

Service and Justice Updates

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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

**Summer/Fall
2021**

In 1527, a new outbreak of bubonic plague occurred in the city of Wittenberg, where Martin Luther was teaching at the university. Luther wrote to the community about the importance of tending to the neighbor in need, emphasizing the centrality of service, and admonished people to take the necessary steps for that support even if they had to leave the city to protect their own families. In the same letter (“Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague”) Luther also writes about the responsibility of public officials in times of crisis. This letter clearly states that the church’s mission amid a pandemic is to accompany the people suffering the terrible impact of the disease. Turning toward the neighbor in need is the hermeneutical principle behind Luther’s theology.

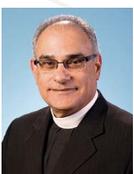
Our radical grace is lived in *alterity*, in our capacity to become one with the other (particularly the suffering other). This capacity defines our mission just as our Lutheran identity is defined by the notion of *justification* by grace through faith (keeping in mind that, in the life of the Christian, justification is intrinsically connected to *sanctification*). The freedom of the Christian is a liberation from sin and for service to the other. We are freed to love.

Paradoxically, then, the margins become the center, the locus for God’s action, where the church is incarnated as God’s instrument for liberation and the restoration of creation. The margins are where we find “the least of these,” God’s vulnerable children. This principle of marginality also defines our Lutheran mission: we journey toward the margins not as pragmatists, to find objects for our charitable work, but as bridge-builders, displacing the church from its privileged position and helping it empty itself in favor of God’s suffering children, an act of kenosis.

The Gospel according to Matthew highlights this imperative for the community of faith when, in the parable “the Judgment of Nations,” Jesus declares, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (25:40).

In this update you will hear stories of our walking among God’s vulnerable ones. Journeying with them shows us the way to become the church Jesus intended us to be.

Pax,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rafael Malpica Padilla". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla
Executive Director, Service and Justice

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Administration

In the new Future Church structure, there are three main teams within the Service and Justice home area: Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks; Building Resilient Communities; and Witness in Society. There is also an Administration team, which includes both Program Directors for Relationships and AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). Following is an update from the Administration team.

Program Directors for Relationships

Program Directors for Relationships are guiding the creation and development of a Service and Justice Conference to take place Aug. 21-28, 2022. A steering committee of 11 staff members from all four teams in the home area have been meeting over the last three months to prepare the event's vision statement, projected outcomes and theological framework. Several "mini events" will bring together networks that work closely with teams in Service and Justice. The overall vision is to connect all four teams with key networks in the ecology of the ELCA, weaving together staff (including global mission personnel), synods, congregations and members of independent Lutheran organizations. We hope to be joined by many synodical bishops and directors of evangelical mission, as well as leaders of companion synods, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.

AMMPARO

The geographic expansion of AMMPARO presents new opportunities for mutual sharing and support among AMMPARO companions throughout the Americas. The first virtual event of AMMPARO Continental took place on July 17, 2021, when Spanish-speaking pastors and lay leaders from North America (Mexico and the United States), Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua) and South America (Argentina, Chile, Colombia and Peru) participated in a community dialogue on effective responses to xenophobia in Lutheran and other faith communities. Xenophobia is a common challenge faced by churches that engage in migrant ministry, regardless of whether they welcome Central Americans in Mexico and the United States, Venezuelans in Colombia and Peru, or Haitians in Chile.



Participants in AMMPARO Continental.

The conversation was led by three experienced leaders in church-based migrant ministry: Alaide Vilchis Ibarra, executive director of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice in Portland, Ore.; the Rev. Moisés Pérez Espino, migrant ministry coordinator for the Mexican Lutheran Church and the Rev. Irene Ponce, co-founder of the Accompaniment Ministry for Venezuelan Migrant Families of the Lutheran Church of Peru. Alaide, Moisés and Irene shared firsthand accounts of the xenophobia encountered in the faith communities they serve, as well as strategies they have found to be effective in overcoming church members' fear and mistrust of the "sojourners in their midst." The conversation then moved to discussion groups, where all event participants were able to add their own experiences and insights.

In the months ahead, AMMPARO plans to press forward with this witness by advocating for the federal government to discontinue its pandemic-era expulsion and removal policies at the Mexican border, which harm migrants; to better care for unaccompanied children; to sensitively implement the United States' regional migration and root-cause initiatives; and to reform U.S. immigration law to prioritize family unity, including a pathway to citizenship, among other priorities as they arise.

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Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks

The Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks (APCN) team maintains global relationships between churches as it shares mission personnel and carries out mutual endeavors for evangelical witness. Engaging with partners in the ELCA ecology, it will pursue the full partnership and participation of African Descent, American Indian and Alaska Native, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian, Pacific Islander and Latino ministries in the life of this church. Accompaniment will frame our integrated global and local work. The staff's respective portfolios remain, but the new team represents a new opportunity to carry out God's mission within our church and around the world. Following are brief updates on the team's support for missionaries as well as global and U.S.-based ministries.

GLOBAL SERVICE

The Global Service team oversees new mission personnel onboarding and deployment, and provides support to ensure that all personnel are equipped for service. The team organizes new missionary orientations, a summer missionary conference and reentry retreat events in partnership with colleagues in the Service and Justice home area.

This July the Global Service team welcomed 11 new mission personnel, who began their mission service with a weeklong digital orientation, followed by the Summer Missionary Conference, also held digitally over five days. About 21 new missionary positions will open in the next year. Due to the ongoing pandemic, there have been delays in deployment for some mission personnel. The Global Service team has provided support for current missionaries to travel back to the United States to receive a COVID-19 vaccination or to receive one in their country of service.



