

Service and Justice Updates

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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

**Winter/Spring
2021**

“Justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced.”

—Jesus of Nazareth (Luke 11:42)

“To change the world, my dear Sancho, is neither craziness nor utopia, but justice.”

—Don Quixote de La Mancha, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (translation mine)

Feb. 1, 2021, marked the beginning of a new design for the churchwide organization. In this rapidly changing world, with all its complexities, brokenness and beauty, we seek to witness together so that this world God loves so much experiences “the difference God’s grace and love in Christ makes for all people and creation,” as stated in the Future Church vision statement.

The Service and Justice home area is called to foster and facilitate this church’s engagement in service with and among communities, globally and locally, and to promote efforts to call and act for justice. Part of this work is done by engaging systems and processes in the public square and seeking a more robust, just and equitable response to the many “isms” affecting the communities where we live and serve. Most of our work happens as we support the free course of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world and the freedom of Christians to love and serve their neighbor.

New Testament scholar Douglas R.A. Hare defines love as “stubborn, unwavering commitment.” This is the way of Jesus, a deep, passionate and extravagant love that leads to restored relationships and transformed communities. We seek to activate people so that this world may experience community, justice and love.

Together we envision a younger, more diverse church. The Service and Justice home area, in collaboration with synods, congregations, campus and outdoor ministries, colleges and universities, social ministry organizations and independent Lutheran organizations (the whole ecology of this church), provides vibrant and motivational opportunities to find connections through community-rooted, justice-seeking ministry that offers faith formation in the way of Jesus so that all may experience God’s radical, transformational and liberating grace.

As Cornel West once said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” This update offers you a summary of our work of love for the sake of God’s world.

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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Service and Justice Home Area

Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks

- Domestic Ministries
- Global Ministries

Building Resilient Communities

- ELCA World Hunger
- Lutheran Disaster Response

Administration

- Senior Administration
- AMMPARO
- Program Directors for Relationships

Witnessing in Society

- Federal and state advocacy
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Lutheran Office for World Community

Administration

In the new Future Church structure, there will be four teams within the Service and Justice home area: Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks; Building Resilient Communities; Administration; and Witnessing in Society. The Administration team oversees the work of the home area and also includes Program Directors for Relationships and AMMPARO.

Program Directors for Relationships

There will be three program directors for relationships within the Service and Justice home area. Their vision for the home area's work is to move from the companion synod program to a portfolio of relationships. The plan is to create an interactive space that inspires local engagement through global awareness. In these engagements, the ELCA recognizes the great work done in the past even as it welcomes and invites members of our church to share new passions and talents. Together we will shape a multiplicity of relationships that can be seen as pathways to inform, connect and strengthen members of the ELCA, and to unleash their potential for new and existing relationships.

Karin Brown
Middle East and North Africa

Paulina Dasse
Latin America and the Caribbean
Europe

Kevin Jacobson
Africa
Asia and the Pacific

AMMPARO

The Biden administration has undertaken a comprehensive approach to foreign policy and immigration, showing greater humanitarian interest and service while acknowledging the drivers of forced migration. New enrollments to the previous administration's Migrant Protection Protocols, which have forced at least **70,000 asylum-seekers** to remain in Mexico, were promptly **suspended**. President Biden signed an **action** to "preserve and fortify" the DACA program, which protects an estimated 650,000 undocumented youth in the United States. The U.S. secretary of state has also spoken to the need for an orderly and humane approach to migration that addresses root causes and ensures protections for those who need them. The president **supports** a task force to help reunify families separated by a 2017 policy at the U.S.-Mexico border and to

strengthen asylum and refugee protections, especially for minors in Central America. The president has also called upon Congress to enact a sweeping immigration reform proposal.

To respond to this new comprehensive approach, the AMMPARO U.S. network is considering congregational sponsorship of asylum-seekers. A three-session training, jointly sponsored by AMMPARO, Episcopal Migration Ministries and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains, was conducted in October 2020 and will be offered again to interested congregations in spring 2021.

#SomosHermanas/os was a two-month campaign conducted by AMMPARO and international companions to raise awareness of migrant rights.



28 de diciembre
Día de los Santos Inocentes
(Mt 2:16-18)

Hoy en día, las políticas crueles de separación familiar y encarcelamiento infantil le roban a la niñez migrante de su inocencia y dejan heridas profundas.
¡Basta ya con la detención de niñas y niños migrantes!
Defendamos su derecho de permanecer junto a sus seres queridos.

#SomosHermanas/os

AMMPARO
Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities

Foto: ELCA

Logos of partner organizations: Asociación Pop Noj, ELCA, Lutheran Family Services, Episcopal Migration Ministries, and others.

Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks

The Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks (APCN) team maintains global relationships between churches as they share mission personnel and carry out mutual endeavors for evangelical witness. It will engage with partners within the ELCA ecology to pursue full partnership and participation of African-descent, American Indian and Alaska Native, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Latino people 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 presents a new opportunity to carry out God's mission within our church and around the world. Following are brief updates on the team's global and U.S.-based ministries.

Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM)

While the YAGM team now falls under Christian Community and Leadership in the Future Church design, it is important to note this timely update. On Jan. 28, 2021, the Rev. Dr. Rafael Malpica Padilla, then the executive director of Global Mission and now of Service and Justice, wrote to ELCA synods and companion churches to announce cancellation of the YAGM year of service for 2021-2022. "We will not be sending volunteers into service this year, resulting in two years in a row with no active volunteers," Padilla wrote. "As you might guess, this decision is due to the continued uncertainties and difficulties presented by COVID-19, and its variants." He continued, "Related to this decision, it has also been decided that we are no longer able to keep our team of Country Coordinators on staff for another year. Effective March 31, 2021, all ELCA Young Adults in Global Mission Country Coordinators' service will end." This decision was made in the best interests of mission personnel and the countries they serve.

