

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

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Winter 2023

Boundless



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

In him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:4-5).

Dear friends in Christ,

For those of us who live in the northern United States, this is the darkest, coldest part of the year. The days are short, the plant life outside is dormant under a layer of frost, and we don't leave our homes without wrapping ourselves in layers of additional clothing. This is maybe the best time, then, to enter the season of Epiphany — when we celebrate God's only child illuminating the world as the light of all people.

This Epiphany issue of "Boundless" celebrates the light of Christ as it shines through you. With your gifts you are making Jesus known in many ways. In the pages ahead you will read about how your support is casting Christ's light across the earth.

In Zimbabwe you are providing people with small livestock that will create financial growth and stronger futures for generations to come. In Nicaragua you are empowering women to become theological leaders and, in turn, encourage and guide more leaders from their communities. Through ELCA Fund for Leaders, your investment in the future of our church continues to multiply. In the United States you are helping to create spaces where new, young and diverse people feel welcome in our church, and feel comfortable inviting others in as well.

I am so grateful for your partnership in this work, but I'm not the only one. This issue of "Boundless" gives some of our neighbors who have been directly touched by your generosity the chance to thank you in their own words.

Because of you, this season of Epiphany is bright with hope and renewal. Thank you for empowering this church to spread the light of Christ around the world.



In peace,

Rachel Wind

RACHEL WIND

Executive for Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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On the cover: Members of the Gather Network, a new ministry for young adults, meet at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi, Minn. Learn more on page 14. Photo: Stephanie Anderson.

Boundless

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Rewriting Narratives in Nicaragua

Jaqueline Canada, who graduated from Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teologicos y Sociales (CIEETS, or Inter-ecclesial Center for Theological and Social Studies) in Nicaragua, says she earned her degree in theological studies for more than career advancement. “I decided to do it out of the need to continue breathing,” she says, and “rediscover myself with theology and from there rediscover a part of myself.” Jaqueline, 35, leads a congregation in Nicaragua. She spent five years working toward her undergraduate degree at CIEETS in order to better serve her faith community. Once she’d completed her

courses, the only requirement left for graduation was a final, “completion of studies” project. At that point she found herself struggling with a lack of confidence: “When I hold the pencil with which I write, a fear tells me that I will not be able to.” Still, she says, “I feel a great need deep inside of me.”

Jaqueline wasn’t alone in her struggle to complete the degree program. CIEETS faculty noticed that fewer women were participating in theology studies and that many of them had finished their coursework but hadn’t completed their final project. “This situation can be due to economic difficulties, family difficulties related to sexist behaviors and also churches with patriarchal models,” explains Blanca Cortez, dean of the theology faculty at CIEETS. In many conservative communities, leadership is reserved only for men.

So, in partnership with the ELCA and thanks to your gifts, CIEETS created a program that offered women students extra guidance as they completed their final project. Participants received financial support and worked with tutors as they shaped the project.



Jaqueline Canada presents the final project required to earn her degree in theological studies. Photo: Moises Mercado.



“This project came as a blessing. Being able to write about me was liberating.”



Because of your generosity to Global Mission, 15 women were able to finish their degrees in theological studies at the Inter-ecclesial Center for Theological and Social Studies in Nicaragua. Now they are serving as leaders in their congregations and changing our narratives about women in the church.

These final projects were based on the “autobiographical method,” with students drawing upon their own life experiences to illustrate what they learned through their theological studies. This approach was empowering and therapeutic for Jacqueline and other participants, who were able to put words to their emotions in a way they hadn’t before, to find connections between themselves and women in the Bible, and to reimagine God as a female figure. As Jaqueline says, “This project came as a blessing. Being able to write about me was liberating.” The approach also enriched the group experience of everyone involved in the program – faculty, tutors and students were all able to learn from one another’s experiences.

The program was initially designed for eight participants, but those students encouraged other women in academic limbo to complete

their final projects as well, and CIEETS was able to find ways to share program resources with these students. Altogether your support has encouraged and enabled 15 women to complete their degrees.

Now these women will take what they have learned back to their home congregations, serving as an example and resource for other emerging women leaders. CIEETS faculty are assembling the students’ writings into a book that can be used in future courses (many of the existing resources were written by men).

