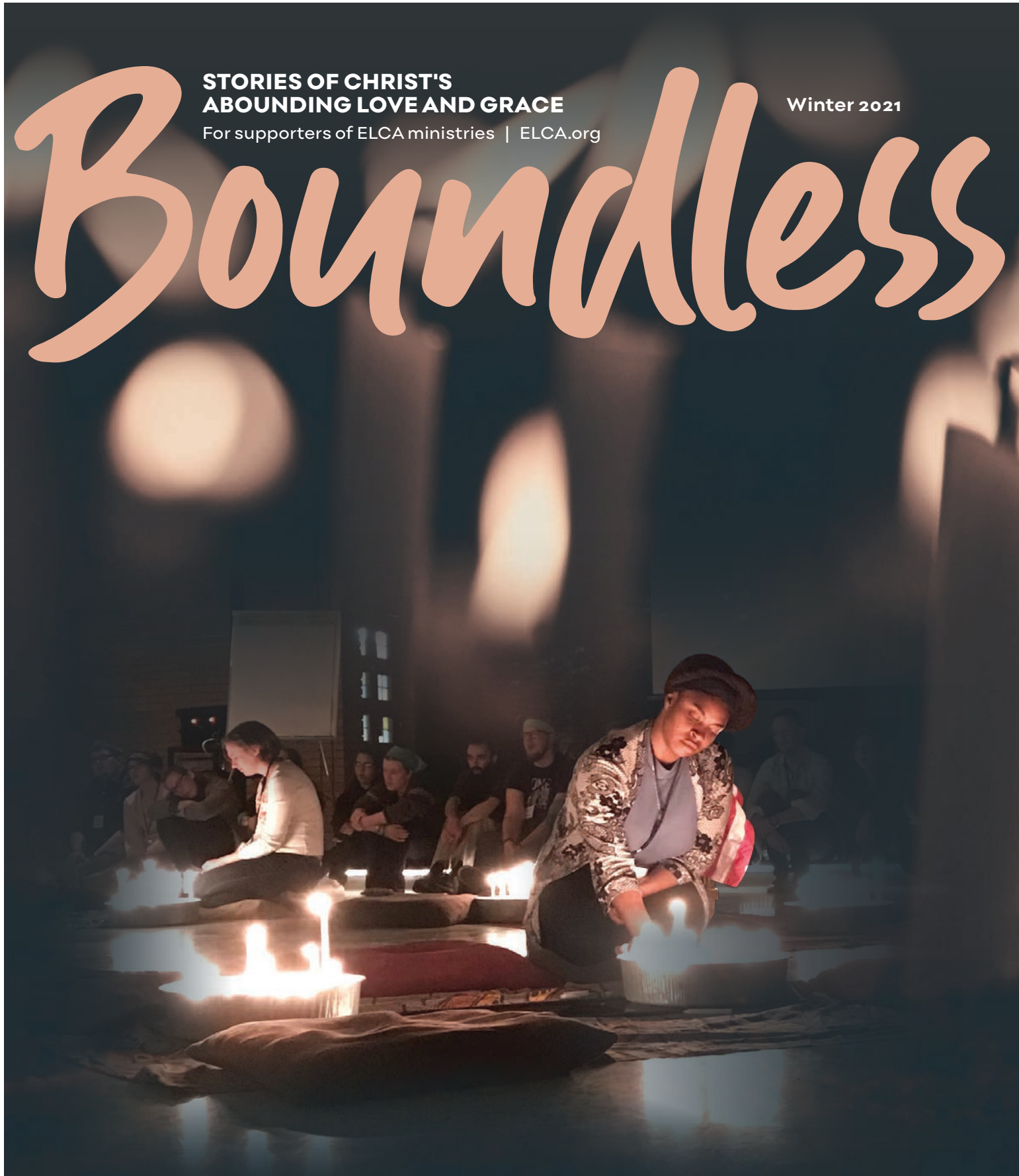


**STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE**

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Winter 2021

Boundless



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear siblings in Christ,

“So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (Luke 2:16-20).

The weeks building up to Christmas are prone to chaos. With trips to plan, gifts to buy and family to see, we can easily lose ourselves in the hustle and bustle of everything that needs to get done. But even a cursory glance at the story of Jesus’ birth reminds us that the days and weeks leading up to God’s indwelling were quiet, cold, contemplative and at times even fearful.