DOMESTIC MINISTRIES

African Descent Ministries

With stay-at-home orders disconnecting many people from their workplaces and communities, it became important to help the African-descent community feel connected. To that end, and with the partnership of the African Descent Strategy Team, African Descent Ministries launched a series of virtual summits in September 2020. With up to 125 participants, the monthly summits have brought together people from all over the United States for education, support and worship. A revival was held in November 2020. These gatherings will continue through at least March 2021, and February's summit focused on Black History Month under the theme "An Evening of African Descent Cultural Expression." The focus for the 2021 pandemic year is to continue building, supporting, strengthening and connecting Black congregations and leaders.

African National Ministries

The African National Ministries desk continues to coordinate missional work among its six caucuses during this time of pandemic. These caucuses, known as the African National Communities, include West Africa, Southern Africa, the Horn of Africa (speaking Oromo, Amharic and Tegra), South Sudan and Eritrea, plus a sixth caucus for Swahili speakers. These communities, like most others, have been unable to gather in person for worship. Facebook is by far the



Training for African national leaders in San Diego, Calif., in March 2020.

most popular platform used by the African National Ministries, although many churches also use YouTube and/or their own websites. Several congregants have tested positive for COVID-19, and all six caucuses have lost members to the pandemic. About 106 ministries meet online every Sunday for worship service, Bible study and leadership gatherings. Worship attendance and giving have dropped between 25-30% in most of these ministries. The International African Lutheran Conference, originally planned for April 2021 in Monrovia, Liberia, has been postponed. In 2021, as we transition into the new Future Church structure, the task of identifying young, gender-diverse and visionary leaders will be given top priority.



Leaders of Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries assemble in October 2019.

Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries

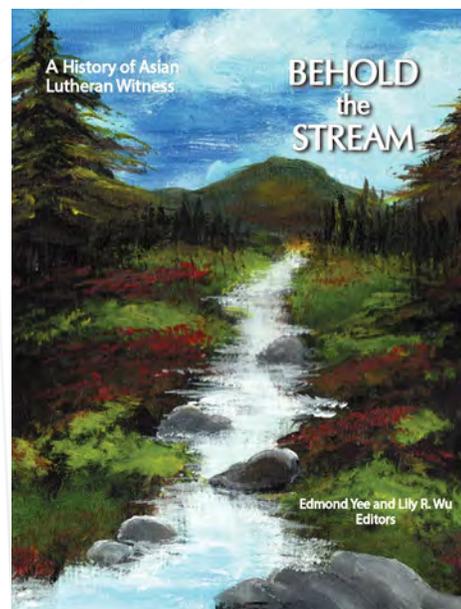
Over the past six months the pandemic has radically changed our sense of human community. Even before the pandemic there was a trend of people moving their lives online, but this year many staff members of Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries have lived through their screens in ways they never expected. The leadership of Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries was

amazed, inspired and grateful for the way the Arab and Middle Eastern community so quickly and successfully adapted to becoming a mostly digital community and church. There have been some real benefits: attendance has risen at times, and members who had moved or were stuck at home could once again take part in the life of their congregation.

The ministry has worked very closely with congregations to manage grant funding, find pro bono attorneys to help with immigration cases, and provide food for families impacted by the pandemic, while doing both legal and medical translation and assisting members of the Arab and Middle Eastern congregations with emotional care. A webinar about the olive harvest and Advent in Palestine, produced with Peace Not Walls and the Young Adults in Global Mission program, was attended by hundreds of people.

Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries

As part of its ongoing mission to build a resilient Asian community, Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries presents its newest resource, *Behold the Stream: A History of Asian Lutheran Witness*. The book includes a history of the Asian Lutheran community from the 1960s to the present, a listing of congregations/ministries and leadership, theological essays, and publications of the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders-ELCA and the Asian Lutheran International Conference (ALIC). Coedited by professors Edmond Yee and Lily R. Wu, the book was published by the association. This year's ALIC has been postponed until Jan. 20-25, 2022, when it will take place in Bangkok, Thailand. The association's 14th biennial assembly will commence in Bangkok a few days prior to the ALIC gathering.



Behold the Stream: A History of Asian Lutheran Witness, coedited by Professor Edmond Yee and Professor Lily R. Wu, was published by the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders-ELCA.



Sam Cunningham, mayor of Waukegan, Ill., and the Rev. Nestor Espinoza Perez, pastor of Sagrado Corazón Lutheran Church.

Latino Ministries

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Latino communities in the United States in many ways. Food insecurity has been one of the main issues, and thanks to the ELCA and other partners contributing food and funding, many programs in Latino congregations have been operating at full capacity. An excellent example of this initiative is the Sagrado Corazón Lutheran Church in Waukegan, Ill. Sagrado Corazón received financial assistance from not only the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the ELCA World Hunger domestic program but also from private entities such as Faith in Place and Faith Acres Foundation. Sagrado Corazón operates a food-drop program that helps more than 200 families weekly. Not only did it provide food, but with the help of the census workers, program workers were able to facilitate completion of more than 25 census forms while distributing face masks and hand sanitizer. With the help of the congregation and community volunteers, the program has been a very successful ministry among the Latino communities.