Through the gifts you’ve made in support of the ELCA’s global work, you help build a global community of faith where everyone has equal access to education and leadership, and where everyone has a chance to find their voice.



Jackie Ryan (far right) is recognized with fellow Mission Developer Scholarship recipients at the ELCA Fund for Leaders 25th Anniversary Awards Celebration.

NEW CONNECTIONS in Christ

Jackie Ryan spent at least 30 years in the tech industry, working in research and software development as a consultant and team leader before embracing her call to ministry. Now a second-year student at Luther Seminary, Jackie says, “It’s not leaving the tech world behind but rather using those gifts and skills to bring them forward into serving others and helping others experience and hear God in a way they couldn’t before.”

Jackie didn’t grow up in the church. Until she married and experienced the faith practices of her spouse’s Roman Catholic family, she had no interest in religion. But the way her spouse’s family worshiped and lived showed her God in a different way, and she began her own faith journey. Worshiping, learning and being part of a faith community brought her closer to knowing

what it means to listen to God. At 24 she was baptized in the Lutheran church. Since then, she has felt a tug toward ministry.

“The work I used to do in development and consulting, my job was to connect people together,” she recalls, “whether it was employees, clients or people in the supply chain – you name it. Just like in ministry, that connection depends on building relationships and understanding what people are feeling and what their needs are and where they are in life.”

Jackie lives in central Oregon and attends seminary as a distant learner, taking online courses. As an ELCA Fund for Leaders (FFL) scholarship recipient, she wants to use her tech background to find innovative ways of reaching new people. COVID-19 forced the church forward, encouraging congregations and pastors to embrace Zoom and online streaming platforms such as Facebook,

YouTube and Vimeo. But Jackie points out that those platforms are all unidirectional.

“Society and culture are changing. People are looking for different experiences than what they’ve known. ... This kind of mission development isn’t for those already in the church but for those who have yet to join us. The ones who need to be loved and served differently. This is an additional way to reach them when we can’t normally.”

Jackie envisions a future in which the church can use augmented and virtual reality to move beyond one-way digital church experiences to a connectional online church that allows ministry leaders to be present with people in the phases of life when they can’t be present with us. From accessible, virtual hospice ministry to online prayer requests that can connect you with a person able to pray for you in real time, to a database of liturgy accessible across denominations, Jackie sees tremendous potential in what technology can do.

Her scholarship is helping to give her the time, space and knowledge to begin exploring that potential. “FFL is allowing me to build out some of the platform and technologies and theology that needs to be researched, considered and thought out to understand what ministry online could be. This is an early area of work. The blend of my past comes through, and FFL is helping make that possible.”

As she continues her Master of Divinity studies, Jackie is grateful for the donors who are entrusting her and her Fund for Leaders classmates with the future of the church – even as that future is still being shaped. She says, “I’m just so thankful.”

Your generosity enables Jackie and other Fund for Leaders Mission Developer Scholarship recipients to explore new ways of inviting people into our community of faith.

“Society and culture are changing. People are looking for different experiences than what they’ve known.”

... This kind of mission development isn’t for those already in the church but for those who have yet to join us.”

—Jackie Ryan, 2022 ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship recipient



Thank You!

YOUR GIFTS IN ACTION

ELCA Fund for Leaders

"During our time together, I was filled with gratitude — gratitude for the ELCA members willing to invest in us, gratitude that I was able to meet others in my cohort and gratitude for the ability to explore our hopes and questions with each other."

MARIT JOHNSON

Fund for Leaders Full-tuition Scholarship recipient



Marit Johnson (right) at the Fund for Leaders Scholarship Awards Celebration.



For the first time since 2019, Fund for Leaders scholarship recipients gathered in person, for the 25th-anniversary Scholarship Awards Celebration. Thanks to your generosity, these seminary students know that they are surrounded and supported by the whole church as they begin their journeys toward rostered leadership.



Learn about the event and hear directly from more Fund for Leaders scholars who want to thank you at the event website.



Global Mission

"Through your generous donation, you are helping me and Hongo Student Center to not only teach English, Bible class, and discussions, but also to be a sunny corner of grace — a cozy place radiating God's amazing grace in the community."

