

Boundless

Winter 2020

**STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE**

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

"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people'" (Luke 2:10).

We are coming up on what is likely to be one of the hardest winters we will ever remember — not because it will be the coldest, or the harshest, or the worst for next year's crops, but because we won't be able to gather in community the way we're used to doing. Difficult times are meant to be dealt with together, yet we are being asked to stay apart for the safety of our communities.

However, we are not alone. We come from a long history of storytelling. Our ancestors sat around the fire together and told stories of the creation of our people, of great floods, of being torn away from homelands and finding refuge in new places. The stories we tell help us carve out our identity. These stories are a current running through our past, present and future and connecting all of us to one another.

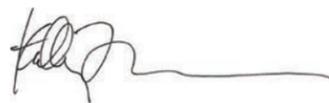
Every year, we share the story of Advent — a story of waiting, wishing and anticipating the coming of Christ. No matter who we are or where we are from, this story inspires similar feelings in all of us as followers of Jesus. It's about a poor refugee family, tired and worn, without a place to stay. Yet God marks this journey as sacred and, through this holy family, sends God's son, a sign of joy for the whole world.

Advent is about daring to hope, even in the hardest times.

This winter, we unite through the stories we tell as a community. We gather around these stories from God, a warm hearth at the center of our home in Christ. In this issue of *Boundless*, you will find stories from across our church that reveal how our living, active God is at work. You will hear about scholarship recipients following their callings, global companions teaching one another agricultural skills amid the pandemic, and ELCA congregations meeting critical needs in their communities. Each story will bring you a little closer to your church family, whether they live across the street or on the other side of the globe.

As you await Christ's birth, pour yourself a cup of tea or hot cocoa, wrap up in a blanket and warm yourself by the light of your gifts at work in the world.

Christ's peace be with you,



KATHY SUMMERS

Executive Director, Mission Advancement
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



On the cover: In response to rising unemployment and hunger during the pandemic, St. Andrew Lutheran Church in West Chicago, Ill., started a pop-up food distribution ministry. Photo by Gaby Valladolid.

HOW TO GIVE

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Dreaming Without Limits

Naomi Mbise has always had the drive and passion to be a leader. Growing up in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Naomi saw the life-changing work her church was doing for the community, and she knew she wanted to be a part of it.

“My home church has been a great resource for the enhancement of the community,” she said. “They enhance the community’s welfare spiritually, socially and economically. Its contribution in health and medical care, education and poverty alleviation [tends to people in the] whole.”

Through the International Women Leaders (IWL) program, funded by your gifts, Naomi is making her goals a reality. She is now a sophomore at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, Calif., studying political science as well as theology and Christian leadership.

“I am so humbled and blessed by the opportunity to represent the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania,” Naomi said. “Getting an opportunity to represent my church like this even more stirs my intentions to serve as a leader to my church and community.”

The IWL scholarship program boldly invests in established and emerging women leaders from our global companion churches all over the world. Your gifts support the education of international women not only through degree programs at ELCA colleges and universities

“Thank you to all the wonderful donors who support this program—because of you, the IWL scholarship program touches so many of us.”

NAOMI MBISE
International Women Leaders scholarship recipient



but also through seminars, networking and mentorship opportunities, and in-country study programs. The ELCA walks with more than 80 companion churches around the world, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Naomi’s home church denomination. By investing in the future of women leaders, the IWL program also supports our companion churches as well as educational institutions and entire communities.

“Thank you to all the wonderful donors who support this program,” she said. “Because of you, the IWL scholarship program touches so many of us.”

Recently, COVID-19 has added stress to Naomi’s time in college: she prefers more engaging, in-person learning, yet the pandemic has made the future of classes uncertain. It has financially strained students who have lost summer jobs or internships. Now, many students can’t support themselves as easily or gain academic experience. Staff from the IWL program have been working tirelessly to provide support to scholars such as Naomi during this hard time, and your gifts are even more needed now.