This has been a hard year for many, leading into a difficult Advent season. Fear and anxiety run rampant throughout our world. And yet, the Christ child comes. A child to bring good news to a weary land. A story so joyous that the shepherds dropped everything and came to see. A story full of hope that Mary, amid the noise and chaos of giving birth, treasured and pondered.

Through your generosity, you have shared that story of hope and joy with the world. As church together, we empower refugees seeking new homes in the United States, send young adults out into the world to form transformative relationships, build bridges between faith communities in Jordan and the Holy Land, support leaders who are passionate about developing new missions in their communities, and so much more.

As you read this issue of *Boundless*, I invite you to rejoice in the connections you have fostered. I hope these stories allow you, like Mary, to ponder how God Immanuel is at work in this church and in the world. May the anticipation of Advent give birth to a joyful Christmas.



With gratitude,

Rachel Wind

RACHEL WIND

Executive of Philanthropy
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

On the cover: Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) volunteer Ashley Holbert lights candles and prays during a contemplative worship service at the YAGM “Discernment-Interview-Placement” event before her YAGM year begins. As the YAGM program prepares to reopen in 2022, Ashley and two fellow alums reflect on their YAGM experiences. Read their stories on page 6.

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Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger have helped Scolastica realize her dream of becoming a farmer. With your support, Lutheran Services in Iowa Refugee and Immigrant Services is empowering refugees such as Scolastica to cultivate stronger futures in the United States.

"I am a farmer now."

A Family Farming Tradition

Scolastica is descended from generations of farmers in Burundi – a country she has never even seen. By the time she was born, her family had fled Burundi and landed in a refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Soon after her birth they moved again, to a camp in Tanzania. Scolastica would go on to spend 30 years living in refugee camps, eventually starting a family of her own.

Scolastica met her husband, Phenihias, in a camp, and they are raising five children. "It was very hard to be a mom to so many kids there," Scolastica says. "I had to find food and clothes for everyone. It was not easy."

Things began to change in 2015, when Scolastica and her immediate family were able to resettle in Iowa. Coming from a family of farmers, Scolastica dreamed of owning her own farm. She enrolled in Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI) Refugee and Immigrant Services, a project supported in part by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, and LSI's Global Greens program. Hunger, poverty, conflict and persecution have forced millions of people to leave their homes around the world. With your support, ELCA World Hunger partners with organizations such as LSI to help people on the move build stronger futures in their new homes.

Through LSI, Scolastica and her family have reconnected with the land and their own farming skills. She receives support to develop a growing plan and to plant different foods at different

times. She has learned how to strategize which vegetables to grow throughout the season, how to keep bugs away from her produce and how to wash it properly before selling it at the markets.

Scolastica says she has learned to farm more efficiently: "We farm a small piece of land but make more food. You need to know when foods will be ready."

Scolastica begins her day by heading to her family's farmland. The weather is warm and sunny, and she is surrounded by her parents, husband and siblings as they toil to harvest vegetables from their plot.

She oversees three farming plots, totaling about a quarter of an acre, at Global Greens Farm in Des Moines, where she grows her favorite vegetables – African eggplant and shell peas. She sells her produce at the Global Greens Farmers Market, through LSI's Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and through the Iowa Food Cooperative.

Scolastica has grown more confident through expanding her business and selling to hungry customers – and her kids have access to fresh, healthy food. Scolastica dreams of one day returning to Africa and visiting Burundi, but for the time being, she's proud of the life her family has built in the United States. Scolastica says, "I am a farmer now."

"Prepare Your Heart to Be Opened"

Every year the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program sends young people to walk alongside global communities during a year of service. In March 2020, though, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the 2019-2020 YAGM volunteers to return to the United States several months early. The program has remained paused since then.

Yet even without active volunteers, YAGM has been hard at work. The staff have deepened relationships with the program's country partners through intentional conversations, and YAGM alums are finding new ways to use lessons they learned in the program.

As YAGM prepares to send volunteers into the world again in 2022, three alums reflect on how their YAGM experiences continue to impact their work, relationships and lives.

ASHLEY, South Africa, 2016

Before Ashley Holbert applied for YAGM, she worked in sales and was good at it. Yet she longed for something more purposeful. A close friend who had served YAGM the previous year encouraged Ashley to apply. "You're looking for something," Ashley's friend said. "Why not this?"

