



Domestic Mission

New executive director

On Feb. 1, 2019, the Rev. Philip C. Hirsch began serving as the new executive director, upon the retirement of the Rev. Stephen P. Bouman. Rev. Hirsch has a passion for helping congregations bring people into faith and Christian community and wants to help the ELCA focus on the health and vitality of congregations and the leadership needed to support that effort. He has served congregations in poor communities (Camden, New Jersey) and wealthy ones (Fairfax, Virginia) before serving as director for evangelical mission (DEM) for the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, where he planted new churches and led an effort to connect thousands of new people to congregations and the way of Jesus Christ. Rev. Hirsch is grateful for this opportunity to serve the ELCA and to help the church find a new focus together for the sake of the world.



A new focus

As a part of *Future Directions 2025*, this unit will focus on health, growth and vitality of congregations and the leadership needed to make that happen.

Chapter 16 of the ELCA constitution directs that “the Domestic Mission unit shall foster and facilitate the work of synods, congregations, and partners in making congregations vital centers for mission and in creating coalitions and networks to promote justice and peace.”

The growth of any ministry is the work of the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers and enlightens people. The job of leaders is to respond to this movement of the Spirit by making new followers of those whom the Spirit has prepared. To grow as a congregation and denomination, the church needs to focus on evangelism and recover the best sense of that calling of God for each person. The ELCA’s future as a denomination will involve communities connecting with a diversity of new people who are younger than the church is now, as well as responding to current communities and contexts. This report supports that great effort over the next few years.

Report of work for 2016–2019

1. Helping congregations grow as vital centers of mission.
2. Starting new churches.
3. Faith formation: Making followers of Jesus.
4. Ethnic-specific and multicultural: Growing more diverse.
5. Leadership
6. Church for the sake of the world: Hunger ministries, advocacy, HIV/AIDS, AMMPARO, Lutheran Services in America (LSA), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), and Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR).

1. Helping congregations to grow as vital centers of mission

Congregational vitality is a term that has been used for several years in the ELCA and beyond. A universally accepted description of vitality is still being developed, but it is understood to include a movement toward conditions that would result in the growth of a ministry, so that more people come to know more about Jesus through Christian community.

In the last two years, the Domestic Mission unit has made a significant strategic shift in how it works with congregations in search of renewal or redevelopment. At first, the ELCA would directly fund a limited number of “redevelopment” congregations that met certain criteria. These well-intended efforts too often failed to produce the results desired. Further, the congregations in need of renewal far exceeded the available support. A new method was needed.

The Congregational Vitality team and related staff were organized to lead a new effort that would broaden the effort to reach every synod and every congregation in need of renewal. The team is working in collaboration with synods and congregations to train leaders who will support new efforts to help congregations grow in the depth of their faith, relationships with their community and their ability to bring new people along.

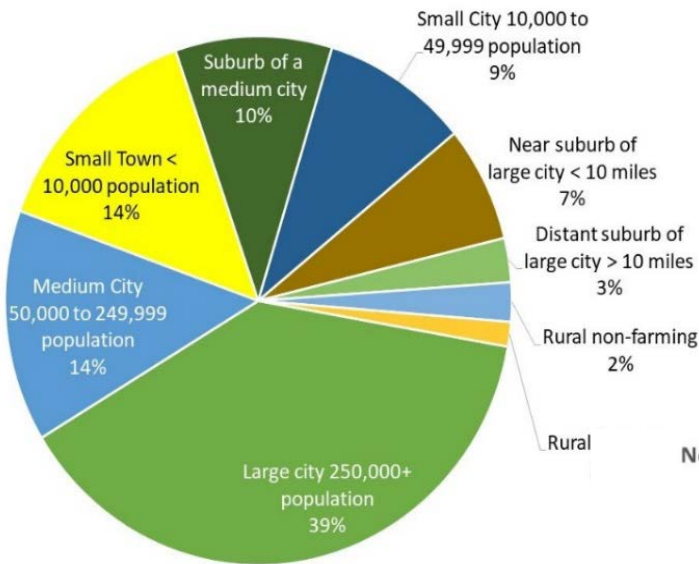
- **Synod vitality:** Domestic Mission supports more than 40 synods in their efforts to help congregations become vital, allocating \$500,000 in grants in 2019.
- **Holy innovations:** Because there is no one way to help a ministry connect with new people, the ELCA needed to try new things, evaluate what worked and apply those lessons going forward. A \$1 million grant from *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* is funding 18 innovation grants in synods and congregations for two years.
- **Anchor church:** The most effective way to start a new church or renew an existing one is to pair it with a healthy, larger congregation. To date, 13 pastors are involved in a program that pairs congregations with existing churches in need of renewal or helps them develop a new mission start out of their own church. A total of \$300,000 was allocated in 2019.
- **A guiding coalition of bishops, pastors and ELCA staff** are developing and testing metrics to measure vitality and guide the work of evangelism and leadership development.
- **Partnered Synods Project:** In fall 2017, Domestic Mission staff proposed a two-year project to work with directors for evangelical mission and bishops in specifically “partnered synods.” The emphasis, born out of the Churchwide Organization Operational Plan, was supporting and assessing how synod staff and the directors strengthen the capacity of congregations to engage their local communities for the sake of evangelical witness and service. A cross-unit Partnered Synod Project team began meeting in January 2018. The five synods include Indiana-Kentucky, North Carolina, Northern Texas–Northern Louisiana, Southwestern Washington and Upstate New York.

