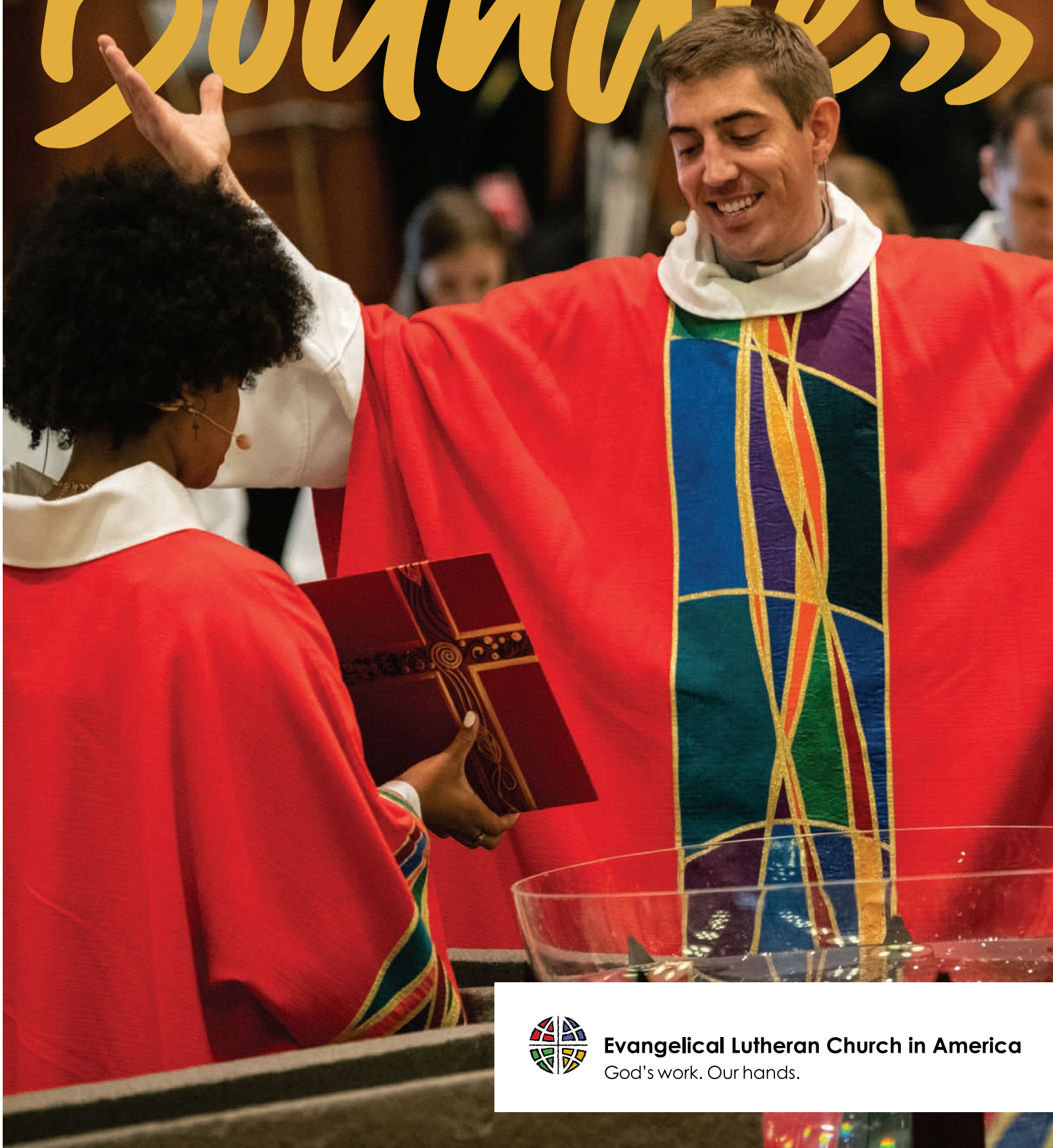


**STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE**

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Summer 2021

Boundless



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

On the cover: Pastor Ben Hogue, an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient, leads worship at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. Learn more about Pastor Ben on page 12.

