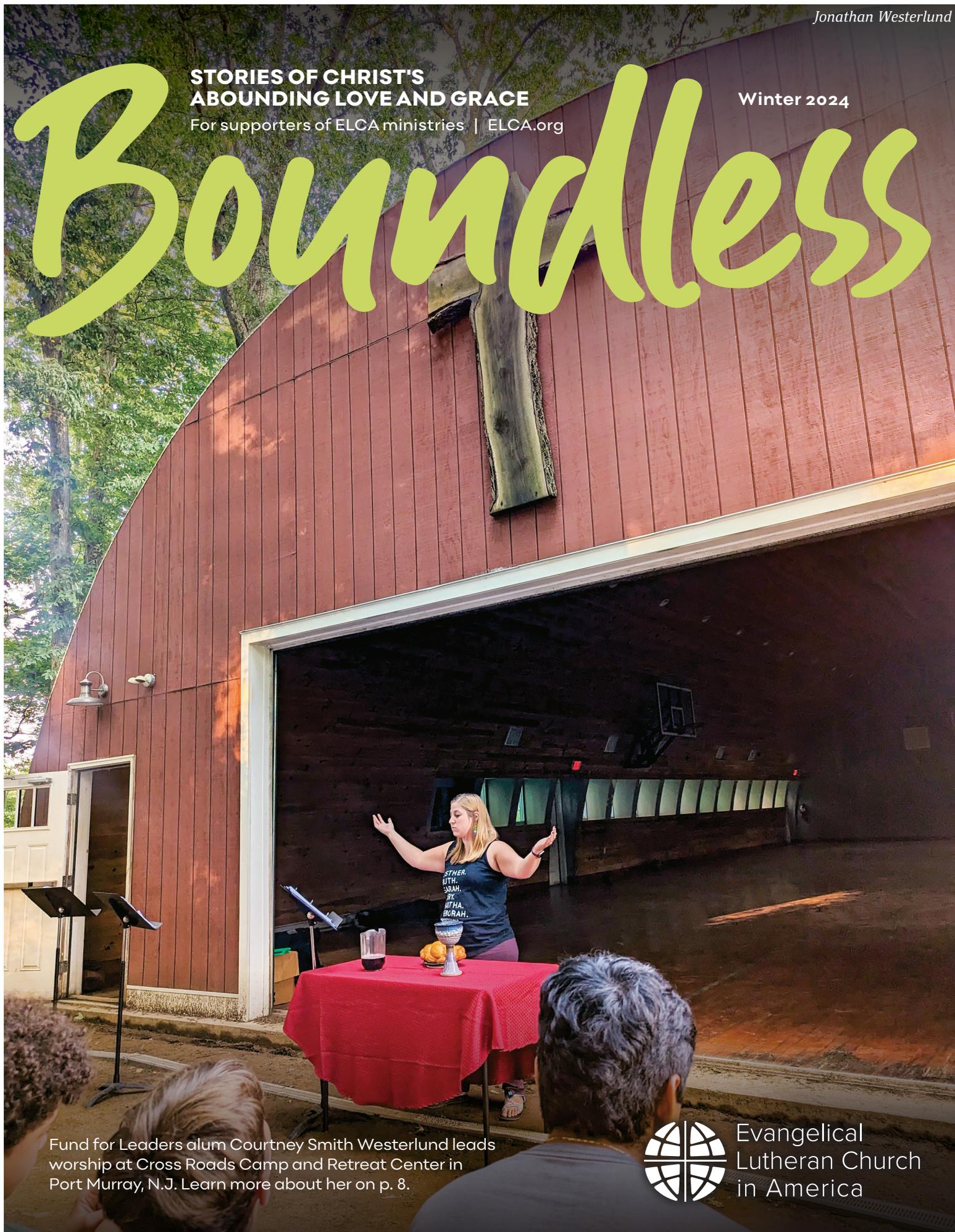


STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

For supporters of ELCA ministries | ELCA.org

Winter 2024

Boundless



Fund for Leaders alum Courtney Smith Westerlund leads worship at Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center in Port Murray, N.J. Learn more about her on p. 8.