Ashley ended up going to Johannesburg, South Africa. Of all the different kinds of work she did there, she was most changed by her time with urban-farming support groups. Ashley loved working the earth with her hands alongside farmers, "getting dirty and getting into it."

When Ashley returned to the United States, she wasn't sure what to do next. Ashley is Black and wanted to be surrounded by a community of Black and Brown people as she had been in South Africa. She found a job at a local plant shop, began learning floristry and eventually started her own business. In 2019 she received a call from a "kindred spirit" who was opening an event space in Johannesburg. Ashley has spent several months in that space as a "florist-in-residence," styling flower arrangements and teaching others.

Ashley is open to exploring new places and possibilities, but she will always be connected to South Africa – not least by her son, whose father is South African. Ashley knows that she and her son are part of the South African community for life.



Photo at left: Ashley Holbert. Photo at right: Haley Toresdahl (far right).

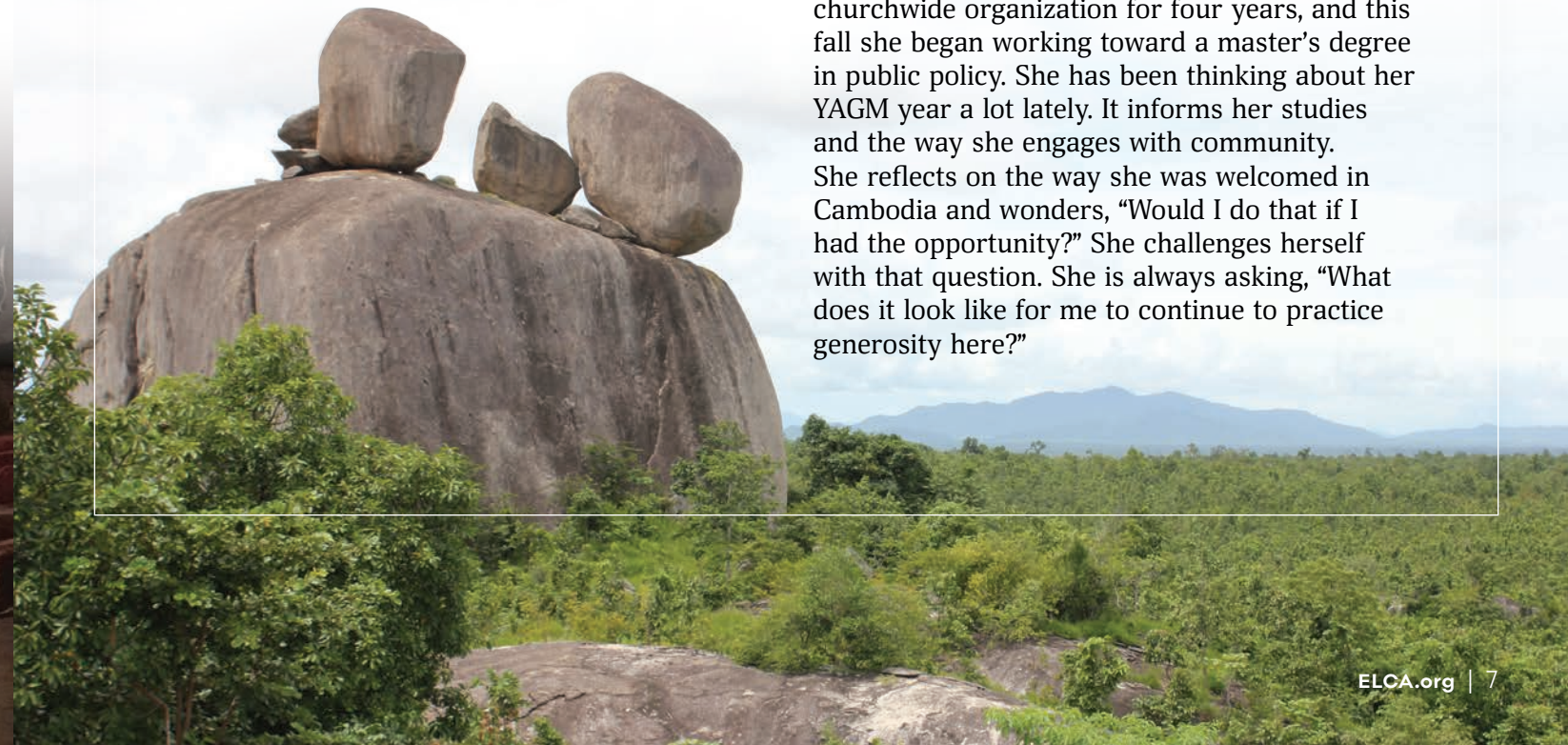


HALEY, Cambodia, 2015

One day early in her YAGM year in Cambodia, Haley Toresdahl was struggling to make stir-fry in the communal kitchen of Life With Dignity, a local organization serving vulnerable communities through development work. One of the officers saw her, observed, "You don't

know what you're doing," and invited her to dine with his family in the village instead. After that, Haley joined his family for dinner almost every weekend. She is immensely thankful for their hospitality: "They didn't have to welcome me in the way that they did."

After her YAGM year, Haley worked at the ELCA churchwide organization for four years, and this fall she began working toward a master's degree in public policy. She has been thinking about her YAGM year a lot lately. It informs her studies and the way she engages with community. She reflects on the way she was welcomed in Cambodia and wonders, "Would I do that if I had the opportunity?" She challenges herself with that question. She is always asking, "What does it look like for me to continue to practice generosity here?"



Your support for Young Adults in Global Mission empowers young people to build relationships in communities around the world that make an impact far beyond their service years.

Benjamin David



BENJAMIN, Argentina, 2019

When Benjamin David learned he would be going to La Plata, Argentina, he was excited because he spoke Spanish. Or, as Benjamin puts it, “I *thought* I spoke Spanish.” When he got to Argentina, he realized he had a lot to learn. Still, the community was welcoming. Benjamin says, “There was a lot of grace on their end with me.”

