

FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

STORIES OF CHRIST'S
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

Winter 2026
ELCA.org

Boundless



Members of a Roma girls' club in Serbia celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child. Learn how you support them – and how they support one another – on p. 6.



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold." —Psalm 18:2

Dear siblings in Christ,

We are surrounded by change, always. Sometimes that's exciting, and other times it's overwhelming. Maybe you're experiencing one of those overwhelming times right now as we find ourselves at the beginning of a new year, with new goals and routines. There's also a new beginning for our church as the Rev. Yehiel Curry starts his term as presiding bishop of the ELCA. He will lead our community of faith as it responds to a world that's changing too.

Yet even in times of transition, some things remain the same. As Christians, we can steady ourselves with the eternal constancy of God's grace. We know that God's love for us exists outside of time, space and the flux we experience in every corner of our lives. Through your gifts to ELCA ministries, you let that everlasting love shine through you. Even as old systems fail and new troubles arise, you remain a constant presence alongside our neighbors around the world.

This issue of "Boundless" is full of examples: our story about the Rev. Bekah Davis describes the challenges mounting against migrants and refugees in Cairo but also our church's mission to support them, which continues thanks to your support. The stories about Ruzica and Pla show how your generosity enables women to honor their commitment to their own education. We continue to lift up educational opportunities for women and girls because — informed by the stories of Ruth, Esther and other powerful women in the Bible — we know that women can change the world. And the story about Confluence demonstrates how you help our church find innovative ways to share the age-old story of God's love.

When we feel as if the ground is shifting beneath our feet and change is life's only constant, we are invited to lean on God as our rock. Your faithful generosity is helping to spread that message to others — those named in "Boundless" and those beyond. For so many of our neighbors, you are a steady force of hope. **Thank you.**

In abounding gratitude,



Rachel Wind

RACHEL WIND

Executive for Development

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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GLOBAL MISSION 4
A beautiful mix of people

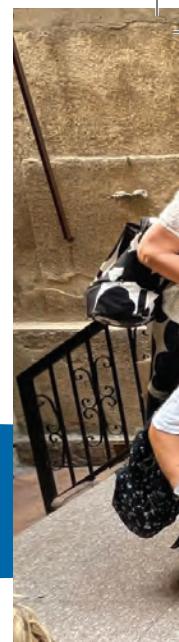
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A beautiful mix of people



The Rev. Bekah Davis, an ELCA missionary in Cairo, Egypt, describes her current congregation as “a beautiful mix of people.” To describe the unique community she has the privilege to serve, she shares an image from a recent memorial service. As she led the service, she watched the British ambassador to Egypt – a wealthy man with significant political influence – worship next to a refugee from South Sudan who, until two years ago, didn’t know how to read. “It’s an incredible thing to witness,” Rev. Davis says.

Rev. Davis is about three years into her four-year term as pastor of St. Andrew’s United Church of Cairo in Egypt and chaplain at St. Andrew’s Refugee Services (StARS). An international, ecumenical congregation, St. Andrew’s provides a safe space for individuals of all faiths as well as those with lived experience of forced displacement. Through ELCA World Hunger, donors such as you have long supported the congregation and its work with migrants and refugees – and now you are supporting Rev. Davis’ call as a spiritual leader and community builder.

Rev. Davis leads English-language worship services every week and manages the use of the building by five other language- or ethnic-specific congregations. Thousands of people turn to St. Andrew’s to worship, pray and

memorialize their loved ones at funeral services. Rev. Davis’ role requires a lot of pastoral sensitivity and problem-solving.

With so many congregations using the same space, the church doesn’t always have enough time, staff or building space for all of them. Rev. Davis has been working with leadership of the different congregations to ensure that everyone has the resources they need. They are willing and ready to work together in ministry, but they rely on Rev. Davis to bridge language and cultural gaps.

The work that truly “captures joy” for Rev. Davis is her role as chaplain of StARS. That organization, which was founded by an ELCA pastor in 1979, has helped over 80,000 forcibly displaced individuals from the Horn of Africa, Yemen, Syria and Iraq secure housing, education, emergency medical assistance, legal aid, political advocacy and basic human rights. StARS also provides child protection services to unaccompanied and separated children and youth, who make up a large portion of the people it serves. StARS now has over 600 staff members and 200 volunteers. Volunteers sometimes come from the local community or from partners such as the ELCA, but many are refugees themselves who are being trained for paid staff roles.