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you" (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Dear friends in Christ,

A few years ago, when we began dreaming about this newsletter, we knew a couple things right away. We wanted to illustrate the impact donors such as you are making across our church and throughout our global community, so we knew the newsletter would contain stories, from across ministries, about the lives you have changed. But we still needed a title that would fit the scope of your impact and those stories.

Eventually we settled on "Boundless." It's a word that illustrates God's love for us — as well as the ways you share that love. With each new issue "Boundless" continues to live into its title, thanks to your incredible generosity. You are making a difference beyond the bounds of geography and time.

In this edition of "Boundless" alone, you can read about how your gifts are at work in the United States and around the world. You help provide crucial resources to people experiencing homelessness in Austin, Texas, and to missionaries in Bratislava, Slovakia. You have empowered one pastor to serve the community he grew up with in rural Iowa and another pastor to create a welcoming community in digital spaces. You are part of a long history of giving — as you can see when you read about the 50th anniversary of ELCA World Hunger — and your gifts will continue to strengthen communities for generations to come.

As this new year begins, I am filled with gratitude for all the work your faithful generosity has made possible over the past several months. I am also filled with hope for how that work will grow and evolve in the future. Thank you for your partnership and for the countless ways you share God's boundless love!



With abundant gratitude,

Rachel Wind

RACHEL WIND

Executive for Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Online

[ELCA.org/donate](https://elca.org/donate)

Phone

800-638-3522

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Make checks payable to "ELCA" and mail to:
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P.O. Box 1809
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Scan to support the work of our church!

Boundless

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Gifts of Global Community

Kelly Schumacher Fuller (foreground) greets the new YAGM Central Europe volunteers.



At the beginning of 2023, when Aaron Fuller and Kelly Schumacher Fuller were in a season of discernment about where God might be leading them, they never imagined they would find new positions, together, on the other side of the world.

Kelly had worked with domestic and international programs that focus on leadership development, helping refugee and immigrant populations in Minnesota, serving as a Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) in South Africa, and living and working for years in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Germany and Washington, D.C. Aaron had served as a submarine officer for almost 10 years before pursuing a seminary degree and becoming a chaplain in the Navy Reserve. He is interested in trauma-informed spiritual care, ethical leadership and moral injury (the damage done when a person perpetrates, witnesses or fails to prevent acts that transgress their own moral beliefs and values).

In January 2023, Kelly got the chance to serve as YAGM country coordinator for Central Europe, and Aaron was named pastor of the Bratislava International Church in Slovakia. By March they were deployed. By May they were in Budapest, Hungary for language instruction and cultural immersion, and by August they had moved into their apartment in Slovakia. The couple work in tandem, each contributing their own gifts.



Rev. Aaron Fuller (center) is installed as pastor of Bratislava International Church in Bratislava, Slovakia. Your gifts to missionaries such as Aaron and Kelly Schumacher Fuller enable them to become rooted in communities around the world and deepen connections with our global companions.

A year of service through the YAGM program invites young adults to become the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, providing critical support to ministries and projects in communities of need. It also invites volunteers into a journey of self-reflection, providing them with space to consider their sense of identity, God's work in the world and their place within it all. YAGM country coordinators serve both a pastoral and an administrative role, arranging all placement sites, housing and volunteer retreats, as well as providing care and support throughout the year.

Many of these young adults, Kelly points out, feel as if they're coming to offer something and instead have to learn how to accept offerings from others. Kelly encourages them to recalibrate their expectations and truly embrace the beauty of accompaniment. Rather than seeking to be experts, their role is being in relationship with those around them and learning from those connections.

"Any given Sunday is a new pocket of people. It's a really diverse congregation in thoughts, walks of life, race — truly an international community."

—Rev. Aaron Fuller

"As Americans we find so much worth and affirmation in getting the right answer and having all the information," she says. "There's comfort in competency. But what does it look like to build our capacity to connect instead?"