VOLA RANAIVOSON

Your gifts to Global Mission are strengthening our global community of faith. You foster relationships such as the one between the ELCA and the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church. Together, these churches work to recruit English speakers to teach English in Japan and to support congregational ministries. Vola Ranaivoson (at right in the photo above) is one of those teachers, serving the Hongo Lutheran Church in Tokyo.



International Women Leaders

"I am very, very grateful for the sponsors of [International Women Leaders]. I just want to let you know that your support is literally changing lives. It has changed my life. I'm not the same person I was four years ago when I came here. I am really, truly grateful and blessed to be a part of this."

DIANA KASENTE
IWL scholar

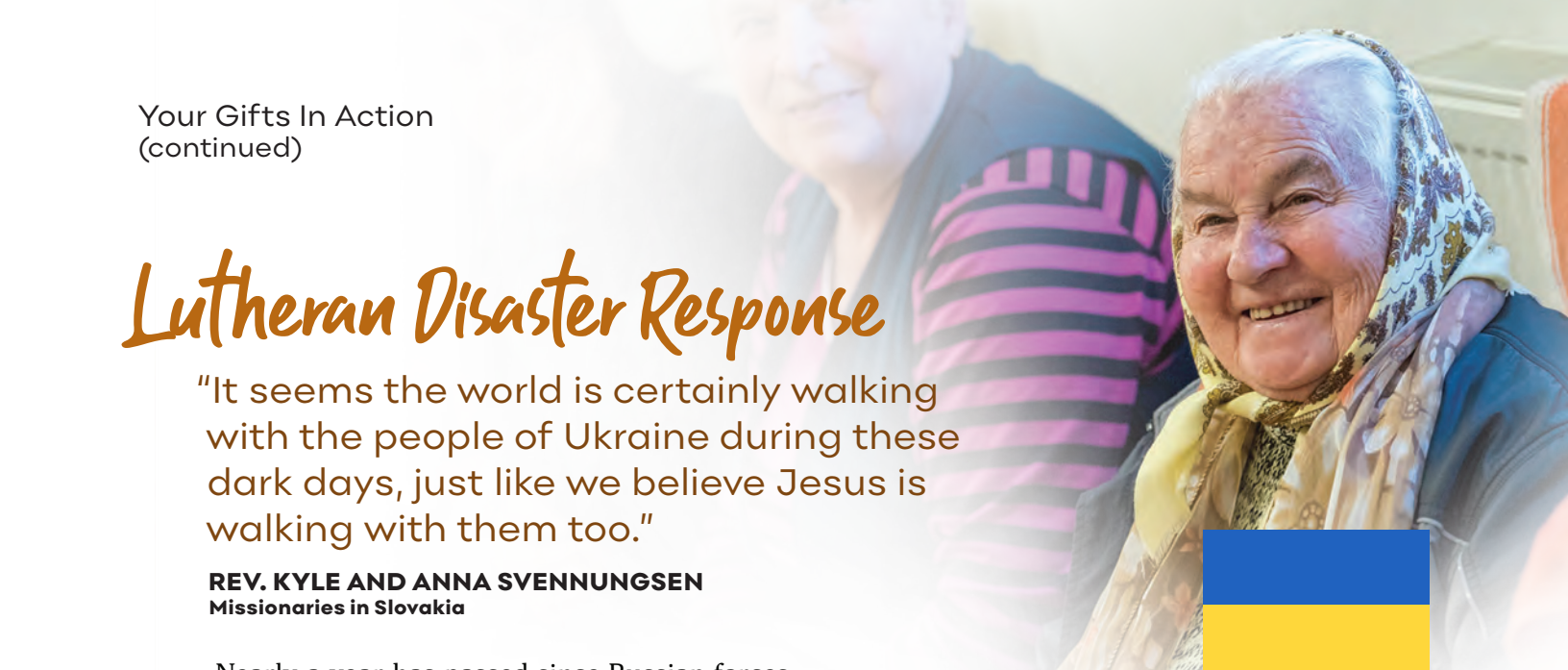
Through your gifts to International Women Leaders, you support the education of emerging leaders from our global companion churches. Your generosity enabled Diana, originally from Kenya, to receive her degree from Newberry College in June.