Missionaries and ELCA staff attend new missionary orientation online in July.

DOMESTIC MINISTRIES

African Descent Ministries

The Rev. Nicolette Marie Peñaranda will begin in her role as the Program Director for African Descent Ministries in the Service and Justice home area on Oct. 4, 2021. Pastor Nicolette currently serves as mission developer of First Lutheran Church of the Trinity in Chicago. Prior to her congregational call, she was a program director at Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection in Chicago where she oversaw youth and young adult programs, coordinated community service projects and established partnerships with community organizations.



As the pandemic continues to separate people physically, the African Descent Ministries (ADM) desk and African Descent Strategy Team (ADST) have created opportunities for the community to gather virtually via Zoom. This time together has helped the African-descent community to connect, reconnect and share joys and concerns. It has also helped the ADM desk and ADST to understand better some of the needs of the African-descent community as we hope to leave the pandemic behind.

African National Ministries

The African National Ministries desk continues to coordinate missional work among its six caucuses. Churches have been unable to worship in person for a year and several months. Facebook has been, by far, the communications platform most used by African National Ministries, though many churches also used YouTube and/or their own websites. During the pandemic, some members of African National communities lost jobs and houses, and the rates of divorce and separation have increased. African National communities reported 26 suicides, 18 of them among South Sudanese. ELCA leaders in South Sudan are meeting to address the issue. There are 14 African nationals studying in ELCA seminaries. Six African mission developers have been ordained and rostered in the ELCA during the pandemic. In September 2021, the COVID-19 vaccination training/awareness program in African communities, sponsored by a grant from ELCA World Hunger, will take effect. The Association of Liberian Lutherans in the Americas (ALLIA) met Friday, Aug. 13, 2021, at Peoples' Community Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Md. One item on the agenda was a commemoration of ALLIA's 10th anniversary: "Celebrating the Past; Embracing the Future in Unity." There was a fundraising banquet for Lutheran University in Monrovia, Liberia.

American Indian Alaska Native Tribal Nations

Vance Blackfox has been named desk director for American Indian Alaska Native Tribal Nations. A citizen of the Cherokee Nation, Vance has earned degrees from Texas Lutheran University and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and lives in San Antonio, where he serves as Indigenous theologian for the San Antonio Faith-Based Initiative.



The American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association has been awarded a grant from ELCA World Hunger to respond to needs created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds will be distributed to American Indian and Alaska Native congregations to create programs that will educate congregation and community members about COVID-19 and public health opportunities available to them. Over the last year, American Indian and Alaska Native communities saw infection and death rates much higher than those of other ethnic communities and racial groups in the United States. As infections with the delta variant of COVID-19 surge, this grant will allow vital and timely educational opportunities in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Since the 2016 Churchwide Assembly passed the social policy resolution "Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery," the ELCA has accomplished little in addressing the concerns it listed. However, last fall Presiding Bishop Eaton began convening a group of Native and non-Native ELCA leaders to discuss and begin the work of repudiating the doctrine in healthy and impactful ways.

Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries

In April the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH) celebrated Arab American Heritage Month and honored the contributions of Arab Lutherans to the ELCA. This virtual event was well-attended and marked the first time the ELCA has used Arab American Heritage Month to celebrate the contributions of Arab Lutherans to both the church and society.

The president of ALAMEH and the program director of Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries partnered with ELCA World Hunger to secure a three-year grant addressing three major challenges in the Arab and Middle Eastern community: providing food assistance, educating immigrants about their rights and attacking the causes of domestic violence.



Exploring church planting possibilities in the Central States Synod

Many recent immigrants face language barriers and, as a result, don't know about or cannot access available resources. Anti-Arab and anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination discourage many in the community from taking advantage of government programs. Some Arab and Middle Eastern immigrants are undocumented, which increases their vulnerability because they may not be eligible for unemployment benefits, stimulus payments or job security after being exposed to or contracting COVID.

The grant will enable ALAMEH to define more clearly the needs of recent Arab and Middle Eastern immigrants and to find tangible, meaningful ways to address those needs more effectively. The ALAMEH board and program director will collaborate with pastors, lay leaders and community workers to design and implement programs and allocate funds accordingly. Overall, this investment will help recent immigrants grow into their potential as healthy, informed members of their communities.

▶ Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries

The Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders has received its first grant from ELCA World Hunger. The three-year, \$65,000 grant will fund a project begun in August to address needs that arose within the Asian American community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Activities will include: providing a food pantry to people who live in impoverished areas; distributing legal-aid resources to those harmed by COVID-19-related violence; providing technology and school supplies that will equip children in impoverished areas to succeed in online classes and activities; providing financial support to families affected by layoffs and business closures; working with existing shelters to clean and provide sanitation supplies for their patrons' health and safety; and providing an educational program on racism for the Asian American community (internal) and the wider church (external). The grant will be dispersed to 20 congregations and ministries located in strategic areas of various cities and synods. From those sources, it will be distributed to people of various ethnic groups, with priority given to vulnerable people in Cambodian, Chinese, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Korean, Lahu, Laotian, Mara and Thai communities. The grant funds will support all community members, regardless of their ethnicity or religious affiliation.

▶ Latino Ministries

Recently, the ELCA Latino Ministries Association was awarded a three-year grant from ELCA World Hunger to conduct a COVID-19 vaccination campaign in two major cities – Los Angeles and New York – where the pandemic has had a devastating impact. COVID-19 deaths are at least 2.7 times higher among people of color than among white Americans. The Metropolitan New York Synod and the Southwest California Synod will collaborate on implementing the grant. Two Latino congregations in the Metropolitan Chicago Synod – Parroquia Luterana Sagrado Corazon in Waukegan and Iglesia Santa Cruz in Chicago – have sponsored a COVID-19 vaccination clinic in partnership with the Honduran Consulate, Chicago Vaccine Angels and other community organizations.