Benjamin worked with the pastor of a Lutheran church and with a community-run after-school program. But in March 2020, the global pandemic cut short his service year. After working some odd jobs in the United States, Benjamin decided to return to school. He is now earning his master’s degree in school counseling. He also recently reunited with his husband, whom he met in Argentina. They got engaged and picked out rings only days before the pandemic forced Benjamin to return to the United States. In July they married – over Zoom. Since then, they have been able to spend several months together in Argentina.

Benjamin grieves the months he lost in YAGM. Still, the time he did spend in the program made an impact on him. He remembers how nervous he was when he arrived in Argentina. But now, he says, “I feel like I could go anywhere and do anything.”



The 2019 YAGM cohort in front of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago



“The fact that people still see the value in supporting those relationships means everything.”

DAN BEIRNE
Program Director, Young Adults in Global Mission

What’s Next

Ashley, Haley and Benjamin are all excited for new YAGM volunteers to go out into the world. Ashley urges future volunteers to check their privilege and expand their minds. “Prepare your heart to be opened,” she advises, “because you’re going to be changed.”

YAGM director Dan Beirne shares their excitement. He is grateful to donors such as you for making past, present and future life-changing relationships possible through YAGM. He says, “Nothing will change how transformational it is to sit down at the table with a family in a setting different than yours.”

Your Gifts in Action

COVID-19 RESPONSE



NEW HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH

In Aurora, Ill., New Hope Lutheran Church developed the New Hope On-Call Immigrant Care Ministry to respond to the needs of immigrants in the community. The COVID-19 pandemic jump-started the creation of a food pantry that provides food, supplies, delivery and transportation to community members who need them.



HELPING CHILDREN LEARN IN HONDURAS

The Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras has increased its support for students during the pandemic, expanding tutoring hours, uploading tasks to virtual learning platforms, printing work guides and providing childcare.

FORKIDS

When schools in Norfolk, Va., closed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the nonprofit ForKids partnered with local restaurants, individual donors and the nonprofit disaster-relief organization Mercy Chefs to deliver over 8,000 meals to families in the region. ForKids also operates the Housing Crisis Hotline, administers rental assistance for households experiencing COVID-related financial setbacks, and offers emergency shelter placement.

EMPOWERING MIGRANTS IN ARGENTINA

Argentina's United Evangelical Lutheran Church (*Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida, IELU*) is helping people such as Ms. D build new lives in Argentina. A native of Venezuela, Ms. D ran a small food business from her home but was forced to close it due to COVID-19. When she was ready to reopen, the IELU helped her design a new logo and market her business, and when three of the four burners on her stove wouldn't light, the IELU provided her with a new one.



