

FOR FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

# CIRCLE

## *Leadership*

Spring 2021

NEWSLETTER

ELCA.org



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

*“I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19).*

## Dear friends in Christ,

As I write to you today, I think back on the last year and how much our world has changed. Like so many, I am sure, you have experienced grief, uncertainty and loss in your families and communities. Still, you continue to faithfully share your gifts with your neighbors in their time of need, “making a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”

I am honored to have the opportunity to say “thank you” on behalf of all those impacted by your generosity. Your extraordinary support over the past year has made you part of the Leadership Circle – a group of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America’s most generous and invested partners.

In this newsletter, you will find personal updates from the directors of the ministries you support: ELCA Fund for Leaders, ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, Global Mission and ELCA Where Needed Most. Through these stories, I hope you will experience the difference you are making across this church and to our neighbors around the world.

I would also like to thank you, again, for your support of the ELCA’s COVID-19 Response Fund, established to meet the unprecedented need caused by the pandemic. ELCA members, including many of you, have contributed nearly \$1.8 million to the fund, which is reaching communities across the ELCA. So far, we have distributed 190 grants addressing a variety of needs in 63 synods. Additional funds were distributed through ELCA World Hunger Daily Bread Grants, which address hunger in local communities through existing ministries.

Your gifts are making a tremendous impact on this church and the work of our shared ministries – and are especially transformative in this time of rapid change. On behalf of all who are impacted by your generosity, I would like to thank you, once again.



In peace,

**Kathy Summers**

Executive Director, Development  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

*On the cover: A volunteer sorts food at End Hunger in Calvert County’s (EHCC) warehouse. EHCC is supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger.*

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## 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

Jaen Ugalde, 2020-21 Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient attending Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary



The Rev. Ralen Robinson

*“[Fund for Leaders] gave me the financial freedom to really explore my gifts and to see where my heart lay and where I could best be used as God’s vessel. Having that [scholarship] allowed me to work at a hospital and do chaplaincy work while I was in seminary. That gave me the ability to see that chaplaincy and pastoral care were gifts that I don’t think I would have explored otherwise.”*

—REV. RALEN ROBINSON, ordained in 2020 and serving Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kan.

## AN UPDATE FROM THE REV. MARISSA KREY DIRECTOR, ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS

Gifted, passionate and faithful leaders are essential for nurturing and developing vibrant congregations and ministries. To invite more people into the way of Jesus, our church needs rostered leaders healthy in body, mind and soul. Your generous support of the ELCA Fund for Leaders enables our church to invest in the people that will lead our church forward, free to serve wherever God calls them. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of these students and all the communities to whom they will minister. Through them, you are creating and sustaining the church of tomorrow.

*Marissa H. Krey*

### GREATER FUNDS, LARGER AWARDS, MORE SCHOLARSHIPS

Much of the news for 2020 was negative, but there was some very positive news for the Fund for Leaders. Throughout 2020, generous people, congregations and synods gave just over \$3.9 million in new gifts to the fund, enabling us to exceed our fundraising goal for the year by 16.5%! Thanks to such remarkable generosity, and to a good year of growth for the ELCA Foundation’s Endowment Fund Pooled Trust – Fund A, the combined value of our Fund for Leaders endowment funds as of Dec. 31, 2020, was nearly \$76 million – more than ever before!

Thanks to that good news, beginning with the 2021-2022 academic year, we’ve increased the value of our full-tuition scholarships 5.5%, to \$19,000 per year, and the number of new full-tuition scholarship awards from 40 to 45. Our full-tuition scholarship selection committee recently selected this year’s recipients from a pool of 55 excellent applicants. Of the 45 selectees now moving forward in the scholarship selection process, nine of them (20%) are people of color or whose first language is other than English. In related good news, this year our Fund for Leaders Federal Chaplaincy Ministry scholarship selection committee was able to award \$6,000 scholarships to each of the four students who applied for the coming academic year, double the amount of money awarded last year. All four recipients will be pursuing military chaplaincy. Our Mission Developer scholarship selection committee also met, in April, to determine new awards for the upcoming academic year.

