

Service and Justice Updates

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Summer/Fall
2023

A Letter From the Interim Executive Director, Tammy Jackson



On a recent Sunday after Pentecost my pastor preached from Romans 12. You may know the passage, from verse 2: “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God.” My pastor’s message to us was to be transformed, for in being transformed we think about people outside ourselves. He said we belong one to another – a tremendous call in the world in which we live. He referenced Paul, who professed that we are conduits for God’s love, facing outward to the world.

This is the work of the Service and Justice home area. We face outward in our active mission and ministry to the world, caring for our neighbors and sharing God’s love. The pages that follow reveal many and varied expressions of our work in the world. Allow me to offer some highlights:

- **Global Service** – This year 42 new missionaries (including 29 Young Adults in Global Mission) have been sent to walk alongside our siblings in Christ around the world (page 5).
- **African Descent** – Five new-start worshipping communities will be supported in a season of building (page 7).
- **Europe** – Our ministry partners are helping to heal the trauma of war and build peace in the region (page 12).
- **AMMPARO** – An immersion trip in the spring helped teach young adults how to better accompany immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers (page 17).
- **Middle East and North Africa** – ELCA partner churches are in active service to and with their neighbors through their commitment to gender justice (page 14).
- **Lutheran Disaster Response** – A “Care for the Caregivers” workshop provided disaster case managers and other frontline workers with space to reflect on their experiences and process their emotions (page 16).

There are many more stories in this report – and still it’s only a snapshot of the relationships we are deepening with our siblings in Christ. May the God who dwells in our bodies continue to direct our movements as our church faces outward to do God’s work in the world.

Blessings,

Tammy Jackson

Interim Executive Director, Service and Justice

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Administration

The Administration team oversees the work of the Service and Justice home area as well as its relationships with the Deaconess Community and Independent Lutheran organizations.

Lutheran World Federation Thirteenth Assembly

This Sept. 13-19, members from across the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) gathered at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession of Poland in the historic city of Krakow, for the LWF's Thirteenth Assembly. The theme, "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope," referenced Ephesians 4:4 to remind us that, in a fragmented world, we are called to unity in the body of Christ. The assembly is the most significant event in the life of the LWF.

Hundreds of delegates, representatives of associate members, ecumenical guests, official presenters, advisers, ex officio participants, volunteers and staff attended. The weeklong occasion, preceded by a number of pre-assemblies, not only celebrated the communion and the unique contexts of member churches but carried out the official functions of the assembly.

Among the hundreds gathering from around the world were members of the ELCA and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, representing the LWF North America region along with advisers and other invited guests. The Service and Justice home area sent several staff members involved in advocacy, theological education and world service.

We encourage you to download the [Assembly Study Guide](#), which encompasses the themes of the assembly, as well as an [introductory guide to Poland](#) and the host church. Member churches and their congregations are encouraged to use these resources to explore the assembly's themes in contextual ways. Learn more about the assembly at 2023.lwfassembly.org and across LWF and ELCA social media platforms.



Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks

The Accompanying Peoples, Communities and Networks team maintains global relationships between churches as it shares mission personnel and carries out mutual endeavors for evangelical witness. It also supports ethnic-specific and multicultural ministries and the commitment of this church to diversity and inclusivity.

GLOBAL SERVICE

Summer Missionary Orientation 2023

After an in-person hiatus of nearly three and a half years, Global Service hosted an orientation for new global personnel July 9-14 at the Hilton Garden Inn in downtown Minneapolis. The week of programming formed and imagined relationships with ministries both within the ELCA and local to the Twin Cities area. The gathering focused on the five core justice areas – migration justice, environmental justice, racial justice, gender justice and economic justice (MERGE). Each day the attendees learned and grounded themselves in the intersections of these five forms of justice through off-site visits and guest speakers from across the ELCA: congregations, ministries, synods and the churchwide organization.

Beginning on the evening of Sunday, July 9, Global Service staff welcomed new mission personnel, staff and guests in song and dance before sharing dinner. On Monday, Service and Justice senior leadership grounded the orientation attendees in the landscape of Service and Justice and global mission service, introducing the accompaniment model and values: mutuality, inclusivity, vulnerability, empowerment and sustainability. These values infused visits, conversations and speaker presentations throughout the week.

In the afternoon Shari Seifert, president of the European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice (EDLARJ), accompanied attendees on a two-hour guided pilgrimage to the George Floyd Global Memorial at George Floyd Square in Minneapolis. The day concluded with dinner at the Tiny Diner, near the square, with reflection and fellowship from the day.

On Tuesday, Mary Streufert, ELCA director for gender justice and women's empowerment, led participants in attending the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) sexual and gender-based violence online seminar and visiting Esperanza United, a national nonprofit, based in neighboring St. Paul, that mobilizes Latiné communities to end gender-based violence.

Environmental justice was the focus Wednesday, with guest speakers Tammy Walhof, director of Lutheran Advocacy–Minnesota, and Christine Moffett, ELCA program director for environmental and energy policy. They led attendees through a day of environmental education and a visit to Christ the King Lutheran Church in New Brighton, where the new missionaries met the creation care team and toured their environmental efforts. These included solar panels on the church roof and a pollinator garden. Members of Christ the King explained how they strive to be a more sustainable church and facility for their neighborhood and community.