Your gifts enable the Rev. Bekah Davis to serve as pastor of St. Andrew's United Church of Cairo and chaplain at St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) in Cairo, Egypt. With your support, she serves a wide array of people in Cairo, working to accompany the vulnerable and build a stronger community for all.

Along with the joy in this ministry, there are significant challenges too. Over the past year, it has become more difficult for refugees and asylum-seekers in Egypt to access the resources and legal protections they need to rebuild their lives in a new home. StARS staff are working to provide what safety and stability they can for their new neighbors, but the future of their work has become uncertain.

Through this uncertainty, Rev. Davis continues her ministry, bearing witness to everyday joy and injustice. "I cherish this as a part of my chapter right now," she says. "But in my heart of hearts, I wish we lived in a world where this wasn't a need."

"I cherish this as a part of my chapter right now. But in my heart of hearts, I wish we lived in a world where this wasn't a need."

—The Rev. Bekah Davis

Through your generosity, you are working toward that better world alongside Rev. Davis and our partners at StARS – a world where all are safe, welcome and able to feel the power of God's love.



The Rev. Bekah Davis and her husband, Rob Forrest

"I will never give up on my dreams"



Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization staff member Slavica (left) visits Ruzica (right) and her family at home.

When Ruzica, who lives in Serbia, graduated from eighth grade, she thought she had reached the end of her educational journey.

This wasn't her choice. "I've always dreamed of enrolling in medical school to become a pediatric nurse," she says. But Ruzica's grandparents – who have raised her since she was born – didn't have the money for her to continue school.

"I will never give up on my dreams and [will] continue to strive to do my best. Every young girl should follow their dreams."

—Ruzica

Ruzica remembers that when her grandmother told her they couldn't afford to send Ruzica to medical school, she felt as if her dreams shattered. "Nothing seemed to matter anymore," Ruzica says.

Ruzica is a member of the Roma community, the largest ethnic minority in Europe. Systemic discrimination has made it difficult for many Roma people – especially women and girls – to



complete their secondary education. Eighth grade girls such as Ruzica run an especially high risk of dropping out. When they don't finish school, their options to provide for themselves and their families diminish greatly. Ruzica's grandmother didn't continue her own education past primary school, but she wanted Ruzica to go farther and enjoy more opportunities than she did.

Ruzica enrolled in technical school with her grandparents' support, but her financial situation made that difficult too. She lacked money for books, school supplies and transportation to and from school. She wasn't sure how she would make it through her program.

Then one of Ruzica's neighbors told her about a local girls' club run by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), a partner of ELCA World Hunger. The club aspires to empower Roma girls to continue their education from primary school through university. The 10 girls in the club support and encourage one another, and program leaders work with the girls' families to make sure they're supported at home as well.

The club introduced Ruzica to other Roma girls facing challenges similar to hers and to Roma women with successful careers. Program leaders invited a few women, including the director of the Office for Roma Inclusion, to work with the group as professional role models. The director helped Ruzica secure a scholarship.

Ruzica thought her education was finished after eighth grade. But your gifts to ELCA World Hunger have made it possible for her to continue school, bringing her closer to her dream of becoming a pediatric nurse. Your generosity enables women and girls around the world to keep learning, to increase their earning potential and to strengthen their futures.

As Ruzica continues her education, she is grateful to be able to share her struggles and triumphs with her peers in the club. "We have the opportunity to share our experiences and talk about everything that troubles us," she says. "I look forward to each coming workshop or meeting."

With the support of donors such as you, the girls' club continues to present new opportunities for Ruzica to build a stronger future for herself and her whole community. This past year, EHO hosted a Roma Activism Forum in Belgrade where Ruzica delivered a speech to the 60 attendees about the educational challenges she had faced. As the forum's youngest participant, she says, she was nervous about speaking to the group, but she overcame her fear and was rewarded with "a huge round of applause" after her talk. Organizers said she was one of the favorite speakers at the event.