WOMEN'S BILINGUAL LITERACY AND COVID EDUCATION IN LIBERIA

The Lutheran Church in Liberia's Young and Adult Women Basic Bilingual Literacy Project teaches reading and writing skills to women. In response to the pandemic, program instructors received training in information dissemination and community sensitization to COVID-19.



LUTHERAN WORLD SERVICE INDIA TRUST

Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT) is providing support for people who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic. The program helps people such as Sahadep Majhi, who lost his job in a state distant from his family's home. "When I came home, I had no idea how to sustain myself and my family," he says. "But LWSIT stood with me and supported me."

LUTHERAN HEALTH CARE IN BANGLADESH

Despite lockdowns and a shortage of resources, Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh has offered health care services to its community throughout the pandemic. Labor and deliveries continue, and the hospital continues to offer prenatal and postnatal care. In addition, the hospital has offered community-health education sessions on COVID-19 and such COVID-related issues as hygiene and immunization.

- Angola
- Argentina
- Bangladesh
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Burundi
- Cambodia
- Cameroon
- Central African Republic
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Czech Republic
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Ethiopia
- The Gambia
- Germany
- Ghana
- Guatemala
- Guyana
- Guinea
- Haiti
- Honduras
- Hungary
- India
- Indonesia
- Italy
- Jordan
- Japan
- Kenya
- Lebanon
- Liberia
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Mexico
- Myanmar
- Namibia
- Nepal
- Nicaragua
- Nigeria
- Palestine
- Papua New Guinea
- Peru
- Romania
- Russia
- Rwanda
- Senegal
- Serbia
- Sierra Leone
- South Africa
- South Sudan
- Suriname
- Switzerland
- Syria
- Tanzania
- Thailand
- Timor Leste
- Uganda
- United States of America
- Venezuela
- Vietnam
- Zimbabwe

The COVID-19 pandemic is nearing the end of its second year but continues to present new and lasting challenges for communities around the world. Through your gifts, you have walked alongside your vulnerable neighbors. You have met urgent needs through Lutheran Disaster Response, and you have helped communities adapt and build long-term resilience through ELCA World Hunger. **Thank you for your generosity — you are making a global impact!**

Bridge-building in the Holy Land

Your gifts to the ELCA build bridges between communities of faith in Jordan and the Holy Land and beyond.

"We immediately became friends, even though we have different cultural and religious backgrounds. Even though we have two different religions, we respect that."

MURAD

A participant in the interfaith dialogue program developed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)

"We immediately became friends, even though we have different cultural and religious backgrounds," says Murad of his classmate Marwan. Murad, a Muslim, and Marwan, a Christian, are ninth graders at the Talitha Kumi Educational Centre, one of four schools run by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). "Even though we have two different religions, we respect that. We each explain to the other about our own religion."

Murad, Marwan and their classmates have a unique opportunity – access to an interfaith dialogue program designed specifically for them and the context in which they live. Through the program, both Christian and Muslim children are encouraged to consider perspectives different from their own while learning about the other faith.

"It doesn't matter what religion your fellow human beings have," says Murad. "The most important thing is that we respect and love each other."

Developed by Charlie Haddad, director of education for the ELCJHL, the program complements a strict academic curriculum in a way that fosters thoughtfulness and acceptance. Students study under Christian pastors from the ELCJHL and Muslim sheikhs from the surrounding neighborhood. These religious leaders work together to highlight the unique aspects of each religion while noting the many similarities between the two faiths, and between the Quran and the Bible.

"Students have told me they came to know things they didn't even imagine with regard to the other religion," explains Georgette Hazboun Rabadi, principal of the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour. "They are surprised to see similar values and ethical matters in both the Quran and the Bible."

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the teachers and staff with new challenges, but they are adapting to ensure that the program can continue. During nationwide lockdowns, teachers worked to get all the students online.

When restrictions were eased, the program implemented a hybrid schedule in which classes resumed at half capacity to ensure effective distancing measures. Classes have returned to normal for the current school year, with added health and safety precautions.