Lutheran Disaster Response

"It seems the world is certainly walking with the people of Ukraine during these dark days, just like we believe Jesus is walking with them too."

REV. KYLE AND ANNA SVENNUNGENSEN
Missionaries in Slovakia

Nearly a year has passed since Russian forces invaded Ukraine. Through your overwhelming generosity, you have been with the people of Ukraine the entire time, and you will continue to walk alongside them as they rebuild their lives in the days, months and years ahead.



Ukrainian refugee Hennadi in one of the buildings the Lutheran Church in Kuková repurposed to accommodate incoming refugees from Ukraine.
Photo: Albin Hillert/LWF

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger

ARE EMPOWERING OUR PARTNERS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR NEIGHBORS — BOTH NEAR AND FAR.



ELCA World Hunger

"Too many good things are happening! LCLMP [the Lutheran Church in Liberia Malaria Program, an ELCA partner] is always making sure that we have gloves and other PPEs [Personal Protective Equipment] in the delivery room, infection and prevention control materials and many others. Thanks to the Lutheran church."

LORPU, midwife at a clinic in Liberia that is supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger

Young Adults in Global Mission

"Thank you for investing in the Young Adults in Global Mission program. Thank you for investing in young adults like me. Together, we are changing the lives of young people. We are deepening the relationships with our global companions, and we are transforming the world."

CHELSEY JOHNSON

YAGM alum

The Young Adults in Global Mission program was paused for two years during the COVID-19 pandemic. But now, thanks to your support, YAGM is sending volunteers out into the world again for a life-changing journey of service and fellowship.



The 2022 YAGM cohort in front of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.

Congregations

"We're casting a vision for how we're going to touch people we ourselves may never meet."

REV. CHARLES NEWMAN

**Leader of Crossroads Lutheran Church
in San Tan Valley, Ariz.**

"In 2014 we were 14 people with no money, no worship space ... nothing but the desire to be an ELCA Lutheran ministry," says the Rev. Charles Newman, leader of Crossroads Lutheran Church in San Tan Valley, Ariz. Your generous support has helped to grow Crossroads into a community of more than 150 participants on four campuses. Its "microcommunities" include a cigar ministry that engages mainly Black professional men. Members of Crossroads are also working on loving their community through "coffee and the good news" by building a coffee shop. "Our vision is 'making disciples who make disciples who make disciples,'" Newman says. "We're casting a vision for how we're going to touch people we ourselves may never meet."

Your gifts are supporting new, innovative ministries such as Crossroads. You are helping to grow our church by meeting people where they live and spreading the gospel in creative and courageous ways.



Hatching a Stronger Future



“I can proudly say I am now able to run successful projects without fear of failure. My family lacks nothing, I have all that I once dreamt of having, and I am a proud mother.” These are the words of Rumbidzai Tomu, a woman in the Mwenezi District of southern Zimbabwe who is involved with the Integrated Rural Development Project of Lutheran Development Services (LDS) in Zimbabwe. Rumbidzai always had ambitions of providing her family with a better life. With help from LDS and donors such as you, she accomplished her goal.

From a young age, Rumbidzai knew how difficult life could be without a steady income. When she was a child, her parents couldn't afford school fees, and she relied on a nongovernmental

organization to get through high school. When she got married, her husband would try to cross borders to secure items for resale in Zimbabwe. However, these trips were irregular because he didn't have the necessary travel documents.

In 2017, LDS established garden and fishery projects in Rumbidzai's community, giving her and others the opportunity to generate a consistent income. Two years later, though, their water source dried up and the projects could not continue. Rumbidzai was again without an income.

Rumbidzai is chair of the project committee, and when the garden and fishery projects ended, she and the other members looked for ways to revive them. In 2021 they submitted a proposal to LDS for a new project that wasn't as reliant on water: the poultry project.

The Integrated Rural Development Project, which funded the poultry project with support from ELCA World Hunger, empowers individuals in rural communities, such as Rumbidzai, to attain sustainable livelihoods and generate income. Participants attend workshops on aquaculture, climate-smart agriculture, small livestock production, and income saving and lending. The trainings give them the necessary tools and knowledge to pursue a livelihood that appeals to them.