Thursday focused on migration justice. Mary Campbell, program director for AMMPARO (Assisting Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities), led her team in introducing the ELCA's AMMPARO strategy and its expansion to the international level. Attendees visited Tapestry Church, a bilingual and multicultural community in Richfield, Minn., where they learned about its ministry, heard members' personal stories, ate a delicious Venezuelan meal prepared by one member, and sang.

Orientation concluded on Friday after online meetings with area program desks (international missionary centers) and closing worship. Throughout the week guests from across the ELCA joined the group for relationship building, collaboration and fellowship. These included representatives from the churchwide

organization's Innovation, Development and Strategic Communications teams, the Service and Justice home area and the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. The event fostered community, provided participants with experiential learning through accompaniment and MERGE, and equipped missionaries with training in policies, procedures and technical systems.

Global Service also virtually welcomed three new missionaries with a weeklong online orientation in March. This makes 12 new missionaries, spanning 11 countries and five global regions.

Winter 2023 new hires:

- Kelly Schumacher Fuller – Young Adults in Global Mission country coordinator for Central Europe, Slovakia
- The Rev. Aaron Fuller – Pastor of Bratislava International Church, Hungary
- The Rev. Soliette Lopez – Young Adults in Global Mission country coordinator for Mexico

Summer 2023 new hires:

- Bridget Gautieri – Coordinator for the ELCA Wittenberg Center, Germany
- Julia Kontur – Central Europe teacher, Slovakia
- Sophie Warnberg – Horizon seminary intern, Serbia
- Karleigh Crepin – Horizon seminary intern, France
- Justin Mauney – Horizon seminary intern, Malaysia
- The Rev. Andrew Ronnevik – Seminary professor, Papua New Guinea (with spouse Meredith and children Beatrice and Hans)
- The Rev. Rebekah Davis – Pastor, St. Andrew's United Church of Cairo
- Robert Forrest – St. Andrew's Refugee Services, Egypt
- Susan Seidel – Program coordinator for Bega Kwa Bega, Tanzania



Global musicians lead the opening celebration at the Summer Missionary Orientation in St. Paul, Minn.



New missionaries and Service and Justice staff.



New missionaries visit Christ the King Lutheran Church in New Brighton, Minn.

Global Companion Engagement

In January the Companion Synod Program partnered with Luther Seminary to facilitate J-Term trips for seminary students to engage with companion churches in Tanzania and Guatemala. Over two weeks our global companions accompanied these soon-to-be pastors as they experienced new contexts for ministry. The students learned through conversation and experience and built relationships by practicing accompaniment and its values. They returned home with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the context in which they visited and the ELCA's connections with companions around the world.



Seminary students participate in a Mayan new year ritual.



Companion synod youth learn traditional Cameroonian dance and song at the Sudan Centennial.

In the very same place where these seminarians graduated in the spring, a celebration of 100 years of ministry was held at the beginning of July.

In 1923 at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, a document was signed establishing the Lutheran church in what was formerly known as Sudan (now Cameroon and the Central African Republic). This summer the Companion Synod Program partnered with former and current missionaries in West Africa to honor the centennial of this signing. The weekend-long celebration at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., was attended by over 150 pastors, musicians, people from Cameroon and the CAR, bishops, lay leaders, youth from the companion synods, and missionaries, such as Mark Nygard, who coordinated the festivities. The event celebrated the past, present and future of God's mission in Sudan, and concluded with a festival worship service led by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

The Companion Synod Program continues to provide opportunities for relationship and engagement across the ELCA, from the founding missionaries to our newest rostered leaders

DOMESTIC MINISTRIES

African Descent Ministries

This year has been a season of building for African Descent Ministries (ADM). The Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda, program director for African Descent Ministries, returned from maternity leave at the end of March. In April the African Descent Ministries Cohort began. Through this initiative, five new starts will be provided with additional financial and social resources to help them achieve their goals. ADM and Racial Justice Ministries formed a Season of Jubilee team to conduct research among the African-descent community as the church considers community reinvestment. The next Season of Jubilee brunch will take place Oct. 21 in Baltimore, Md. ADM was represented at the Rostered Ministers Gathering with an African-descent dinner for over 30 people that honored the labor of rostered leaders. ADM's Reclaim gathering takes place Sept. 14-17 in Minneapolis, Minn. The keynote speakers will be the Rev. Andrea Walker, the Rev. Solomon Missouri and the Rev. Jazmine Brooks. At this gathering the team will focus on projects and events for the 2024-2025 calendar.

African National Ministries

African National Ministries attended the second International African Lutheran Conference, held in Monrovia, Liberia, by the Lutheran Church in Liberia and its bishop, the Rev. Victor Padmore. Mydea Reeves-Karpeh of Peoples' Community Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Md., was elected conference chair. The conference's theme, "Preach, Teach, Heal," reflects its focus on enhanced ministry, education, and health and healing, and on sustaining and expanding the church's mission.



ELCA delegates gather at the International African Lutheran Conference in Monrovia, Liberia.



Sendoff party at Tumbaini University Makumira, Tanzania, honoring Esther G. Ngomuo, mission developer of Christ Kiswahili Lutheran Mission in Nashville, Tenn.

