



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

U.S. INTERNATIONAL AID: Lutheran Reflections and National Practice

The ELCA is present all over the world, partnering with local churches and organizations. Our faith reinforces that we depend on God and one another, whereas our economic and political reality reminds us that our well-being is intimately connected to the well-being of our neighbors around the world. Our calling as people of God and global neighbors is to accompany one another toward peace, justice, health, food security and safety for all.

This resource offers a chance to examine:

- *Our grounding as Christians in relationship with global neighbors.*
- *U.S. foreign assistance practices.*
- *Convictions in faith-centered global relations.*

This resource poses lots of questions to prompt reflection. Use it for personal review or share it with a group, using the hymn and prayer options.

OUR GROUNDING AS CHRISTIANS

Martin Luther wrote, "For the sacrament [of Holy Communion] has no blessing and significance unless love grows daily and so changes a person that he is made one with all others."¹



HYMN
(optional activity)

Sing ELW 479, "We Come to the Hungry Feast"

Christians around the world come to God's table with nothing to offer God but their confessions, and there they experience the overwhelming abundance of God's grace. When we gather at the Lord's table, we acknowledge our neediness. That vulnerability before God connects us to our neighbor in humility. In one another we see both need and abundance, and we are justified by grace to be in meaningful relationship with each other.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God."²



**PAUSE &
REFLECT**

How might we experience connection with others through receiving Holy Communion?

Scarcity and Abundance

Airports are a fascinating flurry of activity. If you've been in a terminal at a busy time, you've probably observed that having a ticket doesn't guarantee you a smooth experience. Some last-minute jostling is

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almost inevitable. Choices including those around costs and profitability are being made that set the stage for travel hiccups. Tickets purchased at different prices entitle travelers to different treatment. There are complex seating procedures, and fees for checked baggage. Airline staff are professional yet only human and make mistakes. Flights are oversold, gate calls missed, travel plans changed. Bulky bags may be lugged around, and family members may get seated apart. When tensions flare (or don't), a sense of scarcity and abundance can be used to assess the moment.



PAUSE & REFLECT

Name a travel experience you had that went badly. What was scarce? What created the scarcity? What was abundant? What were the consequences?

A group of Christians in Corinth were struggling to hold the Lord's Supper in a way that would overcome scarcity in the community.³ There was inequity—some were allowed to take too much while others had not enough—and Paul scolded the Corinthians for the situation, angry that they hadn't been sufficiently attentive to their life together to resolve the scarcity. The Corinthians, Paul asserted, should make the Lord's Supper a time of abundance.



PAUSE & REFLECT

On what basis did the Corinthians have "not enough"? On what basis did Paul see abundance? How do you hear these words in your context?

U.S. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PRACTICES

The challenge of scarcity and abundance continues today.

A lot of people in the United States experienced scarcity in early 2020 when toilet paper was difficult to find. This scarcity, which was later resolved, was entirely created. There was always enough toilet paper! But shoppers were buying more toilet paper than they needed, and the system of supply, which was based on "just in time" delivery to keep costs low, didn't keep up.

Meeting our common needs of food, housing and health care is intertwined with scarcity and abundance. Scarcity created by the social order becomes even more urgent and difficult to address when exacerbated by emergencies such as disease and disaster. Worldwide, people with fewer resources suffer disproportionately in a disaster. Recovery from disaster also takes longer for those with fewer resources. In our common vulnerability, how shall we respond?

Foreign Aid

Foreign aid is money, technical assistance or commodities that the United States provides to other countries in support of a common interest.⁴ Polling cited by the Brookings Institution shows that Americans support U.S. active engagement in the world, although some feel U.S. foreign policy is overextended.⁵ The United States gives a lot in foreign aid — historically more than any other country. But we do not give a large proportion of our budget in foreign aid. Foreign aid constitutes less than 1% of the overall federal budget, a much smaller proportion than most high-income nations contribute.

With that 1%, the United States renders assistance in many different forms, from school feeding programs to building roads in the aftermath of disasters. Short-term humanitarian aid relief constitutes only about 14% of the foreign aid budget.

Connected Well-being

In a global economy, our own health, national security, economy and environment are closely connected to our neighbors' well-being. We ourselves cannot prosper without fighting disease, promoting healthy economies and caring for the environment on a global scale. The safety and welfare of God's children around the world are critical to the safety and welfare of God's children in the United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how deeply connected we are to each other. The global spread of COVID-19 has brought suffering, death and grief without borders. The public health crisis has also devastated financial security for many workers in the United States and other nations. Economic activity in our globalized world cannot even begin to return to normal until sufficient numbers of people are protected from both the virus and the economic costs of the pandemic.

