

FOR FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

CIRCLE

Leadership

Spring 2024

NEWSLETTER

ELCA.org



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

“People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to [God] in heaven.”

—Matthew 5:15-16

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the privileges of my role serving the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is the regularity at which I get to hear amazing stories of our church in action. I hear of communities coming together to welcome strangers, young people finding meaningful connections despite the loneliness of the world, people receiving lifesaving and life-changing support after disasters, and so much more. Daily I am reminded of God’s love, shining brightly in and through others.

I wish I could share all these stories with you; as a member of the Leadership Circle, you enable much of the work behind them with your consistent, generous support of ELCA ministries. Whether providing funds for scholarships, leaders, technology or grants, you are impacting the work of this church and the lives of our siblings in Christ around the world.

On the following pages you will find just a few of these stories, made possible by your generosity. With your gifts and leadership, you are turning God’s love into action — living faithfully, witnessing boldly, serving joyfully and giving abundantly. On behalf of all whose lives you have touched, thank you.

In Christ,



Rachel Wind

Rachel Wind
Executive for Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

On the cover: Young adults worship together as part of the Gather community in Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn. Photo: Jessica Holleque.

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HOW TO GIVE

ONLINE:
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800-638-3522

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




Scan to support the work of the church!

YOUR IMPACT

Thank you
for your incredible
generosity!

In 2023 you were one of **4,200 households** in the Leadership Circle that shared **nearly \$30 million** with ELCA ministries.

Because of you, in **2023:**

345 
seminary students
received ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarships.


292 
new-start
congregations or ministries engaged with their communities.

101 
missionary families
worked alongside our companions in 41 countries.

66 
countries
around the world, including the United States, implemented programs supported by ELCA World Hunger.

28 
young adults
served in countries around the world through Young Adults in Global Mission.

755 
young adults
participated in small-group ministries through Abide or Gather, either virtually or in person.

Lutheran Disaster Response coordinated responses in
51 **34** 
countries and U.S. states and territories.

Greetings and joy to you!

Though the Easter holiday is over, the ministries and people I work with continually remind me of its promises: hope, new life and renewal. These fundamentals of our faith are embodied in the efforts and witness of the ministries you support through Christian Community and Leadership, such as leadership initiatives, young-adult groups and new faith communities.

Throughout the ELCA, young adults are gathering in new and innovative ways. Evangelism efforts are igniting a love for Jesus and a passion for justice. New congregations and ministry initiatives are spreading the word of God, serving our neighbors in need and on the margins. And that's just a glimpse of how the Spirit is moving! Such ministries embody a spirit of transformation, nurturing and empowering leaders to establish vibrant Christian communities that radiate joy and inclusivity. They shine as beacons of hope, guiding our church forward on a journey of faithful renewal.

Through your direct gifts and your gifts to Where Needed Most, these and other ministries are empowered to recruit, train and send leaders who establish and grow Christian communities. I am so grateful for your support of this work and your faithful partnership as a member of the Leadership Circle.

Thank you for championing this transformative work of God and for keeping these programs, these ministries and their staff in your prayers. Your faithful generosity fuels our mission of hope and renewal, inspiring us to embrace the promises of Easter and spread the message of God's love to all.

In faith,



Benjamin Hogue

Rev. Benjamin Hogue
Director, Christian Community and Leadership Giving



International Leaders gathering, March 2024.



Kerry Dolan (left), YAGM volunteer in Argentina, has a painting session with a resident at Hogar Armbruster, where she works. Hogar Armbruster is a care home for seniors and people living with disabilities.

ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS

Engaging the next generation of leaders is central to our mission, especially through the ministries of our young-adult communities. Through programs such as Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM), campus ministries and the International Leaders Program, young adults in our church are called together and sent out in the way of Christ. This fall an anticipated 26 new YAGM volunteers will serve abroad in Cambodia, the United Kingdom, Central Europe, Mexico, Senegal and Argentina/Uruguay. The International Leaders Program supports about 200 scholars worldwide; of these, approximately 30 study at ELCA colleges, universities or seminaries in the United States, 20 participate in the International Women Leaders program and about 20 work as international camp counselors at ELCA summer camps in the United States.