Dear friends in Christ,

Let us acknowledge the Lord;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As surely as the sun rises, he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth
(Hosea 6:3).

The last couple years have been defined by turmoil, uncertainty and grief. Even now, as more and more of our world opens up, many are still struggling. Yet we also see heartening moments of joy as grandparents embrace their grandchildren again or bright summer blooms adorn our homes.

As Christians, we know that God is with us during the harsh winters as well as the warm summers. This season is a sign that we can rejoice in hope for the future and care for our neighbors in need.

When we minister to those who are most marginalized, we are truly doing God's work. In this issue of *Boundless* you will find stories of the ELCA doing that work with the support of your gifts. Together, we are celebrating our many vibrant ministries, which create space for members to live authentically, support communities in the wake of disaster and invest in promising new church leaders.

Whether you share these stories with family and friends at a backyard barbecue, with neighbors at a Sunday church service or with colleagues at your next Zoom gathering, let them be glimpses of sunny hope for your community — a testament to our church at its best.

You make this ministry possible. Thank you for your steadfast faith.

Christ's peace be with you,



KATHY SUMMERS
Executive, Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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A Place to Call Home

In January 2019, the Rev. Maria Rojas was in the middle of her internship at Unity Lutheran Church in Berwyn, Ill. The congregation had been approached by two men who wanted to marry in the church but spoke only Spanish and wanted a wedding in that language.

Originally from Celaya, in the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, Rev. Maria immigrated to Chicago with her family and a passion for helping others. Working in social services for many years, she embraced the value of *coraje de salir adelante*, which loosely translates as “the courage to get ahead.” The seeds of Maria’s call to ministry took root as she lived out her faith, helping people she met at the park in her neighborhood. She later attended Wartburg Theological Seminary through the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries program.

Rev. Maria agreed to perform the wedding for the two men and soon afterward performed another wedding in Spanish for two women. Sensing a spiritual need, she talked with the couples and discovered that they had trouble finding a church community where they could be accepted for who they are but also speak their native language.

“After we met for a few times,” she recalls, “one of these ladies stood up, and she said, ‘I would really like to have a church where I can come and I can be who I am, I can feel free, and that many people like us [the Latinx LGBTQIA+ community] can come and worship God.’ So I thought, God is telling us already, right here in front of us, what needs to be done in this community.” In August 2019 the budding ministry, Misión Luterana Unidad, gathered in a member’s home for its first service, with 15 people.

“Pastor Julie [Boleyn] and I walked in, and we invited them to come to the table,” says Maria. “And one of them had felt that she had never been invited to the table. She cried, and then she asked me, ‘Are you sure that I can take this bread?’ And I said, ‘Yes, you can take this bread.’ She cried, she took the bread, and that, to me, was amazing, how much they needed to ... feel that God is with them.”

After a few months of worshiping in homes, Unidad moved its services into Unity Lutheran’s sanctuary. Now it supports a wide range of programs for its members, including Spanish and English classes and a small group called Testimonia en Luz (“Testimony in Light”), which was created during the pandemic as a place for members to share stories from their past trauma and help each other heal.

Before the pandemic, members of Unidad and Unity Lutheran Church hosted lively Latin American celebrations. The congregation has created a Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) *ofrenda* (an altar to honor the dead), celebrated Las Posadas (which commemorates Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem), held a service for the Virgin of Guadalupe and performed a bilingual baptism service.

Before the pandemic, Misión Luterana Unidad hosted a lively Day of the Dead celebration. Pictured is the *ofrenda*, an altar to honor friends and relatives who have died.



“This is going to be their congregation, this is going to be their church, this is going to be their home.”

—Rev. Maria Rojas, mission developer, Unidad, Berwyn, Ill.