Peace Not Walls

In December 2020, Peace Not Walls (PNW) collaborated with the ELCA Young Adult Ministry and a student at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to produce the Advent Pilgrimage in Palestine. Each week the team shared video and blog devotions from a diverse set of young adults, including people from the ELCA (members of the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage, former Young Adults in Global Mission who had served in Jerusalem and the West Bank, young adult trip leaders and others from the Peace Not Walls program) and from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). The themes of the study series were hope, love, joy, peace and justice. Over 1,000 individuals and communities signed up to receive the resources weekly. A new PNW Resource Packet, which includes books, podcasts, maps, news sources, videos, and information about the ELCJHL and the Jerusalem program of the Lutheran World Federation, is now available. In 2021 PNW will be preparing a planning toolkit to help ELCA members take accompaniment-based trips to Israel and Palestine. PNW hopes to consult congregations, synods, seminaries, colleges and campus ministries for advice on how to plan post-COVID-19 trips centered on relationships with the “living stones” of the land – its people.



GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Africa

In 2021, the Africa desk will focus on gender justice and equity as strategic priorities. This strategy will address underlying causes of poverty and inequitable distribution of power while providing resources and opportunities for women and girls to pursue their livelihoods across the continent. The Reconciliation Lutheran Church Community Center and Primary Health Care Clinic was established to provide these holistic services for the Referendum community in South Sudan. The clinic was established primarily as a



Reconciliation Lutheran Church Community Center and Primary Health Care Clinic in the Referendum community of South Sudan.

reproductive and child health care unit. However, pregnant women in Referendum had no facility for medically supervised deliveries, so the ELCA and Reconciliation clinic staff agreed to expand the clinic with a two-story maternity unit offering 10 beds and two delivery stations. The maternity ward will open in March 2021.



The Rev. Cholita Narzary (center) is ordained by the Rev. Ichahak Muchahary (left), bishop of the Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Asia and the Pacific

The Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church, in India, has amended its constitution to require that its governing bodies include at least 41% women. It has also ordained its second woman pastor after 23 years. Both these decisions reflect the church's commitment to furthering gender justice within the church after participating in an ELCA-sponsored regional gender-justice conference. This commitment encourages the ELCA to continue working with churches in the Asia and the Pacific region to address together the importance of gender equity. Further, the Batak Protestant Christian Church (HKBP) in Indonesia – the largest Lutheran church in Asia – has requested special funds from the ELCA to deepen the discussion

of gender justice in its context. These decisions are critical because they unite the churches, other global companions and a variety of ELCA units. The Asia and the Pacific desk is excited to accompany women in the region and to network with other churches across cultures, languages, histories and contexts toward God's justice for all people.

Europe

The ELCA's Europe desk continues to accompany Lutheran churches in Central and Eastern Europe. In majority-Catholic or -Orthodox countries, these churches are often marginalized in national conversations. One example of an ongoing ELCA commitment is its partnership coordinating the Central Europe Teachers program with the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (ECACS). Since regaining possession of the schools after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, ECACS has prioritized the teaching of English and the presence of ELCA volunteer teachers. This strategy has resulted not only in students learning English – viewed as a necessary tool for professional success – but also in students being exposed to Christians strong in their faith. The ministry of the ELCA's volunteer teachers in Central Europe has positively impacted an entire generation of young people. The Central Europe Teachers program also includes one school of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and another of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary.



ELCA Central Europe teacher Megan Freudenberg (top right), fellow teachers and upperclassmen celebrate the arrival of first-year students at Evangelic Lutheran Lyceum in Bratislava, Slovakia.



A grief management workshop for families who have lost loved ones.

Latin America and the Caribbean

On Oct. 30, 2020, a landslide struck the community of Angelitos II, in the region of Nejapa, El Salvador. The Salvadorean Lutheran Synod (SLS) was in a unique position to respond, given its strategic vision of developing a holistic ministry; as SLS members understood from a biblical/theological focus, they saw a need to respond and had the capacity and training to do so. The SLS climate advocacy project, supported with ELCA World Hunger funds, works

to organize communities in Nejapa, and as a result the SLS was able to use its networks and relationships, established through the project, to respond to this disaster and advocate for others to respond as well. Additionally, with support from ELCA mission support funding, the SLS trained its pastors and leaders in trauma response and psychological care. Through one-on-one meetings and grief management workshops, these individuals have been able to attend to people affected by the landslide. Over the last four months, the SLS has accompanied these Nejapa communities as they recover from this tragic disaster.

Middle East and North Africa

Recently, via Zoom, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) desk met with all companions serving in Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt to accompany them and figure out ways to increase their capacity to respond to COVID-19. The pandemic had a huge effect on the ELCA's sister church in the Holy Land, whose economy depends on tourism. In the Bethlehem region alone, 75% of the population are unemployed. A joint team of MENA and Lutheran Disaster Response staff worked for four months with staff of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) to help them define their plans for a COVID-19 response. This was the first time the ELCJHL had applied for and received a grant through the ELCA's disaster response granting system.

The Rev. Dr. Saïd Ailabouni, area director for the Middle East and North Africa, will retire at the end of May 2021. His replacement, the Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, is already serving in Jerusalem and is working with his predecessor and other staff for a smooth transition. Karin Brown will be the program director for Peace Not Walls and for Middle East and North Africa relationships.



The Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, new area director for the Middle East and North Africa.