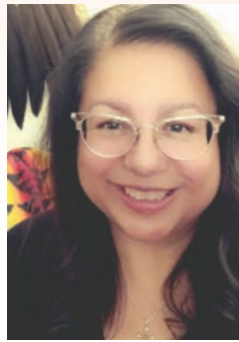
Next fall will mark a decade of this interfaith dialogue program. Over the years, the program has evolved and become more structured, and ELCJHL and school staff hope to see it implemented in other Christian and public schools. Haddad and his colleagues are currently applying for a grant to fund the expansion and further development of this curriculum in partnership with Lutheran World Federation. If approved, the grant would allow for a wider staff of educators, including outside experts, scholars and theologians from both faiths. It would also provide for trips to religious holy sites, bringing the students' different faiths to life in a tangible, memorable and meaningful way.

The program's impact starts with the students, yet Haddad sees it reaching far beyond the



Lutheran Theology and Native American Tradition

Your gifts to the ELCA Fund for Leaders have enabled mission developers such as Wanda Frenchman to attend seminary. Frenchman received a Fund for Leaders Mission Developer scholarship in 2021.



rowing up, Wanda Frenchman never imagined she'd become a Lutheran minister. Wanda was raised in the faith tradition of her Native American community, but as she got older, she and her mother were introduced to the Lutheran church.

This led to her mother realizing she was being called to attend seminary and to pursue the ministry – a decision that would change both their lives.

"I was introduced to the church when she was," says Wanda, "and I feel like I was shadowing her, in a sense, and learning Lutheran theology along with her. It has so much that's the same as Native American religion."

After leaving seminary, Wanda's mother served as pastor for a congregation in Cherokee, N.C., before returning to their home in Phoenix, Ariz., where she launched an urban Native American ministry. Wanda immediately got involved, helping her mother however she could, and along the way discovered her own calling.

"Once we started the ministry, it became, 'I could do this, I could lead this church,'" she says. "But then I realized I needed to go to seminary to do that."

In 2016 she began the journey to seminary, but roadblocks within the synod, coupled with time constraints (Wanda worked full-time on top of her church duties) kept her from actively pursuing her education. Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened. Suddenly Wanda had a lot of time on her hands, and she realized this was the perfect opportunity to pursue her calling at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

This year, Wanda was awarded a Fund for Leaders Mission Developer scholarship. Since 2000, Fund for Leaders has been offering scholarships to students at ELCA seminaries who are pursuing rostered ministry in the ELCA. The Mission Developer scholarship is for students who have completed their first year of seminary studies. Mission Developer candidates are identified and nominated by their seminary and ELCA Christian Community and Leadership.

The scholarship will allow Wanda to pursue her work with Native American populations in the Phoenix area. "There are about 200,000 urban Native Americans who live in Phoenix that come off reservations, and we have 21 reservations in Arizona – the second-largest number in the country," she says. "A lot of the

natives come in from the reservations, and they go to jobs and school – that's the population we cover. We also have a big Native American homeless population that we try to reach."

Wanda's ministry – which operates out of Grace Lutheran in Phoenix – meets twice monthly and combines Lutheran theology with traditions of Native American faith. One of those traditions is smudging, which involves the burning of resins or sacred herbs such as sage.

"We do the smudging, and we also do communion," she says. "We do a giveaway afterward – that's how we do things. We have an office we keep stocked with items like clothing, home goods, etc., and we do a meal afterward."

Wanda says the Fund for Leaders scholarship, supported by donors such as you, has made finishing her studies more feasible and shown her that the ELCA supports her journey into ministry and her Native American community.

"Before I got the scholarship, I felt I didn't have a lot of support, churchwide or from my synod," she says. "It's not just the financial aspect, but it's also the recognition that I'm doing this and that someone is really supporting me."

Wanda says she hopes this award will shine a light on the impact of Native American ministries and encourage others within the church to support their work.

"Native American ministry is alive and well," she says. "We have 21 different ministries across the country – we are a live worshiping community. And we appreciate thoughts and prayer, but also appreciate financial support and volunteer time."



A giveaway takes place after every service. Attendees can shop for clothing, toiletries and other essential items.

"It's not just the financial aspect, but it's also the recognition that I'm doing this and that someone is really supporting me."

WANDA FRENCHMAN
ELCA Fund for Leaders Class of 2021

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Winter 2021

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Members of the Native elders circle at an urban Native American ministry in Phoenix, Ariz., wear orange shirts to remember the children of Native residential boarding schools. Learn more about this ministry on page 14.