“We made tamales together, the English-speaking community and Spanish-speaking community together, and many people translated — it was so beautiful,”

Rev. Maria says. “One person from Guatemala and one person from Mexico decided to teach how to make tamales to everybody else. We made dozens and dozens of tamales, and we shared so many stories. It was a beautiful moment of sharing the different cultures, different groups and communities together.”

This is Unidad at its core — celebrating the diversity of its community. It’s about who people are in their own distinct spaces, and who they are when they join together to make something new.

“When we’re inviting a new group, regardless of their ethnicity or regardless of their background, we have to [have an] open mind and open heart that things are going to change, that things are going to transform,” Rev. Maria says. “When you bring somebody new, a new group or a new idea or new church, we need to acknowledge that these are people that have their own ideas, that have their own way of seeing things, that they have their own power, their own love, and if they put what they have in with what we have, we [will] be creating something very new.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many members of the community were impacted, and Rev. Maria took on new roles, finding innovative ways to offer spiritual support to her church.

One family lost its father, and Rev. Maria offered pastoral care over the phone. The mother of another congregant passed away in Mexico, and because the daughter couldn’t travel for

the funeral, Rev. Maria did a memorial over the phone for her and her wife. Many members of Unidad have lost jobs or were impacted financially by the pandemic. Rev. Maria’s past social work experience empowered her to connect congregants to various social services, including employment services, food banks and food drives, and winter-clothing banks for children. And, like most congregations, Unidad navigated the challenge of new technology, gathering on Zoom, WhatsApp and Facebook Live.

After graduating from Wartburg Seminary, Rev. Maria was called by the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Council as mission developer of Unidad Latinx Mission in Berwyn, Ill. And, on April 17, 2021, she was ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament by Bishop Yehiel Curry. Mission developers are unique church leaders with the skills and vocation required to walk alongside communities as they build new spiritual homes. Your generosity to the ELCA makes new congregations possible by supporting mission developers such as Rev. Maria through ongoing grants.

“Many times, people can have their own idea of what they want to create,” Rev. Maria says. “But I think that the people already know what they need and what they want. Mission developers need to go to those communities and just observe, learn and listen [to] the people. ... It’s not the developer doing everything. ... It’s also to give the power to the people for them to do what they feel needs to be done. Because, at the end of the day, this is going to be their congregation, this is going to be their church, this is going to be their home.”



ELCA missionary Linda Jacobson (right, standing) and women from the Widow's Might craft project (left) in Arusha, Tanzania, meet with visitors.



A Tanzanian Way of Life



Mark and Linda Jacobson have served as ELCA missionaries for 38 years.



Mark and Linda's powerful story is featured in a new ELCA documentary called *Kuambatana (Accompaniment)*: The Ministry of Mark and Linda Jacobson, which is available to watch now at ELCA.org/Kuambatana.

“I have spent more of my life in Tanzania than anywhere else, and it's my home,” says Linda Jacobson.

Linda grew up in Tennessee, the daughter of a Presbyterian pastor, and was deeply interested in mission work from a young age. Mark Jacobson grew up in Stillwater, Minn., and describes a similar calling: “From an early age, probably in high school, I had a sense of responsibility to give back to other people, to serve people in the name of Jesus.”

Now, because of the support of the church community, including your gifts, Mark and Linda continue as missionaries in Tanzania and South Sudan. They are the ELCA's longest-serving active missionaries.

In Tanzania, the church operates many hospitals and medical centers. When Mark and Linda first arrived in Arusha, the North Central Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania had several small, rural pharmacies. Mark's role was to develop a team of community health care workers and share ideas of primary care, basic hygiene, sanitation, water control and nutrition in surrounding communities. After a while, Mark and the other health care workers realized that preventative care could do only so much, and they began work to expand Selian Lutheran care center into a hospital.

As Mark was working in community health, Linda was grateful to have the opportunity to care for their children, work at the church and be a teacher.