The Monrovia conference provided an opportunity to celebrate, connect and discuss how to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ in our contexts. African National Ministries hopes to continue learning from the African church's rich context, practice and vision.

Leymah Gbowee, a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a Liberian native, spoke on healing and reconciliation, encouraging honest and compassionate dialogue between pastors and community leaders, because healing must come from the church first.

Delegates felt renewed and empowered to carry the message of God's love into the world. "Every society is a reflection of its religious institutions," said Gbowee. "Therefore, the church needs to take a huge leap towards healing and reconciliation." The third International African Lutheran Conference will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2025.

Joseph Bocko, director of African National Ministries, attended the African Theological Roundtable in Arusha, Tanzania, July 1-14, as well as the sendoff party, held at Tumbaini University Makumira, for the Rev. Esther G. Ngomuo, mission developer of Christ Kiswahili Lutheran Mission in Nashville, Tenn.

Bishop Julian Gordy and his wife, the Rev. P. Morgan Gordy, represented the ELCA Southeastern Synod. Rev. Bocko also met with Daudi Msseemaa, ELCA regional representative for East Africa, and Bishop Johannes Ole Meluyio of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya.

The African National Ministries Steering Committee will meet in Chicago in September to review ministry performance in six caucuses and to plan for 2024.

Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations

In April, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton announced the launch of the ELCA's Truth and Healing Movement, an opportunity for Lutherans to increase their understanding of their colonizing impact on Indigenous people in the past and present. The next several months will bring opportunities to learn, raise awareness and otherwise impact hearts and lives across the ELCA. The movement is based on the notion that the truth, and our knowing and embracing it, will be the first step toward healing. To learn more, visit [ELCA.org/TruthAndHealing](https://www.elca.org/TruthAndHealing).

In October, on Indigenous Peoples' Day, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary will launch the Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders program in partnership with ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations and the Association of American Indians and Alaska Natives of the ELCA. Though modeled on the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program, the new program will enlist Indigenous

teaching pedagogy. Ninety percent of the instructors are Indigenous, and all 10-plus students are Indigenous people from ELCA ministries and congregations.

To learn more about the many developments in ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, visit ELCA.org/Indigenous.



Photos from the Indigenous Leaders Gathering in San Diego, Calif.

Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries



The Rev. Charbel Zgheib (center front) at his ordination.

The Rev. Charbel Zgheib was ordained by Bishop Claire Burkat of the Sierra Pacific Synod on Saturday, May 6. As pastor of Salam Arabic Church in Sacramento, Calif., he works to provide humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugees. Salam Arabic plans to start worshipping at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Sacramento this November. The Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries team is grateful to the Rev. Todd Wallace and his congregation for opening their doors to support Rev. Zgheib's outreach to the Arab and Middle Eastern communities.

Salam Radio is the first Arabic Christian ecumenical online media organization in the United States, with the primary goal of proclaiming the word of God. It replicates successful media projects around the world that couple radio broadcasts with a visual platform. The station's studio will be located at St. John's Lutheran Church in downtown Sacramento, and the team is preparing a mobile app for Android and Apple Store.



The Rev. Khader Khalilia (left), program director for Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries and the Rev. Charbel Geagea, executive director of the radio and TV station Voice of Charity Lebanon.

Salam Radio offers listeners a chance to interact, access information and practice religious and spiritual activities from any location. It promises to expand the church community to include such marginalized groups as refugees, older adults, LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, etc. Salam Radio aims to develop the Christian and humanitarian values of its audience. Voice of Charity, a Catholic radio station in Beirut, is providing technical support as Salam Radio tries

to duplicate its model of an online radio-TV organization.

Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries is also preparing an Arabic liturgy in collaboration with The Episcopal Church.

Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries

About 120 members of the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) of the ELCA and various Lutheran churches in Asia joined local leaders in Chiang Rai, Thailand, for the 11th Asian Lutheran International Conference (ALIC), held Jan. 12-17. The community gathered around the timely theme “Comfort, Comfort My People: Prophetic Justice and Healing” (from Isaiah 40:1). The gathering included Bible studies, communion and various contextual healing services, plenary presentations, and panel discussions addressing trauma and justice work, the future of being a communion of churches, congregational and cultural visitations, and various ways of building and strengthening relationships and support.



Attendees of the Asian Lutheran International Conference gather in Chiang Rai, Thailand.



Participants in the Asian Lay Evangelist Program gather for their last session.



Participants in the assembly of the ELCA Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) bless their leaders.

The assembly elected new officers and celebrated the transition of leadership as Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries welcomed its new program director, the Rev. Teresita “Tita” Valeriano.

The Asian Lay Evangelist Program, with partnerships among various church institutions, held its last class and celebrated the evangelists’ completion of the program in San Diego, Calif. Members visited the U.S.-Mexico border and remembered their own stories as immigrants and refugees.

Latino Ministries

The Latino Young Adult project continues to create wonderful ideas and plan memorable events. A group from the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod has been planning an event with the young Latiné group from the seven ministries of the synod. This upcoming encounter will engage young people in various workshops led by the young adult group, covering areas from Lutheran identity to barbers’ techniques for cutting hair.

The Young Adult Bakery Coop pilot project in Lake County, Ill., has received an invitation from Myra Gaitan-Morales, executive director of the University Center of Lake County, to manage the center’s student cafeteria. The Latino Ministries team is excited about this new development in the project.