▶ Peace Not Walls

ELCA Peace Not Walls collaborated with Witness in Society to organize the first-ever ELCA Advocacy Summer School, a five-week online series running from Aug. 11 through Sept. 8. Its first session defined advocacy and explored how advocacy is shaped by a faith foundation, especially in members and affiliates of the ELCA. Future sessions will explain how to carry out advocacy work and will examine specific policies the Lutheran community can impact, with a "101 session" on ELCA engagement in Palestine and Israel. Advocacy Summer School sessions will be recorded and made available online at the end of September. We encourage congregations and small groups to use the videos and accompanying discussion questions to prompt small-group discussions of advocacy. The new Peace Not Walls Resource Packet includes books, podcasts, maps, news sources, films and information about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the Lutheran World Federation–Jerusalem.



GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Africa

As COVID-19 has upended lives and economies across the African continent, the ELCA has provided more than \$1.2 million to its companions in 18 countries for pandemic relief (through July 2021). The varied requests reflect the vastly different social contexts of our African siblings. In Liberia the ELCA, together with other international partners of the Lutheran Church in Liberia, buttressed the COVID-19 capacity of the medical institutions associated with the church: Phebe Hospital and Curran Lutheran Hospital. It provided staff with protective clothing and risk management training, supplied patients with oxygen and constructed and renovated isolation units.

In Tanzania, the nonprofit Mwangaza Education for Partnership is working with Lutheran congregations to fight a torrent of disinformation about COVID-19, offering weeklong seminars that train people to evaluate media messages and ask critical questions about news sources: Where do they get their information? Who benefits from it? What are their biases? The seminar then equips congregations to train others to evaluate or assess information.

In Malawi, evangelism outreach has increased during the pandemic. Pastors hosted several short services to accommodate restrictions on the number of people permitted to gather. Evangelists took the word to the people, equipping a pickup truck with loudspeakers so they could preach and sing to people in their homes. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi Bishop Joseph Bvumbwe created a virtual forum for Malawian pastors, providing daily updates so they could stay at the forefront of helping their parishes. Read more in the new issue of “Stories of Faith in Action” about Malawi’s creative approach to evangelism outreach during the pandemic.



Lilongwe, Malawi. Photo: Mphatso Thole



Distribution of sanitizing equipment in Salima, Malawi. Photo: Shakira Chimbaza

Asia and the Pacific

In July the national committee of the Lutheran World Federation in Indonesia hosted a consultation on the church in the COVID and post-COVID contexts. Innovation and creativity have become hallmarks of being church, especially with the growing use of virtual technology. This has accentuated theological questions such as theodicy (why does God allow COVID-19 and other causes of suffering?) and church practices such as Holy Communion. Even in a society where other forces (in this instance, COVID) threaten to drown out the voice of the church, such prophetic voices are indispensable. The church must speak and act to meet people’s needs in ways the government cannot. With the ELCA’s assistance, the Lutheran churches of Indonesia (which also have some Reformed roots) understand themselves better as Lutherans. Indonesia, the country with the largest population of Muslims in the world, has 13 Lutheran churches and more than 5.7 million Lutherans, representing 2.1% of the population.

Europe

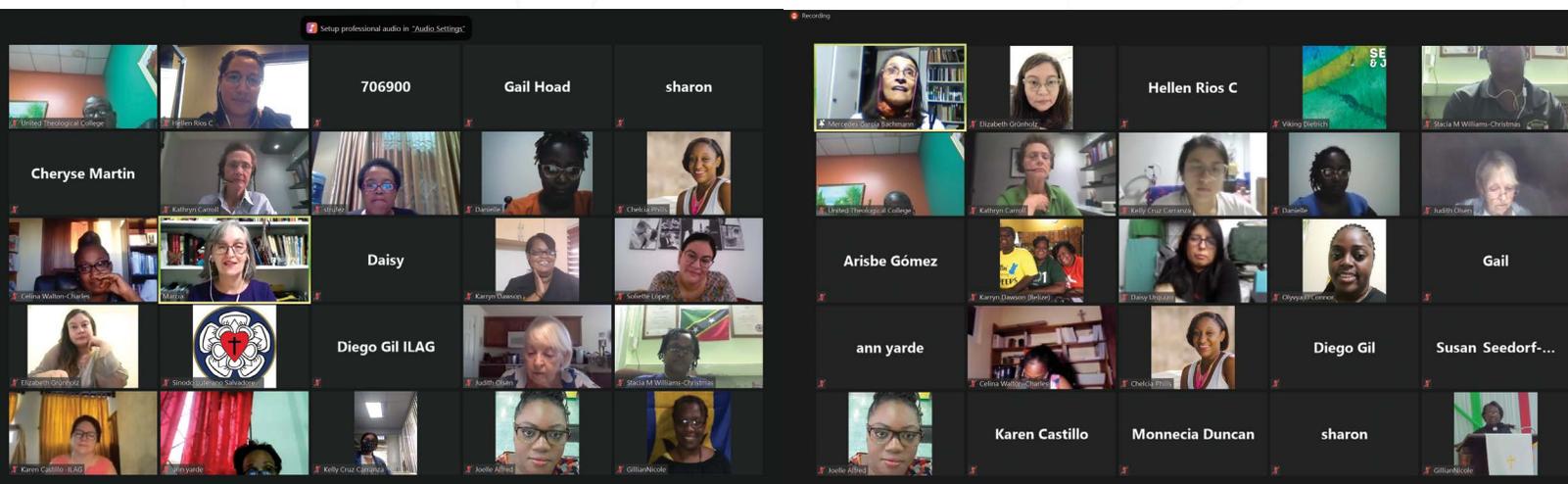
International congregations across Europe welcome members from around the world. These members don't always stay for many years, but they are often deeply engaged while part of the congregation and, wherever they go next, remember the experience of being welcomed into a community. When the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person worship, international congregations streamed their worship and were surprised to find that many people who had worshiped with them in the past rejoined online.

