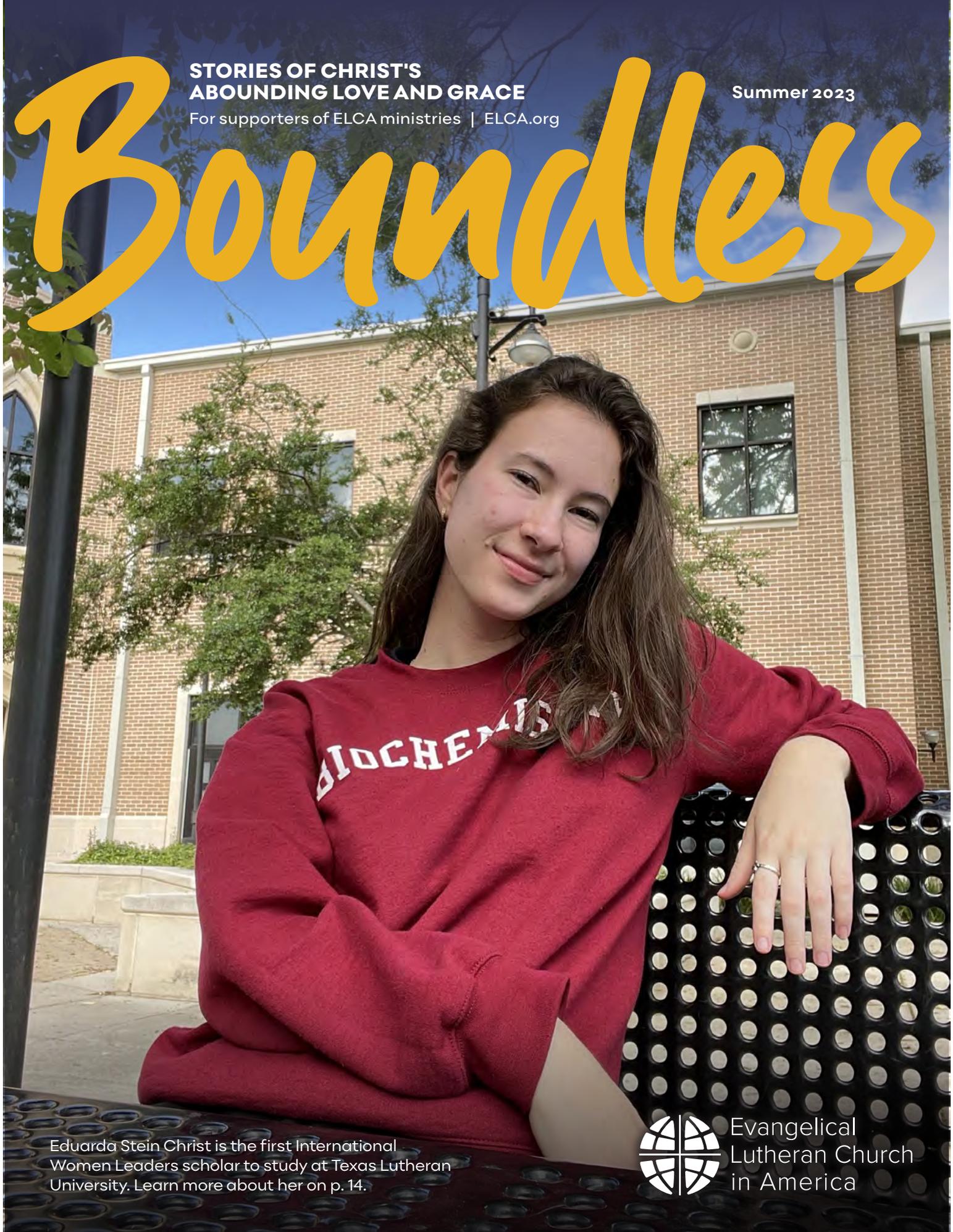


STORIES OF CHRIST'S  
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

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Summer 2023

# Boundless



Eduarda Stein Christ is the first International Women Leaders scholar to study at Texas Lutheran University. Learn more about her on p. 14.



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America

**“Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!” (Matthew 13:9)**

Dear friends in Christ,

Planting is an act of faith. I'm reminded of this as we near the peak of the summer season and I look forward to the fresh tomatoes, green beans and sweet corn available from local farmers. Now, these crops are almost ready to provide nourishment. But earlier this spring, they were just seeds.