Despite the pressures of college and the pandemic, Naomi hasn’t stopped dreaming. She wants to use what she learns in college to work for justice and well-being in her own community.

“After I graduate from college, I dream to be a part of something impactful and work with the church, NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], individuals or the government in enhancing the welfare of my community,” Naomi said. “To be able to build opportunities that will serve and improve my community’s welfare would be a fulfillment of my life calling.”

For now, Naomi is excited to be in her second year of college with countless opportunities before her through the IWL program.

“To be an IWL scholar, to me, means being ‘boundless,’ just as this [publication] is called,” Naomi said. “It means I am without limits! This program has enabled me to pursue my dreams with no limits. ... It has shaped and keeps shaping me as a leader for a global society.”

God's Work Never Stops:

Congregational Ministry in the Time of COVID-19

In early March, when the threat of COVID-19 still seemed distant to most Americans, the Rev. Mary Martha Kannass was right in the thick of it. She and several members of Hephatha Lutheran Church in Milwaukee had been notified by local officials that they had been exposed to the virus while volunteering at a neighborhood school, a location identified as the source of an early outbreak. Pastor Mary Martha and others were asked to quarantine immediately.

Before long, the virus had spread through their tight-knit community and church family. The husband of their church council president got sick, as did others. His death was the first-recorded COVID-19 fatality in their county.

Yet Pastor Mary Martha knew she couldn't give up on ministry, especially when the needs of families in their neighborhood were increasing. "We cannot give up on our communities, especially communities of color and

communities experiencing poverty," she said. "We are a neighborhood church. And when the neighborhood suffers, the church suffers with it."

By March 15, the congregation was worshiping online and developing plans to safely continue its ministries to those in need. Hephatha is known for its work supporting children, especially infants, and pregnant women. "Every year in Milwaukee, 100 babies die before their first birthday," said Pastor Mary Martha. "That's one of the highest rates in the country." Premature birth, co-sleeping and lead poisoning are issues that have particularly affected the community and contributed to this figure.

Lead poisoning struck close to home several years ago when one of Hephatha's youngest members, Kwan,* became seriously ill and was hospitalized. "Until then, I only thought lead poisoning came from pencils," said Ruby, a lifelong member. "But lead is in our toys. It's in our paint. It's in our water." Today, at age 7, Kwan is still dealing with the health effects.

Despite the pandemic, Ruby, Pastor Mary Martha and others continue to advocate for families at risk of lead poisoning and make it easier for parents to keep their families safe. In-person educational gatherings have been replaced with Zoom meetings. Volunteers have taken to the streets to hand-deliver water-purifying pitchers, household supplies, diapers and even cash assistance to parents in need.

The leaders of Hephatha Lutheran Church were not alone in their efforts to ensure the continuation of their ministries in new, creative ways.

In West Chicago, Ill., a Chicago suburb with a high Latinx population, the Rev. Josh Ebener could see how deeply the pandemic was affecting his members and neighbors. "Close to half of the people in our community lost their jobs," he said. "On top of that, people who are still going to work are working in tight quarters at factories and other settings where they are getting sick. It made for a pretty bad combination of factors."



Volunteers help out with the new pop-up food distribution ministry started by St. Andrew Lutheran Church in West Chicago, Ill. Photo by Gaby Valladolid.



Lori, from Unity Lutheran in Brookfield, Wis., transports fresh food and diapers to families in partnership with Hephatha Lutheran in Milwaukee.



Patty, from Unity Lutheran in Brookfield, Wis., with diapers, wipes and formula collected for families, in partnership with Hephatha Lutheran in Milwaukee.



The food distribution ministry at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in West Chicago, Ill. Photo by Gaby Valladolid.

Your gifts have supported grants for the vital ministries of Hephatha Lutheran Church and St. Andrew Lutheran Church in 2020.

Hunger was on the rise and so were the demands on local food pantries, which struggled to keep up with the growing needs. “We learned that people were in need of rice, beans, tortillas and other culturally appropriate foods,” said Pastor Josh. “And these staples weren’t always available at other pantries.”