“What really led to a big part of my service was my neighbors,” Linda says. “The women who were around me came and said, ‘We need work.’” So she worked alongside them to begin the Widow's Might craft project, which lifts up women who have lost their husbands and have had their property and livelihood taken away from them. The project allows them to use their skills of creating weavings, jewelry and art so they can become economically independent and thrive in the community.

“Mark and Linda Jacobson are people who were totally involved in the community,” says the Rev. Solomon Jacob Massangwa, bishop of the North Central Diocese. “For example, Linda has helped many women around where they lived. She did not separate herself but lived in the midst of them and [has] been with them through everything they were experiencing.”

Meanwhile, Mark's work was changing. It took about 10 years for Selian Lutheran Hospital to build up the infrastructure to be able to do surgery. Then, as the AIDS epidemic hit, his team developed a hospice and palliative care program. This program was created to prevent people from dying in pain and suffering,

without the stigma and broken relationships that too often came alongside an AIDS diagnosis. The program brought together their spiritual gifts and the physical care needed to work with such patients.

“Mark and Linda really have taken medicine in a holistic approach, the way the church in Tanzania has been doing for years,” says Rahel Mwitula Williams, ELCA director for Global Mission funding. “He ... adapted a Tanzanian way, African way, of life in treating a person with love and respect and dignity.”

In recent years, Mark and Linda have been formative in leading other significant projects. Mark helped oversee the ambitious construction of the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre, which is now one of the most well-respected and highest-quality hospitals in Tanzania. They have also been highly involved in the Reconciliation Lutheran Center, which provides health care, spiritual care and educational opportunities in Juba, South Sudan, and the Plaster House, a rehabilitation center in Arusha, Tanzania, for children recovering from major surgeries and injuries.

“You give Mark an idea and he knows how to turn that idea into a reality,” says Dr. Paul Kisanga, executive director of the Arusha Lutheran Medical Centre.

“The two things that make me feel most proud about the ministry that I carried on are [first], the fact that we built a high-quality, high-reputation hospital with Tanzanians responsible for what has happened there,” Mark says. **“And then, related to that, is just the pride I have with having stepped away from the leadership of the hospital to see it, under my colleagues who have succeeded me, growing and expanding into new directions.”**

Your generous gifts to the ELCA make this kind of transformative, holistic work with our companion churches possible. Without your commitment and support, Linda and Mark's mission work would be much more difficult.

“I never saw myself as being the answer, but the fact that it was a relationship,” Linda says. “That we were in accompaniment, and that we worked together, and we figure out things together.”

“Mark and Linda really have taken medicine in a holistic approach, the way the church in Tanzania has been doing for years. He ... adapted a Tanzanian way, African way, of life in treating a person with love and respect and dignity.”



Your Gifts in Action:

2020 IN REVIEW

The Fund for Leaders provided over
\$2.8 million
 in scholarship assistance
 to **297 ELCA seminary students**
 during the 2020-2021 academic year.



Last year ELCA World Hunger awarded
232 global grants to partners
 in **60 countries** and
480 domestic grants to partners
 in **63 ELCA synods** in the United States and Caribbean.

Sok Khy participates in agricultural cooperatives as part of the Life With Dignity project in Cambodia. She has benefited from training in climate-change-resilient agriculture techniques.

Since the program began, **International Women Leaders** has awarded
 scholarships to **34 women**, **19** of whom have graduated so far.



Rev. Chandran Paul Martin, regional representative, Asia and the Pacific.

More than **110 ELCA missionary households**
 walk alongside communities in **45 countries** around the world.

Lutheran Disaster Response was
 at work in **47 countries**
 around the world and
51 states and territories
 in the United States and the Caribbean,
 through a combination of COVID-19
 response and other disaster relief.



Members at a baptismal service at the Dwelling, a ministry for those experiencing homelessness. The Dwelling is a new-start ministry in North Carolina that began in March 2020.