Aaron's role as pastor of the Bratislava International Church is another lesson in accompaniment. He preaches to 70 or so people each Sunday, but the makeup of the congregation is never quite the same. "It's fluid — we have immigrants from Iran, we have folks who work with Ukrainian refugees, and native Slovaks. Any given Sunday is a new pocket of people. It's a really diverse congregation in thoughts, walks of life, race — truly an international community."

Aaron quickly realized that expectations for him in Slovakia were different than in the states; the pace was slower and less driven by specific events and programming. He says, "I'm constantly asking myself what I can bring back to the ELCA and congregations in the United States from this experience."

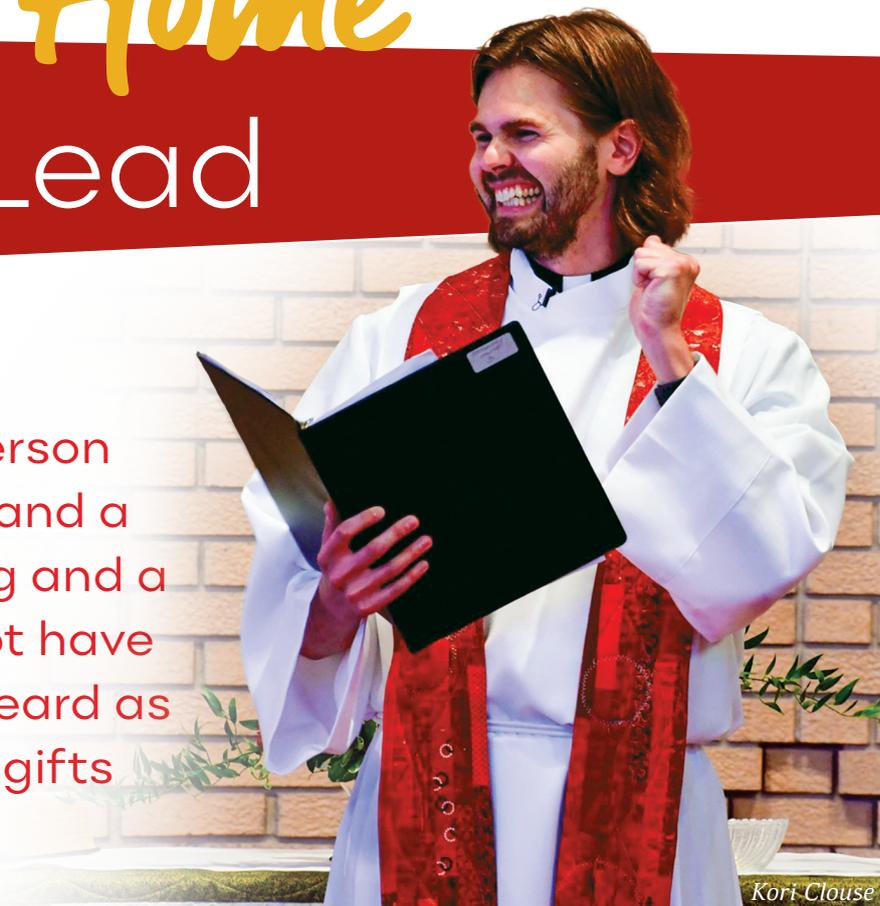
By empowering missionaries such as Aaron and Kelly, your gifts foster global relationships that change the church — here and abroad. As ELCA missionaries learn to embrace the work of accompaniment, they walk alongside the communities they serve and act as God's hands and feet in the world. The experience, like many Spirit-led journeys, feels unexpected. As Kelly puts it, "I could never have named the opportunities that God provided, and isn't that beautiful?"



Coming Home to Lead

"Everyone you're supporting is a person with unique gifts and a story and a calling and a voice that may not have been able to be heard as readily had these gifts not been given."