Working with other local agencies, St. Andrew Lutheran Church hosted its first pop-up food distribution ministry on a Saturday morning in March. Hundreds showed up, and the team had to turn some people away empty-handed. Each week, the team continued their ministry and expanded their offerings. When people came through for food, the congregation also helped connect people to additional resources: rental assistance, health insurance coverage and more.

The turnout was so substantial that even the mayor and state government took notice. “By June, one out of every 30 people in our community had tested positive for COVID-19. These rates were the highest of our whole county, yet we did not have one single testing facility,” said Pastor Josh. “When the state of Illinois was looking for a place to station their mobile testing unit, they came to us because we were already a trusted place in the community.”

Both Hephatha and St. Andrew funded their vital ministries in 2020 with grants made possible by your generous gifts. “We have been receiving various grants from the ELCA to support our ministry for decades,” said Pastor Mary Martha. “There was a time, 30 years ago, where we thought we’d have to close our doors. That was an example of a time when this support really made a difference. Today, we have a roof over our heads. We have a nurse. We have a mental health counselor. We have a consistent, gospel-oriented, thriving church that provides hope. And we have stability.”

Pastor Josh agrees. “These grants allow us to do this work by sustaining us,” he said. “It has helped us to remain vital in our community throughout all of this. Being a safe place for all, especially immigrants, is invaluable.”

**Name changed to protect privacy.*



Thank you!

Eduardo Loa from St. Andrew Lutheran Church in West Chicago, Ill., volunteers for the new food distribution ministry. Photo by Gaby Valladolid.

Your Gifts in Action



OUR GLOBAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19

NAVAJO EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN MISSION IN THE UNITED STATES

In Rock Point, Ariz., Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission responded to COVID-19 by providing meals and clean drinking water for people in need.

Watch video: [ELCA.org/ChurchTogetherRockPoint](https://www.elca.org/ChurchTogetherRockPoint)

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES

In Huntington Station, N.Y., Gloria Dei Lutheran Church doubled the work of its food pantry in response to COVID-19. Gloria Dei grew its ministry by working with food banks and other partners in its community — and with the help of an ELCA World Hunger Daily Bread Matching Grant.

Watch video: [ELCA.org/ChurchTogetherNewYork](https://www.elca.org/ChurchTogetherNewYork)

SAFE SPACES FOR CHILDREN IN SERBIA

Once the state of emergency for COVID-19 was lifted in Serbia, Church World Service's Safe Spaces for Street Children program focused on providing children with food, clean clothes and bathing at its drop-in shelter. The program has also run COVID-19 prevention workshops and individual counseling sessions.

A participant in the Safe Spaces for Street Children program.

RIGHTS FOR PALESTINIAN CHILDREN IN THE WEST BANK

Defense for Children International Palestine (DCIP) launched a petition to demand the release of all children from Israeli prisons amid the outbreak of COVID-19. More than 15,000 people have signed.

At age 14, Osama (now 18) was arrested by the Israeli military at 3 a.m. one night in his home in the occupied West Bank. His mother, Najwa, described the imprisonment of Osama and his brother as the most difficult time of the family's lives. Photo by DCIP.

THE INFOHUT PROJECT IN NAMIBIA

The Infohut project of the Lutheran Communion in Southern Africa trains youth in computer skills, life skills and HIV prevention. Infohut has also trained teachers in using online platforms and new technology amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in the Infohut project last winter, before the onset of the pandemic.

LIVELIHOOD PROJECT IN INDONESIA

The Protestant Christian Church in Mentawai accompanies congregation members and local communities through sustainable economic development. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the leaders of the livelihood project have been meeting immediate needs and researching the impact of the pandemic on informal workers.

Harmelius, a volunteer, helps distribute clothes to local people in the Sirisurak sub-village of Mentawai Islands, Indonesia.