Seeds need many things to flourish, including sun, water, protection from pests and — as Jesus says in Matthew 13 — good soil. Seeds also require patience and hope. Once the planting is finished, the farmer must wait, trusting that the crop has everything it needs to grow.

Your generous giving to ELCA ministries is another act of faith. When you made your gifts, you may not have known precisely how they would impact your siblings in Christ. Still, you trusted that you were planting something in the good soil of our church community and that it would grow strong enough to make a difference.

Your faithful gifts are already bearing fruit all around us. This issue of “Boundless” contains just a few examples of the growth you have made possible.

Through Fund for Leaders, you empowered a mission developer in Florida to grow a vibrant church community in a new city. Through ELCA World Hunger, you provided resources for new kinds of sustainable crops in Nepal. Through Young Adults in Global Mission, you fostered relationships that will strengthen our global community of faith. And through International Women Leaders, you inspired an emerging leader to pave the way for other women leaders — at her college and in her home church.

With your gifts, you have invested in the future of our church and our world. You have planted your seeds in good soil, and they will bear fruit for years to come. I am so grateful for your generosity and your faith. Thank you for your partnership in this work.



In peace,

*Rachel Wind*

**RACHEL WIND**

Executive for Development  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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# Boundless

<b>ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS</b> Fed and Sent Out	<b>4</b>
<b>ELCA WORLD HUNGER</b> Cultivating New Crops and New Hope	<b>6</b>
<b>MAKING AN IMPACT</b> Your Gifts in Action	<b>8</b>
<b>YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION</b> Walking Alongside One Another	<b>10</b>
<b>INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS</b> Paving the Way for Future Leaders	<b>14</b>



# Fed and Sent Out

*The Rev. Matt Shapton preaches from his kitchen in the early days of his ministry.*

**W**hen the Rev. Matt Shapton began his first call, he didn't have an office in a church building or even an established congregation to serve. What he did have was a golf cart, which he rode around downtown Babcock Ranch, Fla., in his clerical collar and stole, offering communion to his new neighbors.

His wasn't a traditional way of starting a church, but that was by design. Matt wanted to help create something new, in a new way.

Matt became interested in mission development while he was studying at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. The idea of building new missions from the ground up appealed to him. Before discerning his call to ministry, he had a career as a skilled tradesman and small business owner. He identifies as self-driven, with an entrepreneurial spirit, saying, "I like having the ability to change the narrative a little."

When he chose to concentrate on mission development, the staff at Wartburg nominated him to receive a \$10,000 Mission Developer Scholarship

from ELCA Fund for Leaders. This special scholarship provides support for students with extraordinary gifts for church-planting, above and beyond the cost of tuition. Matt was also receiving support from his home congregation, so his Fund for Leaders scholarship relieved some of the financial pressure on that community.

Matt is extremely grateful for the support he received from his church and from the donors who made his Fund for Leaders scholarship possible. "Having this faith community around me – not only in prayer and discernment but also to say, 'You know what? We're going to help you through this, we believe in you, we support you, we trust that it's a good investment for the whole church' – that was the thing that allowed me to take the step."

After graduating from seminary, Matt moved with his wife and four kids to Babcock Ranch in central Florida in hope of starting a new ELCA mission there. The Babcock Ranch website calls it "tomorrow's hometown." Its first residents arrived in 2018, and it is the first solar-powered city in the United States. The ELCA Florida-Bahamas Synod identified it as a good place for

**"Thank you for walking alongside people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to be creative – to reenvision what the church looks like for the future."**

a new mission, partly because the city's focus on sustainability aligns with the ELCA's commitment to environmental stewardship.

As a pastor, Matt wanted to grow a ministry that was deeply rooted in the community and that truly met the needs of his neighbors. In winter 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, he remembers, "People were just hungry for church. They wanted to be loved on, they wanted to connect." So he began leading outdoor services in addition to offering communion from his golf cart. He recalls people being brought to tears as they received the eucharist because they hadn't been to church in so long.

Pastor Matt's mission, the Community Church, has grown since those initial golf cart days. First the group met for worship in his house; every Sunday he and his wife would move all their living room furniture into their bedroom to clear space for services. Eventually the congregation outgrew the Shaptons' living room and began renting the gym at the local community center. Matt hopes to construct a permanent church building that can serve the congregation and the wider community.

Worship, he explains, is only a small part of what the Community Church does. "We come here to be fed and sent out." After Hurricane Ian the congregation collected donations and served meals to people who had been displaced by the storm. Recently the group hosted its third annual Earth Day fair, with everything from food trucks to Smokey the Bear. "We are part of everything that happens in this community," Matt says.