The Latino Diversity Network in Puerto Rico is reaching out to congregations to continue offering the workshop “Embrace by Faith,” about how faith helps young LGBTQ people come out.



Young adults plan an upcoming event for the young Latino group in the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod.

GLOBAL MINISTRIES

Africa

ELCA engagement on the African continent is guided by the accompaniment model, aimed at responding to the expressed needs of our companions. These companions are deeply rooted in the communities they serve and therefore have the capacity to identify real community needs.

All expressions of the ELCA, especially the companion synods, are deeply engaged in accompaniment with our siblings in Christ in Cameroon and the Central African Republic (CAR), where the Western North Dakota, Eastern North Dakota, Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast and South Dakota synods walk together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic (ELC-CAR) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon (ELCC) by meeting needs identified by the local church. The first three synods are instrumental in the health work of the ELC-CAR through Emmanuel Health Centre in Lesotho and the food security, village education and water resources management programs of the church. Support from the South Dakota Synod helps provide educational opportunities to children in Cameroon and put roofs on churches across the country.

Despite the challenge of obtaining visas for African visitors, these synods have continued to receive representatives of both companion churches to share God's gifts.

Through the Africa Desk, the ELCA accompanies both churches with funds for Mission and Ministry and Diakonia and Development, aid from Lutheran Disaster Response and, more recently, missionaries contributing hard-to-find resources such as theological education.

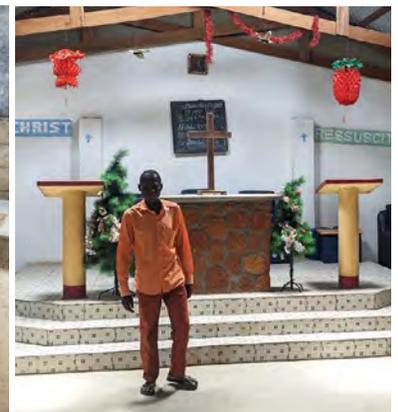
The ELCA's collaboration with our companion churches and other international partners is very important. The church's strategy is to engage these partners in conversation that facilitates a common approach to mission and to pool resources to respond to the needs of our siblings in Christ.

The Africa Desk takes collaboration with all international partners seriously, meeting regularly with the companion churches and other international partners in Cameroon and resuming such meetings in the CAR under the ELC-CAR's new leadership. International partners include the Norwegian Mission Society, the Evangelical Lutheran

Church in Canada, Lutheran Bible Translators, Mission Afrika of Denmark, the Evangelical-Lutheran Mission in Lower Saxony (ELM) of Germany, the French overseas Service Protestant de Mission Défap of France, and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Cameroon and the CAR. In both Cameroon and the CAR the churches co-sponsor many programs. This kind of collaboration provides resources where they are scarce and frees up resources for other needs.



Students attend class in a permanent school building in Cameroon.



A catechist in Bouar, Cameroon.

Asia and the Pacific

The ELCA's relationship with the Lutheran Church in Cambodia (LCC) is not new – in fact the ELCA was the first church to establish a formal relationship with the LCC when it was organized as an independent church in 2017. But new developments are creating new opportunities.



Bishop Touchkeov Sreyliak (right) and young members of the Lutheran Church in Cambodia (LCC).



Bishop Sreyliak visits an older church member.

In June the LCC became the newest member of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). As part of its LWF membership, the church has revised its constitution and selected the Rev. Touchkeov Sreyliak as bishop. Bishop Sreyliak is the second female bishop in Asia, the other being Bishop Selma Chen of the Lutheran Church of Taiwan (Republic of China).

This LWF membership enables the ELCA to engage with the LCC as a communion member and brings exciting multilateral layers to an already bilateral arrangement. For example, the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC) recently asked the ELCA to help with mission engagements in Asia. From this, the opportunity to link the JELC with the LCC organically was presented as an enhancement to the ELCA's work in Cambodia. Some results of this include conversations between the ELCA and JELC about possible joint Young Adults in Global Mission opportunities in Cambodia and about meeting the theological education needs of the LCC.

Bishop Sreyliak will be installed in November, and the JELC will join the ELCA in sending a representative to this event.

Though still a young, small church, the LCC is poised to grow in witness and service in this predominantly Buddhist country. Most of the members are young people, and the church is nurturing new leaders. "I feel happy as a pastor," says Duy Sarun, recently ordained in the LCC. "I can serve, I can teach, and everyone smiles. Even if they may have burdens in their lives, they feel they have comfort from God and God's word. As for me, sometimes I may feel tired. But the people care for me and care about me. They encourage me. It truly is God's strength coming from them."

Europe

The ELCA Europe Desk continues to prioritize peace-building, responding to needs created by the Russia-Ukraine War and uplifting peace initiatives that have been ongoing in Central Europe since the Yugoslav Wars decades ago.

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues to displace families, the path to reconciliation between the two nations seems uncertain. Yet hope persists. Our ministry partners offer holistic care, addressing such acute needs as food, shelter, hygiene supplies, integration support and the long process of emotional, psychological and spiritual healing from the trauma of war.



Duy Sarun is one of the newest pastors to be ordained in the LCC.