POP NO'J ASSOCIATION'S EDUCATIVE PROGRAM IN GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, the Pop No'j Association provides direct care to adolescents and their families through weekly monitoring calls and periodic visits. In the wake of the pandemic, Pop No'j has provided counseling and psychological care through calls and virtual tools such as Zoom, while also creating a WhatsApp group to support youth.

A child in the Pop No'j Association's educative program holds up the newly developed learning booklet, which includes recreational activities for children and their families to complete at home.



ELCA WORLD HUNGER



LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE



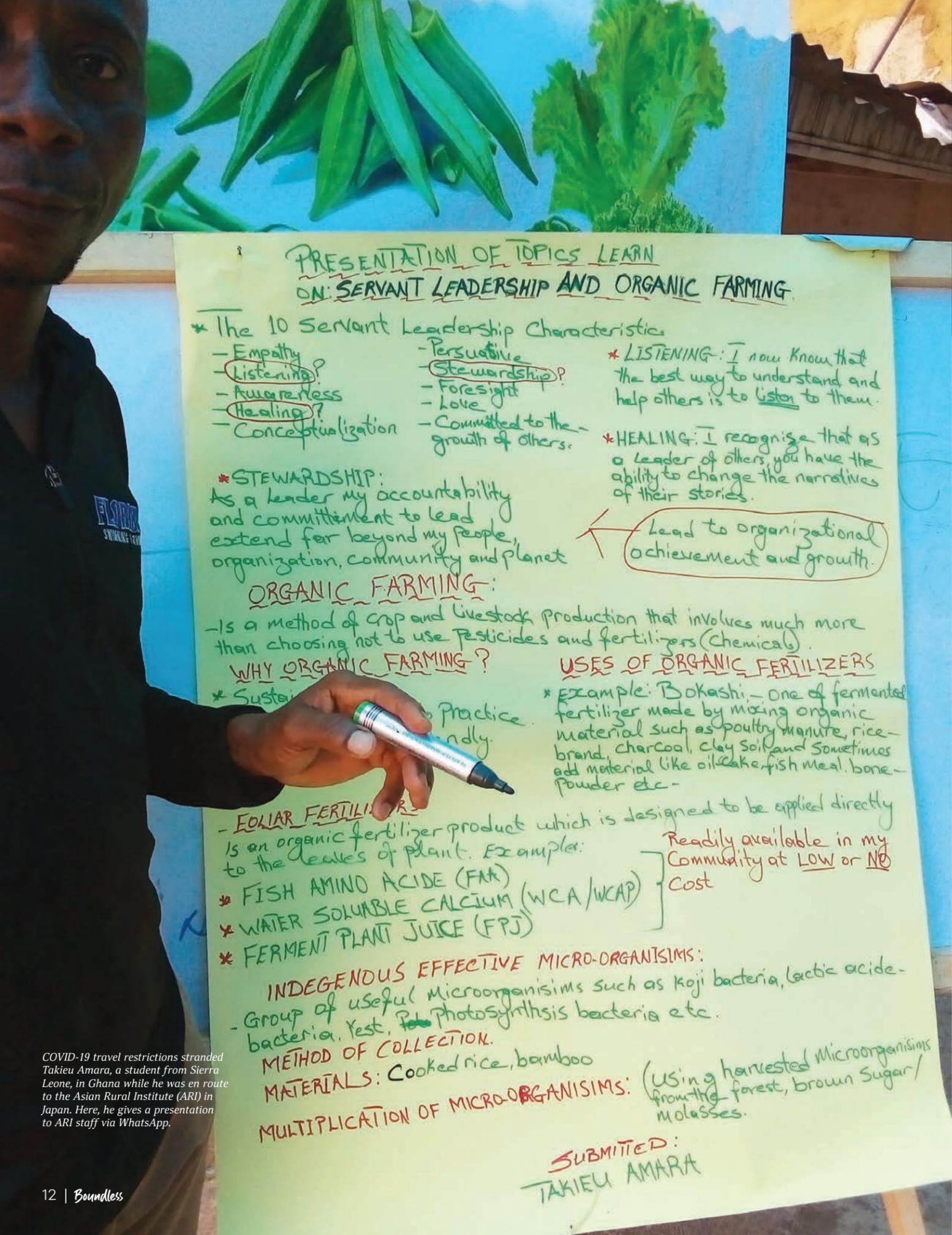
COVID-19 RESPONSE FUND

- Angola
- Argentina
- Bangladesh
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Burundi
- Cambodia
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Czech Republic
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Ethiopia
- Ghana
- Guatemala
- Guinea
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Hungary
- India
- Indonesia
- Italy
- Japan
- Kenya
- Lebanon
- Liberia
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Mexico
- Myanmar
- Namibia
- Nepal
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- Palestine
- Papua New Guinea
- Peru
- Romania
- Russia
- Rwanda
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Sierra Leone
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- The Gambia
- Uganda
- United States
- Venezuela
- Zimbabwe



Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response and the COVID-19 Response Fund are making an impact around the world, as together we respond to the urgent needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for generously supporting these ministries!



PRESENTATION OF TOPICS LEARN
ON: SERVANT LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIC FARMING.

* The 10 Servant Leadership Characteristics

- Empathy
- Listening?
- Awareness
- Healing?
- Conceptualization
- Persuasive
- Stewardship?
- Foresight
- Love
- Committed to the growth of others.

* LISTENING: I now know that the best way to understand and help others is to listen to them.

* HEALING: I recognize that as a leader of others, you have the ability to change the narratives of their stories.

