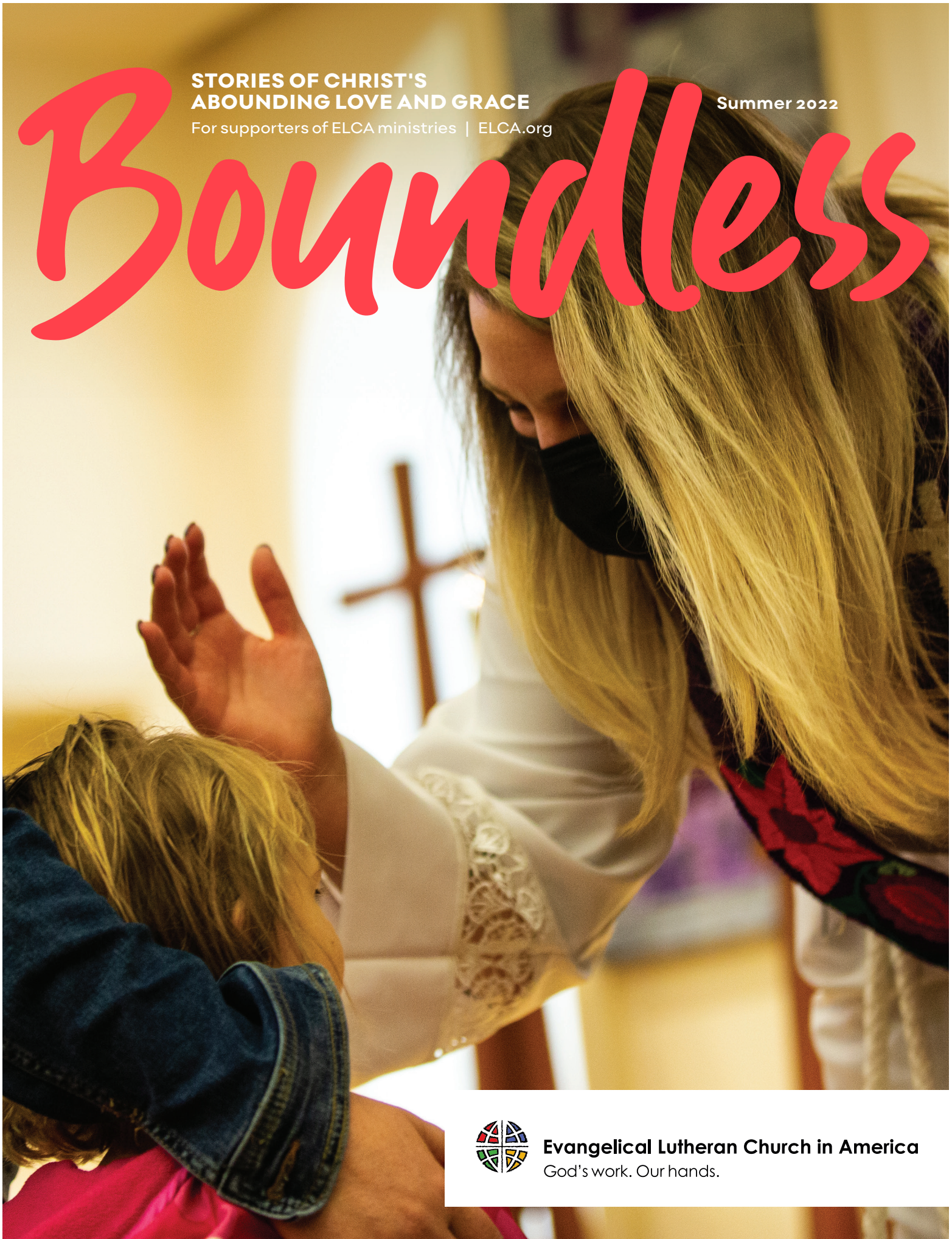


STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

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Summer 2022

Boundless



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

Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long. —Psalm 25:4-5

Dear friends in Christ,

I often feel that the world is waiting for God. Like the psalmist, we search for direction, for truth, and these can feel elusive. We are surrounded by stories of sadness, violence and destruction. We witness neighbors with unequal access to food, education and medical support. With all this going on around us, we can easily feel overwhelmed and perpetually uncertain. *For you I wait all day long.*

Yet hope is flourishing because of you. The ELCA churchwide organization continues to be active and generous, thanks to your gifts. Your support enables our church to lean into those places and spaces where hope can thrive.