Consider this message to the French-speaking congregation in Moscow, a vital ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of European Russia: "My name is Rojo, and I live in Quebec now; however, I was a parishioner of the French-speaking congregation in Moscow during my studies. I liked coming to services there and was very active, since I was chosen a secretary of this congregation. Then I went away for the postgraduate studies to Canada. But we preserve contacts, and when services were online during the lockdown because of the coronavirus, I participated in them from Canada! I did the lessons and sang with pleasure online. The French-speaking congregation in Moscow is just like our alma mater!" The congregation welcomes French-speaking people from all backgrounds, and especially from Africa, who want to worship in the Lutheran tradition.

Latin America and the Caribbean

From April through June, the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) offered its first certificate course in gender justice. In collaboration with the ELCA, the UTCWI invited theologians from the Americas to participate in this virtual effort. The UTCWI sought to learn from the experiences of other seminaries about the process of incorporating gender justice as part of the student formation process. One objective of the course was to reinterpret biblical narratives that are used to legitimize the subjugation of women. Another was to study constructive alternatives aimed at dismantling structures of oppression that hinder progress toward a community of equals.

The course was developed in collaboration with nine professors from theological institutions across the Americas and the Caribbean and 28 students from Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican and Moravian denominations in the region. Because of the diversity of this group, professors and students enjoyed a rich learning process and deepened their understanding of biblical and hermeneutical resources about gender justice. The Latin America and the Caribbean team is seeking to replicate this model with other theological institutions that are starting to incorporate gender justice as a priority and emphasis.



Participants in the virtual course on gender justice

Middle East and North Africa

In Palestine, as in many other parts of the world, COVID-related lockdowns and quarantines took a severe toll not only on the largely tourist-driven economy but also on mental health and family relationships. A Lutheran Disaster Response grant to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) enabled the church's gender justice program director, Ranan Issa, to offer a series of workshops for young married couples from Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christian backgrounds. Professional therapists led sessions in which couples shared their experiences and challenges with one another and learned techniques for healthier, more egalitarian relationships of mutual care, love and support. Workshops in Ramallah and in Jerusalem were well-attended, and more are planned for the near future.

The ELCA grant also funded safe-dialogue sessions for youth on gender equality, positive masculinity, women's rights and nonviolent leadership, and a new digital marketing course was developed for young adult entrepreneurs. Held in person or over Zoom as pandemic protocols allowed, these outreach programs offered resources across generations and denominations to Palestinian Christians living under the dual challenges of the pandemic and the occupation. The ELCJHL is fast becoming a leader among Palestinian churches in gender justice, not only for its own members but for the wider community.



Married couples in Palestine attend a relationship workshop funded by a grant from Lutheran Disaster Response.

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Building Resilient Communities

BUILDING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES



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



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

The Future Church design brings together the ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) teams, which had been separated geographically and by program, into a new team: Building Resilient Communities. The purpose of this team is to meet human needs and enhance human dignity; to overturn oppression and injustice; and to engage collaboratively toward the flourishing of human community and creation, both internationally and domestically, through advocacy, development and disaster response programming. By integrating, the new team can build on ELCA World Hunger and LDR's ongoing collaboration, identifying synergies and learnings across program areas, creating efficiencies in processes and making connections across their international and domestic work. This is especially important in a global context of climate change, migration, gender inequality, racism, white supremacy and the COVID-19 pandemic. The new design provides space to better address the root causes of hunger and vulnerability to disasters, work with people and communities in disrupting systems of oppression and injustice so they can claim and act on their own agency, build "transformative, holistic, and integrated" ministries toward seeking liberation, and be more efficient and impactful together. In addition, within Service and Justice, Building Resilient Communities will have greater potential to coordinate with Witness in Society in advocacy efforts and with Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks to engage more strongly as one church in matters of service and justice.

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

Domestic

The domestic work of ELCA World Hunger supports individuals, congregations, synods and other ministries in understanding and addressing, through our shared faith and identity as church together, the challenges contributing to hunger and poverty in the United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. ELCA World Hunger carries out this work through its network, educational resources and granting.

This year – through additional funding made possible by the extraordinary generosity of this church to ELCA World Hunger, and in light of the pandemic's disproportionate impact on marginalized communities – ELCA World Hunger is partnering directly with the ELCA's ethnic ministries and associations. Through new multiyear grants, ELCA World Hunger is working with these ministries to respond to the unique impacts of the pandemic on their specific communities. Projects include food distribution, education about and access to vaccines, and initiatives to address rising rates of mental health crises and domestic violence. This exciting partnership reflects the opportunities ELCA World Hunger is exploring across the ELCA's service-and-justice-oriented ministries through its transition onto the Building Resilient Communities team, including deepening alignment with Lutheran Disaster Response and between domestic and international ministry.

