“Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29)

Dear friends in Christ,

This question asked of Jesus is well known, posed by a lawyer hoping to prove himself. Jesus, in keeping with his enigmatic style, responds not with a straightforward answer but with a story. Just like the sacred story of Jesus’ birth, it is a story of compassion, reconciliation and grace.

The stories in this issue of Boundless, much like the parable of the good Samaritan and the nativity story, ask us to consider who our neighbor is. In one story, it is the Samaritan, someone who is seen as an outcast from Jewish society; in the other, it is the small, newborn son of two refugees and everyone his birth called to, from shepherds to the magi.

Although many of our global partners are on the other side of the world, ELCA ministries help bring us right next door to members of our family in Christ, no matter how far away they may be. And we, in turn, bring you stories of your gifts at work in the world.

In this issue, young adults spend a year in Palestine to work side by side with friends amid political divisions. Nurses and doctors live in Tanzania to join with local medical staff in the hard work of fighting malnutrition. Farmers in Cambodia learn to hone new skills in the wake of a changing climate.

When you give to the church, you allow leaders from our churches and synods to walk hand-in-hand with our global church companions and our neighbors here in the United States. Together, we are able to answer God’s call to be part of something bigger, doing what we do best by rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

Who is my neighbor? You may ask. We are learning the answer to this question over and over again as we build relationships at home and abroad, saying, “I am your neighbor, and you are mine.”

This Advent, let us hear these stories together and rediscover God’s love, which knows no limits.

KATHY SUMMERS
Executive Director, Mission Advancement
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

On the cover: Refugee girls attend school at St. Andrew’s Refugee Services (SARS) in Cairo, Egypt. Your gifts to the International Women Leaders program and ELCA World Hunger are helping the young women and girls at SARS stay in school and achieve their goals. Read more on page 8. Photo: Paul Jeffrey

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ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS
Called to Mission and Ministry

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS
Women Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

MAKING AN IMPACT
Your Campaign Gifts in Action

ELCA WORLD HUNGER
Transformative Farming Techniques

MISSIONARIES
Overcoming Malnutrition in Tanzania

We are pleased to introduce you to Kathy Summers and warmly welcome her to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Kathy joined the ELCA on Oct. 7 and is serving as the president and CEO of the ELCA Foundation and the executive director of Mission Advancement.
Called to Mission and Ministry

ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient Lars Anderson didn’t think, at first, that his journey to ministry would lead him very far from home. He grew up attending church at an ELCA congregation with his parents in Duluth, Minn. When he was in fourth grade, he began attending an ELCA-affiliated outdoor ministry, Camp Vermilion, in Cook, Minn. While he was there, Lars said, “I experienced God in a different way.” He loved being surrounded by nature and “cool” young people living out their faith.

When he got older, he joined the staff at Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry, another camp in northern Minnesota. Lars would have been content to keep working at Voyageurs indefinitely, but had what he called a “getting-kicked-out-of-the-next-moment.” The leaders at Voyageurs told Lars that if he wanted to work there long term, he should first go out and experience camps and ministries in other places.

Lars agreed, though he didn’t know just how far from northern Minnesota he was about to travel. In 2016, Lars’ sister led a trip from their synod to the West Bank with the Peace Not Walls program, the ELCA’s campaign for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine. She had completed a year of service in the West Bank as a Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) in 2013. As Lars put it, “I was sort of dragged along.”

Once there, he was struck by the depth of the relationships his sister had formed in the West Bank. People still remembered her from her YAGM year, even though she had been gone for years. Lars calls the trip a tipping point for him. He was beginning to feel called to ministry, but before he applied to seminary, he decided to become a Young Adult in Global Mission himself.

As a YAGM volunteer in 2017, Lars was also placed in the West Bank. He worked at a school in Bet Sahour, helping with secondary English classes. He also volunteered at a church one day a week. During Lars’ YAGM year, political relations between the United States and Palestine became especially strained. Lars was concerned about how this would affect the relationships he was forming. But, he said, “My host mother told me she loved me and was watching over me, and that I was always welcome in Palestine.” People at the school and even strangers on the street kept assuring him that he was still welcome. This gave him a new understanding of grace. It also strengthened his desire to become a minister so he could share the story of that grace with others.

This fall, Lars began his first year at Wartburg Theological Seminary, funded by a full scholarship from the ELCA Fund for Leaders program. Without this scholarship, Lars said, a career in ministry would not be feasible for him. He knows the same is true for many of his classmates. He is immensely grateful for your gifts, which have enabled the ELCA to award scholarships to more than 900 seminary students since 2000. Lars is also grateful for the gifts supporting other ELCA ministries, such as YAGM, that have given him opportunities to see the world from different perspectives.

Lars doesn’t know what type of ELCA leader he’ll eventually become. He said he wouldn’t be surprised if he ended up where he began, at an outdoor ministry. But he has also had rewarding experiences in parishes, and his conversations with students as a YAGM recruiter have led him to consider campus ministry.

