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# CIRCLE

# *Leadership*

Fall 2021

NEWSLETTER

ELCA.org



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



*“Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58).*

Dear friends in Christ,

This has been a year in which we, as people of God, were challenged to respond to the growing needs of the world. During years such as this one, I am so grateful for those among us who, amid continuing uncertainty and hardship, commit even more resolutely to the work all of us are called to do: to love one another as God loves us.

As a member of the Leadership Circle of the ELCA, you are one of these people. Your unwavering commitment and faithful generosity have allowed this holy work to not only continue but expand as we meet the evolving needs of our neighbors in our church, in our communities and around the world.

This issue of the *Leadership Circle* newsletter includes the latest on how your commitment to the work of the ELCA is bearing fruit and making a difference in the lives of many in our church and beyond. You’ll read about a record-breaking year for the ELCA Fund for Leaders program; the growth of ELCA World Hunger, which will fund even more life-changing programs for those facing hunger and poverty; the strength of our network of partnerships, which allow us to respond quickly and with the greatest impact when disaster strikes; and the exciting, hopeful return of our Young Adults in Global Mission program.

None of this would be possible without your support. Partnering with you is an honor, and I thank God for the faithfulness of members, such as you, who make our ministry possible.



In peace,

Kathy Summers

Executive Director, Mission Advancement  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

On the cover: International Women Leaders scholarship recipient Marina Fomgbami of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon recently graduated from St. Olaf College with a degree in nursing. Read more about the International Women Leaders program on page 7. Photo credit: Marvelous John

## CONTENTS

ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS	3
ELCA WORLD HUNGER	4
LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE	5
ELCA WHERE NEEDED MOST	6
YOUR GIFTS AT WORK	6
GLOBAL MISSION	7

## HOW TO GIVE

### ONLINE:

[ELCA.org/donate](https://elca.org/donate)

### PHONE:

800-638-3522

### MAIL:

Make checks payable to "ELCA" and mail to:  
ELCA, P.O. Box 1809,  
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009



Twenty-five years ago, in fall 1996, leaders of our church were busy preparing the case for establishing what we now know as the ELCA Fund for Leaders. Their goal was to present a compelling argument for a robust commitment to theological education at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly the following summer. Memos from this time argue that *"the size of this effort should be dramatic and challenging."*

This fall, 24 years later, Fund for Leaders is celebrating another record-breaking year. The goal of supporting every candidate at an ELCA seminary continues to challenge us, but the impact of the Fund for Leaders can surely be called dramatic. In total, Fund for Leaders will distribute **more than \$3.2 million in scholarships to 317 students** over the course of the 2021-2022 academic year! On Oct. 1, the Fund for Leaders community gathered online to celebrate our newest class of scholars. Today, Fund for Leaders touches nearly one out of every three ELCA seminary students. What we have achieved together is truly miraculous.



*Marissa H. Krey*

The Rev. Marissa Krey  
Director, ELCA Fund for Leaders

### IMPRESSIVE GROWTH IN MISSION DEVELOPER AND FEDERAL CHAPLAINCY SCHOLARSHIPS

In addition to our 45 new full-tuition scholarships, we are celebrating impressive growth in both our mission developer and our federal chaplaincy ministry scholarships, with 15 new awards. Together, these two specialized funds represent not only more scholarship dollars distributed to students but also our church's commitment to supporting students who are called to many different types of ministry. Furthermore, these special funds allow us to grant scholarships to returning students who have discerned a special call since beginning their seminary education. If you are interested in learning more about these funds, please email [fundforleaders@elca.org](mailto:fundforleaders@elca.org); we will be happy to answer your questions or supply additional information.

### LEADERSHIP TABLE MEETS AGAIN THIS FALL

The Fund for Leaders Leadership Table will gather this month (virtually) for its semiannual meeting. This group of dedicated volunteers serves a vital role in helping us move our mission and vision forward so that more people continue to invest in the future leaders of Christ's church. Those in the group have made invaluable contributions to higher education, candidacy committees, and seminary governing and advisory boards. We thank all current and former members of the Leadership Table for their support.