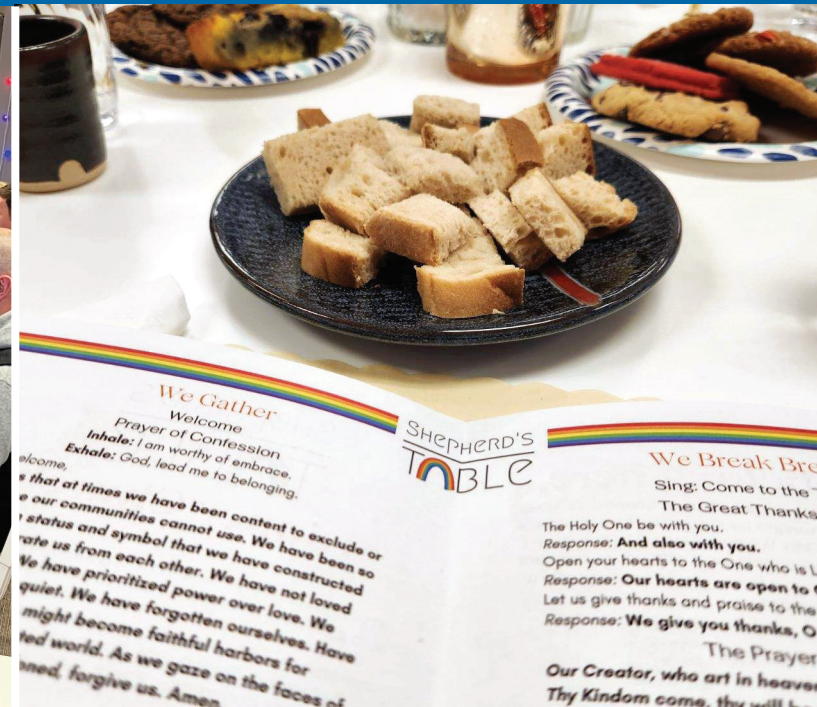
Our young-adult communities also include Abide and Gather, small-group ministries that meet young adults where they already are. Abide small groups gather members from around the world to meet online around topics such as climate change, being a public church, Dungeons and Dragons, and more. This digital ministry, which started as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, has touched the lives of thousands of ELCA young adults. The Gather network connects young adults in cities or geographic regions for in-person fellowship, worship, community and discussion. Currently there are 16 Gather small groups meeting to ask challenging questions of themselves, their faith and the world.

You're invited!



Want to learn more about how your gifts are connecting and equipping this church's young leaders? Join us on Sept. 26 for a virtual fireside chat where you will hear directly from program staff and those impacted about the importance of these leadership-development opportunities. Watch your email inbox for an invitation in the months ahead.

Unsure if your email is on file? Please contact us at events@elca.org or **773-380-2872** to be added.



“BUILDING A LONGER TABLE”

Your gifts support new faith communities and efforts to reach new people, including trainings, new worshiping communities, and investment in ministries among diverse and historically marginalized communities and cultures. Grants are awarded for congregational collaboration, accompaniment between churches, and “holy innovations,” which are special initiatives new and useful to the ELCA. These joint efforts involve strategy and collaboration from leaders and community members at all levels of the church.

One of these new ministries is Shepherd’s Table in Sioux Falls, S.D. Formed around the idea of a dinner church, Shepherd’s Table is leading with a radical welcome to all under the vision of “building a longer table.” The community’s name is meant to remind us of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and carries a second meaning as well. “We also lift up the memory of Matthew Shepard, the 21-year-old Wyoming college student, who was brutally attacked and murdered for being gay,” the Shepherd’s Table website reads.

The Rev. Sawyer Vanden Heuvel, pastor and mission developer of Shepherd’s Table, grew up in a church community in which he saw no place for himself as a gay man. As a young adult in college, he decided, along with some friends, to check out a local ELCA congregation. “When I stepped into an ELCA congregation for the first time,” he recalled, “and truly felt welcomed to participate in all of the goodness that comes through being in worship

and in community life, this became the first step to knowing and trusting that there’s still something out there for me. God did not give up on me.”