### INTRODUCING A NEW DIRECTOR

As we approach 2022 and the 25th anniversary of the Fund for Leaders, we are pleased to welcome the Rev. Marissa Krey to our team. As an ELCA mission funding director, Marissa has already been working across the church to raise support for the fund and is excited to help lead the 25th anniversary celebration. A Fund for Leaders recipient herself, she is keenly aware of how such generosity impacts a rostered leader’s ability to lead by example. “In a world that often teaches scarcity, our church needs leaders who operate from a default of abundance,” she says. “Fund for Leaders alums have experienced God providing for them in a tangible way. This allows them to step out in faith and encourage their congregations and ministries not to let anything get in the way of what they believe God is calling them to do.” If you are interested in learning more about how you can help celebrate the fund’s 25th anniversary in your congregation or synod, please e-mail us at [fundforleaders@elca.org](mailto:fundforleaders@elca.org).



hope

**AN UPDATE FROM THE REV. DANIEL RIFT  
DIRECTOR, ELCA WORLD HUNGER AND  
LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE FUNDING**

As 2020 unfolded, the spread of COVID-19 threatened to create a national and global hunger crisis. Now, with a year’s hindsight, we can begin to sense the impact of the virus. For many, this has been a year of challenge and tragedy. Yet in the big picture, a rising wave of extreme hunger has so far been largely averted. We are confident that the actions we took in 2020 contributed to this and, for many, encouraged even greater resilience into the future.

Members of the Leadership Circle were especially important in this success. Because congregations are typically pivotal in garnering support for ELCA World Hunger (especially during Lent and Easter) and most activities were reduced last year, direct support was down by more than 15% year-over-year by the end of May 2020. However, we pressed forward with our activities and encouraged greater giving. You came through, and by the end of the year, income for ELCA World Hunger exceeded that of any previous year. Thank you!

*Daniel Rift*

**AN EFFECTIVE APPROACH**

We started our season of responding to hunger in a time of COVID-19 by saying “yes” to good ideas emerging from our reliable companions. When folks were faced with something as big as a pandemic, saying “yes” gave them permission to take immediate action. We learned that what had worked to address hunger before the pandemic worked through the pandemic as well. Though our plans for the year required adaptation, our dedication to work that is holistic, integrated and transformative translated into a response that was critical, relevant and engaging across communities in the face of COVID-19.

**EMERGING CHALLENGES**

Four areas of programming have expanded since the rise of COVID-19:

- Work in sustainable livelihoods (increasing food production for local consumption, enabling small loans, getting goods to market, etc.) has become critical to economic survival for many.
- Those who were already migrating or had been displaced due to shutdowns needed additional assistance.
- Programs addressing domestic violence and gender justice and ministries for children (especially girls) have all become increasingly critical.
- COVID-19 has complicated much of our work in disease prevention and primary health care.

**A JUST WORLD WHERE ALL ARE FED**

In our efforts to address the root causes of hunger, we must ask who is hungry and why. Often those most vulnerable to hunger have faced sustained hurdles to accessing resources and opportunities or establishing identity. These are the same groups most impacted by COVID-19 and most likely to experience hunger. Our work in 2020, while primarily focused on backing community-based action to address hunger and build resilience, was not limited to that. It also included supporting those who must seek out justice, and advocating with them.

**CONTINUING OUR WORK ACROSS THE  
UNITED STATES AND IN 60 COUNTRIES**

Your increased support allows us to further expand our work this year. So far, thanks to generosity and effective work, a dramatic rise in extreme hunger around the globe has been averted. However, it remains at our doorstep should we let down our persistent efforts. This remains one of those moments in our lives when the gifts we share with effective organizations, such as ELCA World Hunger, can literally change the direction of history for whole communities. Thank you for your prayers, your curiosity and your ongoing support.



Even without the spread of COVID-19, 2020 would have been notable for the number and complexity of its natural disasters. The regularity and increasing severity of extreme weather events dominated headlines throughout the year. These same extreme conditions brought wildfire to the western United States. The year was capped by two massive hurricanes that swept across Central America, complicating an already heart-wrenching humanitarian crisis in several nations. Yet many disasters that might have commanded great attention in a typical year were secondary to a barrage of other news.