In this issue of "Boundless" you will read about some of those places and see the ways you help share the love of Christ with our neighbors near and far. As you will learn, you have provided welcome for Ukrainian refugees, empowered talented and passionate ministers across the ELCA, strengthened a global community of women leaders and shown God's grace to people in El Salvador who had never experienced it before. You make all this possible, and so much more.

I hope these stories help you see what a difference you make in the lives of your siblings in Christ. In a world that sometimes seems to be waiting for God, you are at work right here and right now, actively sharing God's amazing grace. Thank you for equipping this church to make Christ's presence known.



With gratitude,

Rachel Wind

RACHEL WIND

Executive for Philanthropy
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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On the cover: Kelsey Kresse, an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient, currently serves as associate pastor at Abiding Presence Lutheran church in Burke, Va. Learn more about the 25th anniversary of ELCA Fund for Leaders on page 8.

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A Place of Welcome for Refugees

Pastor Márta Bolba (right) helped build Mandák House into a community center in Budapest, Hungary.

Mandák House in Budapest, Hungary, is more than just a church building. It houses a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (ELCH), but it also serves as a community center and place of welcome. The people of Mandák House live out the gospel through their actions.

Historically, the Józsefváros district, where Mandák House is located, has been home to a large Roma population. Roma people make up the largest ethnic minority in Europe, and systemic discrimination against them and other minorities has contributed to a lack of development in the district. Despite recent investment in the area, Józsefváros still has a reputation of being unsafe and impoverished. Mandák serves vulnerable populations, including members of the Roma community, throughout the district.

Pastor Márta Bolba has helped build Mandák House into what it is today. When she arrived in 2012, she began reaching out to other local nonprofit organizations in Budapest, looking for ways they could collaborate to holistically

support people in need and address social issues. The relationships she formed are vital to her community work in Józsefváros – which, though gentrifying, is still one of the poorer districts in Budapest.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sparked a major humanitarian and refugee crisis. Millions of people left Ukraine for bordering countries such as Hungary. In 2015, Mandák House faced a similar situation with an influx of Syrian refugees. This experience helped Pastor Márta mobilize quickly when the first refugees from Ukraine arrived.

Mandák House has become a hub for new refugees in Budapest. Almost 600 volunteers, working in shifts, collect, sort and distribute supplies, including food packages, clothing, hygiene kits and bedding, in the church garden. But Mandák House is more than just a distribution center; it's a place for refugees to rest and connect with others. The garden bustles with activity – tables being piled high with donations, people talking and refugee children playing together. "It's not a transactional model but a relational one," says Pastor Márta.

“This humanitarian response connects us. These kinds of boundaries fall, and we are helping each other.”



At the beginning of the war, many refugees were just passing through Budapest, so Mandák House provided supplies that families could take as they moved on. Now Pastor Márta observes more people staying in the city, some in shelters, some with family and others with residents who welcome them into their homes. The refugees need a different kind of support now, beyond immediate relief supplies. The staff and volunteers at Mandák House, also home to the ELCH's Integration Services Center, help refugees enroll their children in school, find jobs, access the health care system and join the community.

Pastor Márta doubts that a response of this magnitude would be possible without support from the community and other nonprofit organizations in Budapest. Different religious denominations and groups came together to support refugees in need. “This humanitarian response connects us,” says Pastor Márta. “These kinds of boundaries fall, and we are helping each other.”

With support from Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), Mandák House has expanded its capacity to serve refugees through psychosocial care, language interpretation, legal services and other assistance. It has also hired coordinators to manage the hundreds of volunteers present every day.

Working with Lutheran World Federation, ACT Alliance and Church World Service, LDR is responding to the crisis in Eastern Europe by supporting companion churches in Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. These partners and companion churches are doing work similar to what happens at Mandák House – distributing supplies to refugees, welcoming them into homes and churches, and preaching the gospel through action. Your gifts to LDR and the ELCA touch the lives of refugees throughout Eastern Europe and around the world.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response are creating safe, welcoming spaces for Ukrainian refugees. Through organizations such as Mandák House, you are helping to provide immediate relief, counseling, translation services, legal assistance and more.

Your gifts to the ELCA Fund for Leaders have enabled leaders such as Tawanda Murinda to follow his call to rostered ministry.