New ELCA congregations are taking shape
 throughout the United States and the Caribbean,
 and in nearly every synod. Out of
380 "new starts" nationwide,
28 were approved last year.
 Of these, nearly **75%** are in
ethnically diverse communities,
 in lower-income neighborhoods and urban
 settings, and/or among LGBTQIA+ and
 young-adult communities.

The Confidence to Lead

For the Rev. Ben Hogue, an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship was important not just financially but also because it instilled self-belief.

“I have always been so grateful for the incredible gift of that scholarship,” says Ben, associate pastor of Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Washington, D.C. “It just felt like a community was investing in me as a leader in the church – that’s what gave me the boost of confidence I think I needed.”

Pastor Ben, whose ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship was made possible by the Portico Benefit Services Seminary Scholarship Endowment Fund, graduated from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif., in 2018 and then accepted a call from Reformation, where he had served a senior-year internship.

For Pastor Ben, serving at Reformation – which is located in the shadow of the Supreme Court, a block and a half from the U.S. Capitol – is part of a professional and spiritual journey that began at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in his hometown of Grand Junction, Colo.

“I grew up in a wonderful congregation that shaped my faith and really allowed me to thrive,” he says. “I always felt like I had gifts to give, and at Shepherd of the Valley they were appreciated and acknowledged at any age.”

Hogue graduated in 2010 from California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks with a degree in public relations and marketing and then spent three years in Ukraine with the Peace Corps, teaching English and taking on multiple leadership roles.

“I loved teaching a lot, but I wanted more,” he says. “I wanted to do organizing, I wanted to walk alongside a community of people, I wanted a faith component.”

After his time in the Peace Corps, Hogue took a year off. Living in Denver, he met his fiancé, Marshall Monda, and in 2014 he enrolled at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, where he studied for three years prior to his internship and permanent position at Reformation.



“It was supposed to be a one-year gig, but the Spirit had different plans,” Pastor Ben says. “It’s a gift to be here, serving incredible people on the Hill, being able to walk with them in their everyday lives, lives that people don’t often think about when they think about Washington, D.C.”

When people think of Washington, D.C., lately, they may think of the violence on Jan. 6. Pastor Ben, whose home is less than two blocks from the Capitol, says the day reminded him that, though his call is to proclaim the gospel to the nation and the neighborhood, in that moment he needed to minister to the friends and acquaintances “who call this place home.”

“The world was turned to the Capitol, and I was looking at my neighborhood,” he says. “My job and honor and privilege was to focus on my people.”