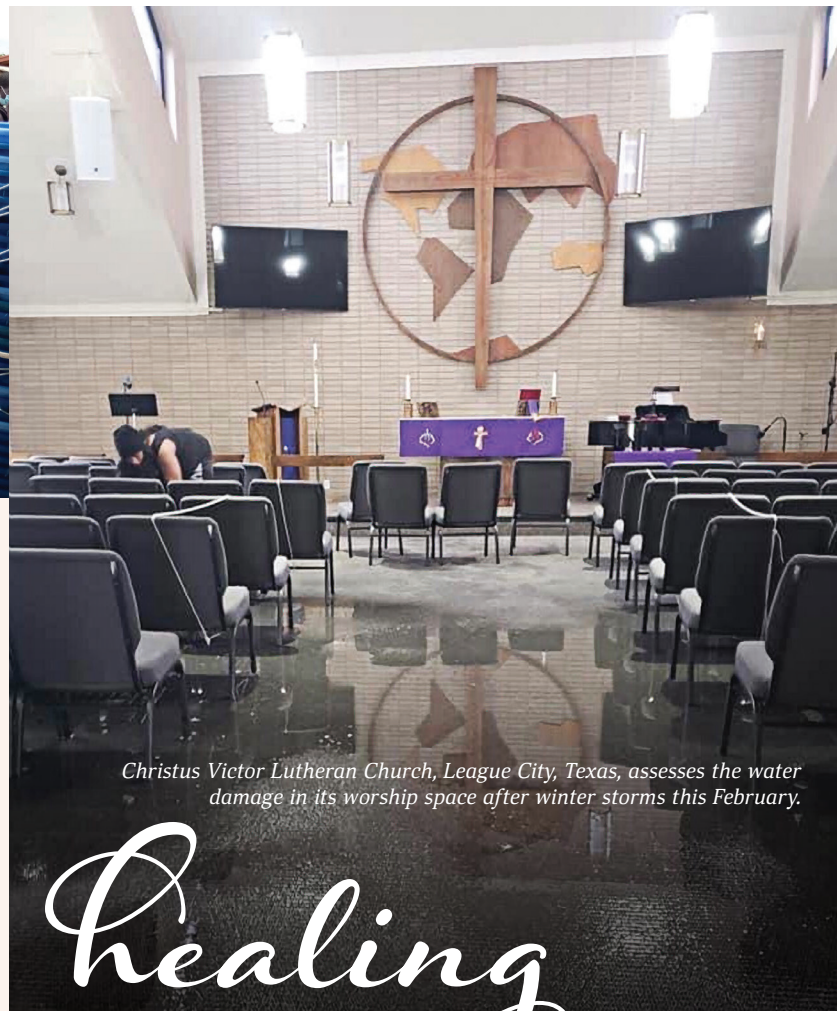
Nevertheless, we responded. Because Lutheran Disaster Response is interwoven with churches and local organizations, we were privileged with firsthand reports and had the opportunity to encourage an effective response. The measure of our success with Lutheran Disaster Response has been the faithful support we have received, especially leadership-level gifts. Thank you.

## RESPONDING TO COVID-19

Response efforts to COVID-19 extended to programs in 48 countries, as well as 42 states and territories in the United States. This support was extended in coordination with synods and expanded the work being supported locally (and in partnership with other funds of the ELCA). The first support funds were already at work, in Asia, before most people in the United States had even heard about the virus, and the work continues in 2021.



**48 COUNTRIES**  
**42 STATES**  
**SUPPORTED**



*Christus Victor Lutheran Church, League City, Texas, assesses the water damage in its worship space after winter storms this February.*

# Healing

## VARIED RESPONSES

Lutheran Disaster Response also supported other disaster work in the United States and around the world. A complete listing may be found in the spring 2021 *LifeLines* at [ELCA.org/LifeLinesSpring2021](http://ELCA.org/LifeLinesSpring2021).

COVID-19 presented a unique set of challenges even to our responses to other disasters. Volunteer cleanup and rebuilding programs had to be reorganized. Care for those displaced by a natural disaster or fleeing violence had to be adapted. The trauma of disaster was amplified by the anxiety of a global pandemic. Those experiencing a natural disaster wondered, would their crisis be noticed? Thanks to you, such crises were not only noticed but addressed.