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 into Building Resilient Communities, the new team will have opportunities to further build on ongoing collaboration, identify synergies and learnings across program areas, create efficiencies in processes, and make connections across the international and domestic work. This is especially important in a global context of climate change, migration, gender inequality, racism and white supremacy, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The design provides space to better address the root causes of oppression and injustice in the work of both ELCA World Hunger and LDR, building on “transformative, holistic, and integrated” ministry to address “-isms” and move toward seeking liberation (see more below). The intent is to be more efficient and impactful together. In addition, within Service and Justice, Building Resilient Communities will have greater potential to deepen coordination with Witnessing 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 and the Caribbean. ELCA World Hunger carries out this work through its network, educational resources and granting.

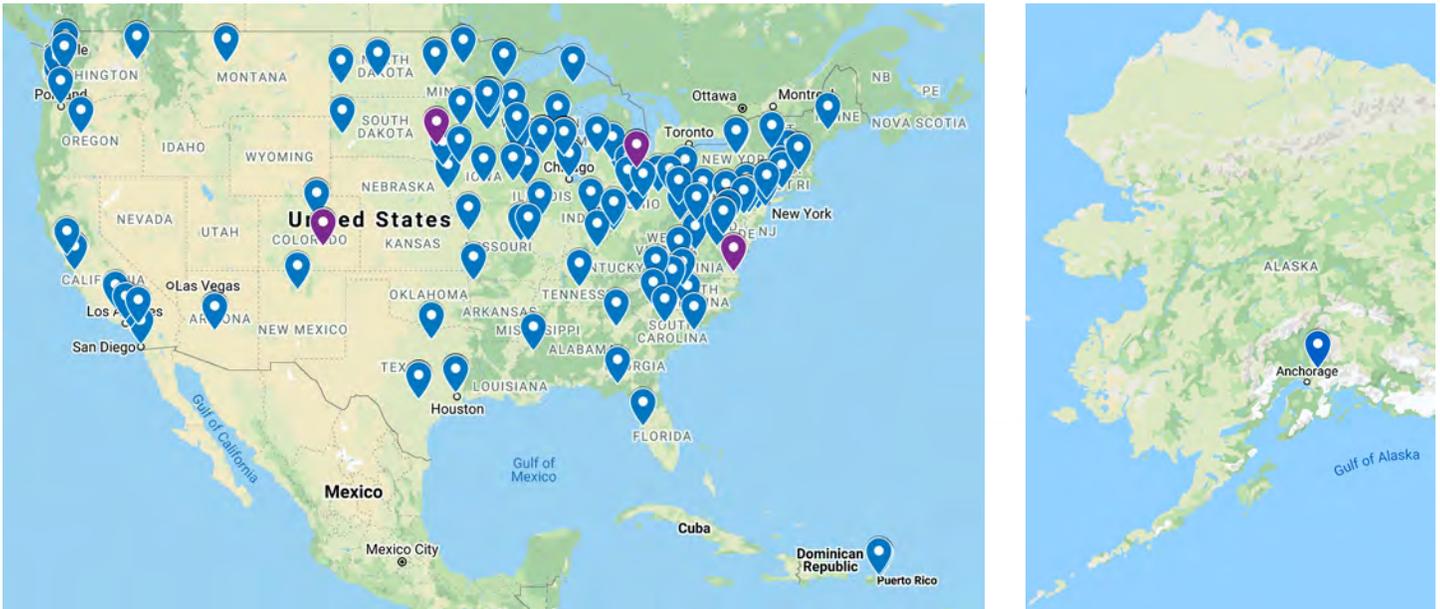
Grants: ELCA World Hunger is honored to award grants to ministries working to address hunger and poverty in their communities. Beyond the award itself, ELCA World Hunger accompanies partners through the term of the grant as they work in transformative, holistic and integrated ways. Looking ahead, the ELCA World Hunger domestic team will explore with its partners what it means to incorporate the guiding principle of “liberation” into this work together.

In 2021, 53 new Domestic Hunger Grants will join existing multiyear grants for a total of 167 grants across 63 synods, representing over \$1 million in investment in partner ministries. This rounds out the three-year cycle initiated in 2019 and substantially increases both the total number of grants and total amount awarded for domestic hunger. These are joined by four [Big Dream grants](#) supporting ministries that are boldly working to

uproot, transform or envision the structures and norms that perpetuate unequal access to resources and result in 77% of low-income Americans living without the savings to cover costs when an emergency arises.

In light of the success of ELCA World Hunger's Daily Bread Matching Grants as part of the ELCA's COVID-19 response, ELCA World Hunger plans to award an additional 50 Daily Bread Matching Grants to ELCA congregations this summer, bringing the total 2021 ELCA World Hunger grant investment in domestic partner ministries to over \$1.25 million.

ELCA World Hunger FY2021 Domestic Hunger Grants (blue) and Big Dream Grants (purple)



Education: In 2021, Hunger Education will continue to provide opportunities for Lutherans to connect their faith to the baptismal vocation “to strive for justice in all the earth” by producing new resources for audiences across ages (including children, youth and young adults) and releasing a new book on global Lutheranism. ELCA World Hunger is particularly excited about building collaborative space with Lutheran Disaster Response, expanding its support of educational opportunities through congregations and virtual spaces, and diversifying the voices that shape ELCA World Hunger as we work together for a just world where all are fed.