Ruzica doesn't plan to stop learning or working toward a stronger future for herself and other women like her. "I will never give up on my dreams and [will] continue to strive to do my best," she says. "Every young girl should follow their dreams."

Through your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, you have accompanied Ruzica throughout her journey. By walking alongside her, you offer Ruzica, and others like her around the world, a way out of the cycle of poverty and toward a future of abundance and hope.

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 your impact on their lives.



Fund for Leaders

"Your support doesn't just help students – it helps shape the future of the church. Every gift you give becomes a sermon preached, a baptism celebrated, a meal shared and a hurting heart comforted. Donors like you make it possible for leaders to be formed not just academically but spiritually and emotionally, so we can show up fully for the communities we're called to serve. Your generosity is part of every moment of grace we witness in ministry."

—Juan Manuel Arias Perea,
2021 Fund for Leaders Scholar

Your gifts enable the future leaders of our church to answer God's call to serve and build ministries they are passionate about.



Global Mission

"As the ELCA, we work in these contexts, addressing people's lives for the betterment of human living and the flourishing of communities; we work to represent you in the world."

—Chandran Paul Martin,
ELCA Regional Representative for Asia

Lutheran Disaster Response

"We thought we were not ever going to be able to use this fellowship hall again. And now it is renewed, and it's so beautiful, and we're hoping now that people will have funeral dinners and wedding receptions here, and we all feel just reenergized now. The donation [from Lutheran Disaster Response] actually brought us to tears when we found out we were going to get it, and you guys got a standing ovation in our church."

—Joann,
Canton Lutheran Church member



In 2024, about a foot of water flooded into the basement fellowship hall of Canton Lutheran Church in Canton, S.D., rendering it unusable. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response empowered this small congregation to repair the space and restore it as a busy community hub.

Young Adults in Global Mission

"It was because of your support from wherever you are that I was truly able to engage as much as I did during my YAGM year. Whether it be monetarily, through prayer, or even in person if you are in the Hungarian community, having you being my back, supporting me, was monumental. I felt encouraged from you all and was motivated to share more stories and be a witness to the goodness of God and the saving grace of Christ as I lived in Kőszeg."

—Megan Valle,
Central Europe, 2024-25



Your support enables young people to embark on life-changing journeys of global fellowship as part of the Young Adults in Global Mission program. You walk alongside them as they go out into the world, grow as individuals and strengthen our global community of faith.

ELCA World Hunger

"[As we connected with] the churches, we were able to find some organizations that provided help. The work that they do is helpful. And that help was a very good thing. I don't know, it just seems like those are the groups who are willing to help. Thanks to the Lord, we are better than we were then."

—The Funez family

Your generosity to ELCA World Hunger supports ministries around the world and close to home. The Alliance for Congregational Transformation Influencing Our Neighborhoods (ACTION), which shares nutritious food through pop-up markets in Youngstown, Ohio, is one of them. Before the Funez family found ACTION, their resources were stretched especially thin during the holiday season. Your gifts helped provide them with fresh fruits and vegetables and some Christmas gifts for the young girls.



Deepening in wisdom, *growing in leadership*

Pla Kuhakatipob isn't a born-and-bred Lutheran. She grew up in a primarily Buddhist family in Thailand. Her father is Christian but attended church irregularly. When Pla accompanied him, she was welcomed with kindness and soon got to know others in the congregation. As she grew older, she decided to become a Christian like her father and officially joined the church.

After graduating from university, Pla served as a Sunday school teacher while working as a speech therapist. During her time teaching at her church, Pla decided that she wanted to study religion. She attended a seminary in Bangkok, where she got a master's degree in theology. But Pla knew that her education wouldn't stop there. She served in the church for five more years as she discerned the area in which she wanted to dig deeper.

Eventually Pla settled on biblical studies. "The Bible is a good foundation for people to know God and to understand themselves," she said. It's "a guideline for people to walk and to live their life in this world."





"Coming here has opened my world."

—Pla Kuhakatipob

Pla learned about the International Leaders Program, supported by your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most. Through it, she could apply for a scholarship to study in the United States. She received the scholarship and applied to pursue a Ph.D. in New Testament biblical studies at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC).