Wherever his path leads next, he will bring with him all the lessons he’s learned at home and abroad. He said he’s excited to be part of the ELCA’s global network of relationships “connected through God.”
Women Leaders of Today and Tomorrow

In November 2018, women from 12 of the ELCA’s companion churches and institutions around the world gathered in Hyderabad, India, for a week of learning, networking and capacity-building at the first-ever Global Leadership Academy.

This event, which grew out of the ELCA’s International Women Leaders initiative, was built around the themes of interculturalism, gender justice, leadership and accompaniment. A major component of the academy was the development of action plans – foundational work for projects related to gender justice that each participant is implementing alongside the churches and institutions they represent.

Because of your gifts to the International Women Leaders program, the ELCA was able to provide scholarships to all 26 participants – women such as Pamela Gorder and Amany Ahmed of St. Andrew’s Refugee Services (STARS) in Cairo, Egypt.

“In a world where gender justice is unfortunately still far from being realized, it is very important and powerful for women leaders to get together, share experiences and think together about how we can create a movement of change around the globe,” Pamela said. “It is important to acknowledge that the struggles we face are not stand-alone struggles but that other women go through similar challenges.”

STARS, a longtime partner of the ELCA, is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for refugees living in Egypt. Supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, they offer several client-centered programs in the areas of education, psychosocial support, legal aid and community outreach.

For Pamela and Amany, the opportunity to attend the Global Leadership Academy was a critical part of advancing the work they were already doing to promote gender justice — and fight gender-based violence — among the clients and communities they serve at STARS.

Gender-based violence creates several barriers to female students, making it more difficult for them to continue their education. “We were encountering a daily risk of female young students dropping out from school for lack of protection, financial and family support,” Amany explained.
In 2017, Pamela and Amany began narrowing their focus to female education programs. “While at STARS, we try to remain flexible and quickly adapt to newly emerging needs of refugees by developing new projects and action plans frequently, but we are often pressed in time to do so,” Pamela said. “The (Global Leadership Academy) provided Amany and me with the space to properly think through a new action plan on how to increase female participation in our education programs.”

The resulting Gender Justice Action Plan detailed activities that addressed not only the girls and young women enrolled at STARS but their teachers and caregivers as well. The goal of the plan is to ensure that the education programs at STARS continue to improve and that at least 50% of participants in all classes and workshops are female.

Since implementing the plan, STARS has created extra tutoring classes and extracurricular activities, a mentorship program and leadership workshops for their female students. They’re conducting regular meetings with parents and caregivers to raise awareness about the importance of female education. They hired two female psychosocial workers to support young women in education and are training teachers to identify girls at risk of dropping out. They are also providing sanitary products to young women, which has reduced their absences.

“When we developed this action plan [at the Global Leadership Academy], we managed to address all the needs we desired (to fully support) young females as well as to increase their attendance and participation rate,” Amany said. Of the 352 students enrolled in the Children’s Education Program for 2019-20, 191 students (54%) are girls. This represents a 6% increase from the previous school year.

The organization’s Unaccompanied Youth Bridging Program saw similar results. At the start of the fall 2018 semester, 99 of the 243 enrolled students were girls and young women. By the spring 2019 semester, that number had increased to 143 girls and women out of 283 students.

The increased attention given to girls enrolled at STARS helped to reduce the dropout rate among female students from fall 2018 to spring 2019. STARS also continues to reenroll girls who have previously dropped out due to financial barriers; mental health, family and medical issues; and other psychosocial concerns.

For Pamela, this is just the beginning. “We hope that girls who graduate from these programs become leaders within their communities and encourage other girls to attend classes and graduate from education programs,” she said.

“The ultimate goal is to extend the reach of concepts of female participation and gender justice beyond STARS through well-trained and confident young women.”

Pamela and Amany’s participation in the Global Leadership Academy was a significant factor in their ongoing work to fight gender-based violence in Cairo. “The academy lived up to my expectations, as I found it very inspiring to meet so many strong, creative and justice-driven women from different backgrounds,” Pamela said. “As participants we gradually opened up to each other, sharing past trauma in relation to gender injustice while creating a powerful space of support and encouragement.”

“Forming a community of support for each other can be incredibly powerful.”

PAMELA GRODER
ST. ANDREW’S REFUGEE SERVICES (STARS) IN CAIRO, EGYPT

Thanks to your support, both Pamela and Amany made lasting connections at the Global Leadership Academy with women whose shared experiences will continue to positively impact the lives of girls and young women at STARS.

“I personally feel that the connections I made are invaluable and unforgettable,” Pamela said. “I often think back to the words of wisdom participants shared with the group and the encouragement, support and care we extended to each other. Forming a community of support for each other can be incredibly powerful.”
Making an Impact

Your Campaign Gifts in Action

ELCA ministries have witnessed unprecedented growth since the launch of Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA in 2014. Through the generosity of members and congregations across this church, ELCA ministries received $250 million to continue, strengthen and expand their work here at home and with our global companions around the world. Thank you for being a part of this historic effort!