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"The money I obtained from selling vegetables, I multiplied it through income saving and lending and then used it to build the chicken housing."

The poultry project proposal was accepted by LDS, and the committee constructed fowl runs at their homesteads for chickens that they could sell or raise for meat and eggs. LDS and government agricultural extension officers led trainings to teach participants more about raising poultry and choosing the right breeds of chickens for their needs. Rumbidzai plans to sell 34 chickens, which will leave her with 30 hens and 10 roosters for egg production.

As the poultry project excelled, sufficient rainfall came to replenish the community's water source, enabling Rumbidzai to bring back the garden project and add vegetable sales to her streams of income. She also participates in a community income-saving-and-lending group, which increases the investment capital of everyone in the group.

"The money I obtained from selling vegetables, I multiplied it through income saving and lending and then used it to build the chicken housing," explained Rumbidzai. "My Sasso chickens I got from the LDS are well taken care of."

Rumbidzai's aspirations didn't stop with her chickens and garden. With her savings, she opened a small shop. Her husband, who can now afford travel documents, imports items from South Africa and Mozambique to sell in the store. She also bought pigs to add another source of income.



Thanks to the Integrated Rural Development Project, your gifts to ELCA World Hunger and her own ambitions, Rumbidzai and her family now have three meals a day and she can afford to send her four children to school.

"Now even if LDS will go, we don't feel abandoned," said Rumbidzai. "We have the capacity to sustain ourselves as a family using the skills we got from LDS."



Photo: Jessica Holleque

Gathered Together

The first seeds for the Gather Network were planted several years ago in Minnesota when a few communities and churches in the Minneapolis–St. Paul area collaborated to create Gather Twin Cities – a space for young adults to join in fellowship, worship, community and discussion.

Another seed was planted in the Abide small groups – a virtual ministry for ELCA members between 18 and 35 that started shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020. After connecting online, some members of those small groups expressed interest in gathering in person. To meet this need, the ELCA Young Adult Ministry team began building the Gather Network. It is made up of four current ministries, with several more in development. These ministries do not replace traditional worship but provide a unique, specific space for young adults to explore their faith together in new ways.

Through programs such as the Gather Network, your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most are rippling out through the entire church. You are helping new, young and diverse people to experience the gift of community, rooted in Christ.

CURRENT MINISTRIES IN THE GATHER NETWORK:

- **Gather Twin Cities — Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minn.**
- **Gather Cincinnati — Cincinnati, Ohio**
- **Gather Pikes Peak — Colorado Springs, Colo.**
- **A Community Called Grace — Bemidji, Minn.**

CITIES WITH GATHER MINISTRIES IN DEVELOPMENT:

- **Denver, Colo.**
- **Grand Rapids, Mich.**
- **Metropolitan D.C.**
- **Kansas City, Kan.**
- **Austin, Texas**
- **Phoenix, Ariz.**
- **Chicago, Ill.**
- **Milwaukee, Wis.**
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- **Duluth, Minn. / Superior, Wis.**
- **Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio**
- **Kearney, Neb.**