Vanden Heuvel got the idea for Shepherd’s Table after attending the 2021 Sioux Falls Pride Festival, where he managed a table, representing the Lutheran community, to show God’s love for all people. “Some folks I visited with just felt like there was no place for them in Sioux Falls to be welcomed in a faith community,” he said. “[They are] people longing for a place to fit in, longing for a place to belong, to share their own faith journey with folks as well as looking to grow their own faith and spirituality in a safe environment.”

Fast-forward to December 2023: Shepherd’s Table hosted a community-wide launch event, attended by more than 100 people. This January, Shepherd’s Table began meeting monthly for dinner church at the new Prism Center in Sioux Falls, which offers a welcoming and affirming space for LGBTQIA+ people. The group plans to host a few more informal social events this summer, such as a community picnic, brewery meet-ups and game nights.

“To witness the Holy Spirit make dreams like this become realized for a public, unapologetic, unashamed ministry of the church that is focused on supporting LGBTQIA+ people and their families moves me deeply,” said Vanden Heuvel, “because I know this, without a doubt, will become life-saving and vital work for many who call South Dakota home.”

A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Investment in leadership remains an important aspect of the church. An umbrella network, supported by your gifts, connects and nourishes a diversity of educational and formational programs, including seminaries, lay schools, candidacy for rostered ministry, the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities and the ELCA Fund for Leaders. For the 2023-2024 academic year ELCA Fund for Leaders is supporting 345 students at all seven ELCA seminaries, with a total \$3.18 million in scholarships that lessen the financial burden for individuals following a call to ministry. We are also celebrating the newest ELCA university, Waldorf University in Forest City, Iowa, becoming part of the network of 27 ELCA colleges and universities, which began in 1832 with Gettysburg College. Prior to Waldorf, the last addition was California Lutheran University in 1959!

Though these updates are only a glimpse into this work and ministry, they show how God is actively moving through and supporting the witness of the ELCA. With the abundant generosity and prayerful support of Leadership Circle donors, including you, the work of building up Christian communities and empowering lay and rostered leaders continues – thanks be to God!

INNOVATION

BUILDING BRIDGES THROUGH MUSIC

ELCA Where Needed Most remains one of the most important ways ELCA members can sustain the work of this church. Through Where Needed Most your gifts reach across the ecosystem of the ELCA, underpinning long-standing ministries while empowering our leaders to identify promising new ideas that meet the critical needs of our siblings in Christ, now and in the future.

Last year your gifts to Where Needed Most were used to identify and amplify the efforts of ELCA congregations and communities pioneering new, innovative ministry initiatives across the church. Through these initiatives we are reaching new people and communities so that more people may know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.

One such initiative was a concert last December that celebrated the birth of Christ using “music and ecumenism as a vehicle.” The concert, which took place at Pilgrim Baptist Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., was produced by Stephen Styles, a member of Messiah Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne.

Along with composer Lana Mason and her chorus and band, Styles gathered singers from several Fort Wayne churches and from the Summit City Singers, a nonreligious community chorus. The singers ranged in age and came from various ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Mason drew inspiration from African American music for the concert and believes that “events like these are how people truly create bridges where others may see divisions.”

The concert is part of a larger initiative called the Beloved Community Cohort Project, which aims to bring all people together under Christ to deepen community ties, foster new relationships and reduce the divisions so often amplified by fear, hatred, racism, distrust and xenophobia.

“The world as we know it has too much division and hatred in it,” said Styles. “And if there is a thing that can unify us, number one, I believe it to be the love of God – and the love of music.”

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." —Hebrews 13:8

While the triune God remains forever the same, the way in which God's love is made real in mission is an ever-adapting venture. Today the church adapts more substantially in mission than many of us might have imagined.

Through global companion relations and personnel, not to mention ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response and the ministries of diverse cultures and communities — the building blocks of the church's Service and Justice work — we are adapting and launching initiatives for faithful presence and action.

One clear example of our adaptive mission presence has been our expanding work in Jerusalem, the West Bank and Jordan since the attack of Oct. 7, 2023. The presence of the Christian community (including Lutherans), the long-standing program work, and adaptive adjustment to new challenges have been our hallmark and strength.