Empowered to Follow God's Call



In a typically brutal winter night in Grand Forks, N.D., about a dozen people in their 20s and 30s from ELCA churches and ministries across the city brave the freezing wind and icy sidewalks to come together for “God Talk on Tap.” This casual conversation about God and theology takes place at a local brewery on Thursday evenings. Participants sit around two long tables in a small downstairs room with low ceilings and cheerful paintings on the walls. Tonight, the Rev. Tawanda Murinda, associate pastor of Sharon Lutheran

Church, will lead the conversation. When everyone is settled, he opens with a personal story. He concludes by asking the group some open-ended questions for discussion, then he joins one of the tables. As he sits, conversations begin to spark around the room.

This gathering of young adults represents just one of the many ways your gifts to the ELCA Fund for Leaders impact communities across the country. Two of the organizers of “God Talk on Tap” – Pastor Tawanda and Deacon Shera Nesheim – attended seminary with the help of

ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarships. From 2019 to June 2022, Shera served as campus minister for Christus Rex, the ELCA Lutheran campus ministry at University of North Dakota, and tonight she has brought students with her to participate in the discussion. The ELCA Fund for Leaders has made a difference in both Shera and Tawanda's lives, but without it, Tawanda's leadership journey wouldn't have even begun.

Tawanda grew up in Harare, Zimbabwe, and came to the United States for college, where he was introduced to the ELCA through its campus ministry. After earning his bachelor's degree, he began to study engineering. Tawanda felt called toward ministry and began the application process for Wartburg Theological Seminary, but when he thought seriously about how much a seminary education would cost, he abandoned his application. To his surprise, the Wartburg admissions team reached out to him anyway with news that financial assistance was available from the ELCA Fund for Leaders. Tawanda applied and was awarded a full scholarship.

Thanks to donors such as you who support the fund, Tawanda was able to take the next steps toward rostered ministry. "I'll be honest," Tawanda says. "Without the Fund for Leaders, I would not have become a pastor. That allowed me to do the thing that I thought God was calling me to and to do something that I love."

Tawanda began his newest call at Sharon Lutheran in February, though he has lived in the area for several years and served his community in many ways beyond his congregational work. In 2020, community leaders raised money to install a memorial marker for Charles Thurber, a Black man lynched by a white mob in Grand Forks in 1882. As part of the installation, Tawanda led an interfaith memorial service for Thurber, giving community members space to acknowledge violence and injustice together. Grand Forks is Tawanda's home now, and he feels responsible for making it more welcoming for everyone.

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Pastor Tawanda Murinda leads an Ash Wednesday service at Sharon Lutheran church.

On this night, "God Talk on Tap" is scheduled to end at 8 p.m. Tawanda formally concludes it then, but people are slow to pull their coats on. They draw out their goodbyes, seeming reluctant to go their separate ways in the cold. By empowering leaders like Tawanda, gifts to ELCA Fund for Leaders create warm spaces such as these, where passionate leaders can foster discussion, build community and strengthen the future of our church.



Young adults at "God Talk on Tap."



25 years

of ELCA Fund for Leaders

An Anniversary Celebration

At the 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, leaders of our church presented a case for establishing what we now know as the ELCA Fund for Leaders (FFL). They challenged the church to make a robust commitment to theological education for its future leaders. In 2000, the Fund for Leaders awarded its first eight scholarships. Now, as FFL celebrates its 25th anniversary, it supports over 300 candidates for ministry with over \$3.2 million in scholarships. Your gifts have empowered over 1,100 gifted leaders to become pastors, deacons, chaplains, mission developers and more.

Together, we are working toward our ultimate goal: a future in which all rostered ministers are free from financial debt and able to serve wherever they are called.



Deacon Shera Nesheim (far left), 2007 FFL scholarship recipient, helps lead the ELCA campus ministry at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, N.D.



The Rev. Meredith Lovell Keseley (right), 2002 FFL scholarship recipient, at Abiding Presence Lutheran Church in Burke, Va.



Wanda Frenchman (left), 2021 FFL scholarship recipient, with her mother, the Rev. Mary Louise Frenchman.

"When we support leaders financially, when we launch them into their first call debt-free, when we put the weight of the whole church behind them and we say,

'you are called'

— we are setting people up for success."