Overall, the federal government has committed [trillions of dollars](#) to domestic COVID-19 relief, with only a small portion allocated for international COVID-19 relief. The international aid will help countries procure COVID-19 vaccines and food aid, provide humanitarian relief and provide additional support for existing global health programs such as the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief ([PEPFAR](#)) and the [Global Fund](#), fighting AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. This is a great start, but pressing needs remain, such as access to COVID-19 vaccines in low-income countries. Wealthier countries have used their buying power to purchase higher quantities of vaccines. Combined with trade and property rules that prevent wider production, this has created a scarcity of vaccines for less wealthy countries trying to meet their basic needs.



Hospital workers in Naples, Italy rest in front a sign reading "Everything will be fine" in this photo taken by ELCA World Hunger.



PAUSE & REFLECT

Read the account of Jesus feeding the 5,000 in Matthew 14:13-21. Where do you see scarcity in this story? Where do you see abundance? If our nation and its foreign assistance were elements of the story, how might it be told?

Each year, advocacy staff in the ELCA look at the federal policy horizon in the United States and [prioritize advocacy action](#) based on our church's social teaching documents and the experiences of its congregations, ministries and partners. Scarcity and abundance, as understood by people of faith, are ideas essential to public dialogue.

The story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 is often presented as a miracle, but it is also a story of how Jesus' presence transformed need into generosity and scarcity into abundance.

Impacts of Foreign Aid

“There is hard evidence that development and humanitarian programs produce considerable results,” reads the aforementioned Brookings article.⁶ Following are some examples of U.S. foreign assistance. Review the [full article](#) for basic foreign aid facts; then, using the “Pause and Reflect” questions below⁷, consider the possible results of the following aid expenditures.



AGRICULTURE - Feed the Future Bangladesh

In collaboration with Cornell University and other partners in late 2017, Feed the Future introduced an eggplant variety in northwest Bangladesh⁸ that helped to reduce pest infestation by 95% and the use of toxic pesticides by 56%. By the 2018 harvest season, farmers growing the eggplant variety also saw a 42% increase in yields and a \$400 increase in profits per hectare.

Learn more: feedthefuture.gov .



IMMIGRATION – USAID supports Venezuelan migrants who have settled in Peru

Two organizations worked to obtain local recognition of the professional and technical degrees of Venezuelan migrants – including 50 medical doctors. USAID helps cover these migrants’ cost of accreditation, supports them in navigating the process and assists them in finding work.

Learn more: usaid.gov .



Also available: Learn about ELCA World Hunger’s support of gender justice in Guatemala with the video “[Education Opens Doors for Young Women in Guatemala.](#)” Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala (ILAG) opened Casa Milagro in 2018 to provide education to young women from rural communities.



GENDER JUSTICE – Women learning carpentry in Afghanistan

A 19-year-old woman spearheads a group called the Afghan Women’s Initiatives Organization, which teaches job skills to women, mostly widows or women whose husbands have disabilities.

Learn more: usaid.gov .



PUBLIC HEALTH – Lesotho COVID-19 relief

A USAID partner is providing technical assistance and critical care support for COVID-19 case management at two treatment centers in Lesotho . Within a few months, the project had supported more than 160 patient admissions. In addition, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) provided training on national COVID-19 clinical guidelines to nearly 900 clinical staff and more than 800 nonclinical staff across 14 hospitals. These critical-care interventions are crucial in bolstering health care providers’ capacity to identify, manage and treat individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 throughout the country.

Learn more: usaid.gov .



PAUSE & REFLECT

Where do you see scarcity in each story? Where do you see abundance? As aid is dispersed, where are the benefits - immediate/communal/long-term - to the recipient and the United States?

CONVICTIONS IN FAITH-CENTERED GLOBAL RELATIONS

In all the locations named above, the ELCA is also present – in Bangladesh, funding community development programs; in Peru, assisting Venezuelan migrants; in Iraq, supporting gender justice projects; and in Malawi, Zimbabwe and Madagascar, accompanying churches as they work to raise awareness about COVID-19 and protection.

The ELCA Service and Justice home area accomplishes a great deal, but the scale of its work is minuscule compared to the resources of the U.S. government. Service and Justice does not seek to replace the work of the government. It has a different center. We accompany others – to emphasize relationship rather than resources, to recognize and celebrate each other’s gifts, and ultimately to live so that our stories intertwine.



The ELCA operates in the context of our humility before God. Anything we might have to share comes from what God has first given to us. The ELCA works alongside people in the world according to these principles:

Mutuality -

All of us have gifts to support God’s mission. There is no mission to, only mission with and among.

Inclusivity -

We seek to build relationships across boundaries that exclude and divide.

Vulnerability -

Just as Jesus became vulnerable to us, we open ourselves to others.

Empowerment -

We seek to identify and correct imbalances of power, which may mean recognizing and relinquishing our own.