Pla arrived in Chicago 11 months after giving birth to her first daughter. "It was a very challenging time for a new mom, a new student – everything is new." But after she adjusted to her situation, she thrived in school. A few years after she started her degree, her family returned to Thailand, where her husband works and her daughter attends school. It's difficult to be away from them, says Pla, but "I still have great support from my school and also the ELCA."

At LSTC, Pla enjoys her classes, especially ones in which she and her classmates discuss biblical

interpretation. "Sometimes we read the Bible and we interpret it in our own experience," she explains. Pla approaches the Bible through her lens as a Thai woman, yet one of her peers from a different background might pull other meanings out of the same passage. Being able to talk about these interpretations and understand the reading in a new way excites her every day.

"Coming here has opened my world," Pla acknowledges. Through her school involvement, she has also learned about different cultures. She studies alongside students of different ages and backgrounds, expanding her worldview as she learns about their differences and similarities.

The International Leaders Program accompanies leaders from ELCA global companion churches, offering academic scholarships and leadership development programming to individuals around the world. Students study subjects from theology



Your generosity enables Pla (second from left) and other members of our global partner churches to follow their passions, deepen their theological knowledge and become the leaders their communities need.



to social work to health and more. These transformative experiences equip them to make a real impact in their communities.

Not only does the International Leaders Program give scholarship recipients an opportunity to further their education, but it also builds relationships between students. When Pla misses her home or family or is facing challenges as an international student in the United States, she knows that she can turn to other international students for support. "When I share my feelings,

they are ready to welcome me," Pla said. Having people that can relate to her situation helps her as she yearns for home.

Pla's growth – both as a student and as a person – is a result of your generosity. "I learned not just the academic knowledge, but I learned different wisdom from different people, and it's helped me a lot to understand myself and understand people." People such as Pla are strengthening and connecting the global church, building leadership skills for the sake of mission and ministry.

Gifts to the ELCA from generous donors such as you help individuals around the world follow their educational passions through the International Leaders Program. They go on to lead in their churches, their communities and the Lutheran communion, multiplying the effects of your support.

Small gifts make



a big difference

With support from donors such as you, the worshiping community Confluence awarded microgrants to several of its members so that they might explore their vocational gifts. Your generosity is enabling them to follow their passions, grow spiritually and strengthen their communities.

innovative projects aimed at meeting community needs. Members of CLI cohorts are trained in design thinking: a creative, empathic approach to problem-solving. Cohort members also have access to some funding to implement their projects, provided by a grant from the Lilly Endowment and support from donors such as you.

When Confluence joined the initiative, members began their project the way all CLI cohort members do: by listening to the community. Led by Colter Murphy, a group of Confluence members interviewed some neighbors to learn about their hopes, challenges and interests. That part of the process alone was extremely valuable, says Colter. Being able to ask people, one-on-one, “What matters to you, and how can we make that happen?” helped connect them to the wider community in a new way.

Colter’s group also worked through guiding questions from CLI coaches. One that stood out as especially important to their work and ministry was “How can Confluence do things differently to foster a sense of belonging?”

When members of Confluence – a synod-authorized worshiping community in Missoula, Mont. – had the opportunity to try something new to strengthen their community, they could have planned one big event or program. Ultimately, though, they realized they could make the greatest impact by thinking small.

Their opportunity came through the ELCA’s Congregations Lead Initiative (CLI), a learning and training program that enables congregations to try



Central to Confluence's identity is the belief that everyone has something unique to offer. "We value the individual stories of everyone who comes to Confluence," Colter says. As an extension of that philosophy, the working group began to wonder how they could foster each member's personal gifts and interests and invite them to share their gifts with the community.

Someone in the group raised the idea of offering microgrants. What if, instead of using CLI funds to support a single project, they offered smaller amounts of money for individuals to expand their vocations in meaningful ways?

The team created awards up to \$250 and launched a portal to receive applications from the wider community. Confluence wanted people to submit proposals so the group could help applicants think through their plans and connect with others in the community who could help bring those plans to life.