Visit [ELCA.org/LeadershipCircle](https://www.elca.org/LeadershipCircle) to watch the 2021 Fund for Leaders celebration online.



*Leadership*

*"The thought that I will become a pastor in the ELCA is more than exciting. To me it is a fulfillment of a spiritual call to serve, learn and share God's love in the world. Without the Fund for Leaders, I would not be attending seminary. It represents to me the unequivocal support and belief of the church body in myself and the other recipients."*

—TORI VALCARCEL,  
ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient

## ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS AT A GLANCE

Recipients of the full-tuition, mission developer and federal chaplaincy scholarships come from **36 of the ELCA's 65 synods**.

Of those 36 recipients, **seven are people of color or whose first language is other than English**.

**Half of this year's students** will be studying in distributed learning (i.e. nonresidential) programs.

The average age of this year's Fund for Leaders scholar is **32**.





Walk with ELCA World Hunger this Advent! Visit [ELCA.org/hunger](https://www.elca.org/hunger) to download our Advent study, Advent calendar and more for use at home or in your congregation.

**A JUST WORLD WHERE ALL ARE FED**

For many of us in the church, the current state of hunger in the world calls to mind the famine in Genesis 41. Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's dream as a prophecy of famine not only won him his freedom but aided in the people's survival. We should remember that famine, once common, is now largely confined to intersections of political conflict and environmental calamity. We have come a long way. Yet the rise of hunger in this country and around the world is more than a bad dream. It is a present reality, one that does not have to be. Beyond denial, beyond despair, there is a third way. There is the path of commitment.

There is much we can do together as hunger threatens to rise. The most challenging and fragile part of that work is gaining financial support to keep it going.

We plan for the possibility of greater work and invite support. Here are some ways in which we're taking greater action:

- Responding with special program activities in areas where hunger is on the rise.
- Holding back the increase of hunger through renewed efforts at sustainable development.
- Continuing action to address the injustice and inequity that often cause hunger.
- Investing in local leadership, especially women, who can bring about better living conditions in the present and into the future.
- Working at the intersection of hunger and health.

ELCA World Hunger is growing its program work. As was reported in the last newsletter, giving in 2020 exceeded expectations. Trusting that this new giving would continue in 2021, we decided to mobilize this extra income and increase program expenditures by \$2 million, growing our annual budget to \$23.5 million. This decision comes at a risk, but we have no doubt that the risk is worth it. The program's growth has allowed the church to respond in vital, lifesaving and life-changing ways in some of the most challenging contexts. We also live in the hope that the risk is minimal because those who support this work are faithful. Because of your leadership and support, we can be confident in our continued growth as we care for our neighbors, both this year and in the years to come. Thank you.

*Daniel Rift*

The Rev. Daniel Rift  
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran  
Disaster Response Funding



**A PEOPLE OF HOPE: UNTIL ALL ARE FED**

Recently Presiding Bishop Eaton and Rick Steves, the author and travel TV host, invited those committed to the cause of addressing and ending hunger through the church to the special online ELCA World Hunger benefit "A People of Hope: Until All Are Fed." We heard from three people who carry out the church's mission and from the Rev. David Beckmann, a Lutheran who has committed his life to building coalitions among Christians and other people of faith toward ending extreme hunger. **Together, we raised more than \$100,000 toward our shared goal of ending hunger and poverty for good.** We are so grateful to everyone who made this possible. You can find a recording of this special evening at [ELCA.org/LeadershipCircle](https://www.elca.org/LeadershipCircle).

**OUR WORK CONTINUES**

Please invite others in your life to support ELCA World Hunger. Check in with your pastor or church council to see how hunger relief might fit into your congregation's activities or mission plan. Give ELCA Good Gifts early to those on your holiday list and invite them to do the same. Order and share ELCA World Hunger's Advent calendar and post your reflections of its Advent devotional materials on social media. Your giving can go further if it encourages others to give. As you count your blessings amid the challenges of this year, resolve to be a blessing to others.





### THE STRENGTH OF OUR PARTNERSHIPS

The reach of the Lutheran community, specifically the ELCA, has been especially evident in the serial disasters that have come upon us in 2021.