—Rev. Jami Goetz



Kori Clouse

Students awarded scholarships by the ELCA Fund for Leaders are able to attend seminary and, unburdened by financial debt, to serve the church wherever the Holy Spirit calls them.

Yet the journey of leadership took Jami Goetz to a familiar place: the synod where he grew up.

Originally from Buffalo Center, Iowa, Jami began to feel called to ministry at a young age. He enjoyed pursuing knowledge and insight through the Bible. He describes his parents as "service-oriented" people who instilled a value of service in him as well. Ministry seemed like the right way to match his gifts and passions, and to give back to others.

Jami learned about ELCA Fund for Leaders as he finished his undergraduate degree and began applying for seminary. His scholarship award meant that he could attend Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn., where he felt God was calling him. It also helped him feel affirmed in his call. "Fund for Leaders was my first experience of breaking out of myself and my bubble and of thinking about the wider church," he says. "Here was this push from people I've never met before that say, 'We can see these gifts that other people close to you see and that you feel, and we believe in you and want to support you in this.'"

Jami worked in Luther's admissions office while studying, so he got to hear what the Fund for



Kori Clouse

Leaders meant to his classmates as well. Many of them grew emotional when they heard about these full-tuition scholarships that could allow them to become pastors without taking on any debt. “There’s just something really spiritual about that.”

As Jami approached the end of seminary studies, he heard there was a need for leadership in the Western Iowa Synod – specifically, an opening for a pastor at Grace Lutheran Church in Spirit Lake, about an hour’s drive from his hometown. He wrestled with his decision, but ultimately he knew God was calling him there. He felt a responsibility to his parents and the community that helped him begin his own leadership journey. He understood that rural communities

can have a hard time finding pastors. And he could feel how excited the people at Grace were about his specific skills, passions and ideas.

Jami has just begun his work as lead pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, but he’s already busy building community there, meeting with members and listening to their stories. The congregation is committed to creating a welcoming space for everyone, and he is excited to help them. He is working on growing their youth programming and inviting families into church. Before Jami began serving at Grace, the congregation had pared down its worship; he has revived the fuller liturgical services, which have brought new energy to the congregation. Multiple people have told him that worship now feels like a homecoming.

Jami describes different parts of his leadership journey as “puzzle pieces falling into place.” Your gifts to ELCA Fund for Leaders enable him and other leaders to serve our church wherever they fit the needs of their communities – in rural congregations such as Grace and in others of all shapes and sizes across the ELCA. Jami is deeply grateful: “Everyone you’re supporting is a person with unique gifts and a story and a calling and a voice that may not have been able to be heard as readily had these gifts not been given.”



Kori Clouse

Your gifts to ELCA Fund for Leaders empower leaders such as the Rev. Jami Goetz, who answered the call to lead a congregation in his home synod of Western Iowa.

Thank You!

YOUR GIFTS IN ACTION

Your gifts are making a difference in the United States and around the world – but don't take our word for it. Here are just a few of the people your generosity has touched, describing the impact you have had on their lives.

Fund for Leaders

"I truly cannot say 'thank you' enough. You changed my life, you made seminary possible for me, and you've helped me grow into my calling as a pastor. Knowing there are people, whom I may never meet, supporting me and other future people in ministry means the world to me. I thank God for you, your generosity and your support of leaders in ministry."

—Rev. Courtney Smith Westerlund,
2018 Full-tuition Scholarship recipient



Global Mission

"Every time I go abroad, I learn more about God and relationship. God is working in amazing ways all around the world, and it is a blessing and honor to be a witness and partner in ministry."