Network: Following the successful completion of the first virtual ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering in January 2021, ELCA World Hunger looks forward to new opportunities for members of its network to learn from and accompany one another. This year the ELCA World Hunger domestic team will explore ways to expand network engagement through accessible online programming and to build a more diverse network through intentional outreach and targeted programming. ELCA World Hunger also looks forward to creatively exploring alignments across existing networks, particularly those of ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.

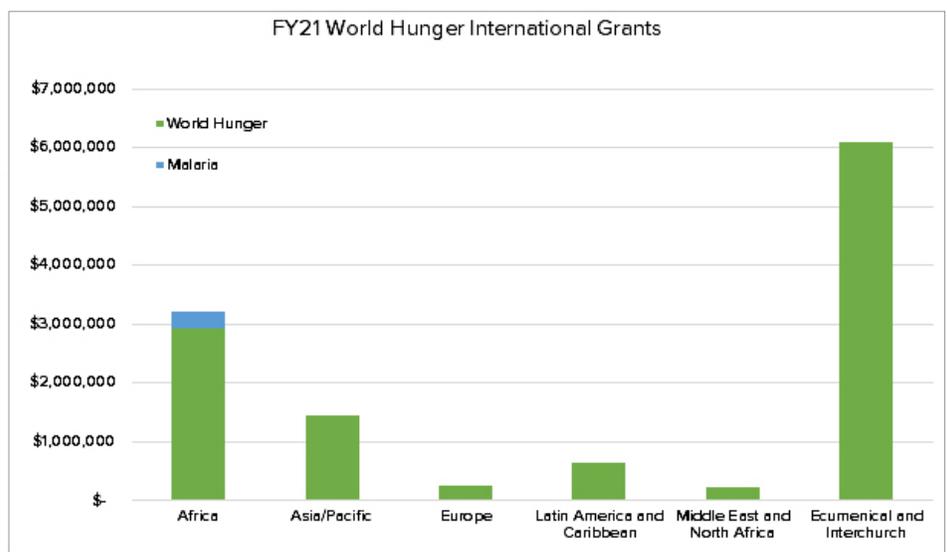
The Future Church structure provides a welcome space for collaboration and learning between programs that already align naturally. ELCA World Hunger will further explore opportunities for improved and aligned granting processes, robust and impactful story sharing, and effective and engaged networks across international and domestic programs and with Lutheran Disaster Response – all with the hope of better serving our constituents and partners in ministry in the United States and around the globe.

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 (a communion of Lutheran churches around the world). 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.

As the ELCA moves into the Future Church structure, ELCA World Hunger continues to support the work of Lutheran churches and other organizations internationally by providing grants for their projects and programs. Supporting projects that address gender justice, migration, livelihoods and health remains a top priority. In 2021, ELCA World Hunger is supporting 11 new projects implemented by companion churches, four of which focus on gender justice issues. These new projects are in Cuba, Guatemala, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Cambodia, India and Myanmar. This is the first year that ELCA World Hunger has supported work with companion churches in Cuba and Myanmar. The graph below breaks down by region and interchurch and ecumenical partnership the grants ELCA World Hunger plans to provide in the upcoming year.

All projects are being adapted in some way to the changing reality of COVID-19. Companions are reimagining work that has often been conducted in person, working through other mediums or providing adequate precautions when in-person spaces are critical. Further, COVID-19 has even more clearly exposed the inequalities related to income; access to food, water, education and health; and gender, racial and ethnic injustice – and the continued need to change this reality. Many companions are unlikely to see vaccinations until 2022, which pushes them further into situations that increase vulnerability to the short- and long-term impacts of COVID-19.



Service and Justice continues conversations with companions and within the home area to encourage projects that are transformative, holistic and integrated. As ELCA World Hunger moves into Service and Justice, it will be viewing its work through the lens of liberation theology. The ELCA World Hunger international team is excited to continue working in close collaboration with the LDR international team and to deepen the connection with World Hunger's domestic work, particularly in storytelling and impact reporting, in our collective efforts toward a just world where all are fed.

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

Domestic

Under the Future Church structure, the domestic team of Lutheran Disaster Response will seek opportunities to deepen engagement and connections among people and partners with whom it works, including synods, congregations and Lutheran social ministry organizations; to build on the existing LDR network; and to work toward more intentional connectivity and enhanced collaboration among members.

The LDR domestic team plans to assess and further develop existing educational resources related to emotional and spiritual care, disaster recovery service navigation, community long-term recovery development and coordination, the effects of climate change, COVID-19, and addressing racial and ethnic injustice within the LDR disaster response and recovery system – the last of these especially important as LDR begins to view its work through a lens of liberation.

Through the grant-making process, LDR will continue to work with local communities as they empower themselves to respond to disasters in their contexts. It will explore ways to engage collaboratively in and support disaster response, such as working more widely through the LDR network, including social ministry organizations (SMOs) as well as ELCA synods and congregations. LDR also aims to streamline the grant-making process, keeping it outcome-focused; to strengthen monitoring, evaluation and reporting practices; and to consider three types of grants: relief and solidarity grants (small, expedited grants designed to empower local synods, SMOs and congregations to engage immediately in addressing urgent needs); recovery grants (larger grants designed for deeper, longer-term intervention); and resilience grants, which engage local communities in building their capacity for disaster response and preparedness.

In the Future Church design, the LDR domestic team looks forward to deepening engagement around disaster preparedness capacity building in collaboration with the LDR international team, particularly related to issues such as climate change and COVID-19, as well as to new potential for engagement with the ELCA World Hunger domestic team in resilience and development work with ministry partners and social ministry organizations.