Facilitator Neda Popovic leads a trust workshop. Photo: Davorka Horvat

Meanwhile the Evangelical Church in the Republic of Croatia, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia and the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Serbia are weaving a tapestry of peace-building and women's empowerment after the Yugoslav Wars. In the ELCA-supported program Women to Women in Ministry and Mission, women from different churches and ethnicities forge trust and become advocates for change in their communities.

The pathways to peace vary, yet the Europe Desk maintains its dedication to supporting partners' initiatives in peace-building, gender justice and migration justice. We continue to accompany our partners, who are working toward transformative change, reigniting hope in war-torn communities and sowing seeds of future peace.



Participants in the workshop identified personal strengths in Croatian. Photo: Sarah Grow



A workshop participant shares insights about youth work. Photo: Davorka Horvat

Latin America and the Caribbean

The Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) team commits to accompanying companion churches and institutions in capacity-building processes for planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) of ministries and projects. In June the team invited emerging leaders (60% women and 30% youth) from companion churches and institutions in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean to participate in a workshop centered on the basics of PME.

For this workshop, held June 5-9 at the Lutheran Center in Mexico City, the ELCA invited the Mexican social service organization Amextra, the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope, and the Central American office of the Lutheran World Federation's Department for World Service to facilitate various training modules. This model of co-facilitation with companions, alongside colleagues from the LAC Desk, ELCA finance, and Building Resilient Communities, included the voices and expertise of colleagues and leaders across the region. Furthermore, many of the companions that facilitated have organizational structures and processes similar to those of other churches and institutions in the region, which enriched conversation as the training progressed.

In addition to the innovative facilitation model, the LAC Desk collaborated with selected Latiné congregations and the ELCA Caribbean Synod to invite ELCA leaders to this workshop. These leaders were able to actively learn from companion churches, share from their own contexts and make connections with companion church leaders for further engagement.

The LAC team is excited to continue with future capacity-building opportunities that respond to the needs and requests of companions.



Members of companion churches and institutions in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean participate in a workshop centered on the basics of planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Middle East and North Africa

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Christianity is a minority religion, marginalized and persecuted, which puts significant pressure on Christians throughout the region. Yet MENA churches are active not only in worship and fellowship but also in service to their neighbors of all faiths. This includes the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), an ELCA companion and the only Lutheran World Federation member church in the region. The ELCJHL includes numerous ecumenical partners with whom the ELCA is engaged in accompaniment ministry through personnel presence and financial support.

ELCA support has allowed the ELCJHL to increase staffing for its gender justice program and oversee a breadth of church and community workshops and events, including a July workshop on anger management for women and a May workshop for a local scout troop (ages 11-17) that emphasized positive masculinity and gender equality in relationships between boys and girls.

Gender justice program coordinator Shadin Nassar and ELCJHL ecclesiastical judge Scarlet Bishara represented the ELCJHL at international conferences on women's rights in Rwanda and Morocco. At the international Women Deliver 2023 Conference (WD2023), held in July in Kigali, Rwanda, Nassar represented the ELCJHL through the organization Young Women for Awareness, Agency, Advocacy & Accountability (YW4A) and in partnership with the Christian Youth Association, speaking about her experience as a young Palestinian woman living under occupation and about the ELCJHL's commitment to gender justice in Palestine. "The ELCJHL believes in empowering young women leaders who have the potential to become agents of change in the future," says Ranan Issa Abu Shanab, manager of the church's gender justice program.

This commitment was evident in the January ordination of the Rev. Sally Azar, the first Palestinian Lutheran woman pastor in the ELCJHL and the MENA region. In preparation for and support of this historic moment, the gender justice program conducted an ongoing educational campaign that included a [video featuring ELCJHL and ELCA leaders](#).

Since February, Rev. Azar has served as co-pastor of both the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour and the English-speaking Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, a partnership of the ELCJHL and ELCA. Rev. Azar's position is financially supported by an ELCA grant to the ELCJHL. Her bridge-building ministry has included substantial time meeting with ELCA-related and other tour groups to talk about the ministry of the ELCJHL, and she has taken a leadership role in its youth and young adult ministries. As a board member of the Lutheran World Federation and the ACT Alliance, she represents the Indigenous Lutheran church of the MENA region in international Lutheran and ecumenical circles.

In 2022 the MENA Desk began an in-depth review of Peace Not Walls as a campaign of accompaniment, awareness-raising and advocacy. Peace Not Walls was founded in 2005, after the current ELCA strategy for engagement in Israel and Palestine was adopted. The purpose of the review is to update and strengthen our work to reflect the developing realities on the ground in the region. This process is in its final stages, and once it is complete, MENA will publish a report on the review.



Shadin Nassar (left), gender justice program coordinator for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, attends the international Women Deliver 2023 Conference (WD2023) in Kigali, Rwanda.

Building Resilient Communities

Building Resilient Communities meets human needs and enhances human dignity; works to overturn oppression and injustice; and engages collaboratively toward the flourishing of human community and creation, both internationally and domestically, through advocacy, development, and disaster response programming.

Stories connect people. When stories convey vulnerability and struggle, they elicit empathy and compassion. Such stories also convey dignity and hope. As Desmond Tutu once said, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.”

The Building Resilient Communities team would like to share with you stories from the people it serves. Our church is hopeful when people are hopeful. As a faith community, BRC connects through accompaniment, hearing stories of inequity and working toward justice alongside one another, with dignity and hope.