—Rev. Bridget Gautieri

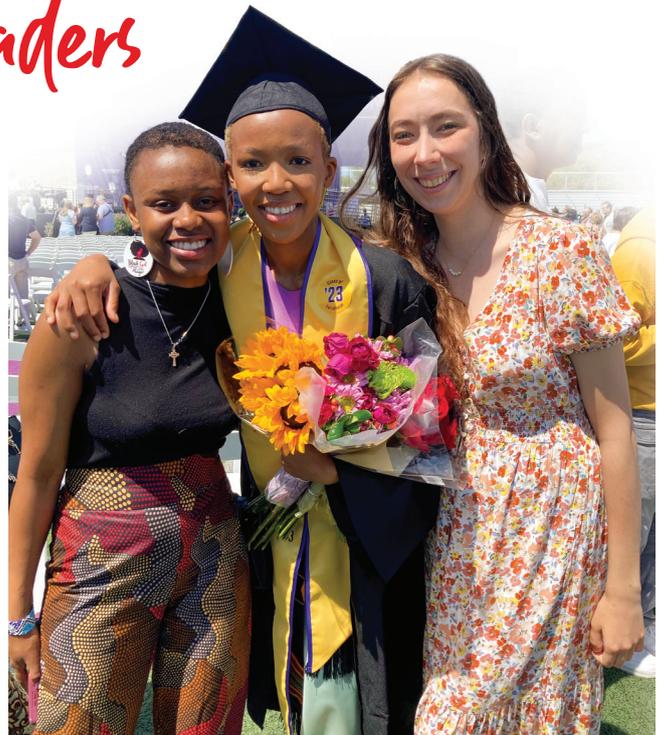
Your gifts to Global Mission are strengthening our global community of faith. Bridget Gautieri serves as ELCA Wittenberg Center coordinator in Wittenberg, Germany. She is grateful to supporters of ELCA missionaries for allowing her to work and live in Wittenberg, where the community is ready to welcome her.



International Women Leaders

"I would love to say 'thank you.' I think that gifts [to IWL] have been of tremendous support in my academic journey. The impact that it has on me as a person, it's really huge. It is what makes my life on campus every day so smooth. I can just study what I want to be without having to worry about anything else — it's just immeasurable."

—Naomi Mbise



Through your gifts to International Women Leaders, you support the education of emerging leaders from our global companion churches. Your generosity enabled Naomi, originally from Tanzania, to receive her degree from California Lutheran University last June. Now she works as an intern in the ELCA's Lutheran Office for World Community.

Lutheran Disaster Response

"I'll never feel alone, and I'll take the help of others to withstand any disaster situation."

—Surya Tudu

Thanks to your support for Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), communities around the world are rebuilding in the wake of disasters. After Surya Tudu's home in Cuttack, India, flooded, she was unsure how to secure food for her family. Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT), a longtime partner of LDR, provided her with food and hygiene supplies to help prevent waterborne illnesses. LWSIT also trained her to better prepare for future floods.



Sprouting Roots

in Community

In 1998, Alan Graham heard God's call to "love your neighbor." He answered this call by looking around his community in Austin, Texas, and pondering what was needed. Seeing the large population of unhoused people, Alan and a few friends started preparing and delivering sandwiches to people who were experiencing hunger and homelessness. They called their ministry Mobile Loaves & Fishes, driving a truck to deliver food and clothing. As Alan and other volunteers talked with the people visiting the truck, they saw that their clients craved relationships. The ministry became a source of both food and community.

Ellis first patronized the Mobile Loaves & Fishes food truck over eight years ago, walking for more than two hours from the spot in North Austin where he'd been camping. At the truck Ellis met Alan. Together they talked, prayed and, of course, ate delicious food. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.





Alone and unhoused just eight years ago, Ellis now has permanent housing, a job he loves and a community he considers his family. "I'm not alone anymore!"

After witnessing the patrons' desire for belonging and purpose, the Mobile Loaves & Fishes organizers established Community First! Village, a 51-acre facility that provides affordable housing and supportive services for chronically unhoused people in Austin. Residents are presented with opportunities to earn a dignified income and can access physical and mental health care. The program organizers and residents are working to build the community that God has called them into, together. Ellis is an essential part of that fellowship.