In coming months, as ELCA World Hunger continues to build a network that includes new, young and diverse leaders, it will launch new programming and platforms for online engagement and continued learning. These include the “Hunger at the Crossroads” webinar series on the root causes of hunger, how they intersect, and how we can participate in God’s promise of a just world where all are fed. As the United States faces a looming housing crisis, ELCA World Hunger is also focusing on access to housing as a critical factor in preventing hunger. Congregations and leaders interested in taking action will be able to use the new “Hunger and Housing” resource, to be published this fall.

Posada, a current Big Dream partner ministry in Pueblo, Colo., has been a tremendous resource in providing housing to older community members and those impacted by COVID-19 over the past year. One of Posada’s clients is a 62-year-old man currently enrolled in the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) program. He collects a disability payment of \$900 a month, but because he was unable to find affordable housing, he began living in his RV. For months he lacked running water or a generator for heat or electricity. He also struggled to purchase food and medication. He began to worry about spending the winter in his RV, so he came to Posada in July 2020. He qualified for Posada’s programs, but given the great demand for affordable housing in Pueblo, the ministry couldn’t find him a place for several months. Finally, in October, Posada helped him find a studio apartment. He calls Posada daily to thank the staff. With the help of his TBRA case manager, he now knows that he can count on a place to stay and nutritious food. He has had some setbacks, such as being admitted to the hospital. But his case manager helps him navigate finances, manage his medical treatments and obtain the care he needs to have a better quality of life.



Food distribution at Posada, July 2021.

International

The international work of ELCA World Hunger is firmly rooted in relationships that reflect our identity as a church working with churches and as a member of the Lutheran World Federation. This includes relationships with companion churches, local development and/or interchurch organizations stewarded by regional desks, and relationships with organizations (including the Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran World Relief, the World Council of Churches, and Church World Service) that bring together churches in the United States and around the world for collective work.

Over the past six months, ELCA World Hunger has supported companions and partners around the world as they adapted their projects to ensure that they could continue to serve their communities amid lockdowns, economic downturns, illness and death. Though COVID-19 has dominated our lives, it has not meant the end of other diseases. In fact, it has often worsened health outcomes for other diseases because people are scared to seek care at clinics and hospitals. When they do go, the clinics and hospitals are overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients.

Over the next six months ELCA World Hunger’s international programming will focus on expanding work in the Middle East (with gratitude for our generous donors who make this possible), connecting more strongly with the domestic team as they educate and network with ELCA constituents on hunger-related issues, and reviewing new applications for the FY2022 application cycle, prioritizing projects that are transformative, holistic, and/or integrated, and particularly those that address climate change or peace and reconciliation.

Huria Kristen Batak Protestan (HKBP) AIDS Ministry (HAM) in Indonesia works to end the spread of HIV/AIDS, to encourage the HKBP church to care about HIV/AIDS, and to empower people living with HIV/AIDS to live their lives to the fullest. The program serves people such as Arjen Marbun, infected with HIV as an infant. When HAM first met Arjen, he was HIV-positive and malnourished, with pulmonary tuberculosis and a persistent cough that kept him up at night. He lives with his family in a remote village, seven hours from the nearest hospital. HAM worked with Arjen, his mother and local health officials to access vitamins and antiretroviral medications. Arjen also receives nutritional assistance from HAM every month. In August 2020, Arjen started taking ARVs and began drug therapy for the pulmonary TB. His weight has increased from 27 to 33 kilograms, and his cough has disappeared. HAM also assisted Arjen’s mother with a one-year revolving fund that she used to purchase supplies for weaving fabric and raising chickens. She also attended a group session, hosted by HAM, on women being leaders for themselves and others.



Arjen Marbun
Photo: HKBP AIDS Ministry

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

Domestic

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) operates in three modes – relief, recovery and resilience – to ensure that the church responds to disasters and other community disruptions (relief and recovery) while simultaneously working to mitigate the effects of future disruptions (resilience).

Because disasters disproportionately affect our most vulnerable neighbors, LDR proactively addresses the root causes of vulnerability, supporting communities as they build new capacity. This resilience-based approach is rooted in the idea that LDR’s work must be driven by intentional awareness of community vulnerabilities. LDR recognizes that congregations, synods and social ministry organizations are deeply rooted in their communities and best situated to address community challenges both pre- and post-disaster.



Photo: Julia Menzo, LCS

One story of LDR’s recovery and resilience work is unfolding in the Eastwick neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pa. In August 2020, Hurricane Isaias swept through the eastern United States, causing severe flooding in Eastwick. 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.”

Addressing disaster-related need and building resilience in vulnerable communities such as Eastwick lie at the core of Lutheran Disaster Response's ministry. LDR strives to let people know they are not forgotten in the weeks, months and years after a disaster. In the coming months LDR will continue to accompany disaster-impacted communities such as Eastwick as they journey toward greater hope and wholeness of life. LDR will also update and strengthen its granting process, making it more transparent and accessible.

International

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to dominate headlines around the world. With the rise of variants, many countries are seeing new waves of infections and deaths. Since December 2019, Lutheran Disaster Response-International has awarded 100 COVID-19 response grants, totaling over \$2.9 million, in 50 countries. The humanitarian response from our companion churches and ecumenical partners includes distribution of food and hygiene items, promoting COVID-19 awareness and assisting people with new livelihood opportunities. Another major focus of the response, provided by local churches and faith-based organizations, is psychosocial care and pastoral counseling to alleviate the stress of lost jobs, isolation from others and the sickness or death of loved ones.



"I have motivation to continue fighting and am grateful for the new ways that I learned to work with my family, and so, together, we can heal." Lilliam Ruiz (seated in the middle) reflects on the counseling session she and other women in Nicaragua attended through the psychosocial care initiative funded by LDR-I.