Our church is directly engaged in providing presence and service in times of disaster. In the first nine months of 2021, congregations and programs across the ELCA have directly responded to disasters including wildfires, tornadoes, storms, floods and hurricanes. Long after most disaster organizations have moved on, the church offers compassion and speaks for justice.

We are also connected to a resilient set of Lutheran organizations and companion churches. In the United States, the network of Lutheran social service and social ministry organizations provides opportunities for disaster survivors to work with someone who is skilled at listening and knows how to access help from a variety of sources.

As new neighbors from Afghanistan began arriving in the United States this summer, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service was already at work in communities around the country, and it has expanded the number of communities it connects to refugee sponsorship. Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief respond to ongoing relief needs in many areas including Northern Africa and Yemen. And our companion churches continue to support communities in scores of countries as they respond to natural disasters and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

We pledge to help those in need as we witness to the love of Christ and all those who follow in his way, not just Lutherans or even Christians. Sometimes the best work happens in partnership with others. Working ecumenically, we have been able to continue work in Afghanistan, expand work in Haiti – where we are also supporting the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Haiti – and assist those in migration in several countries, especially in Northern Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. At times, our efforts dovetail with the humanitarian initiatives being organized by those of other faiths.

For this reason, we often hear that the greatest strength of Lutheran Disaster Response is how it connects with the broader work of the church. These connections are what allow us to respond across the United States and around the world, to identify disaster response efforts that can make the greatest difference, and to direct resources to those efforts.

All of our disaster response activities, whether based in churches, Lutheran organizations, ecumenical partnerships or interfaith connections, are made possible by gifts given specifically to Lutheran Disaster Response. This wide and growing endeavor exists only because of the generosity of directed giving. We show up and expand our work because of you. Thank you for your support in these intense and challenging times. Together we serve the world.





**ELCA WHERE NEEDED MOST**

What a truly incredible time to be a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America!

Though I've served in my current role with the church for only a few years, I've witnessed firsthand the many ways in which our members and congregations have come together during such a difficult time for so many of us.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to shape our lives. Racial injustice threatens the happiness and well-being of millions of God's beloved children. In response to this, the ELCA's members and congregations are carrying out the work of Future Church, a new design for the ELCA with a new purpose: to actively share the way of Jesus with more people so that they might experience community, justice and love.

Recently I had the pleasure of spending a Sunday in the town of West St. Paul, Minn., with Humble Walk Lutheran Church, which is carrying out this new, shared purpose of the ELCA by reaching its community in new and innovative ways with the good news found in Jesus Christ.

Humble Walk is a relatively small faith community, but it's making a big impact in West St. Paul by adapting its ministry to the needs of its neighborhood. This church meets people where they are and invites them into relationship with one another and with God.

This work is funded in part with a grant from the ELCA's Open Doors Initiative, launched to support congregations as they try to meet new people during a time of regathering in physical spaces. The Open Doors Initiative was made possible by gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most.

Humble Walk's story is one worth hearing, and I invite you to do so by visiting [ELCA.org/LeadershipCircle](https://www.elca.org/LeadershipCircle) and watching the event recording for "One Church: Partnering in Mission," during which we originally shared this story with the rest of the church.

Together, we have accomplished so much. And because of your generosity, I know that we will accomplish even more. Thank you for your partnership.



**DeWayne Cook**  
Director of Major Gifts



In August 2020, Hurricane Isaias swept through the eastern United States, causing severe flooding in the Eastwick neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pa. Several feet of water in basements damaged or destroyed appliances; heating, ventilating and air-conditioning systems; and other belongings.

Most Eastwick residents live at or below the poverty line, and some had lost jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the tropical storm, many families had little access to necessary resources and were unable to afford flood insurance.

Flooding is not new to this community, yet some buyers weren't even told that their homes lay on a floodplain. With financial support from Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Congregational Services (LSC) is addressing flood damage and other challenges in Eastwick. LSC is walking alongside survivors to build a holistic recovery plan and to connect them with the resources they need for recovery.

LSC is also helping to replace heating and air-conditioning units in homes and to install equipment to prevent future water damage. "My greatest joy is letting people know they are not forgotten," says Stacey Ford, a resident of Eastwick and a case manager for the Eastwick Unmet Needs Roundtable. "It has been very rewarding to build new relationships with the people of Eastwick and the professionals who have helped us along the journey to recovery."