ELCA WORLD HUNGER

“I am a farmer,” says Sao Chen. “I grew up working in the fields and did not learn how to read and write. Living conditions have become harder because the weather has become unpredictable, and it affects crop production.”

Sao and his wife, Seng Kun, live in Chrak Sdach village in rural Cambodia. Sao attended a training session, offered by Life With Dignity (LWD), where

he learned practical tools and agricultural techniques for better farm management and adapting to climate change, and received seedling crops, nets, pipe and other agricultural resources. The training taught him how to select crops and use natural fertilizer; it explained more efficient techniques for growing long beans, cucumbers and bitter gourds, and for raising pigs, chickens and ducks.

Sao and his wife applied these techniques and supplies. Through patience and hard work they have adapted to the changing climate, and their agricultural production has increased. This means not only food for the family but additional income to pay off debts and meet other needs.

ELCA World Hunger supports projects that seek innovative yet practical solutions to the growing issues of climate change. Long-term partnerships and investments with local faith-based organizations such as LWD allow for continued research into and development of simple, localized ways to improve production for rural small farmers around the world.

Education and Networks

In July four leaders from across the ELCA joined ELCA World Hunger and the Lutheran Office for World Community as Lutheran World Federation delegates to the 2023 United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York City. The delegation heard from leaders around the world, connected with staff from ELCA Witness in Society, listened to stories of change and challenge, and considered how everyone can participate in working toward the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.



Left: Sao Chen and his wife, Seng Kun, of Chrak Sdach village in rural Cambodia. Right: Seng Kun collects long beans from the family farm.



A Lutheran delegation to the United Nations prays with staff of ELCA Witness in Society.

In evaluations 100% of participants agreed with the statements “The event was valuable to my own development as a leader in the church” and “I am eager to apply what I have learned to my current or future work.”

One attendee wrote, “Attending the event has challenged me to join those amplifying the voices of marginalized communities, youth, and other stakeholders affected by these issues in ensuring their perspectives are included in policy discussions. ... I hope ELCA World Hunger will continue this engagement by equipping leaders and emerging leaders with the tools to carry out advocacy work in deserving communities.”

Reflections from the participants have been shared on the ELCA World Hunger blog at blogs.elca.org/worldhunger.

In 2024 the education and networks team will prioritize offering these kinds of development opportunities to emerging and engaged leaders through ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response and the ELCA’s social ministry engagement, in collaboration with partners inside and outside the ELCA.

LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE

“I am reminded of how much pain people are carrying around and how much they need to share, and to have people bear witness to what they are going through. I will remember that.” This insight was shared by a participant in Lutheran Disaster Response’s (LDR) “Care for the Caregivers” workshop, held April 28 in Jacksonville, Ore. Among the attendees were disaster case managers and other frontline workers who had spent two years with survivors of wildfires in Oregon’s Rogue Valley. The workshop was organized in coordination with the Oregon Synod and the Jackson County Community Long-Term Recovery Group, and offered to participants free of charge.

This workshop is one example of how LDR approaches its work in a holistic, relational way, entering a community by invitation and responding to the needs it identifies itself. Incorporating a variety of activities – including breathing work, movement, writing and a ritual using water from the local watershed to release burdens – the workshop provided a safe opportunity for LDR to honor participants’ experiences and for participants to process the intense emotions of the past two years. In the words of one participant: “You blessed me with your presence, and I needed it more than I even knew.”

To read more about LDR’s innovative work, subscribe to the LDR blog at blogs.elca.org/disasterresponse. LDR’s biannual catalog of training and learning events is available upon request.



Lutheran Disaster Response’s “Care for the Caregivers” workshop, held April 28 in Jacksonville, Ore., asked participants, “What do you want to let go of, and what do you want to carry with you into the future?”



Participants in Lutheran Disaster Response’s “Care for the Caregivers” workshop in Jacksonville, Ore., listen to Sister Karie Hamilton, a session facilitator.

LDR Training Initiatives

Lutheran Disaster Response has reestablished recurring Community of Practice gatherings with domestic synods, congregations and social ministry organizations. These informal conversations allow members in the eastern, midwestern, southern and western United States to deepen relationships by sharing success stories and best practices and to support each other in overcoming challenges. The gatherings also allow LDR to introduce new staff and share funding opportunities, programmatic updates, and education and training opportunities. In August, LDR issued its first quarterly e-newsletter for the Community of Practice, designed to share what's happening at LDR, celebrate the work of the Community of Practice, and foster continuing conversation around disaster and humanitarian response issues.

AMMPARO

Fourteen young adults were selected for AMMPARO's first-ever young adult immersion trip, which took place April 25-30 in collaboration with ELCA Young Adult Ministry, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS) and the Border Servant Corps. The group was accompanied by Giovana Oaxaca, migration policy program director for AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). Participants stayed in New Mexico and had the opportunity to visit hospitality centers in Las Cruces, N.M., and El Paso, Texas. Participants also learned about current asylum policy and attended a Q&A session with officers of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in the El Paso region. Young adults will serve as LIRS ambassadors for one year and have been invited to reunite in September for an advocacy day with ELCA Witness in Society. Participants were encouraged to use this experience as they raise awareness in their congregations on how to accompany immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers.



