

**STORIES FROM OUR CHURCH'S  
HUNGER AND DISASTER  
RESPONSE MINISTRIES**

Fall 2025  
ELCA.org/hunger | ELCA.org/disaster

# Lifelines





*"Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you  
will fulfill the law of Christ."  
—Galatians 6:2*

Dear friend,

Wherever this issue of "Lifelines" reaches you, I hope it renews your faith in our community, in what we can do together. Right now, so many messages descend on us daily to tell us that we are alone, that we are strangers to one another, and that a movement of cultural solipsism – or even cruelty – is winning over a culture of belonging and care.

When I look at these pages, I see the opposite.

I see people showing up for each other when they have lost their home, their mother, their country, their livelihood. Through your gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response, you are demonstrating what it is to love one another, to see the face of God in our neighbor – the one next door and the one recovering from disaster an ocean away.

I hope that, should I lose my country and need to flee, I will have the resilience to start over, as Roza did in Kyrgyzstan, or find a refuge as kind and life-affirming as Casa de la Misericordia, along the Arizona-Mexico border. Or that my children will always be surrounded by love as Angel is in Indonesia, that they will never be defined by their health status, and that their ability to be children remains, above all, sacred. I pray that no matter where our young ones are born, the dream of education is attainable – that the destiny of the next great physicist and pioneer to change our world for the better will not be pushed off course by poverty and inaction. It is my earnest desire that, should any of our families lose their home to disaster, we will find shelter amid our community and rebuild stronger and more resilient to weather the next storm.

Your generosity gives us every reason to hope, providing a flame to light the way forward for our communities in these tumultuous and sometimes gut-wrenching times. When we are pulled in by news stories that demand ever more attention, it is good to remember you and our partners are the grounding story of our community.

In Christ's service,

*Susannah Cunningham*

Susannah Cunningham  
Senior Director, Building Resilient Communities



Susannah  
Cunningham  
Senior Director,  
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John Eggen  
Senior Director,  
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## HOW TO GIVE

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ELCA.org/GiveWH  
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### Phone

800-638-3522

### Mail

Make checks payable to  
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"Lutheran Disaster Response"  
and mail to:

ELCA  
P.O. Box 1809  
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

## CONTACT US

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# LifeLines

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# Hands-on learning in Zimbabwe

**M**r. G. Mahwira, who teaches biology at a secondary school operated by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, knows that hands-on learning is the best way for kids to understand science. They need to be able to perform experiments, see chemical reactions and take three-dimensional measurements, up close. But for a long time, none of that was possible for his students.

Mr. Mahwira's school is located in a rural area where it is hard for everyone to access the educational resources they need. High school attendance rates for boys are especially low because they often need to work to support their families. The best tools Mr. Mahwira had to teach the students who made it into his classroom were a chalkboard and some dated videos. He knew those resources weren't good enough. His students were having trouble understanding the concepts he was trying to teach them through diagrams and video-recorded experiments. They were falling behind, and many were failing their final exams.

Things are different in Mr. Mahwira's classroom now, thanks to you. Your support for ELCA World Hunger helped provide the tools his students need to do their best learning. Mr. Mahwira and his colleagues now have chemical compounds for conducting experiments and calipers for taking precise measurements. "Life has been made easier with the availability of the instruments," he says. His students are becoming more engaged, grasping



*Students in Zimbabwe have the tools they need to do their best learning, thanks to you.*

concepts they couldn't understand when they were staring at scratchy writing on a chalkboard.

Your generosity has provided tools to help these students grow in other ways too. With your support, the school has been able to purchase uniforms and sports equipment including soccer balls, javelins and discuses. As the students play together, they build their confidence and teamwork skills. Your gifts have also helped fund the school's computer lab, which connects students to the wider world and prepares them for life after graduation.

A higher percentage of Mr. Mahwira's students are passing their final exams now, and he knows that the lessons they are learning will stick with them long after they leave school – which is more important. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger are preparing kids for success all over the world. You are making sure that students have all the tools they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond it.



When children can attend school, they can secure better opportunities for their futures. Your gifts support teachers and educational programs around the world, ensuring that kids can do their best learning and reach their full potential.