- 281 new-start congregations approved during the campaign — a record growth
- 1,300 seminary students received ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarships
- 953 ministries working to end hunger in the United States
- 453 Young Adults in Global Mission serving or having served in countries around the world
- 135 long-term missionaries working alongside our companions in more than 40 countries
- 29 Renewing Congregations grants distributed in synods across the ELCA
- 46 New or enhanced Youth and Young Adults ministries received grants to grow existing programs or start new ones
- 189 Lutheran women around the world gained access to networking opportunities and academic scholarships and training
- 14 African countries gained access to malaria programs, including volunteer training, prevention supplies and medication
- 11 new global ministry evangelism projects initiated by companion churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America
- 62 countries around the world — including the U.S. — implementing programs supported by ELCA World Hunger

Your generosity is making a difference in the lives of our neighbors around the world.
Toa Pheurn and Cheing Khorn are parents and subsistence farmers who live in the Kampong Speu province of Cambodia. They grow rice, which they eat year-round, and corn, which they sell to cover their basic expenses. But with four children between the ages of 14 and 20, they worried about making ends meet.

“Our children are bigger and bigger. We don’t know where to find money to support them to study,” Toa said. “Sometimes, we think that when they are married, where should we find money to prepare a wedding party and to buy land for them to build a house and plant rice? We are very stressed.”

In 2018, Toa joined a vegetable producers group organized by Life With Dignity, supported in part by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger. Life With Dignity is a longtime partner of ELCA World Hunger that serves vulnerable communities through development work prioritizing human dignity.

The program Toa joined was designed to help farmers adapt to a changing climate. A report from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) predicts extreme weather patterns in Cambodia, with prolonged drought and intense typhoons and flooding. As part of the program, she received training in farming techniques as well as a drip irrigation system, nets and seeds. The drip system saves labor and water and makes it easier to grow a greater variety of produce, such as leafy greens, root vegetables and fruits. With more variety, farmers’ income is more secure.

With her new tools and training, Toa started growing cucumbers. From her first harvest, she earned more than $500, four times as much as her corn crop had earned. She used her earnings for food, school fees, clothing and social activities, putting a chunk of it into savings. From her second harvest, she bought a bicycle for her daughter to get to and from school more easily.

“Now, I feel happier than before because I have additional income to support my family,” she said. “I have money to support the study of my children, and I have saved some money to support my family and children’s study in the future.”

Thanks to you, Toa and Cheing can rest more easily, knowing their children can finish college and they can have a safety net of savings as well.

This Life With Dignity program is just one of hundreds in more than 60 countries around the world, including the United States, that your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support. From education to microloans, from health care to support for migrants and refugees, the programs you fund are making a difference in many lives. Thank you.

“Now, I feel happier than before because I have additional income to support my family.”
TOA PHEURN

Toa Pheurn with some of her cucumbers harvested. Photo: Life With Dignity
Overcoming Malnutrition in Tanzania

Stories like Juliana’s give Jodi a sense of hope. She and her husband, Steve, serve as missionaries in Arusha, working at Selian Hospital and Arusha Lutheran Medical Center. As a pediatric nurse, she works alongside Tanzanian nurses to treat children who face acute and chronic malnutrition. Even on difficult days, Jodi finds encouragement in working with her fellow nurses.

“To work alongside these Tanzanian nurses is something that gives me the greatest joy,” she said. “I can come here on a day I’m feeling really discouraged and thinking, ‘Am I really making any difference?’ and I see their faces and greet them with a hug and a kiss, and I already feel better.”

The Swansons moved to Tanzania in 2013 at the invitation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and its hospitals. When Jodi first began working at Selian Hospital, she learned from a nutritionist named Mama Imani and focused on building relationships. As the need for increased malnutrition care became clear, the Swansons established an inpatient feeding program at the hospital and then an outpatient program for follow-up care. Mothers bring their children to the outpatient program on a weekly basis for a nutrition checkup, and they receive ready-to-use therapeutic food to supplement the children’s diets. They also learn how to create their own gardens to grow nutritious foods.

Between the changing climate and population growth, many families in Tanzania face hunger and malnutrition, with about 13 million people living in poverty, according to the World Bank. Jodi has seen some of the hungriest children in the hospital’s malnutrition clinic. Often families will bring their children to the hospital after nothing else has worked.

She sees need for both capacity-building and additional resources. As local doctors and nurses grow in their skills, care has been improving, but there is still a lack of such critically needed resources as medicine and supplies. “That’s where I think that we step in and help, out of compassionate hearts,” Jodi said, “to take our place in the world and say we’re going to share our resources with you.”

“Thank you for supporting missionaries such as Jodi Swanson. Their ministry is possible only because of gifts from donors such as you.”
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*ELCA scholarship recipient Lars Anderson (right) attends the graduation ceremony at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour in 2018. Now, he is a seminary student himself at Wartburg Theological Seminary. Read more about his journey from the Midwest to the West Bank and back on page 4.*