Pastor Matt is grateful to the supporters of ELCA Fund for Leaders for all the work they have made possible. "Thank you for empowering innovative ministry," he says. "Thank you for walking alongside people who would not otherwise have the opportunity to be creative – to reenvision what the church looks like for the future." He hopes that donors such as you will continue to invest in Fund for Leaders and in mission developers, and to spread the word. Your support will strengthen ministries such as the Community Church in the present, and the whole church for years to come.

*Over 100 people gathered outdoors for the Community Church's Holy Week services in 2023.*



Your gifts to ELCA Fund for Leaders are empowering mission developers such as Matt Shapton to follow his call and grow the church in bold and innovative ways.

# Cultivating New Crops and New Hope

**S**unita Chunara is a freed Haliya in Dadeldhura, Nepal. The Haliya were a class of agricultural bonded laborers until 2008, when the Nepali government outlawed their exploitation. They were released from their bondage with no livelihoods, no income, no education and no political power. Some families were given pieces of land from the government, but often the land was unfavorable for traditional farming.

Sunita lives on a hillside. Instead of farming the land, she grows mushrooms in a shelter on her property. Because mushrooms are contained, use relatively low amounts of water and can be easily harvested throughout the year, they provide a much better alternative to tilling the land.

Before Sunita started mushroom farming, she worked over the border in India, like many Haliyas. But the COVID-19 pandemic drove her back home. Then she had the opportunity to attend an eight-day training from Lutheran World Federation Nepal (LWF-Nepal) and its local implementing partner, Rastriya Mukta Haliya Samaj Federation Nepal (RMHSFN), an organization that advocates for Haliya rights. From the training she learned the basics of mushroom cultivation, as well as business and finance skills.

Mushrooms grow from bundles of damp straw that hang from the ceiling of the mushroom hut.

"I have just started paying insurance for my son, which I can pay from income from my mushrooms. All education expenses, household expenses can be paid from my mushroom income."

ELCA World Hunger partnered with LWF-Nepal to conduct these trainings in several Haliya communities. In addition to mushroom cultivation, participants could learn about vegetable farming, iron smithing or goat- and chicken-rearing. With these livelihood opportunities, freed Haliyas can become self-sufficient and support their families.

In Sunita's mushroom shed – a wooden frame covered by a black tarp to create a dark, cool, humid environment – she hangs around 30 bundles of wet straw from the ceiling. She then adds mushroom spores to the straw, leaving them to grow off the sides of the bundles.

Sunita can see as many as four harvests per year, bringing in a steady income. Sometimes she takes the mushrooms to the community market, but she makes a higher profit when people come to buy from her home. The money is a lifeline for Sunita and her four children.

"I have just started paying insurance for my son, which I can pay from income from my mushrooms," she says. "All education expenses, household expenses can be paid from my mushroom income."

In addition to livelihood trainings and advocacy work, RMHSFN has a Transformation Education Program (TEP) where Haliyas such as Sunita can acquire basic literacy skills, learn about their social and economic rights and explore such issues as gender-based violence and caste-based discrimination. Through the TEP classes and

livelihood opportunities, freed Haliyas are empowered and equipped to build sustainable lifestyles.

Your continued support of ELCA World Hunger and other ELCA ministries provides opportunities for people such as Sunita to transform their lives. She is not only bettering her current life – she's building a foundation for her children and generations to come.



Photo: Y. Franklin Ishida

Sunita Chunara explains the process of mushroom cultivation, which she learned from ELCA World Hunger partner Lutheran World Federation Nepal.

# Your Gifts in Action:

## 2022 IN REVIEW



Photo: LWF/Albin Hillert

A volunteer at a church-run support point greets a refugee family who have just arrived in Slovakia.

Last year ELCA World Hunger awarded **436 grants** to partners in **67 countries** and **57 ELCA synods**. In total, **over 3.3 million** people were served through ELCA World Hunger partnerships worldwide.



Manna From Heaven, an ELCA World Hunger-supported ministry in Myra, Ky., runs a food and chicken delivery program.



FFL Mission Developer Scholarship recipient Perla Florez Ruiz gathers with the FFL community at the 25th-anniversary Scholarship Awards Celebration.

Fund for Leaders provided **nearly \$3.5 million** in scholarship assistance to **375 ELCA seminary students** during the **2022-2023 academic year**.

Lutheran Disaster Response was at work in **42 countries** around the world and **26 states and territories** in the United States and the Caribbean, responding to hurricanes, tornadoes, conflict and migration, the Russia-Ukraine war and more.

