“The church becomes a family only with the recognition of women as equal partners in God’s vineyard.”
Cholita Narzary made history in November 2020 as the second woman ordained into ministry by the Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC) in Assam, India. She joined the roster 22 years after the denomination ordained its first woman, the late Kunanjaw Basumatary, who served as BELC bishop in the past.

“Since the first woman’s ordination there were many silent years,” said Ichahak Muchahary, BELC bishop. “The church becomes a family only with the recognition of women as equal partners in God’s vineyard.”

Muchahary credits the ELCA-organized 2019 South East Asia Conference on Gender Justice in Hyderabad, India, for pushing him and other leaders to advocate for and implement gender justice shifts within the church. The ELCA has accompanied the BELC for two years, funding some of its ministries through Mission Support. Since entering a formal companion relationship with the BELC in 2018, the ELCA has accompanied the church with mutual encouragement and leadership training events and funded community development, disaster response and academic scholarships (including for International Women Leaders).

Said Narzary of her ordination, “I knew the call of God from my childhood, but due to my parents and others, I could not go for further biblical studies. It took me long years, and it was really challenging for a girl like me to [acknowledge] my true [vocation].”

Prior to 2020, Narzary served as an evangelist and Sunday school teacher within the BELC and received training at the Karnataka Theological College in Mangalore (India).

She currently works as women’s coordinator for the BELC, manages its Silk Research and Development Centre and leads a local parish.

“I strongly believe that men and women are equal in God’s kingdom, both bearing the image of God. Now, after experiencing the work that women are also capable [of], the church will open the door for other women too.”

Muchahary said Narzary’s ordination has paved the way for the BELC to ordain more women. Currently six are pursuing theological studies in different seminaries in India, and in 2021 the BELC General Council adopted a resolution to implement 41% gender representation in all its governing bodies, in compliance with the Lutheran World Federation’s gender justice policy.

With those amendments, Narzary hopes that many qualified and ordained women will take leadership positions in the BELC. “Women have always been in the forefront of Jesus’ ministry,” she said. “I strongly believe that men and women are equal in God’s kingdom, both bearing the image of God. Now, after experiencing the work that women are also capable [of], the church will open the door for other women too.”