Participants in AMMPARO's first-ever young adult immersion trip.

The AMMPARO network in the United States continues to grow as more churches become welcoming and sanctuary congregations. The network now includes 238 such congregations, including Lutheran, Episcopal and United Church of Christ churches. The AMMPARO team looks forward to even more growth as the ELCA's global migration strategy expands.

NEW COLLEAGUES

Heather Hardecopf, events and administration coordinator for Building Resilient Communities. A lifelong Lutheran, Hardecopf began volunteering at a Lutheran summer camp while in high school. She has continued to serve in many different volunteer and professional capacities over the years. She loves Jesus, her family, ballet and baking.

Raed AbuJries, program manager for education and communications, AMMPARO US Network. AbuJries is a blessed husband, father, Palestinian-American and global citizen with a passion for communication, filmmaking, travel, cooking and nonfiction.

Haemin Lee, director, World Hunger. Born and raised in Seoul, South Korea, Lee has always wanted to participate in God's mission by sharing the love of Jesus Christ. He earned a B.A. at Yonsei University, came to the United States in 2002 and earned advanced degrees from Harvard University (M.Div.) and Emory University (ThM, Ph.D.). Lee was ordained in 2007 as a minister of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and has served in various ministries. He has traveled across Africa, Asia and Latin America, overseeing numerous mission programs and teaching at Kumi University in Uganda. He met his wife, Nicole, when she was doing mission work in Tanzania. They have a 3-year-old daughter, Katie Hayoung.

Witness in Society

ELCA Witness in Society encompasses some of the work and ministry the ELCA does in the public sphere, advancing justice and shining a light for 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 17 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 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.

FEDERAL ACTIVITIES

At a Washington, D.C., reception to celebrate bipartisan commitment to the 2023 Farm Bill, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton introduced Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), chair of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. ELCA Witness in Society staff helped organize the June event with Bread for the World and other partners. In her remarks, the bishop noted, "Luther saw vividly entire systems that are necessary to deliver daily bread to sustain human bodies and support agricultural communities and steward natural resources needed for people throughout the world to thrive."

Connections with lawmakers, partners and networks are key in effective ELCA advocacy work and ministry. Yet the ELCA's advocacy in the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization process this spring was also significantly shaped by listening sessions that informed the church's priorities. Initial farm bill listening sessions attracted about 250 registrants, who brought a wide variety of experience to their conversations with ELCA advocacy staff and one another. Additional listening sessions were held with young adults particularly.

"It's not just a future thing, it's a now thing too," said one young adult from the Minneapolis Area Synod who organizes his congregation for environmental justice. "What's decided now will impact our futures."

Witness in Society staff were joined by rostered ministers and bishops, USDA employees, farmers, public school lunch volunteers, food pantry managers and many others from various parts of the country. Participants stressed the importance of SNAP benefits and expressed concern over food waste and food deserts. They were concerned with farms and their interface with conservation, rural community health, and subsidies and crop insurance. Participants also voiced concern over global food access, hunger, and issues for small family farms, and supported provisions to support marginalized communities and farmers. This input has been used to shape how the ELCA shares priorities for the policy.

Witness in Society will continue to deepen and broaden its engagement in an effort to strengthen the ELCA's advocacy actions.



Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and the Rev. Amy Reumann, senior director for Witness in Society, confer at a meeting with federal lawmakers and coalition partners to urge bipartisan farm bill reauthorization.

LUTHERAN STATE PUBLIC POLICY OFFICES

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) declares: “In response to God’s love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies in Pennsylvania that promote the common good.” As the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization process advanced in recent months, LAMPa was in a strong position to help promote common good for ELCA members and their neighbors in the commonwealth, and communities local and around the world. Pennsylvania has seven ELCA synods, and those synods are strongly connected to agriculture, so LAMPa’s coordination of synod bishops led to compelling and faithful letters and visits to influential members of the U.S. Congress.

Four ELCA bishops serve in the district of Congressman Glenn “GT” Thompson (PA-15), chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture. In their letter to Thompson the bishops cited the nearly 120,000 ELCA members in over 450 congregations who “are farmers, businesspeople, bankers, veterans, faithful volunteers and more. The Farm Bill touches us all, and we are disturbed by reports that the challenges faced by those of us who struggle with access to nutritious food may deepen by proposals being considered. ... Our church’s boldness in speaking in support of this legislation does not come from our own achievements but from our yearning. We reach together for the anticipated ‘peaceable kingdom,’ the day when each person is valued, and all are protected from harm. God who ‘executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry’ (Psalm 146:7) calls us to advocate for a world where all are fed.”

Lutheran state public policy offices are wonderful conduits for dynamic local ELCA ministries and members to deepen and extend what Lutherans can do together for the common good.

LUTHERAN OFFICE FOR WORLD COMMUNITY

The Lutheran delegation to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which met in July in New York, was organized with the Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC). The forum is a voluntary reporting mechanism for the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). “We are calling on all member states of the U.N. to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs so that no one is left behind!” LOWC encouraged. “We all have a role to play!” The SDGs are at the halfway point of their 15-year mandate, and at their current course they will not be achieved. Rapid acceleration is required to hit any target established by the goals.