Ellis moved into Community First! Village in 2015, and there he flourished. His favorite part of the community is Genesis Gardens, where he started working even before moving in. First a part-time contractor, now a full-time staff member, Ellis leads a team of residents and volunteers who harvest, wash and package the fruit and vegetables grown in the gardens, and who collect eggs from the gardens' flock of chickens. He and his team use the produce to prepare different varieties of salsa, hummus and pesto, selling their products at a weekly farmers market.

With support from ELCA World Hunger, the Community First! Village Genesis Gardens have grown over the years. The community brought in new residents and expanded the gardens, helping gardeners generate larger incomes. This also gave

Genesis Gardens the opportunity to employ more volunteers and dismantle their stereotypes of unhoused people – giving them new ways to show love for their closest neighbors.

Alone and unhoused just eight years ago, Ellis now has permanent housing, a job he loves and a community he considers his family. "I'm not alone anymore!" he observes.



For 50 years, ELCA World Hunger has changed countless lives in the United States and around the world by addressing the root causes of hunger through projects that

focus on agriculture and nutrition, water and sanitation, income and savings, health, housing and other justice issues. The global reach of ELCA World Hunger is made possible through partnerships with churches and organizations such as Community First! Village that are also carrying out God's work. Working with local partners encourages efficiency and empowers communities to tailor solutions to their specific challenges. Your gifts to ELCA ministries such as ELCA World Hunger give people such as Ellis the chance to become more resilient in an ever-changing world.





50 years

of ELCA World Hunger



"Let us love
not in word
or speech
but in deed
and truth."

—1 John 3:18

Since 1974 hundreds of thousands of generous people from across this church have contributed more than \$650 million to support ELCA World Hunger. Countless more have prayed for our shared mission, led their congregations in special fundraising efforts, volunteered at local hunger ministries, or advocated to change policies and systems that perpetuate injustice. Together we have made great strides against hunger and poverty, providing food to meet immediate needs while equipping communities to foster long-term change through access to education and quality health care, sustainable solutions in agriculture, and advocacy for just laws that make ending hunger possible.

50
years



We have been part of this story – a story of faith in action, a story of hope, but most of all a story of a church set free for bold, abundant love and service, a church that responds, with creativity and courage, to God’s invitation to transform the world. Despite the challenges we face, the story goes on.



L. Gillibert/LWF

Join us in celebration and be part of the story of our next 50 years together — boldly and faithfully pursuing God’s promise of a just world where all are fed.



All Places

Together



“My hope is that All Places Together continues to be a ministry that celebrates that God loves us wherever, whoever and however we are.”

—Rev. Colleen Montgomery

The Rev. Colleen Montgomery has been a digital-first, progressive pastor in the ELCA for over eight years. Like most of us, Colleen felt her faith change during the pandemic. She felt an urgency to create an online faith community, because she knew God wasn’t inside buildings. From that place of urgency she launched All Places Together, a digital faith community and podcast.

“All Places Together has many communities within it,” Colleen explains. “We’ve grown from just the podcast community to a social media community, Zoom community and partner congregations who subscribe to our social media subscription. Young adults are woven throughout all of these communities.”



Hoping to engage and grow this community, Colleen jumped at the chance to work with ELCA Innovation Lab – a new initiative of the ELCA that tries to change the way we think about and approach challenges in the church, and to inspire innovative solutions.

In partnership with Solace VR, the lab developed a prototype to connect spirituality and authenticity in a virtual space where people use personalized avatars to interact with each other across the



world in real time. Having built a temporary platform, the lab needed someone to test the prototype in their own ministry context. Colleen, All Places Together and the ELCA Young Adult Ministry volunteered.

All Places Together hosted a prototype event where young adults could explore a relaxed and safe digital space to wonder and reflect, chat with other curious people about life's biggest questions and embrace a "no-judgment zone" facilitated by Colleen. On this night of learning, young people from across the ELCA gathered around a virtual campfire to share their experiences of God in a whole new way.