← Lead to organizational achievement and growth.

ORGANIC FARMING:
- Is a method of crop and livestock production that involves much more than choosing not to use pesticides and fertilizers (chemicals).

WHY ORGANIC FARMING?
* Sustainable practice

USES OF ORGANIC FERTILIZERS
* Example: Bokashi, - one of fermented fertilizer made by mixing organic material such as poultry manure, rice-brand, charcoal, clay soil, and sometimes add material like oilcake, fish meal, bone-powder etc -

EOLIAR FERTILIZERS
- Is an organic fertilizer product which is designed to be applied directly to the leaves of plant. Example:

- * FISH AMINO ACIDE (FAA)
- * WATER SOLUBLE CALCIUM (WCA/WCAP)
- * FERMENT PLANT JUICE (FPJ)

Readily available in my community at LOW or NO cost

INDEGENOUS EFFECTIVE MICRO-ORGANISMS:
- Group of useful microorganisms such as Koji bacteria, lactic acid-bacteria, Yest, Photosynthesis bacteria etc.

METHOD OF COLLECTION.
MATERIALS: Cooked rice, bamboo

MULTIPLICATION OF MICRO-ORGANISMS: (Using harvested Microorganisms from the forest, brown sugar/molasses.)

SUBMITTED:
TAKIEU AMARA

COVID-19 travel restrictions stranded Takie Amara, a student from Sierra Leone, in Ghana while he was en route to the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Japan. Here, he gives a presentation to ARI staff via WhatsApp.



John Yeboah (second from left), a graduate of the Asian Rural Institute in Japan, with the four students from Sierra Leone and two local farmers at a pig farm in Kumasi, Ghana.

"That We May Live Together"

Funded in part by ELCA World Hunger, the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) in Japan is a nine-month service leadership training program that draws people from around the world, allowing them to live and work together as they learn agricultural skills they can take back to their home communities. ARI also invites guest lecturers from Japan and abroad to teach sustainable development, organic farming and more.

Through this model, ARI empowers people to build community, embrace diversity, value rural life, see the dignity of labor, promote food sovereignty and live in harmony with nature. Graduates return to their home countries equipped to work in sustainable development, build community and receive ongoing support from ARI in identifying funding and leadership opportunities.