International

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered worldwide economic turmoil and caused a huge setback in progress on food security, nutrition, health, education, gender justice and livelihood, especially in the most affected communities. Lutheran Disaster Response made a bold commitment to support companion churches and ecumenical partners – not only in providing immediate relief assistance but also in providing continued support for recovery assistance, disaster preparedness, trauma counseling, and implementing innovative programs to adapt to what could be the new normal – and to focus on populations pushed into vulnerable situations, such as people affected by gender-based violence, people with disabilities and people who are older adults, migrants or refugees. In 2020, LDR internationally awarded over \$4.79 million in 125 grants to 49 countries; 84 of the grants (\$2.45 million) were in response to COVID-19, reaching at least 776,000 people around the world. In addition, LDR responded to major catastrophes as well as disasters that didn't make headlines.





On April 29 and 30, 2020, Bodo Evangelical Lutheran Church (BELC) conducted food distribution for 203 families in remote villages in Assam, India. Families were unable to leave their villages due to the COVID-19 lockdown imposed by the government. Photo: BELC.

This year LDR will focus on the continuing impacts and aftermath of the pandemic, responding to political conflicts, migration and refugee crises, and climate-induced catastrophes afflicting the globe. During the first quarter of this year, LDR will provide humanitarian assistance to those affected by the political crisis in Ethiopia, food insecurity in Venezuela and the migration crisis in Central America (through AMMPARO), as well as refugees and internally displaced people in Iraq and Jordan. Through the generous contribution of Lutheran constituents, LDR can provide immediate and long-term assistance where it's needed most.

Future Church offers the LDR international team the opportunity to work more collaboratively with the LDR domestic team and the ELCA World Hunger international team in developing strategies toward building resilient communities, especially in times of crisis. LDR recognizes that for communities to become self-reliant, it must invest in companion churches and local faith-based groups to build their capacity as trusted organizations. This means addressing not only immediate needs but also emotional and spiritual

support to disaster-affected communities. Disaster preparedness and mitigating potential risks are key to resiliency and must be prioritized as many experience more frequent and intense disasters. Adhering to the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability is an approach LDR has been supporting and began to promote more intentionally in 2020 through online training with both international and national partners. It will continue to do so in 2021. The approach reminds us that humanitarian response must be people-centered, focused on human dignity and on protecting people from further harm. With the Future Church structure in place, 2021 will be a year of learning and exploring our potential, and we look forward to the innovative ideas that will emerge from our more intentional collaboration.

Witnessing in Society

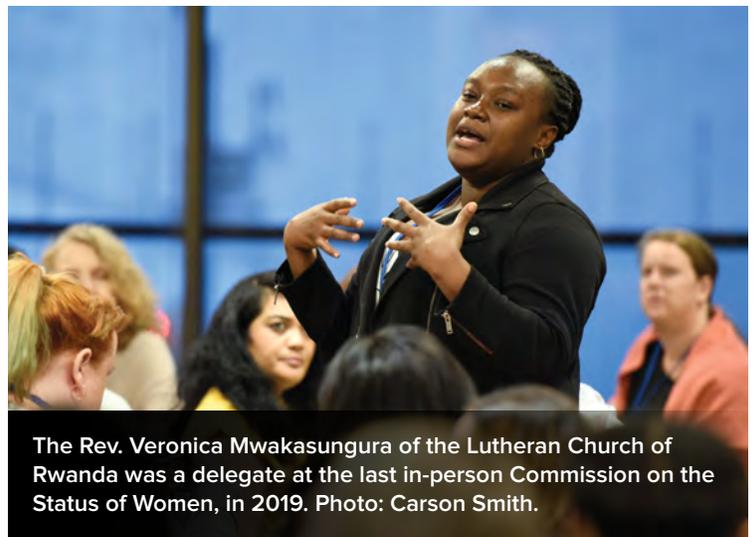
Witnessing in Society encompasses some of the work and ministry the ELCA does in the public sphere, advancing justice and shining a light on peace and dignity. This work and ministry take place wherever Lutherans are found, in communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region, with focused 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.; and Lutheran state public policy offices (SPPOs) in California, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, as well as more than 15 directly affiliated locations serving even more states. Through the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, the ELCA intersects with social implications of company practices and affects 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 WITNESSING IN SOCIETY ACTIVITY

Lutheran Office for World Community

The Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC) represents both the ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation 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. Find a fuller description of LOWC's focus on each of these areas in its [2021 United Nations Policy Priorities](#). "In an increasingly integrated world nations cannot and should not seek only their own security," reads the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World*. "Their goal should be common or mutually assured security. ... We support, without illusions, efforts to make stronger and more effective the work of the United Nations and regional bodies in preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding."

Lutherans and their guests who come to New York are aided by the organization, connections, experience and hospitality of LOWC staff for U.N. meetings and events, such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Plans are underway for a CSW virtual experience in 2021 that, when last held in person, in 2019, was attended by 32 Lutheran delegates from seven nations who built a network of understanding with each other in parallel and side events and represented their nations in larger gatherings.



The Rev. Veronica Mwakasungura of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda was a delegate at the last in-person Commission on the Status of Women, in 2019. Photo: Carson Smith.

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 in collaborative relationships with faith-based and issue-focused coalitions, advance accompaniment awareness and goals from ELCA ministries and colleagues, and act and facilitate action from ELCA advocacy network members at opportune moments 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



When in-person exchanges are possible, the D.C. office trains and facilitates visits to Capitol Hill for groups such as the AGAPE Illinois State University campus ministry.

up for policies that create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, preserve God’s creation and promote racial and gender justice.