## OUR WORK CONTINUES

In 2020, Lutheran Disaster Response spent nearly 40% more than it took in. This was possible because of large grants provided to the program at the end of 2019 and because it had carefully stewarded its resources for catastrophic disasters. The challenge for 2021 is to continue in our faithful response with sufficient resources. The program expands based on the gifts given. The opportunity to make a difference has never been so clear and present. Thank you for the prayers you bring to the work we share.



**AN UPDATE FROM RAHEL MWITULA WILLIAMS  
DIRECTOR, GLOBAL MISSION FUNDING**

Through your Leadership Circle gifts, you are impacting many lives across the world at a time when your help is needed most. Nearly every community is impacted by COVID-19, yet we continue to find new ways to connect as a global community of Lutherans. Your gifts are a sign of love and hope.

**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS**

International Women Leaders (IWL) scholars continue to achieve great things despite today’s challenges. Students are excelling academically and earning honors from their schools. One student, Tamar Haddad, published a book during the last semester: *The Future of Palestine: How Discrimination Hinders Change*. In March, some scholars served the Lutheran World Federation as delegates to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. Many are working on projects to advance gender justice in their home contexts.

This spring, six IWL scholars will graduate: Haddad, from California Lutheran University; Rebeca Amaro Treviño, from Wartburg College; Marina Fomgbami, from St. Olaf College; Salinla Manowong, from Luther College; Dinah Murekatete, from Lenoir-Rhyne University; and Dora Pomdoo Houma, from Concordia College. With the addition of this class, a total of 19 women have graduated from the program so far.

We are in the middle of our application review process for the 2021-2022 academic year. These scholarships continue to be sought by global companion churches and ELCA colleges and universities. We don’t yet know the size of our incoming class, but we are grateful for the pool of strong candidates eager to continue their studies.

**MISSIONARIES AND YOUNG ADULTS IN  
GLOBAL MISSION**

Those missionaries forced back to the United States by COVID-19 last year have now safely returned to their countries of service. We also have two new missionaries: Charles Peterson, serving in Indonesia, and Hannah Jensen-Reinke, serving in Japan. They join 110 other missionaries walking with more than 80 companion churches around the world.

Due to continued uncertainties and challenges presented by COVID-19, Young Adults in Global Mission decided to cancel its 2021-2022 year of service. Unfortunately, this meant we were no longer able to keep our team of country coordinators on staff. Effective March 31, 2021, all country coordinators ended their service, though a few of these missionaries will transition to other roles with the ELCA. We thank them for their service, knowing the decision was made in the best interests of mission personnel and the countries they serve.

**UPDATE FROM SOUTH SUDAN**

When the ELCA first started its global ministry project in South Sudan six years ago, the project’s main focus was establishing a primary health clinic. At the time, the ELCA team was not aware of the widespread issue of fistulas. We now know there are over 60,000 girls and women suffering from this illness, which isolates many from their families and communities. The Reconciliation Lutheran Community Center and Primary Health Care Clinic now hosts fistula “camps,” connecting women with reparative surgeons.

The team also came to understand the need for a maternity ward in the communities surrounding the clinic. With God’s help and support from across the ELCA, we were able to add a wing to the clinic that houses a 24-hour maternity ward. This type of expansion is possible only because of your continued support. Thank you!



## Your gifts at work: Adapting palliative care in Tanzania

Since its inception, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) has served its community through a holistic approach. One of its core ministries is that of its vast health care system, which provides medical and surgical services through 23 hospitals and health centers. In a country where 1.7 million people are currently living with HIV, ELCT is also in the forefront of HIV and AIDS education, prevention, hospice and palliative care.

An important aspect of that work, palliative care aims to improve the quality of life for those living with HIV and AIDS through physical, social, psychological and spiritual care. Started by an ELCA-supported medical missionary in 2004, the ELCT's Palliative Care program (ELCT-PC) is now the leading organization providing palliative care services in Tanzania, serving 80,000 patients a year, 80% of whom are HIV-positive. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger help make this possible.

One of these patients is 52-year-old Severa. In 2008, when palliative care was introduced in Nyakahanga Hospital, Severa was one of its first clients. Together, they developed a care plan, along with a plan for holistic pain management. With the team's support, Severa was able to rebuild relationships with her family and friends and eventually gained confidence to disclose her status and provide counseling and support to others. After the team saw her effort to help others, Severa was trained as a lay counselor.