Sustainability -

To ensure that local ministries last for a long time, we seek to embed mission in ongoing relationships and communities.



ELCA ACCOMPANYING COMPANIONS AS PARTNERS – Building resilient communities in Bangladesh

The COVID-19 pandemic brought economic activity in the informal sector to a near standstill in Bangladesh. Microfinance organizations that normally cover personal expenses were constrained in their lending because their earlier clients were unable to repay outstanding debts. The head of one microfinance organization, trying to find masks and disinfectant for his 3,000 group members, contacted Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh (LHCB) after exhausting all his personal and professional contacts. LHCB was able to provide disinfectant and a mask to each member, as well as food relief to a limited number.

Learn more: livinglutheran.org .



ELCA ACCOMPANYING COMPANIONS AS PARTNERS – Long relationship with the Salvadoran Lutheran Church

Congregations within the ELCA Sierra Pacific Synod were inspired by their accompaniment of congregations in El Salvador to become [welcoming congregations](#) and sanctuary congregations as part of the AMMPARO initiative (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) and to advocate for Salvadorans in both their native land and the United States.

Learn more: spselca.org .

When we share abundance mutually, we get to experience accompaniment; through accompaniment, we learn and grow.

Lutheran Reflections and National Practice

PAUSE &
REFLECT

- Do you think Martin Luther's reflection on blessing through being "made one with all others" (see page 1) impacts how we appreciate scarcity and abundance?
- What priorities are reflected in the way the ELCA describes its international service?
- What might we have in abundance even in a time of stress and apparent scarcity?

We and our global neighbors need accompaniment as we seek health and safety. Foremost in our awareness is the stress and illness people around the world have experienced during COVID-19, and though vaccines have arrived for some, the repercussions of this pandemic will be felt for a long time. Our worship life and experience of the sacraments reminds us that all God's children have many needs and much to give.

HYMN
(optional
activity)

Sing ELW 674, "Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ"

PRAYER
(optional
activity)

Gracious God, as we come to the Lord's table, prepared for us in humility by Jesus Christ, remind us that, though we come for ourselves, we leave having experienced your abundant grace together with all God's children.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," 1519 (Timothy Lull translation; *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*).
- 2 Ephesians 2:19.
- 3 1 Corinthians 11:17.
- 4 "What Every American Should Know About US Foreign Aid" (Oct. 15, 2019), <https://www.brookings.edu/policy2020/votervital/what-every-american-should-know-about-us-foreign-aid/>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Find questions at the end of this resource to reflect more deeply on each example.
- 8 In 2017, the United States exported approximately \$1.5 billion in U.S. goods to Bangladesh and imported approximately \$5.7 billion worth of goods from Bangladesh, [according to the U.S. Embassy](#) there. U.S. exports to Bangladesh include machinery, iron and steel products, and agricultural products (grain, seeds, soybeans, cotton, wheat, corn). U.S. imports from Bangladesh include textiles, agricultural products and apparel (footwear, headgear).



**PAUSE &
REFLECT**
(optional
activity)

In addition to the "Pause and Reflect" questions on page 4, here are expanded situation-specific questions to stimulate discussion.

IMPACTS OF FOREIGN AID: FURTHER QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION



AGRICULTURE — Feed the Future Bangladesh

- *How do small farmers benefit from increasing production?*
- *What do they buy when they gain access to markets?*
- *How might more money in the pockets of small farmers affect trade with the United States?*



IMMIGRATION — USAID supports Venezuelan migrants who have settled in Peru

- *How might a local community benefit when a person seeking asylum can practice their profession, such as medicine?*
- *How might this improve their family's life?*
- *How might the ability of Venezuelan immigrants to find refuge in Peru affect immigration to the United States?*



GENDER JUSTICE — Women learning carpentry in Afghanistan

- *How might steps toward gender justice that provide opportunities for women to work and earn an income help benefit a whole community?*
- *What might raising the status of women mean for religious fundamentalism?*
- *What do we in the United States have to gain from raising the status of women in Afghanistan?*



PUBLIC HEALTH — Lesotho COVID-19 relief

- *How has COVID-19 impacted the U.S. economy?*
- *How do you imagine COVID-19 affecting the economy of a country such as Lesotho?*
- *How can unchecked spread of COVID-19 across the globe impact us?*



The LWF "Waking the Giant" initiative anchors its work on the SDGs in the bible.
[Photo: LWF/S.Gallay](#)

In 2015, articulating a 15-year vision, the United Nations adopted the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), "a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity." This agenda includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 universal goal commitments to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and combat climate change. The [Lutheran Office for World Community](#) commits to a faith-based framework in achieving sustainable development by achieving the SDGs. The ELCA is working with fellow member churches of the Lutheran World Federation toward SDGs as part of the "[Waking the Giant](#)" initiative.

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