# Sharing God's bountiful harvest

In Iowa, your generosity is transforming lives through fresh, healthy produce. Cedar Rapids is a metropolitan area surrounded by small, rural communities. Though the city is known as a good place to raise a family, its government struggles to support the needs of a growing marginalized population that includes many immigrants. By one estimate, 11% of the

county's adult population is food-insecure and 40% of those individuals do not qualify for federal food assistance such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Feed Iowa First, which is supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, is a grassroots community of businesses, faith organizations, schools, farmers and volunteers that combats food insecurity by "growing food and farmers." The food production takes place on underutilized urban land in and around Cedar Rapids, including at a handful of ELCA congregations. At St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Feed Iowa First set up an urban farm with bitter gourds, cucumbers and sweet peppers. The garden at Faith Lutheran Church in Marion grows leeks – over 125 pounds just last summer.

A key part of this food production is to increase access to farmland for a diversity of farmers, including immigrants, so they can grow crops for their families and communities and build successful businesses. Darius Nupolu, a graduate of the farming program, grew up in a small village in Liberia with his father. "Farming was the only major source of income for our family," Darius shares. Income from their family farm provided for Darius' education, and over time, he became more interested in agriculture. When he completed high school, he says, "I told my dad that I was going to college to study agriculture so that I would



*With your support, Darius (right) began growing Liberian produce in Iowa. He now operates a thriving agricultural business.*



Feeding ministries provide immediate support to those in need. With community gardens and agricultural programs, communities grow food to nourish themselves and build stronger futures.





Feed Iowa First

return to help improve our farming system, ultimately improving the lives of our family members.” After college, he had the opportunity to work with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), where his interest and passion grew.

In 2015, Darius and his family moved to the U.S. However, not until they relocated to Cedar Rapids two years later was Darius able to begin farming. Through networking, he connected with Feed Iowa First and quickly saw a huge demand in the local African immigrant community for culturally relevant vegetables. Many traveled to Minnesota for such produce, a four-hour drive. With the help of Feed Iowa First and ELCA World Hunger, Darius began growing Liberian bitter ball, eggplant, okra, sweet potato vines, hot peppers, collards and cucumbers. He now operates a thriving business – Nupolu’s Emerging Farms LLC – which he continues to expand.



Feed Iowa First

In 2024, with your support, Feed Iowa First produced 43,655 pounds of fresh, chemical-free produce. More than 32,000 pounds were delivered to local food banks, pantries, community refrigerators, apartment complexes and clinics. Some of this produce is distributed through the organization’s “veggie van,” which gives vegetables to anyone who stops by – more than three thousand people last year alone. At one stop last year, a gentleman thanked volunteers for coming to his apartment complex in a part of town where it is difficult to find affordable, fresh, healthy food. “These are the only vegetables I see all week,” he said. For Feed Iowa First, the act of meeting neighbors where they are is essential when those neighbors face food insecurity, income disparities, health problems, mobility problems and other social disadvantages.



Feed Iowa First

**Through your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, you ensure that people have access to the food they need, which is critical to building vibrant communities where everyone can reach their full potential.**



# Rising confidence in Kyrgyzstan

**R**oza was born and raised in Uzbekistan and attended culinary school there with the hope of becoming a professional baker. After she graduated, she married a man from Kyrgyzstan, her parents' native land, and she and her husband decided to live and raise a family there. However, in a new country, surrounded by strangers, Roza lost confidence in her pastry-making skills. She limited herself to taking only small orders for baked goods, wondering how she would make ends meet as her four children grew.

That began to change when Roza got involved with the Women's Public Union Erayim project Taking Our Lives Into Our Hands, which is supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger. The project aims to improve the livelihoods of people living in remote areas of Kyrgyzstan where job opportunities are limited – especially young women, who can have a difficult time accessing education and vocational training. The program provides agricultural tools and training, community-building resources, support for women-owned businesses and more.

Roza joined the Tazagul "self-help" group, supported by the program and composed of women entrepreneurs who live on her street. She and her neighbors share learnings and motivation with one another, strengthening their businesses and building community. With the encouragement of the collective, Roza gained the self-assurance necessary to lead the group in establishing a confectionary business. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger helped the women purchase the

equipment they needed to get started, including an oven, a mixer and a deep fryer. Eventually the group were able to use their own money to purchase a refrigerator, a table and new electric wiring in their kitchen.

Every day, Roza and her colleagues sell cakes, pastries, gingerbread and other sweets to members of their community. All this is possible because of the support of donors such as you. "Without the help of the project and the Tazagul self-help group, I would not have been so successful," Roza says. "I am very grateful!"

As Roza's pastry orders get bigger, her confidence is returning too. "I am not afraid to plan and set big goals for myself," she says. Thanks to your generosity, when Roza thinks about the future now, she feels confidence in the growing strength of her community, her family and herself.

