preparing to perform an adaptation of the Bible story of the feeding of the 5,000 throughout the neighborhood and for the national IELCO education gathering.

They hope to send a message “that we can abandon the presumption of scarcity and begin to trust in the abundance of resources around us,” Hernandez said.





Use Stories of Faith in Action in your ministry

Interested in using a story from this publication as a devotion for a group gathering? Here's an outline you could use—or feel free to create your own!

Opening

Leader: As in one body we have many members,

Response: So we, who are many, are one body in Christ.

Readings

Select and read a Bible passage from the following list:

Mark 12:41–44

Luke 10:25–27

Acts 2:43–47

1 Corinthians 12:12–31

2 Corinthians 7:16–8:7

Galatians 5:22–26

Next, choose and read one story from this publication. See pages 6–17.

Discussion

Choose and discuss one or more of the following questions:

- In what way(s) does this story exemplify the Bible passage you read?
- Identify the passion that motivated the people in the story.
What passions motivate people in your ministry?
- What is one thing you learned about ministry across the ELCA from this story?
How might you share this with others in your ministry?
- What new idea for ministry does this story inspire?

Closing

L: Let us pray.

R: Gracious God, we cannot begin to know all the ways we, as your church, respond to the needs of the world. We thank you for the generosity shared from across our church. Give us strength to respond to your call to live out our faith in service to our neighbors, near and far. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

To download a flipbook, printable PDF and other resources, visit ELCA.org/SOFIA.

A message from the Mission Support team

Dear partner in ministry,

Mission Support is about so much more than dollars and cents. Mission Support is one of the ways we in the ELCA express how we are church together.

Responding to God's call to serve our neighbors near and far takes a commitment to build and nurture relationships. Nurturing our relationships with God, one another and our global companions are the keys to ministry vitality. These relationships become the foundation for our shared ministries.

The stories in this booklet—of ministries that are only made possible because of our work together as church—are just a glimpse into the many ways God reaches the world through us. Telling these stories makes what we do together as church more visible to everyone.

We encourage you to be part of building and nurturing relationships across our church. Please use this booklet to share stories of how we are church together for the sake of the world.

We are deeply grateful for the way Mission Support is shared across this church and for the relationships that bind us together as one body in Christ. Thank you!

In peace and partnership,



Nick Kiger
Associate Director, ELCA Mission Support

Victoria Flood
Director, ELCA Mission Support

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Congregations are encouraged to reprint the content of Stories of Faith in Action for use in their ministries.

Any reprint should include the following information:

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To download a flipbook, printable PDF and other resources, visit ELCA.org/SOFIA.

To order free copies, call 800-638-3522 or visit ELCA.org/SOFIA.

Visit LivingLutheran.org for more stories of faith in action, including those made possible by Mission Support.



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