"I enjoy my work so much and get satisfaction when I see people living with HIV and AIDS who were lost to [begin again] to care," said Severa. "I now see why I went through the things I went through; it is because I needed to help others. I found a different meaning in my life. Before it was only my children, but now, I live for many."

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new concerns and challenges to this work. Because people with underlying health conditions are more susceptible to severe COVID-19 disease, services were adapted for those in the palliative care program. During the lockdown, the program utilized the ELCT's television and radio outlets to educate the public about palliative care. The ELCT-PC also participated in the development of guidelines for health providers facilitating palliative care services during the pandemic and, through advocacy work, is ensuring that chronically ill patients receive reimbursement and financial support for care and pain medications.

This work is possible because of your gifts to ELCA World Hunger. Together, we can help the most vulnerable continue to receive high-quality, necessary health services that are affordable, accessible and equitable, as well as advocate for policy changes that will continue to impact lives for years to come.



### AN UPDATE FROM DEWAYNE COOK SENIOR DIRECTOR, MISSION FUNDING

Thank you for your support of ELCA Where Needed Most. The global pandemic has forced us into new realities, natural disasters have caused chaos in our communities, and we continue to face social and racial unrest in our country. So many things are happening in this world, and we are responding to these issues as a church does – together. Your undesignated gifts to the ELCA Where Needed Most allow us to continue addressing those matters and responding to a changing world.

Recently, Presiding Bishop Eaton and the Conference of Bishops issued a statement addressing the increase in violence directed toward Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. We grieve with our Asian siblings in the injustices they are facing nationally. Because we understand God's justice and mercy, we all desire to ease the suffering and sorrow of our neighbors. Therefore, we continue to equip ELCA members and leaders to advocate legislation that promotes justice and peace and to speak out against violence. You may read the full statement on anti-Asian racism, and access worship resources for a Day of Lament Against Anti-Asian Racism, at [ELCA.org/dayoflament](https://www.elca.org/dayoflament).

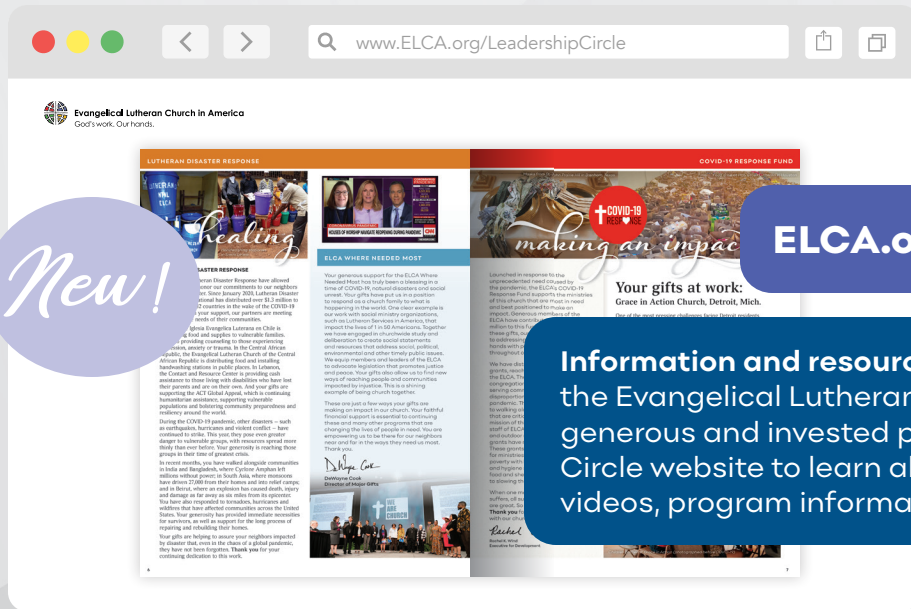
This is just one of the many ways your support is making an impact in our church. Your generosity to ELCA Where Needed Most empowers us to be there for our neighbors near and far when they need us most.

*Dewayne Cook*

# CIRCLE Leadership

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
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Chicago, IL 60631-4101  
ELCA.org

Spring 2021



Would you like to know more about the ways your Leadership Circle gifts are making a difference?

**Give us a call at 800-638-3522.**



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