Faithful support from those in the Leadership Circle provides the substantial possibility of this church's work in the present *and* toward the future. Thank you! We enjoy sharing with you how God has brought us all into new adaptations for faithful mission.



Daniel Rift

Rev. Daniel Rift
Director, Service and Justice Giving



GENERATION ZERO-HUNGER

In July youth from ELCA congregations across the country will come together in New Orleans for the ELCA Youth Gathering. This year's gathering attendees will join a long lineage of young Lutherans coming together — the first gathering was held in 1902!

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of ELCA World Hunger. During the gathering, youth will be invited to join ELCA World Hunger and commit to being part of Generation Zero-Hunger, taking action to usher in a world without hunger and futures filled with hope. With a matching challenge of \$250,000 from generous individual donors including Leadership Circle members, youth will strive to raise \$250,000 of their own to net half a million dollars or more for this life-changing ministry.

Continuing this commitment, youth will receive a take-home kit empowering them to share what they have learned with their congregations. We encourage you, as leaders of this church, to get involved! Check to see if youth from your congregation or another ELCA congregation nearby are attending the Youth Gathering, and invite them to share what they have learned with your congregation, small group or other setting. Your invitation can be a great opportunity for them to share their faith, learnings and leadership experience in the ministries of our church.



Participants in the Lutheran World Federation Symbols of Hope program, supported by AMMPARO Global, are returned migrants and would-be migrants whom we accompany through training and support to become productive members of their local communities, which reduces their need to migrate.

RESPONDING TO INCREASED GLOBAL MIGRATION

In recent years persecution, ongoing conflict, violence, human rights violations, economic shocks, natural disasters and other destabilizing events, all compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, have greatly increased the number of people forced to flee their homes worldwide. As of mid-2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide at 114 million. Central and East Africa, the Middle East, Venezuela, Sudan and the Ukraine account for most of the world's displaced population.

In light of this sharp increase in migration, AMMPARO, the ELCA's strategy to accompany migrants with protection, advocacy, representation

and opportunities, has gone global, working through our companion churches to assist global migration work in Europe, Africa and Asia. This is in addition to the program's work in Mexico, Central America and South America, which began in 2016. At its core AMMPARO supports the emerging migrant ministries of ELCA companions and ecumenical partners around the world while simultaneously expanding our network of support, upholding and promoting the basic rights and protection of migrants, and advocating for humane policies in the United States.

A key part of this ministry in the United States is the still-growing roster of more than 240 Lutheran, Episcopal and United Church of Christ congregations in the U.S. whom AMMPARO has trained to accompany people in detention, voice their concerns to policymakers and sponsor migrant families. Recently your generosity has enabled the ELCA to expand this program and provide training and grants to more congregations sponsoring asylees.

One such congregation — Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bell, Calif., just southeast of Los Angeles — is housing 13 asylum-seekers from Mauritania and about two dozen Latin American immigrants. With a grant from AMMPARO, the congregation not only offers food and shelter but also connects those under its roof with resources and personal contacts so its guests can learn English, find jobs and secure more permanent housing. Many of the congregation's members, including the Rev. Maria Elena Montalvo, are immigrants from Mexico and Central America who understand the struggles of navigating the immigration system in the United States. "What motivates me is to be able to give back a little of what this country has given me," said Montalvo. "I don't want for them to endure what I did, to be alone, without friends, without anyone who can help you."



You're invited!

Join us on June 27 for a virtual fireside chat where we will share more about AMMPARO and the church's continued commitment to migration work. Please contact us at events@elca.org or 773-380-2872 to reserve your spot or to receive the recording after the event.



Nadia, a participant in the agriculture livelihood program, on her property in Derhachi, Kharkiv.

With your support we raised more than \$13 million for initial and ongoing efforts in and around Ukraine since the Russian invasion began more than two years ago.



REMAINING IN UKRAINE

With your support we raised more than \$13 million for initial and ongoing efforts in and around Ukraine since the Russian invasion began more than two years ago. Amid one of the worst refugee crises in recent history, Lutheran Disaster Response's partners in the region gathered food, clothing and other supplies and opened their doors wide to the traumatized people who began to arrive.