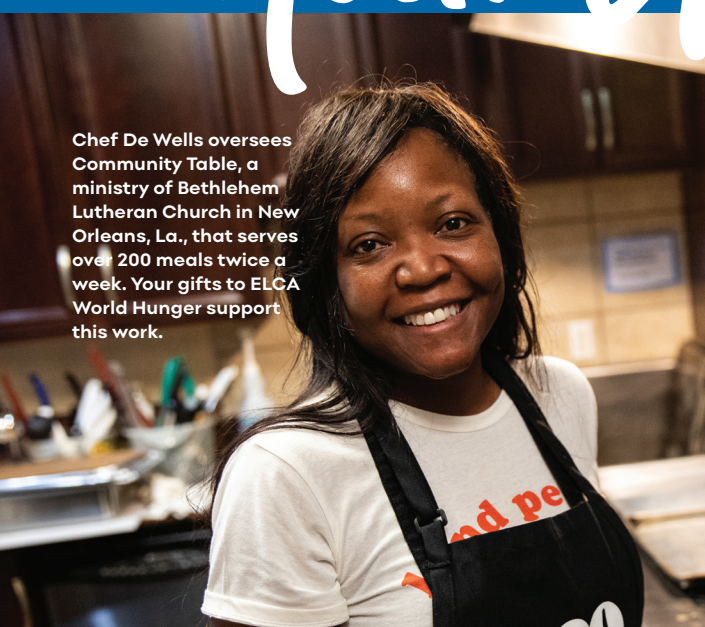
—Meredith Lovell Keseley, Fund for Leaders Class of 2002, Abiding Presence Lutheran Church, Burke, Va.

ELCA Fund for Leaders
1997 **25**th 2022
Anniversary

The 25th anniversary video series shows some of the ways Fund for Leaders is making an impact in communities across the country; visit [ELCA.org/FundforLeaders25](https://www.elca.org/FundforLeaders25).



Your Gifts in Action: 2021 IN REVIEW



Chef De Wells oversees Community Table, a ministry of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in New Orleans, La., that serves over 200 meals twice a week. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support this work.

In June 2021 the International Women Leaders program

celebrated its **third full class** of

six scholars graduating

from **ELCA colleges and universities.**

Last year ELCA World Hunger

awarded **469 grants**

to partners in **67 countries**

and **63 ELCA synods.**

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.



With support from Lutheran Disaster Response, Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey partnered with Trinity Lutheran Church in Jersey City, N.J., to distribute food after Hurricane Ida.



Missionaries Anne Langdji (second from left) and Willie Langdji (second from right) with leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic and Lutheran World Federation Africa.

The Fund for Leaders provided
over \$3.2 million
in scholarship assistance to
317 ELCA seminary students
during the **2020-2021 academic year.**

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 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary, an ELCA regional partner, offers practical skills workshops to roma individuals.

More than **120 ELCA missionary households** walk alongside communities in **45 countries** around the world.

Leaders Mentoring Future Leaders

Marina Fomgbami

In March the brand-new African Girls Scholarship and Mentorship Program closed its first application period with almost 20 applicants. The program aims to help 10 girls (five from Cameroon and five from Tanzania) earn their high school diplomas over the course of two years. The program will also match each girl with a mentor in her field of study.

Naomi Mbise of Tanzania and Dora Houma and Marina Fomgbami of Cameroon, who designed and implemented the program, all received full scholarships from International Women Leaders (IWL). Thanks to support from donors such as you, they enrolled in ELCA colleges and universities. Now they are taking what they have learned and paying it forward, empowering girls in their home countries through education.

Marvelous John

Investing in women leaders is one of many ways the ELCA walks alongside more than 80 global companion churches. Women are key to addressing social issues around the world. Your gifts to the IWL program enable the ELCA to invest in women leaders through educational seminars, south-to-south exchanges, in-country study programs, and degree programs at ELCA colleges and universities. In addition to these opportunities, IWL scholars gather annually in Chicago to network and share ideas. As friendships form, so do initiatives such as the African Girls Scholarship and Mentorship Program.

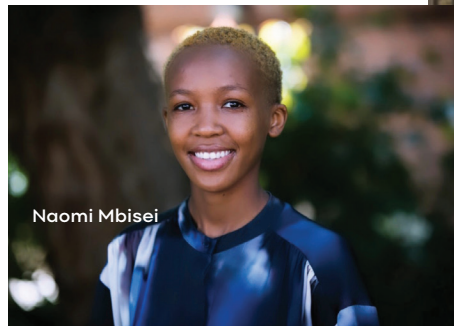
Dora Houma, current program director, stresses the importance of being part of a community of women leaders. “I believe that being in contact with people, women especially, [who] do what you want to do is very impactful,” she says. “I myself chose to pursue academics, and my passion comes from witnessing my mother get her Ph.D. It was never unattainable or unreachable, because I had that role model in my life.” Dora recently graduated from Concordia College.