The individuals who received the awards used them to delve into things they were passionate about and to invite others on the journey with them. One recipient, Rebekah, connected with Hope Lutheran Church in nearby Bozeman – another member of the CLI cohort. Hope Church was using its CLI funds to launch an artists' collective. Rebekah collaborated with the church to bring to Missoula both touring artists and artists from the Hope

congregation. She invited the whole community to a "writer's round," where the artists took turns sharing songs and stories and discussing the connection between their spirituality and their creative process.

Another microgrant recipient, Kim, invited a group of people to a nearby outdoor labyrinth. She used her grant to make a gift to the labyrinth caretakers and to pay for transportation, so the trip was free for all participants. When the group arrived, Kim first led a gentle yoga practice and meditation. Colter later wrote in a blog post that this allowed "the place to soak into our bones." Then they walked the labyrinth in their own time, contemplating their connection to one another, the earth and the cosmos.

Though Confluence's CLI experiment has officially ended, the microgrants are still turning ideas into reality. One grant applicant has planned a free day-retreat, and another is leading a book club with free books for participants. Colter is excited to watch these plans unfold and to see how his community will grow because of the larger lessons they've learned. He says that Confluence has the courage to spend its own dollars in bolder ways now, and to take more risks. The group now better understands how important it is to take time and really listen to the needs of the community.

For ministries such as Confluence, your generous gifts provide much more than financial support. You enable them to respond to the needs of their neighbors with radical empathy, to unleash their creativity and to try new things, creating a more relevant, responsive and vibrant church for everyone.



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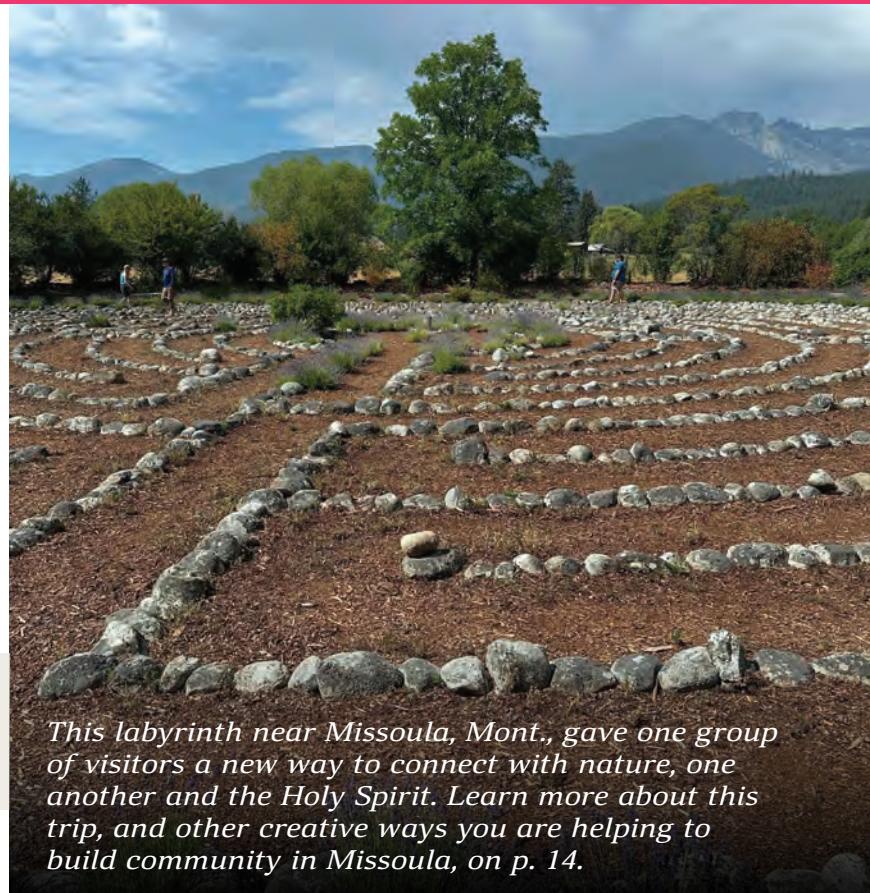
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This labyrinth near Missoula, Mont., gave one group of visitors a new way to connect with nature, one another and the Holy Spirit. Learn more about this trip, and other creative ways you are helping to build community in Missoula, on p. 14.