Based on the current federal landscape, the document “[2021 ELCA Federal Policy Priorities](#)” lists the church’s priorities for advocacy in domestic policy, housing policy, environment policy, international policy, migration policy and Middle East policy, as well as civic engagement.

Acting on experiences of ELCA members and communities, the ELCA has advocated for policy to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its cultural strain. Through coalitions such as the Circle of Protection, the Domestic Human Needs interreligious

working group of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community, and many others, ELCA voices have expressed in a nonpartisan voice the need for proposed legislation to respond to the most vulnerable. People responding to ELCA Action Alerts directed over 2,500 messages to lawmakers in late 2020, emphasizing priorities for COVID-19 response packages.

“At the end of the day, our ‘macro’ advocacy efforts result in billion- and even trillion-dollar legislation and programs to respond to the crisis created by the pandemic. The ‘micro’ result is that a family has rent for another month, food on the table, medicine needed or heat on a cold winter’s night. How do we follow Jesus’ command to ‘abide with and love one another’ in the 21st century? We do it together. Government and advocacy give it shape,” says John Johnson, program director for domestic policy.

National borders are not respected by the pandemic, nor do they delineate the needs of God’s children. The ELCA’s advocacy voice has included a call for international COVID-19 relief.

“In our work to advocate for international funding in supplemental packages, we were able to facilitate a high-level meeting for Presiding Bishop Eaton and Speaker Pelosi’s office to highlight the importance of U.S. government support for our neighbors around the world. These funds will help low-income countries access vaccines, PPEs, diagnostic devices, and address humanitarian needs resulting from the COVID-19 global crisis,” says Patricia Kisare, program director for international policy.

Almost 400 participants from 28 countries and over 150 interfaith organizations from around the world took part in “Good Trouble for a Healthy Planet” virtually in September 2020. This second interfaith-based consultation, like the first, was organized and led by ELCA and coalition partners to address the impact of human activity on the planet and the urgent need for action to build sustainable and resilient communities and to develop recommendations for addressing climate change.

“Bringing together these interfaith entities revealed the power, insight and hope of faith voices at this watershed moment while emphasizing the need for action by all,” says Ruth Ivory-Moore, program director for environment and corporate social responsibility.

The ELCA has a long legacy of welcoming and caring for newcomers, a tradition that is active today. Along with Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and through the Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) strategy, our congregants share concern for migrants and refugees, in particular children and families. Prioritizing this awareness in policy was a pressing call for ELCA advocates in 2020. From mobilizing more than 240 ELCA bishops and ministers around generous refugee admissions in September, a campaign undertaken jointly with LIRS, to organizing a seven-week public campaign on migrants with AMMPARO's regional partners, ELCA advocacy, through groups such as the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, continues to highlight public policy affecting the lives of migrants in the United States and outside its borders.

“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,” says Giovana Oaxaca, program director for migration policy.

Witnessing in Society has the responsibility and privilege to bring a racial- and gender-equity lens to policies advancing in our country. “A burning cross reminds us that blatant acts of intimidation, hatred, and violence continue,” reads the ELCA social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture*. “A critical look reminds us of barriers that are more insidious. The source of this many-faceted crisis, however, is profoundly spiritual. We will rise to the crisis, not by making a longer list of commitments, but by persisting with repentant hearts.” We use our transformed hearts to persist toward breaking barriers of injustice in policies, from housing and health to environmental impact and everything in between, that profoundly impact all of us. In policy, we seek to affirm the declaration described in the social statement: “Cultural differences still matter, but they can be seen for what God intends — blessings rather than means of enslavement.”

“Homeownership disparities have long contributed to the shocking racial wealth gap in America,” says Andrew Fuller, program director for housing and human needs. “When the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) proposed a new rule that would weaken oversight and national data on fair housing initiatives, hundreds of Lutherans challenged this discriminatory move through public comments facilitated by the ELCA Action Center in the spring of 2020. The interfaith response to address housing disparities was noticed by top officials, including incoming officials of the Biden administration, and the rule is now being revisited by HUD.”

State Public Policy Offices

Advocacy engagement takes shape among members, in congregations and in synods, and a network of Lutheran state public policy offices brings a faith-centered voice into public dialogue. The ELCA publishes a [list and map of state public policy offices](#). Varied, dynamic and responsive initiatives show results for us and our neighbors across this map.

The Lutheran Office of Public Policy–California (LOPP-CA) has advocated with a coalition of over 60 anti-poverty, immigrant rights and community-based organizations in support of Assembly Bill 1876, which was signed into California law in September 2020. Now noncitizen immigrant households, as well as mixed-status families in which one tax filer has a social

GETHESEMANE LUTHERAN CHURCH
3600 HAMPTON AVE, ST. LOUIS, MO

ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE

Participate in a letter writing campaign to your representatives.

(Great socially distant activity!)

Check out other ways to give:
gethsemanestl.org/gods-work-our-hands

God's work. Our hands.

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

Many ELCA congregations, like this one in Missouri, used advocacy tools in service to our neighbors, including templates for writing lawmakers, on “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday. Image: Gethsemane Lutheran Church, St. Louis, Mo.

security number but others do not, will directly benefit from expansion of California's anti-poverty tax credits. The coalition says critical support to over 600,000 individuals, including over 200,000 children, will help reduce inequality, stimulate the economy and alleviate the impact of the 2020 recession, which hit immigrant communities and communities of color the hardest.