In Nicaragua, LDR-I supported the Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teologicos y Sociales (CIETS) in addressing the emotional impact of the pandemic. In addition to distributing food to families, the project also provided opportunities for participants to express and process their fear, pain and anxiety.

Group-counseling sessions helped participants recognize that many others were going through similar experiences. Participants are building emotional resiliency that will strengthen them and their families during the pandemic and beyond.

With resiliency at the center of this ministry, LDR-I will continue to support companion churches and ecumenical partners as they bring a sense of normalcy back to communities affected by disasters. LDR-I will also help provide people with tools to cope with life's adversities and emerge stronger from these experiences. Additional requests for COVID-19 humanitarian responses are also anticipated over the next six months. LDR-I is also preparing to respond to natural disasters as the monsoon and typhoon/cyclone/hurricane seasons approach. Extreme-weather calamities caused by climate change, such as prolonged droughts and intense storms, will put many vulnerable communities at risk of losing properties and livelihoods. Together with Lutheran Disaster Response-Domestic, LDR-I will review its grant-application and reporting processes, find ways to further streamline granting procedures and increase efficiency in responding to local and international crises.

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Witness in Society

Witness in Society encompasses some of the work and ministry the ELCA does in the public sphere, advancing justice and shining a light on peace and dignity. This work and ministry take place wherever Lutherans are found, in communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region, with focused activity through the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations in New York City; the ELCA's federal hub in Washington, D.C.; Lutheran state public policy offices (SPPOs) in California, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin and more than 15 directly affiliated locations serving even more states. Through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, the ELCA intersects with the social implications of company practices and adjusts ELCA investment policy in socially responsible ways. The Christian community of the ELCA envisions a world experiencing the difference that God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.

FOCUSED WITNESS IN SOCIETY ACTIVITY

Lutheran Office for World Community

The Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC) represents both the ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Guided by such priorities as gender justice, racial justice, migration, humanitarian issues, sustainable development, human rights and HIV/AIDS, a Lutheran advocacy presence in this setting brings people together to make a difference in lives around the globe and in all creation.

LOWC's 2021 United Nations Policy Priorities (available at [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy)) recommend advocacy around "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Agenda 2030), which encompasses the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 169 targets and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation through the [U.N. High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF).

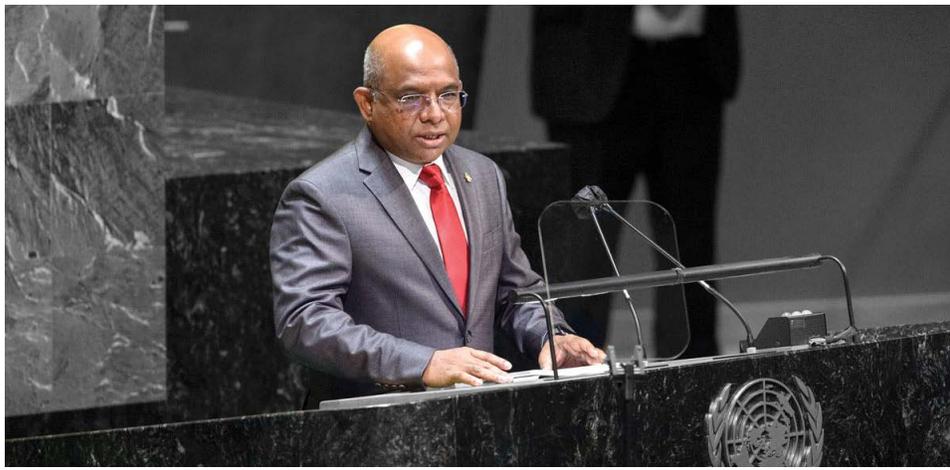
Lutheran churches (one of which the ELCA represents) that participated in the "[Waking the Giant](#)" initiative in Colombia, Indonesia and Namibia presented reports at an event titled "Transforming Our World Together" ([see video](#)). The reports reviewed their countries' performance toward achieving Agenda 2030. LOWC staff worked with an LWF planning team for the forum that organized an event. Representing their nations were Bishop Eduardo Martinez, national coordinator of Waking the Giant in Colombia; Uhuru Dempers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia; and Fernando Sihotang of the LWF National Committee in Indonesia.

"Transforming Our World Together" featured remarks from Rev. Martin Junge, LWF General Secretary; Eva Ekelund of Act Church of Sweden; and, via video, Ezra K. Yego of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network, among others. All the speakers urged churches to raise their prophetic voices for justice and inclusion.

"Faith voices are key" to holding governments accountable and can offer an ethical perspective, providing "a deeper analysis on the future that we want."

—Eva Ekelund, head of policy and deputy international director for Act Church of Sweden

The LOWC will follow the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 76), which opens Sept. 14. LOWC will also follow the deliberations of the Third Committee of the General Assembly, which deals with social and humanitarian affairs and human rights issues.



Abdulla Shahid, minister of foreign affairs for the Maldives and incoming president of the 76th United Nations General Assembly. Photo: U.N. Photo/Loey Felipe

Federal Activity

Deployed ELCA staff in Washington, D.C., include skilled policy advocates who monitor developments consistent with ELCA federal policy priorities, develop relationships with policy makers, consult with faith-based and issue-focused coalitions, advance accompaniment awareness and goals from ELCA ministries and colleagues, and, at opportune moments, act and facilitate action from ELCA Advocacy Network members toward a just world where all are fed. In the ELCA we believe that, through baptism, God calls us into the world to serve together. Shaped by social teaching documents and the experiences of its congregations, ministries and partners, the ELCA advocates to end world hunger and stands up for policies that create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, preserve God's creation and promote racial and gender justice. Directions for this year, based on the anticipated federal landscape, can be found in ["2021 ELCA Federal Policy Priorities."](#)

Effective advocacy depends on relationships and networks. Along with the broader Washington, D.C., interfaith community, ELCA advocacy staff were instrumental in ensuring a strong faith presence in White House policy discussions, including reestablishment of and regular meetings with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

Enormous progress against hunger has been made in the last 18 months, according to sources such as the Urban Institute. Its July 2021 report projected a 7.7% poverty rate for 2021. This is below the 13.9% estimated by the organization three years earlier but still reflects a projected poverty rate of 5.6% for children and 9.2% for people age 65 and older, with rates higher among historically marginalized people.