As the impact of COVID-19 began to ripple around the world this spring, countries closed their borders and airports and flights were changed or canceled. Out of 26 students who'd planned to participate in ARI this year, only seven arrived in Japan; the others encountered travel restrictions and other challenges.

Four ARI participants from Sierra Leone were at the closest Japanese consulate – in Accra, Ghana – applying for visas to enter Japan when Sierra Leone closed its borders and the government in Ghana ordered a nationwide lockdown. The participants obtained their Japanese visas, but the airports and borders were closed, so they couldn't leave the country.

This is when ARI reached out to its graduates in Ghana for help. John Yeboah, a 2018 graduate,

answered the call, providing safety, food and lodging for the travelers. He escorted them from Accra to Kumasi by bus and took care of their needs while they awaited travel news. Modeling what he had experienced during his training in Japan, John even worked with ARI to start the participants' training right where they were. He led them in morning exercise, Japanese class, time-management techniques, leadership training and coaching, and discussion and reflection sessions.

For the first few weeks, COVID-19 restrictions prevented Ghanaians from traveling to their fields. Eventually, restrictions were loosened, allowing the group to begin the agricultural portion of their unexpected training program. Following the ARI curriculum, they practiced growing crops such as cabbage, beets, carrots, chili peppers, okra, lettuce, spring onion, mint, spinach and cucumber. (Much of John's farm is organic.)

ARI staff have called John's work a testament to the impact of the ARI training program on a community. With his display of servant leadership and his ability to adjust in a time of crisis, John turned a challenging and stressful situation into an unexpected time of learning and bonding for the Sierra Leone participants.

Despite the difficult year, John and people like him around the world are demonstrating adaptability, ingenuity and Christ's love for the neighbor. Thanks to your support of ELCA World Hunger, ARI can continue its work, no matter the geographic location, and uphold its motto: "That we may live together."



Your gifts

to the ELCA Fund for Leaders have made it possible for scholarship recipients such as the Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley to attend seminary. Pastor Meredith received a full-tuition scholarship in 2002.

The Cloud of Witnesses

The Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley, an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient, has served as senior pastor of Abiding Presence Lutheran Church in Burke, Va., for more than 10 years. Photo by Joel Mayfield.

"It really was this sense of profound presence of the great cloud of witnesses who walked with me every step of the way."

THE REV. MEREDITH LOVELL KESELEY
ELCA Fund for Leaders Class of 2002

One afternoon during her senior year of college, Meredith Lovell Keseley had a conversation with her religion professor about whether she wanted to go the divinity school route or the seminary route in her studies. In that moment of deliberation, she walked back to her campus apartment and, checking her email, discovered that she was one of four students being considered for two ELCA Fund for Leaders full-tuition scholarships at the seminary where she'd been accepted.

"I threw up my hands and said, 'OK, God, that's the burning bush,'" Pastor Meredith said. Eventually she was selected as one of 16 full-tuition scholarship recipients out of 32 total scholarship recipients in 2002. With this support, she attended Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (now United Lutheran Seminary) and was ordained in 2006. For more than 10 years now she has served as senior pastor of Abiding Presence Lutheran Church in Burke, Va.

Now the ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship program has expanded to fund many full-tuition, mission developer and federal chaplaincy scholarships so that future rostered ministers can pursue their calls. This academic year, 50 new recipients received one of these three types of scholarship. The program is currently supporting 297 students with just over \$2.8 million in scholarships; over the past 20 years, it has helped more than a thousand students.

Pastor Meredith said that her scholarship affirmed her sense of call, especially during the harder moments along her seminary journey when she doubted that God wanted her to be a minister. She always knew the whole church was behind her.

"It really was this sense of profound presence of the great cloud of witnesses who walked with me every step of the way," Pastor Meredith said. "[My scholarship] meant I graduated seminary debt-free, which was huge in terms of my ability to go into ministry."