New ELCA congregations are taking shape throughout the United States and the Caribbean and in nearly every synod, with **322 "new starts"** currently in development and **33 begun during 2022**. More than **70% of total new starts are in ethnically diverse communities** and reflect growing diversity in their LGBTQIA+ leadership as well as their younger leaders and participants.



Danielle works at Refuge Bakery in Belgrade, Serbia. This program, run by the Asylum Protection Center (an ELCA partner), offers job training opportunities and community.

In June 2022 the International Women Leaders program celebrated its **fourth full class** of **five scholars** graduating from ELCA colleges and universities.

The 2023 International Leaders Program gathering gave scholarship recipients the chance to meet in person for the first time since 2019.



In 2022, **131 long-term missionaries** were at work in **45 countries** around the world, and 24 YAGM volunteers served in four country programs.

# Thank You!

# Walking Alongside One Another



**A**fter a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program has sent volunteers around the world once again. The program recruits young adults to accompany local partners in four country programs; two more will reopen for the 2023-2024 cycle.

Sol Namir Nadal Diaz is a volunteer in Linguère, Senegal. She was called to apply for YAGM after earning a master's degree in global health. Sol Nadir enjoyed her time in school, but she felt disconnected from her faith life.

"I mainly applied because I was looking for some sort of connection, a transformation, something that would wake up my faith," she says. YAGM also interested her because she dreams of working for a global health organization and wanted international health care experience.

YAGM is helping Sol Namir work toward both those goals. At a Lutheran primary health clinic she works with HIV patients, preparing for community days that involve HIV education and regular patient checkups. The clinic cares for orphaned babies, and its pharmacy supplies medications to smaller villages outside Linguère; Sol Namir visits these villages with clinic staff to provide women's health education.



Two days a week, Sol Namir teaches English in a primary school.

Two days a week Sol Namir teaches English to primary school students who already speak the national French and their local language, Wolof. "I love being able to see the progress of children in a third language. It's amazing, their enthusiasm and happiness for English class." They're not the only ones learning a new tongue – Sol Namir attends language classes three times a week to master Wolof.

YAGM is about accompaniment – walking together in a solidarity born of interdependence and mutuality. While Sol Namir accompanies her host community by working in the clinic and

"Everyone that I come across accompanies me by being open and wanting to listen about my life back home and learn from me as well. They accompany me by acknowledging that I am here and living moments with me every day, multiple times a day."

school and learning about Senegalese culture, that community also accompanies her. Her neighbors and host family welcomed her with open arms and constantly support her.

"Everyone that I come across accompanies me by being open and wanting to listen about my life back home and learn from me as well. They accompany me by acknowledging that I am here and living moments with me every day, multiple times a day."

Service in YAGM can be challenging. Participants are faced with issues of racial privilege, economic disparity, gender gaps and globalization.

*Continued on page 12.*

YAGM participant Sol (left) and her host family.



Your gifts to Young Adults in Global Mission have enabled a new cohort of participants to journey into the world for the first time since early 2020. Young adults have space to consider their identity, God's work in the world and their place within it all.



Sol Nadir with friends and teachers from her school on International Women's Day.

For Sol Namir the biggest challenge is living in a paternalistic society without falling into a gender role. She enjoys cooking, but sometimes that leads to the expectation that she will always cook. There were also smaller culture-shock moments. In Senegal families eat on the floor around a large communal plate. At first this was difficult for Sol Namir, but she says that she finds joy in the experience, that it connects her with the family.

Everywhere Sol Namir looks, she experiences God in her community, especially in the way people relate to each other. She sees God in the way Christians and Muslims living in her village respect each other's beliefs and celebrate each other's religious days. She sees God in the everyday greetings, the smiles of children and the many villagers who lend a hand when others are in need.

When she returns to the United States, says Sol Namir, what she'll miss most is the people from her community – her host family, coworkers,

students and clinic patients. She'll also miss the quiet, peaceful pace of life in Linguère. "I feel like life moves so quickly in the Western world, so I will definitely need to work on finding pauses in life and enjoying each day as I do here."

Your gifts to the YAGM program provide young adults such as Sol Namir with opportunities to venture into the world, immerse themselves in new cultures and grow in faith and leadership. "Volunteers will come back with a new perspective in life and ready to create change," says Sol Namir. By supporting YAGM, you are supporting the future of the church.