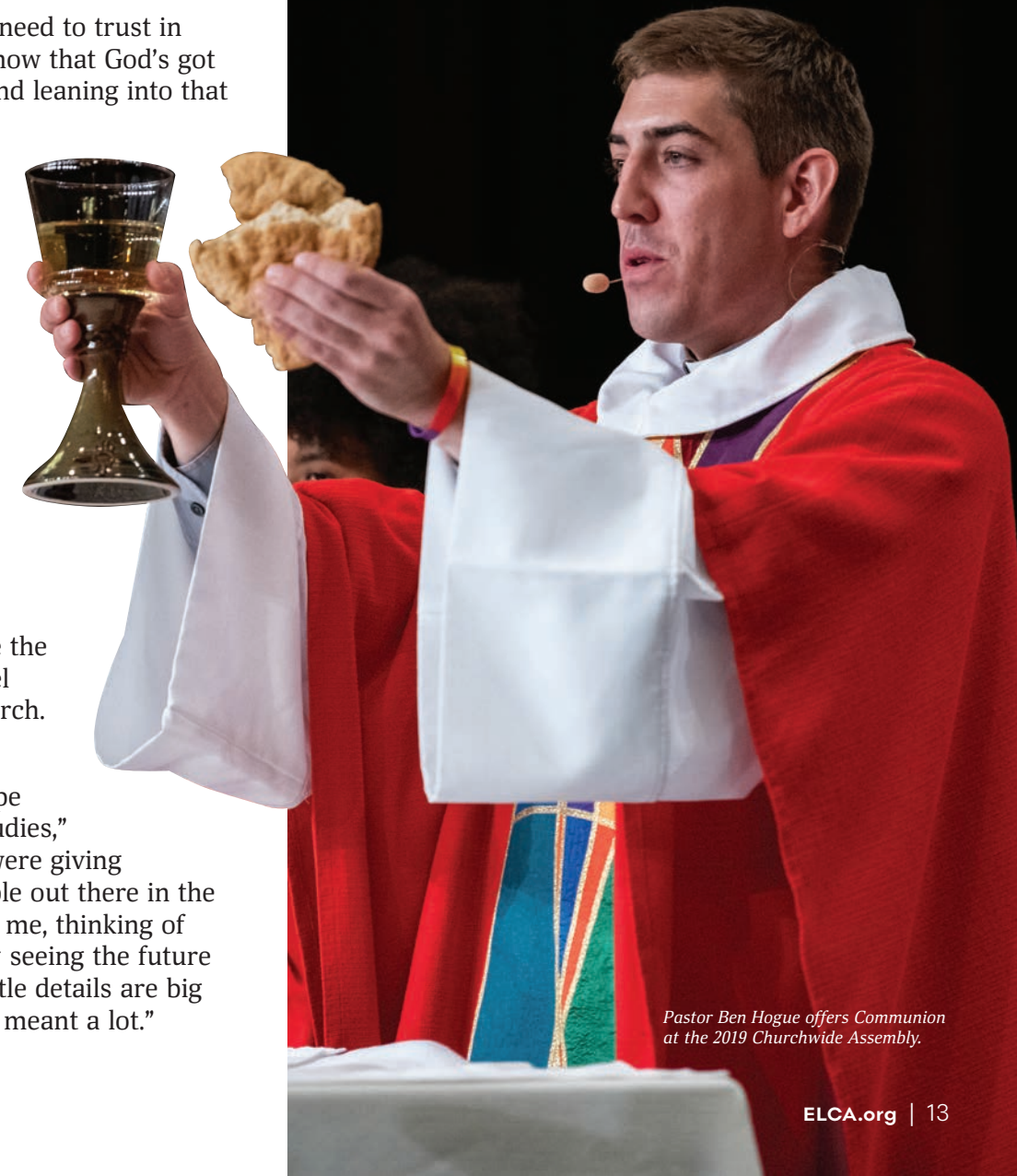
A primary message: “We just need to trust in Christ’s love and grace and know that God’s got us. God will bless the mess, and leaning into that a little bit is just fine.” So too, he adds, is embracing the lessons learned during the ongoing tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I certainly wouldn’t call the pandemic a blessing, but it did open us to new opportunities and allow us to reevaluate what is church,” he says. “We have figured out how to do church in new and dynamic ways, ways that will carry us into the future.”

Pastor Ben continues to value the scholarship that helped propel him into his role with the church.

“The Fund for Leaders community really helped shape the start of my theological studies,” he says. “Portico employees were giving toward that scholarship. People out there in the wider ELCA were investing in me, thinking of me, praying for me and really seeing the future of the church in me. Those little details are big ones for me that have always meant a lot.”

“It just felt like a community was investing in me as a leader in the church — that’s what gave me the boost of confidence I think I needed.”



Pastor Ben Hogue offers Communion at the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.

From Ashes

to New Life

Chief Plews (center) and the volunteer firefighters of the Upper McKenzie Rural Protection District.

Last fall, among the many crises occurring across the country, the American West experienced unprecedented wildfires. Always at the ready, Lutheran Disaster Response worked with synods and Lutheran social service agencies across California, Colorado and Oregon to determine the best ways to respond, addressing immediate needs such as food and providing emotional and spiritual care for those who had been traumatized. Your gifts helped make this possible.