**"I am not afraid to plan and set big goals for myself."**

**—Roza**



You support programs, including education and vocational training, that help people facing hunger, homelessness and other challenges to access jobs, increase their earning potential and break the cycle of poverty for good.





*The writing under these apartments reads,  
"We are all one family."*

# Cruzando Fronteras

**C**ruzando Fronteras, which is supported by your generosity, is a multid denominational ministry that cares for migrants in the binational Sonora-Arizona region. Program staff and volunteers seek to provide a spiritual shelter for those passing through their community after being forcibly displaced from their homes.

The ministry partners with Casa de la Misericordia in Sonora, Mexico, a shelter for families, adolescents and some single adults with and without children, all seeking asylum in the United States. The residents who live there lead the community, organizing everything from skill-sharing to activities for kids to tortilla-making. Your support fosters this safe, vibrant space where everyone can share their gifts and feel at home.



*Kids at Casa de la Misericordia work on a craft project together.*



Around the world, millions of people have been displaced from their homes. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrants with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities), which walks with people as they find new communities and rebuild their lives.



# Rebuilding homes and lives *after Hurricane Michael*



Lutheran Disaster Response shares hope, healing and renewal with people in the United States and around the world whose lives have been disrupted by disasters. Your gifts support disaster survivors as they work to rebuild.



Through your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response, you remind families such as the Larrys and the Bowerses that they are not alone — not when disaster strikes, and not in the years they spend reclaiming their lives afterward.

Over the last few years, the Larry brothers — Dakarian, 25; Mario, 19; and Noble, 10 — have worked hard to stick together. In 2018, they lost their home in Florida to Hurricane Michael. When the storm made landfall, it destroyed over 1,100 homes and severely damaged over 1,800 more. It was especially devastating for the 17% of the county's population who, like the Larry brothers, live below the poverty line.

Then, last year, Dakarian, Mario and Noble's mother passed away. Dakarian and Mario were determined to raise Noble even as Mario continued his college classes and Dakarian continued to search for a safe home where they could all stay. More than five years after the storm hit, many community members were still living in damaged, dangerous properties.

Now, finally, your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response has helped put a brand-new roof over the heads of the Larry brothers. Dakarian connected with Lutheran Disaster Response partner Rebuild Bay County, which was founded to provide critical resources for the community in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael. Rebuild Bay County is composed of over 150 faith-based and nonprofit organizations, including the ELCA's Florida-Bahamas Synod. Through the synod and Rebuild Bay County, your gifts are at work rebuilding homes and lives in Florida.

Program staff are working with several families to secure homes that meet their unique needs. Some households need ramps or other features for accessibility. Others, such as the Bowers family, need space for kids. The Bowerses are a young couple who lost their home and their jobs in the aftermath of Hurricane Michael and have struggled

to find stable housing ever since. Until recently, they were living with their 10-year-old son in a rundown camper that lacked a working shower, refrigerator or stove. Your gifts helped Rebuild Bay County to purchase a lot and a three-bedroom mobile home for them.

The Larry brothers were thrilled to move into one of the program's newest homes. It was dedicated a couple months ago, and the Larry brothers were present alongside their grandmother. She spoke passionately about what a blessing this home would be to their family. You are walking alongside the Larrys, the Bowerses and others like them, sharing God's redeeming grace, as they rebuild their homes and rediscover hope for the future.

**Read more stories of your impact through Lutheran Disaster Response in the latest issue of "Thrive"!**

The stories in the 2025 issue of "Thrive" show the holistic approach of Lutheran Disaster Response. As we accompany individuals around the world, from North Carolina to Ukraine, your support for Lutheran Disaster Response demonstrates the value of our relationships and the impact of our long-term commitment.



# Lifelines

Fall 2025

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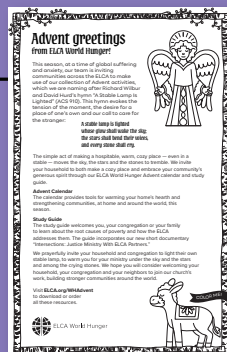
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## NEW ADVENT RESOURCES FROM ELCA WORLD HUNGER!

This Advent, ELCA World Hunger invites you to prepare room in your home and hearth before going into the world to act on behalf of your neighbors. **"A stable lamp is lighted** whose glow shall wake the sky; the stars shall bend their voices, and every stone shall cry" (ACS 910).



ADVENT  
BULLETIN INSERT



ADVENT  
STUDY GUIDE



2025 ADVENT  
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