This effort – along with so many others – is possible because of your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response. Together, we can be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, reminding our neighbors near and far that, even on their most difficult days, they are not alone. Thank you for your partnership in this lifesaving work.





In the face of a global pandemic that threatens to keep us apart, you have shown that it's possible for the global Lutheran community to remain church together. I look with hope to the future of the Lutheran church around the world, and thank God for your commitment to supporting the global programs of the ELCA.



Rahel Mwitula Williams  
Director, Global Mission Funding

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS**

As the 2021-22 academic year begins, the International Women Leaders program is grateful to steward financial support for 27 scholars studying at ELCA colleges and universities, as well as women pursuing other types of academic programs. Despite ongoing pandemic-related challenges, almost all new IWL awardees were able to secure visas in time to begin the fall semester. We are thrilled to welcome new students from Brazil, the Gambia, Malaysia, Palestine, Poland, Namibia, Rwanda and Zambia, who join the sophomores, juniors and seniors already in the program. Along with our returning college and university partners, we welcome Gustavus Adolphus College and Texas Lutheran University as new IWL hosting institutions.

As we celebrate these new beginnings, we also congratulate the six IWL scholars who graduated in 2021. Alongside their sending churches, they are preparing to serve in areas such as educational access for girls, livelihood programs for women, support for survivors of sexual abuse, health care, education and psychosocial services. These scholars are multiplying the impact of their experiences in the program around the world.

**YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION**

We are pleased to share that the YAGM program will resume in 2022! YAGM staff have had lengthy and faithful conversations with the program's partners and hosts to determine what these partnerships can look like in our present context and environment. This has afforded YAGM the opportunity to ask important questions about the status of our relationships and the way we work together, and to make sure that our partners are being heard.

Country programs for the 2022-23 service year include Senegal, Rwanda, Madagascar, Cambodia, Central Europe, Argentina/Uruguay, Mexico, Jerusalem/West Bank, and the United Kingdom.

The application period for the 2022-23 YAGM service year opens Nov. 1. Do you know a young adult who might be interested in this transformative, yearlong journey of international service? Encourage them to apply at [ELCA.org/YAGM](http://ELCA.org/YAGM).

**MISSIONARIES**

Despite the challenges of the last year and a half, our missionaries and global companions have continued to walk alongside one another to share the good news of God's unending love with our neighbors around the world.

In July, the ELCA's newest missionaries gathered with staff and colleagues from across the ELCA for Summer New Missionary Orientation. The missionaries attended sessions on topics such as the accompaniment model, what it means to be a missionary, regional area desk time, health tips and practices, safety and security, and race, power and privilege.

Please keep the following people in your prayers as they begin their service with the ELCA:

**Laura Slezak**  
*ESL teacher, Japan*

**Corey Shaver**  
*ESL teacher, Japan*

**Monica Meyer**  
*English language educator, Indonesia*

**Carolyn Schneider**  
*Lecturer in Western philosophy, church history and contemporary theology, Jamaica*

**The Rev. Aaron Decker**  
*Theological educator, Bolivia*

**Kaitlyne (Katie) Larson**  
*Peace-building and human rights educator and community organizer, Colombia*

**Naomi Sveholm**  
*Education coordinator, Slovakia*

**Jennie Norberg**  
*Central Europe teacher, Slovakia*

**Michelle Laudermilk**  
*Central Europe teacher, Slovakia*

**Mitchell (Mitch) MacDonald**  
*Central Europe teacher, Slovakia*

**The Rev. Kristin Engstrom**  
*Facilitator for leadership development, Zambia*



# CIRCLE Leadership

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ELCA.org

FALL 2021



## Thank you for your partnership!

Your ELCA Mission Funding team, from left to right: Rahel Mwitula Williams, Sharon Magnuson, Gabe Brannan, Karen Mathison, the Rev. Daniel Rift, Signe Fredrickson, DeWayne Cook, JoeLynn Mulari and the Rev. Marissa Krey.



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