“I felt the Holy Spirit moving when this victory was announced,” says Regina Banks, director of the LOPP-CA. “It was equally undeniable when I shared the news with our network. The federal and state income tax return credit is one of the most powerful tools available for lifting people out of poverty, and after a long-standing battle this legislation will include many hardworking Californians.”

Corporate Social Responsibility

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of the ELCA seeks to engage in shareholder advocacy with corporate environmental, social and governance representatives on the social implications of their companies' practices, and to affect ELCA investment policy in socially responsible ways. This activity is organized through Witnessing in Society staff and the ELCA CSR review team. The ELCA collaborates with Portico Benefit Services Social Purpose Funds and with other faith-based investors and asset managers through the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), where the ELCA is now represented on the 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 are utilized to help ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities.

In recent activity, the ELCA Church Council revised its Code of Conduct, Extractive Industries, and Domestic Access to Health Care Issue papers. The Pornography investment screen was also revised.

EQUIPPING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

While ELCA policy staff have a distinct role in Witnessing in Society, every Lutheran does as well. We endeavor to live into our baptismal covenant to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

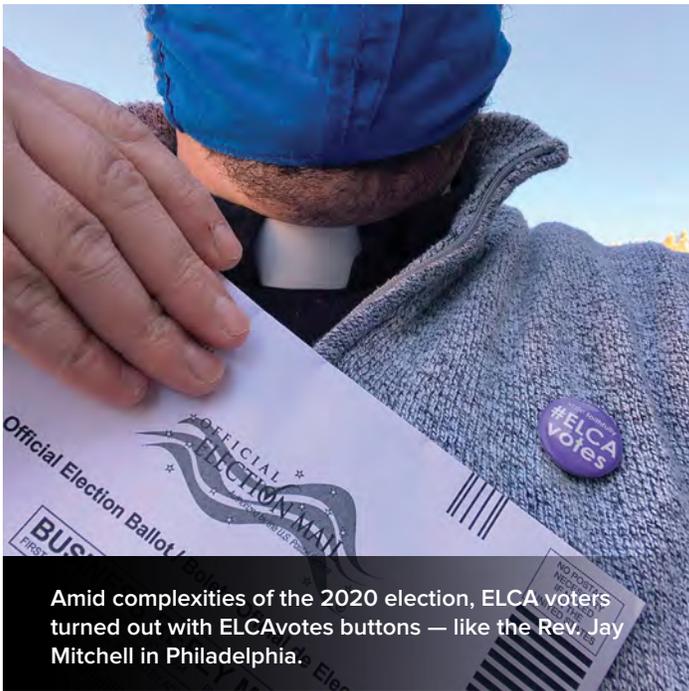
Through its resources, blog, social media presence (@ELCAadvocacy) and communication with those who join the ELCA Advocacy Network through [ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://www.elca.org/advocacy/signup), Witnessing in Society seeks to equip Lutherans with tools and information for engagement. The ELCA Advocacy Convening, a biennial flagship opportunity for ELCA bishops and key leaders, will not resume in person at this time of public health restrictions, but opportunities adapted to the present reality continue.

- Over 2,000 people registered for training in “[Advocacy Tools for Loving Your Neighbor](#),” an online training event in July 2020 jointly hosted by The Episcopal Church and the ELCA, and even more have accessed the archived video. A follow-up event with both Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Episcopal Presiding Bishop Michael Curry is planned.



During the most recent in-person ELCA Advocacy Convening, bishops and key leaders prepped for visits to Capitol Hill to address disasters intensified by climate change.

- ELCA Hunger Advocacy Fellows wrote, compiled and designed “[Advocacy 101 for Young Adults: When Faith Meets Public Policy](#),” posted in December 2020. The fellowship program operates virtually in the 2020-2021 cycle, but its vibrant young-adult leaders make a valuable contribution to Witnessing in Society through their positions in the D.C. office, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, and the Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin.



Amid complexities of the 2020 election, ELCA voters turned out with ELCAvotes buttons — like the Rev. Jay Mitchell in Philadelphia.

There is much Lutherans can do. Our faith is integral to how we, as Christians, attend to the world. Our beliefs and actions are shaped by our relationships with God and one another. Civic engagement is one way we express this.

The ELCAvotes initiative saw a strong uptick in activity with the 2020 presidential election. Lutheran leaders seeking more information via the ELCAvotes network sign-up climbed prior to November 2020, and more people continue to join that list to inform engagement. Witnessing in Society sought to [disseminate accurate information](#) at the height of the election season through social media channels and its blog, including the post “[Sifting Through Misinformation](#)” and response tools for voter intimidation.

When we reflect on our values, faith-driven service activities and experiences, and educate ourselves about the policies surrounding issues, there are many activities we can conduct — as individuals, in congregations and in

other partnerships — that both demonstrate our Christian faith as Lutherans and benefit our communities and country. Tools in our [ELCA Civic Engagement Guide](#) can assist with holding voter registration drives, sharing absentee ballot information, interacting at candidate forums and hosting Pledge to Vote commitments and Get Out the Vote events, and can be used year-round.

▶ [Lively Activity Making a Difference](#)

The ELCA is actively witnessing in society, from a congregation utilizing advocacy tools on “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday, to a campus group visiting Washington, D.C., to voice their concerns to policy makers with training and arrangement by ELCA staff, to the ELCA presiding bishop boldly expressing faith-centered priorities in a country needing the prophetic influence. We in Witnessing in Society are glad to be part of this work, and we ask God to help and guide us.