The African Girls Scholarship and Mentorship Program is being executed in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Cameroon and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, with additional funds from Women of the ELCA and others. Participants in the program will receive comprehensive support and mentorship in areas such as leadership, self-love and life skills.

According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 70% of Cameroonian girls are illiterate. Traditional values in Cameroon can frustrate girls who want to stay in school, and those living in poverty often drop out to earn income for their families. In Tanzania, schools have limited space and are cost-prohibitive. Parents often must choose one of their children to send to school, which may be located anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours away on foot. The African

“

I believe that being in contact with people, women especially, [who] do what you want to do is very impactful.”



Girls Scholarship and Mentorship Program helps girls overcome such barriers, paying for their education and providing them with a mentor who can accompany them on their journey.

Dora stresses the importance of “having that connection and interaction with someone that’s doing what you would do, and seeing that it’s possible regardless of your economic or cultural background. . . . In the long run, we want this to be an international project across the continent. We chose the first two countries since the programs and countries would differ, and then we can integrate other countries and other member churches slowly as we learn.”

As the first-round applicants are reviewed, program leaders will carefully identify each girl’s career goal and pair her with a qualified, successful mentor in her future field. Dora is confident that, as they help the first round of students, the program and its applications will continue to grow. Your gifts to IWL aren’t just supporting education for women such as Dora – they’re strengthening a global community of women leaders that will continue making an impact for generations to come.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support displaced people through the ELCA's AMMPARO Network, providing them the tools to cultivate new homes, vibrant communities and hope for the future.



Second Chances in San Salvador

Hungry Church in El Salvador serves gang members who have been deported from the United States, providing them with safe places to stay, income, job skills training and other support. As the Rev. Nestor Cruz explains, “We love those who others fear to love.”

Nestor began the Hungry Church to provide a community for others like him. He was born in El Salvador but taken to the United States as an undocumented immigrant when he was an infant. He joined a gang at a young age, got arrested and was classified as a youthful offender. After spending over 12 years in prison, he came back to

El Salvador. At that point, he had no connections in his birth country and no way to return to the United States.

Still, Nestor found hope in God’s grace. He became a Christian after he was incarcerated, and he believed God was giving him a second chance in El Salvador. He wanted to offer that hope to others. Nestor spent time outside the migrant processing center in San Salvador, offering support to people who had been deported from the United States. He could often spot them because they spoke English – many didn’t speak much Spanish at all. At the migrant center he connected with the Salvadoran



Members of the Hungry Church learn auto mechanics.

Lutheran Church (Iglesia Luterana Salvadoreña or ILS), an ELCA companion church. When staff from ILS’s migrant ministry met Pastor Nestor and learned about his work, they formed a friendship with him and then a partnership.

In the beginning that partnership wasn’t always easy. To the ILS members, the Hungry Church members looked similar to active gang members in El Salvador. “They always came in a group,” remembers Blanca Irma Rodriguez, coordinator of the church’s migrant ministry, “speaking English with a sense of camaraderie, and with tattoos on their bodies.” However, as the two groups continued to work together, they established a sense of trust.

“

**You’ll be welcomed
no matter how
many tattoos you
have or where
you’ve been ...
At Hungry you
will be loved.”**

First, ILS provided seed money for the Hungry Church’s microbusinesses, selling eggs and pupusas (griddle cakes). Through that support, Blanca says, “we were able to observe the love, responsibility and sense of identity that they had developed for the Hungry Church ministry.” In 2018, Hungry Church leadership decided to provide job skills training. Through its partnership with ILS, an active member of ELCA’s AMMPARO Network, the church received a grant of \$10,000 — made possible by your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR).

Ministry leaders planned to use the money to train eight Hungry Church members in carpentry and auto mechanics. However, demand was so great that they enrolled 20 participants. Some graduates have become teachers in the program and now pass along their new skills to more community members.

“A fraternal community has been created,” Blanca says. “As Christians, they are reaching and attracting those who have been orphaned in terms of fraternal love, who have been excluded from the benefits of material resources.” Thanks to your support of LDR, this ministry is making an even bigger impact than its leaders initially hoped. The team plans to continue growing the program, eventually expanding to other countries such as Nicaragua.

Nestor preaches to his community that God doesn’t care where you’ve come from or what you’ve done in the past. The Hungry Church website declares that this ministry is “a place where you’ll be welcomed no matter how many tattoos you have or where you’ve been. . . . At Hungry you will be loved.”

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