In Oregon's McKenzie River Valley, the Holiday Farm Fire burned a residential area approximately 35 miles long. Prolonged fire and smoke, driven by straight-line winds, destroyed 450 homes and 50 businesses and faith organizations, displacing many residents. The fire devastated a broad swath of the valley, leaving vast ecological damage and emotionally scarring residents.

When the fire ignited in early September, Fire Chief Rainbow Plews and her crew of volunteer firefighters moved through the

town, evacuating residents and fighting the blaze. Lives were saved, but many homes were not. Chief Plews and many of the firefighters were among those who lost their homes.

Following the fires, Chief Plews invited Oregon Synod Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar and local pastors to visit the burned area.

The bishop described "chimney after chimney along a long stretch of once-gorgeous riverside highway, now surrounded by nothing but blackened ash, ghosts of trees, skeletal cars. The remnants of lives. Small town after small town with little to show but a few remaining homes, strangely untouched, and half-melted plastic signs for a grocery store, a laundromat, a diner."

Chief Plews recounted to her the results of the fires – people living in tents and cheap sheds with no internet and no heat during the winter. How were residents expected to work and attend school while rebuilding their lives during a pandemic?

Some of Oregon's own faith leaders were impacted. John Core responds to local disasters as a volunteer with the Oregon Synod Disaster Preparedness Team. He and his wife Christine, a pastor, had just moved into the home in which they planned to retire and were finishing a major remodeling of the property when fires began to spread in their area. There was a knock at their door, and they were told to evacuate immediately. They left with the clothes on their backs, their dog and a handful of sentimental items such as Pastor Christine's grandmother's locket and wedding rings.

John says that, as hard as it was to lose their home, their retirement dream and their family vacation spot, it was even more devastating to lose photo albums, family heirlooms and other irreplaceable items.

"I have no more photos of my grandparents," said John. "We had some family keepsakes that went back to the Civil War. Christine had a collection of Santas which she had been adding to for years. The grandchildren loved them. There is no way to describe such losses, knowing that our experience is multiplied many times over within the community."

Insurance covered some of the Cores' more tangible losses, but other residents of the McKenzie Bridge area were not so fortunate. This is where Lutheran Disaster Response comes in. To respond to the varying needs of the community, the Oregon Synod disaster team and the Lane County Long-Term Recovery group developed a grassroots, community-based collaborative effort to identify household needs and generate resources to address them.

To meet the emotional needs of young people, the Oregon Synod is hosting two sessions of Camp Noah, a program designed to support children impacted by disasters. These sessions will provide children with a space to process trauma and build resiliency skills and will also offer traditional camp activities such as swimming, archery and games. The program is being held at Camp Lutherwood, which is affiliated with the ELCA's Lutheran Outdoor Ministries network. As part of the experience, children will receive personal care kits assembled by a nearby congregation.

Lutheran Disaster Response and the Oregon Synod also assisted the fire department by purchasing generators for some of the volunteers and for a community tool-lending program.

"Even before properties have electricity, people are able to work on projects and run their RVs with the generators," said Chief Plews. "They are something necessary that the volunteers and community members could not afford to replace or purchase for use, no matter how necessary. Most of the volunteer firefighters were not insured and so are struggling to replace items and living necessities."

In addition to partnering with the Oregon Synod, Lutheran Disaster Response is supporting Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains in providing disaster case management services for wildfire survivors in Colorado, and it continues to accompany Lutheran Social Services of Northern California and Lutheran Social Services of Southern California as they support long-term recovery following the previous wildfire seasons.

Your generous gifts have shown people impacted by these disasters that you care for them, whether through long-term recovery projects or something as simple as a generator.

"We look forward to homes being rebuilt and people coming back to the valley and to Blue River, the town that was completely destroyed," said Chief Plews. "The generators are more than just a tool – they are a symbol of life returning to the valley."



The Cores' home prior to the fire.

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