The impact of the war continues to be felt around the world. In 2023 alone Europe experienced fuel shortages, existing food shortages were exacerbated, and Russia suspended a wartime deal that allows shipment of wheat from Ukraine to other countries, which worsened the global food crisis. As the situation evolves in 2024, Lutheran Disaster Response and its partners continue to adapt to accompany the people affected, thanks to your generosity.

One such project is addressing the urgent needs of our neighbors in newly liberated areas of Ukraine through an agricultural livelihood recovery program. The program aims to restore or establish small farms, which provide critical agricultural livelihoods, strengthen local communities and improve food security and household income for war-torn, vulnerable populations. This includes giving them such resources as chicks, chicken coops, feeders, vegetable seeds, gardening tools, canning kits and pickling containers. Local agriculture advisers provide training in small-scale, climate-sensitive farming practices and in winterization preparedness, which involves drying, packaging and storing crops. Additional grants are available to those who have lost assets to the war and need a financial boost to expand their farming. Over 7,000 individuals and families benefited directly from this grant work in 2023, and that number continues to grow in 2024.

For more stories about the impact of your gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response, read the latest issue of "LifeLines."



MISSIONARIES SUPPORTING NEW MINISTRIES

There are currently **101 missionary households** serving **ELCA companions** in **41 countries** around the world. Supported by your direct gifts and by gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most, they are teachers, professors and trainers, program facilitators and communicators, pastors and worship assistants, and doctors and health care coordinators.

In February the Rev. Carolyn Schneider arrived in Guyana, a country on South America's North Atlantic coast, where she serves as a missionary with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana. The country is new to her, but the work is familiar. Previously Schneider served as a missionary with ELCA companions in Jamaica, where she provided seminary education for the theological formation of both clergy and laity.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guyana has more than 40 congregations, divided into 13 parishes, yet there are only six pastors and six deacons serving them. Most of the congregations are very small. In this new call Schneider is tasked with revitalizing the church's lay academy and other leadership training programs to meet their need for more trained leaders. Similar to the Jamaican context, the protestant Christian community has been present in Guyana for centuries but is trying something new to foster wider participation and authentic witness. Schneider's ministry will help them move in this new direction.



Members of St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Lochaber, Berbice, Guyana, on Easter Sunday.

VISIT OUR COMPANIONS ON AN IMMERSION TRIP THIS FALL

Join fellow ELCA members and staff for an immersive trip to see God's work firsthand. During your trip you will find community in our siblings in Christ; rejuvenate your vision for the church; see the impact of your gifts to the ELCA, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response; and witness the powerful impact of companion relationships at work in the world.

COLOMBIA: OCT. 12-19, 2024

Visit the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) and take part in a giving and receiving experience of church sustainability and stewardship. The trip includes worship at IELCO congregations; visiting a Lutheran school; experiencing outreach projects for refugees, people living with disability, and vulnerable communities; and learning about the church's peace, reconciliation and advocacy efforts. There will also be time for sightseeing in Bogotá. The estimated cost is \$3,000 per person plus domestic airfare to the departure city.

Interested in learning more? Please contact us at events@elca.org or 773-380-2872.

INDONESIA: OCT. 3-16, 2024

The ELCA has close relationships with three of the Lutheran churches in Indonesia: the Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), Indonesian Christian Church (HKI) and Simalungun Protestant Christian Church (GKPS). On this trip you will experience the ELCA's partnerships with these churches through theological education projects, healing HIV and AIDS programs, gender justice work in a women's crisis center, and young-adult ministries. There will also be an opportunity to rest and enjoy some Batak culture on Samosir Island, located on Lake Toba. The estimated cost is \$5,500 per person plus domestic airfare to the departure city.

CIRCLE Leadership

Spring 2024

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia.

Join fellow ELCA members and staff for an immersive trip to see God's work firsthand in Indonesia or Colombia this October. Learn more on page 11.



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[ELCA.org/LeadershipCircle](https://www.elca.org/LeadershipCircle)

Visit the Leadership Circle website to access the latest updates from the ELCA's churchwide ministries.