Inspired by this experience, All Places Together is poised to start developing a new space on a new platform. Its hope is to offer an inclusive and affirming VR space where young adults can share their questions of faith and make new connections. "My hope is that All Places Together continues

to be a ministry that celebrates that God loves us, wherever, whoever and however we are," says Colleen. "That we can be a safe faith community for LGBTQIA+ individuals who may not live near an affirming congregation. When nourished by God, we can grow our capacity to see God's movement around us and share God's love in our daily lives, with neighbors and strangers alike."

The future of virtual reality in the church could look like a lot of things. The Innovation Lab envisions anything from regular events facilitated by ELCA community leaders to "ask an ELCA pastor" sessions with open office hours to online support groups where pastors such as Colleen are able to bring their whole selves to the space and to model the radical acceptance (of both neighbor and self) that our faith professes. Whatever comes, your unrestricted gifts to Where Needed Most help people as they search for a more inclusive, forgiving God and try to experience Jesus through authentic community.

Your gifts to Where Needed Most drive innovation across the ELCA. With your support, leaders such as the Rev. Colleen Montgomery are exploring new ways to create safe and welcoming spaces for people in search of community.

Boundless

Winter 2024

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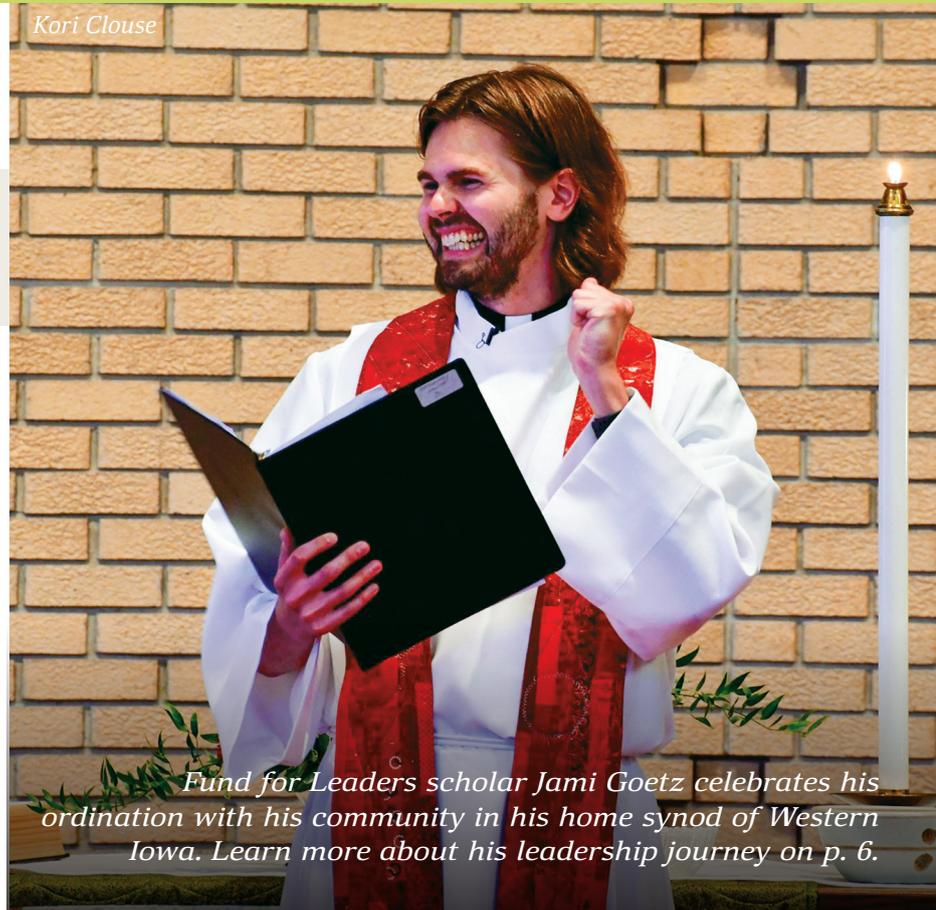
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Fund for Leaders scholar Jami Goetz celebrates his ordination with his community in his home synod of Western Iowa. Learn more about his leadership journey on p. 6.