"I came to Senegal thinking I was looking for an experience in which I could gain knowledge on how the health system worked while serving in a community and looking for connection," Sol Namir reflects. "What I found was myself ... God gifted me connection with myself. I have learned to be at peace with who I am in life, and that my good intentions and what I am doing are enough and part of God's mission."

# Young Adults in Global Mission is back!

Thanks to your generous, sustaining support, young adults are learning, growing and forming relationships in communities around the world once again.



YAGM Jerusalem and the West Bank participants, with one of their country coordinators and her youngest son, put their feet in the sea of Galilee.



YAGM participant Sophie Warnberg leads the prayers of the people at the Christmas service at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.



Photo: John Christensen

YAGM UK participant Gabrielle Irle helps a colleague across the high-ropes course near Kidderminster, U.K.



YAGM Senegal participant Quentin Bernhard (left) with members of his host family at an ngente, a traditional Senegalese event celebrating the birth and naming of a child.

International Women Leaders scholar Eduarda Stein Christ studies math and biochemistry at Texas Lutheran University.

# Paving the Way for Future Leaders

**E**duarda Stein Christ didn't always see herself as a leader – but that didn't stop her from becoming one.

Eduarda is from a small town in Brazil and attended a church that is part of the Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil. When she was growing up, her church's

leadership included few young people and even fewer women. Still, Eduarda was very involved in church life. "I have always had a desire to help people – not just in church but in general," she explains. Eduarda assisted at services along with her mother and grandmother, taught Sunday school and helped in any other way she could. She always enjoyed it, but she thought of herself as more of a servant than a leader.

"I feel like I've grown so much. Not only education-wise and in my career, but with my relationships, how I want to be received, how I want to share my strengths with other people and how I want to change the world."



When the time came for Eduarda to explore options for college, her pastor suggested that she apply for a scholarship through the ELCA's International Women Leaders (IWL) program. IWL provides full scholarships to emerging leaders from the ELCA's companion churches around the world to study at ELCA colleges and universities. No one from Eduarda's congregation or town had participated in the program before. The scholarship appealed to Eduarda because it would allow her to focus on her education but also give her the chance to make a greater impact in her community and beyond. "Why not?" she remembers thinking. "Let's take the shot."

Eduarda received a full scholarship to Texas Lutheran University, but the COVID-19 pandemic forced her to wait a year to begin her studies. In 2021 she finally made it to the United States, and recently she completed her sophomore year at her university.

In addition to being the first IWL scholar from her church and her town, Eduarda is the first IWL scholar to attend Texas Lutheran. She says she always felt supported by her teachers and friends there, as well as by the IWL community: "There was never a time when I felt alone." Still, she is excited by the prospect of welcoming a second IWL scholar to Texas Lutheran while she is still studying there. "I think I would be a good mentor,"

she says. She thinks she knows what that person will be going through, and she wants to be the resource she wishes she'd had when she arrived.

Since becoming an IWL scholar, Eduarda has grown in more ways than she can name. She studies math and biochemistry, and she's starting to think about earning a master's degree or doctorate. Beyond her studies, her confidence has grown and her dreams have only gotten bigger. "I feel like, no matter what I do, I'm going to find my way ... because God has my side, and if he gave me this opportunity, I know he has greater plans for me."

Eduarda lacks the words to express her gratitude for the donors who have supported IWL. Your gifts, she says, reach IWL students "on a deeper level." Because of support from donors such as you, she has been completely changed. "I feel like I've grown so much," she says. "Not only education-wise and in my career, but with my relationships, how I want to be received, how I want to share my strengths with other people and how I want to change the world." Eduarda wants IWL supporters to know that their generosity will continue to impact her for years to come. For her that generosity "is a step further to a better future."

With your help Eduarda can better understand her potential as a leader – and she's ready to help other women see that potential in themselves.

Your gifts to International Women Leaders enable emerging leaders from our global companion churches, such as Eduarda Stein Christ, to attend ELCA colleges and universities. Eduarda is the first IWL scholar to attend Texas Lutheran University and hopes to pave the way for others to follow.

# Boundless

Summer 2023

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## In this issue

### **ELCA FUND FOR LEADERS**

Fed and Sent Out  
p. 4

### **ELCA WORLD HUNGER**

Cultivating New Crops and New Hope  
p. 6

### **MAKING AN IMPACT**

Your Gifts in Action  
p. 8

### **YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION**

Walking Alongside One Another  
p. 10

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS**

Paving the Way for Future Leaders  
p. 14



*YAGM participant Sol Namir Nadal Diaz teaches English in Senegal. Learn more about her on p. 10.*