Recent months have seen an unprecedented shift in government response to need, and children and families in the United States have benefited. The ELCA's advocacy around pandemic response and the child tax credit has helped alleviate the dire impacts of poverty through trillions of public dollars being utilized for hunger and human needs.

"In the 28 years that I have been in Washington, D.C., I can say with confidence that the advocacy work the ELCA did around the child tax credit and COVID-19 response has had the greatest impact we could have imagined or achieved. Engagement with the White House and Congress, calls and letters from Lutherans, and outreach from synod bishops all made a critical difference to lifting almost half of hungry children out of poverty. If energy from bishops, church councils, congregations, lay and rostered leaders is invested, we can make things better for generations to come."

—John Johnson, ELCA program director for domestic policy

Making the child tax credit permanent in the current budget reconciliation package, which has passed the Senate and will now be considered by the House, can make these wins against childhood poverty permanent. ELCA staff will continue advocating for ELCA priorities.

Living into the Future Church vision of the ELCA, Witness in Society has amplified its engagement through enhanced initiatives with colleagues from ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Relief. [Hunger Advocacy Podcasts](#) have advanced advocacy engagement, and an ELCA World Hunger resource on housing education and advocacy efforts will be released later this year. That resource is the newest addition to ELCA World Hunger's suite of how-to guides for new or growing ministries.

Over the past, trying year, ELCA congregations have worked tirelessly to expand services for the growing number of people experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity and hunger. Advocacy of meaningful public policies that help keep people stably housed continues to enhance our real, transformative impact as a church. As federal housing relief from successful advocacy efforts continues to be distributed across the United States, Witness in Society staff will continue its legislative campaigns with members of Congress and share additional action alerts on housing initiatives as they emerge at the federal level.

Ensuring expanded global access to COVID-19 vaccines has been a major focus of the ELCA's advocacy work. Though the U.S. government has already pledged to donate 110 million vaccine doses to numerous countries, the ELCA continues to urge the Biden administration to support global efforts to increase vaccine production in different regions and countries. All doses have not yet been sent, so even as we advocate for greater vaccine availability internationally, we also urge disbursement of what has already been allocated. Additional COVID-19 advocacy includes urging policymakers to expand debt relief for low-income countries to buffer the economic and social shocks of the pandemic.

The ELCA has a long legacy of welcoming and caring for newcomers. Along with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and through the ELCA AMMPARO strategy, our congregants take action to help migrants and refugees, in particular children and families. Prioritizing this awareness in policy was a pressing call for ELCA advocates in recent months. In September 2020, ELCA advocacy mobilized more than 240 ELCA bishops and ministers to join LIRS in supporting generous refugee admissions and organized a seven-week public campaign on persons in migration with AMMPARO's regional partners. Since then, ELCA advocacy has continued to lift public policy concerns affecting the lives of migrants in the United States and around the world within secular and faith-based coalitions such as the Interfaith Immigration Coalition.



Activity takes place government to government, but our advocacy still has an impact. Here the U.S. Embassy marks donation of lifesaving vaccines to Tanzania.

“The ELCA recognizes the need for just and humane immigration policies that honor the gifts of our immigrant siblings. New approaches, like a proposal to legislate permanent protections for undocumented individuals, and commitment to address the root causes of migration are exciting examples of policies that the ELCA has long called for and will continue to push for.”

—Giovana Oaxaca, ELCA program director for migration

Advocacy on environmental issues has borne fruit in the infrastructure bill passed by the Senate. Infrastructure investment would fund more robust rural broadband access, improved electric grid reliability, environmental protection (including water remediation), innovative energy-technology deployment, electric vehicle and charging station investments, and jobs creation with competitive pay across the country.

▶ State Public Policy Offices

Some advocacy engagement takes shape through our network of State Public Policy Offices (SPPOs), where faith-centered voices converge with public dialogue (see list and map at [ELCA.org/Resources/Advocacy](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Advocacy)). Varied, dynamic and responsive initiatives show results for us and our neighbors across this network.

For example, during the early months of the pandemic the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin (LOPPW) organized a statewide coalition to care for God’s creation in Wisconsin. Those efforts culminated in an advocacy day as the legislature rewrote the governor’s 2021-2023 state budget.

The coalition, which included members from each of the six ELCA synods with which LOPPW works, gathered close to 100 people to learn about climate and water issues in the budget and then advocate policy changes to their legislators. Agriculture is a significant source of water pollution in Wisconsin, and farmers need resources to help manage the land. Efforts to address water and agricultural issues were reflected in \$2 million in funding for watershed grants and \$7 million for soil and water resource management.

“Tremendous challenges lie before us. But in all of our efforts, we begin with God, Christ walks with us, and we are sustained by the Holy Spirit. It is a great blessing and sign of God’s grace to be able to lift our voices as faith-based advocates with the church.”