“Looking ahead, we have work to do,” reflected a delegate on the ELCA World Hunger blog. “We have connections to make, voices to uplift, harms to heal, attitudes to align. During one of our devotions, our group reflected upon the feeling of smallness and inadequacy facing the challenges raised during the daily sessions. Even so, I am heartened by the enthusiasm and passion shared by so many here at this year’s High-Level Political Forum.”



Lutheran Office for World Community hosted a delegation that included congregation ministry leaders, the ELCA program director for environment and energy policy, and staff of ELCA World Hunger.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

“What I do in CSR is connect our social teachings to corporate behavior and shareholder relations,” says Kaari Reiersen, ELCA program director for corporate social responsibility, in the article “Credibility and Integrity” in *Living Lutheran* (July/August 2023). In recent months the ELCA, the Sustainable Investment Forum and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (of which the ELCA is a member) have been working to oppose movement against allowing investors to consider ESG (environmental, social, governance) factors in their investing. “This could be destructive to the climate and economy,” says Reiersen.

Because young people want so urgently to address the climate crisis, CSR has been working with the ELCA’s D.C.-based Hunger Advocacy Fellow and other Service and Justice colleagues to host a climate summit for young adults this fall. The summit is meant to motivate young people for faith-based advocacy by connecting ELCA social teaching (such as the newly adopted social message “Earth’s Climate Crisis”) to lived experience and convictions.

Reiersen argues, “This summit can help young adults organize their passions into action and understand and contribute to ways in which the ELCA addresses the climate crisis.”



Kaari Reiersen, ELCA program director for corporate social responsibility, visits Capitol Hill.

NEW COLLEAGUES

Christine Moffett is ELCA Witness in Society’s new program director for environment and energy policy. Prior to her new role, she served the team as a summer intern in 2022 and later as a contract employee. **Alex Parker** joined the Witness in Society staff this summer as a federal policy intern, setting up meetings with legislators, among many other duties.

ELCA advocacy continues to be enriched by young adult leaders through the ELCA Hunger Advocacy Fellowship. Three fellows conclude their service as summer draws to a close, but six begin the 2023-'24 cycle, including fellows placed with D.C.-based staff, the Lutheran Office for World Community in New York, and four state public policy offices: Arizona (Lutheran Advocacy Ministry Arizona), Wisconsin (Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin), Pennsylvania (Lutheran Advocacy in Penn.), and Washington (Faith Action Network).

In addition to welcoming these new teammates, ELCA Witness in Society moved its federal hub to a new location in July: 10 G Street NE, Suite 490, Washington, DC 20002.

Addendum

In the Future Church design, the International Leadership Development Program (“International Leaders”) and Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program reside in the Christian Community and Leadership home area. However, Service and Justice continues to work closely with these programs as they engage with its global and domestic partners to develop leadership across the ELCA.

INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The International Leaders Program accompanies the ELCA's global companion churches and institutions to equip leaders for mission and ministry in a global context. Through international scholarships and exchanges, the program provides transformative leadership development experiences to current and future leaders of the Lutheran communion worldwide.

Summer 2023 has brought an exciting new collaboration that is connecting ELCA-formed leaders around the globe in powerful ways. Together, the International Leaders Program, Fund for Leaders and Young Adults in Global Mission have created the first-ever ELCA Alumni Network, an online platform where alums of these three programs can network, engage in mentorship and further develop their leadership and careers.

Together, these three programs relate to thousands of alums around the world, many of whom occupy leadership positions throughout the global Lutheran communion. The Alumni Network allows these leaders to connect with others in similar work or ministry contexts to share ideas, invite collaboration and strengthen partnerships. Alums can connect by geographic region, professional affinity and interest area. Members can post job opportunities, ask for input on projects, serve as mentors and host virtual or in-person events. This, in turn, strengthens the local and global impact of the International Leaders Program, Fund for Leaders and Young Adults in Global Mission.

As the network grows, it becomes an even better resource for bishops, synod offices and other leaders and networks in the ELCA. Are you hosting a public event, either online or in person? Invite network members to participate! Does your synod have an internship opportunity? Promote it on the network! Are there stories of innovation or inspiration at your local congregation or ministry? Let the network amplify those stories!

For more information about how to connect with the International Leaders Program or the Alumni Network, contact Kaleb Sutherland at Kaleb.Sutherland@elca.org or Ann Hightower at Ann.Hightower@elca.org.



Church leaders from around the world are connecting in new ways through the ELCA Alumni Network. Photo: Glenda Maldonado

YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION

In August, Young Adults in Global Mission sent its second round of volunteers since it successfully relaunched in 2022. This season the program has sent 29 young adults to serve in one of six YAGM country programs: Argentina/Uruguay, Central Europe, Jerusalem and the West Bank, Mexico, Senegal, and the United Kingdom. Twenty-four volunteers have returned from their 2022-2023 year of service, and five will join the churchwide organization as short-term recruiters. This is an opportunity for a handful of returning YAGMs to travel around the country visiting congregations, camps and ELCA colleges and universities to share stories of their experiences in accompaniment and fellowship with our siblings in Christ abroad.



Young Adults in Global Mission serving in Jerusalem and the West Bank put their feet in the Sea of Galilee, joined by the youngest son of country coordinators Adam and Jordan Stubbendick-Miller.

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