Pastor Meredith said she still feels the presence of the great cloud of witnesses of the church carrying her forward – and now she gets to help carry forward the next generation of leaders. She has mentored interns, led a synod young-adult discernment group and serves on the candidacy committee of the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod. This summer, in response to the pandemic, her congregation created the Abiding Presence College-age Internship Program, in which 11 college students have gained experience while discerning their vocations.

In celebration of the congregation's 40th anniversary, Abiding Presence started a scholarship fund through the ELCA Fund for Leaders. The idea originated when one member asked what the congregation could do, beyond the planned festivities, to uplift the whole church. By starting a scholarship fund, the congregation could continue its legacy of raising up leaders and supporting future seminarians in their midst.

"We want to be prepared to support the next generation of leaders the ELCA will need," Pastor Meredith said. "As a Fund for Leaders recipient, part of this was my own deep desire to be able to do for someone else what the church has done for me, and hopefully for a whole lot of someone else's."

As a seminarian, Pastor Meredith received the Rev. Guy Edmiston Mission Endowment Fund scholarship, named after the retired bishop of the Lower Susquehanna Synod. In her first year of seminary, the Rev. Edmiston invited her to lunch – a gesture that meant a lot to her. Once again, she felt the presence of a great cloud of witnesses behind her.

As Pastor Meredith would say to donors, "Don't underestimate how powerful that note you send, that phone call you make, that dinner you offer is to your scholarship recipient. Sometimes that will be what pushes them through. The gift you are giving in naming a scholarship is really a tremendous gift."

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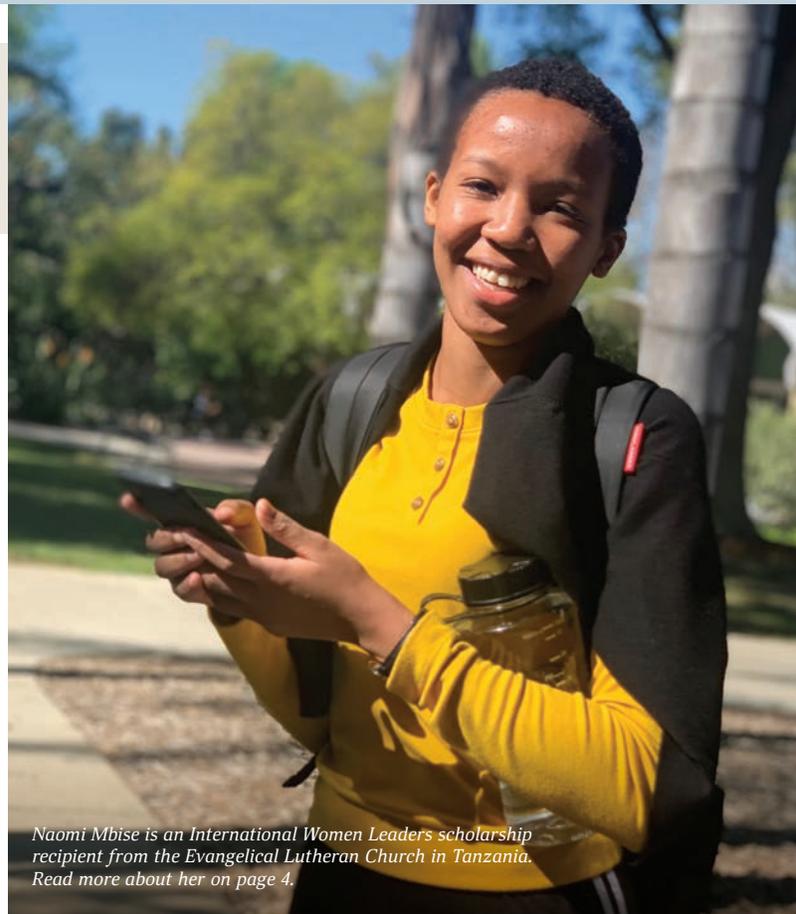
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Naomi Mbise is an International Women Leaders scholarship recipient from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. Read more about her on page 4.