—Rev. Cynthia Crane, director of Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin

Environmental issues such as lead in drinking water, climate change and environmental inequities call for continued efforts from our SPPOs. LOPPW decided to advance successful innovations this year by reconvening its coalition for each state budget season. Year-round, the office continues working with about 25 nonprofits in the Wisconsin Climate Table, whose leadership includes the LOPPW director. LOPPW plans to continue prioritizing care for God’s creation with a new focus on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, where advocacy for groundwater is sorely needed.

▶ Corporate Social Responsibility

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of the ELCA guides the church’s own investment policy and, through the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), engages in shareholder advocacy with corporations. This activity is organized through Witness in Society staff and the church’s CSR review team. Through the ICCR, the ELCA collaborates with Portico Benefit Services social purpose funds and with other faith-based investors and asset managers. (The ELCA is represented on the ICCR board.) Guidance is shaped by issue papers, investment screens and other policy and procedures, which can be found at [ELCA.org/csr](https://www.elca.org/csr). These tools help create sustainable communities where people are treated with fairness and dignity.



The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility has prioritized a just transition to a decarbonized economy. Photo: ICCR.org

“Shareholder engagement is a vital tool in carrying out the church’s witness in shaping policy to protect the poor and most vulnerable, and for developing policies promoting racial, economic and social justice.”

—Ruth Ivory-Moore, ELCA program director for Environment, Energy and Sustainability

During the 2021 shareholder-engagement proxy season, ICCR members filed 294 resolutions at nearly 200 publicly traded companies, 20 of which were passed at corporate annual general meetings. This represents an unprecedented level of support. Climate change and racial justice generated the most momentum. Many of this year’s resolutions took direct aim at workplace policies that reinforce racism. ExxonMobil shareholders prioritized the company’s transition to renewable energy by electing board directors who are forward-thinking on climate change.

“Shareholder engagement brings about concrete and measurable changes in the way that corporations conduct business.”

—Rev. Kaari Reiersen, ELCA associate for Corporate Social Responsibility

The CSR staff review team revised issue papers on climate change, environmental topics and international access to health, as well as the investment screen on private prisons. CSR staff will also assist in vetting corporations that offer to donate to the ELCA Youth Gathering. Over the next several months, the CSR program will undergo a program evaluation. The review will identify and propose a CSR organizational structure that appropriately represents the ELCA Future Church’s ability to work together to share the powerful witness of the gospel in the world.

EQUIPPING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Even without a presidential election on the immediate horizon, our advocacy continues to support the aims of the ELCAvotes initiative ([ELCA.org/votes](https://elca.org/votes)). Comprehensive legislation developed earlier in the 117th Congress (2021-2022) has proved challenging politically. Our advocacy remains focused on compromised and narrower bills that can pass in a deeply divided congress. Staff continue to monitor legislation and meet with members of the House and Senate on both sides of the aisle to protect the voting rights of every U.S. citizen.

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Hunger Advocacy Fellows

Four new fellows will join the team in the 2021-2022 cycle.

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Addendum

In the new Future Church design, the International Leadership Development Program and Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) are housed in the Christian Community Leadership (CCL) home area. However, Service and Justice continues to work closely with these programs as they engage with our global and domestic partners to develop leadership across the ecology of the ELCA.

Young Adults in Global Mission

Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) is excited to announce that nine country programs for the 2022-2023 service year have been approved. With minimal change from previous years, YAGM plans to send 75 young adult volunteers to Argentina/Uruguay, Cambodia, Central Europe, Jerusalem and the West Bank, Madagascar, Mexico, Rwanda, Senegal and the United Kingdom. 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.



The 2019 YAGM group in front of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



To expand its recruitment strategies and process, YAGM has welcomed Mae Helen Jackson to the team as young adult outreach and placement manager. Mae Helen will focus on recruitment and candidate processes for all expressions of young adult ministry. She has been active across all aspects of young adult ministry and the churchwide organization.

Looking ahead: Applications for Young Adults in Global Mission open Nov. 1. Because people are eager to get back into the world, YAGM anticipates a larger number of applicants than normal. The Discernment Interview and Placement event and YAGM orientation will resume. Much of the YAGM programming for spring 2019 was new, so this year of service will be the first opportunity to see many of those changes in action.

The International Leadership Development Program

The International Leadership Development Program continues to provide education and training opportunities to leaders from our global companion churches and institutions. Through awarding academic scholarships and facilitating leadership experiences, the program equips current and future leaders throughout the global Lutheran communion.

2021 has been an exciting year for the program. Over the spring a full slate of new scholarship awards was offered to individuals from companions around the world. These leaders are studying a wide range of subjects including medicine, nutrition, theology, human rights law, psychology, education and languages. They join a community of ongoing scholarship recipients who study all over the globe, many at ELCA seminaries, colleges or universities. Over two-thirds of scholarship recipients today identify as women, many of them supported by the **International Women Leaders fund**.



Dr. Evelyn Mushi of Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre in Tanzania is among those who received new ELCA scholarship awards in 2021. She will pursue a postgraduate residency in pediatrics and child health in South Africa and is on track to become northern Tanzania's first neonatologist. Dr. Mushi's scholarship award is made possible by Mission Support dollars and generous donations to ELCA World Hunger.

Just as new students have joined the program, International Leaders has celebrated many graduations this year. In the face of immense pandemic-related challenges, these scholars have achieved their goals and are now giving back to their home churches and communities.

This fall International Leaders will launch the next round of scholarship application review. Also, as of 2021, the International Leaders team will oversee the

International Camp Counselor program. This longstanding ministry invites young adults from global companion churches to work as camp counselors at ELCA outdoor ministry sites across the country.

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