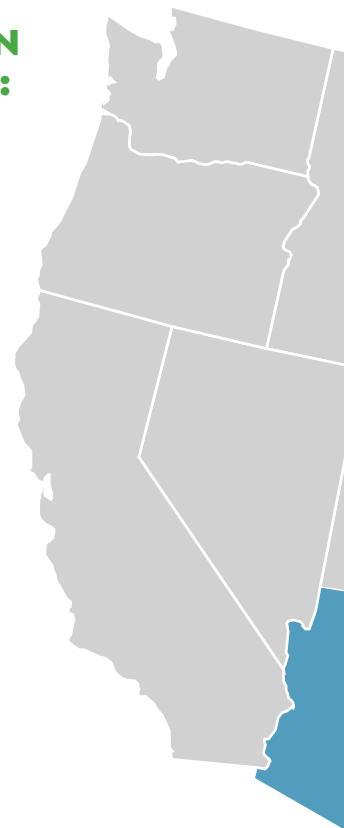




Photo: Stephanie Anderson

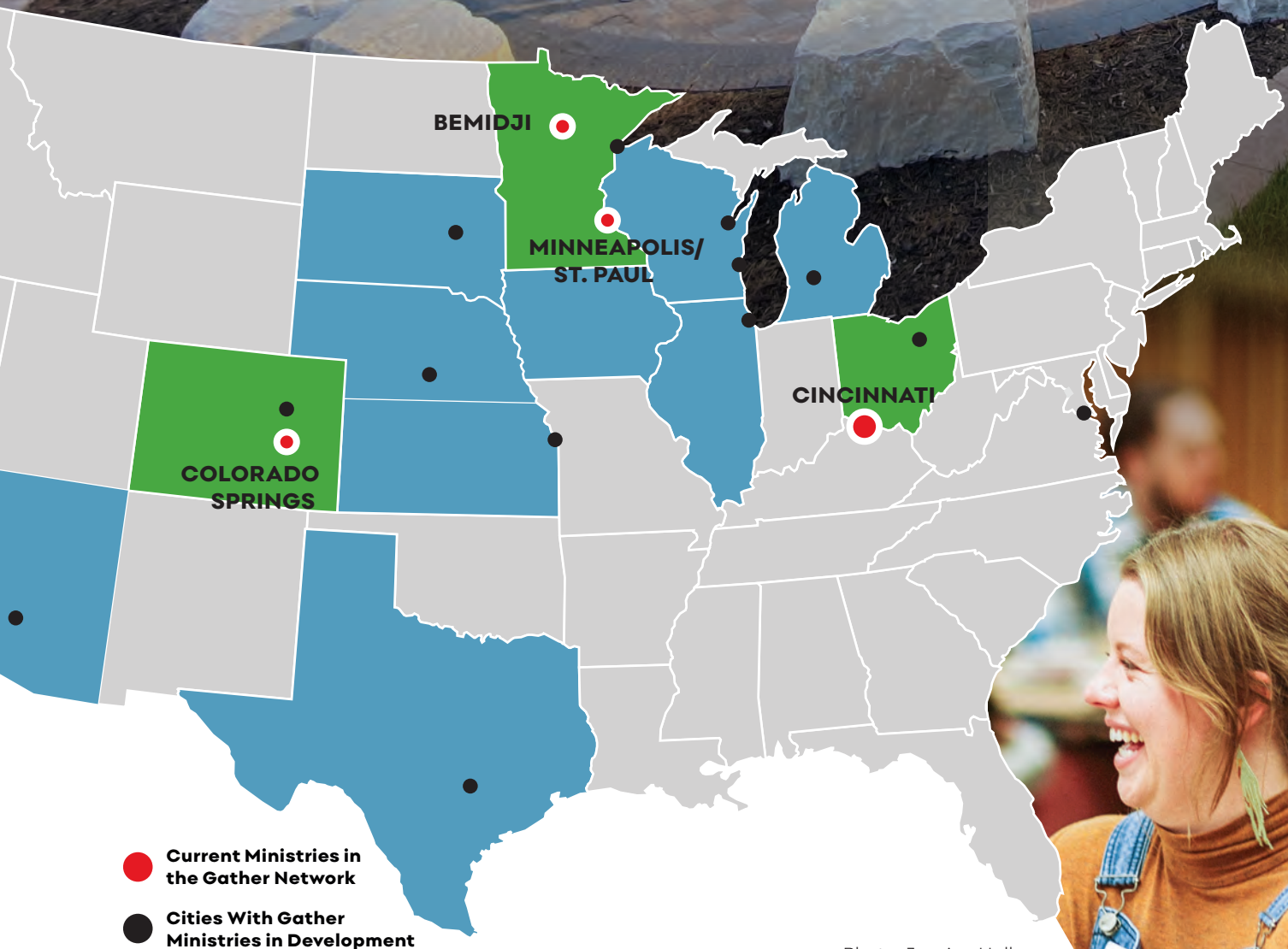


Photo: Jessica Holleque

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Missionary Vola Ranaivoson (right) teaches English at the Hongo Student Center in Tokyo, Japan. Learn more about her work on p. 9.