2. Starting new churches

The best way to reach new people with the gospel of Jesus Christ is to invite them into a new community of faith that is being formed. People connect to a new community more easily than to an existing one. The church always has and always must be planting new seedlings, even as more mature congregations are waning. This ensures that new life will continue. Not all the new starts will become mature congregations; many must start for only a few to mature. What the ELCA needs to do better is to end congregations more quickly when it knows they are not working. The graphs on the following page provide more information about new starts in the ELCA.

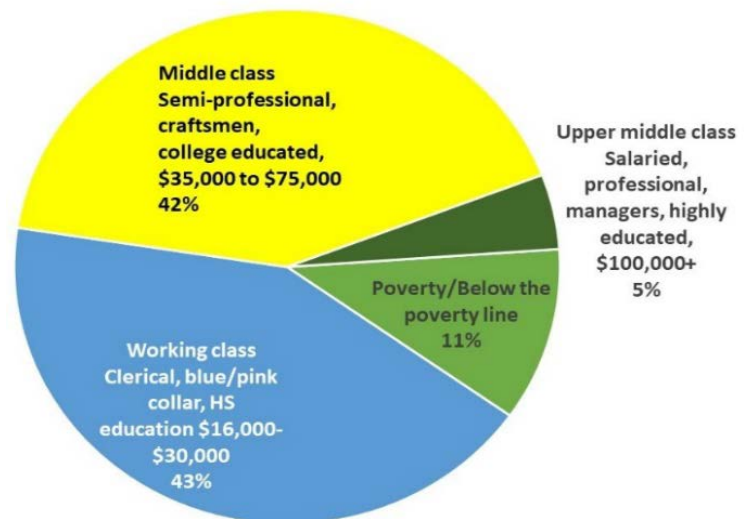
ELCA New Starts

Geographic Setting of New Starts

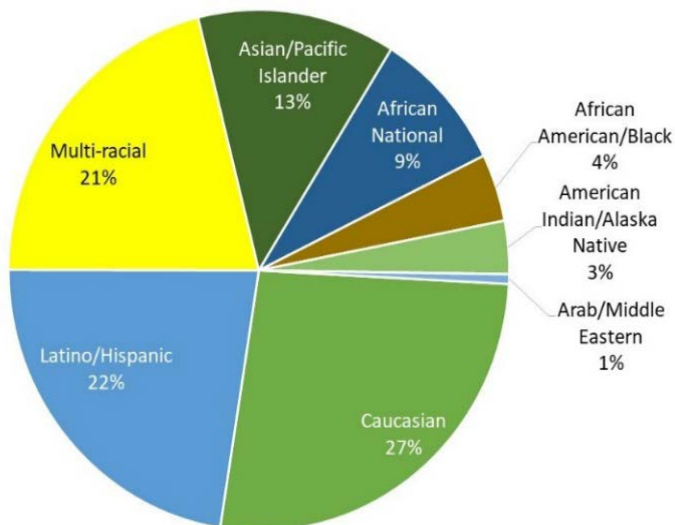


Total number of new starts
2016–2019 (as of May 1, 2019)
159

New Starts by Economic Group Type



Ethnicity of New Starts



3. Faith formation: Making followers of Jesus

Vitality is possible only when people are able to accompany others—across generations, race, class and gender—to be followers of Jesus. The ELCA is focused on bringing people along in the faith. The Domestic Mission unit published “Five Gifts of Discipleship” and other resources to help congregations develop good faith practices and continue emphasizing the Book of Faith as the primary way to know God.

Youth Gathering

The 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston, Texas, brought together 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the church. It included a Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) and the tAble gathering for youth with disabilities. This event is not only the largest in the ELCA, it is the largest public gathering of Christian youth and one of the largest service projects of any sort in the United States. The next gathering will be July 29–July 3, 2021, in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Youth and young adults

- Young adult discernment retreats have recently attracted 100 young adults, one-third of whom were people of color. These events can be replicated across the church to help young adults consider how God is calling them to serve.
- Domestic Mission developed a new website for youth and family ministries: ministrylinks.online.
- Youth leadership summits continue to draw youth from 40-plus synods each year.
- Youth and Young Adult Ministry Innovation Grants from *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* funded 26 ministries in 21 synods.

Camps and campus ministries

- A collaboration with domestic and international partners enabled 86 young adults from 35 countries to work as ELCA camp counselors.
- The ELCA Lutheran Campus Ministry Network, known as LuMin, was incorporated.
- With the ELCA Mission Builders, Domestic Mission constructed 21 church and outdoor ministry structures.

Stewardship

- Domestic Mission developed coaching for stewardship leaders to create cultures of generosity in congregations.
- Domestic Mission negotiated agreements with Tithe.ly and Vanco to create electronic giving platforms for ELCA congregations.

Disability Ministries

A Disability Ministries grants review team was formed to review and approve grant requests submitted by ELCA congregations, synods and affiliated ministries to care for and raise up leaders with disabilities. A total of \$450,000 was awarded in 2019.

5. Ethnic-specific and multicultural: Growing more diverse

The ELCA has a long-standing commitment to better reflect the diversity of communities and better demonstrate what the kingdom of God is like. The “Beloved Community” is a vision given by God that drives the efforts of the Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries team, on behalf of this church, to create and encourage a climate of healthy racial diversity in congregations. The Church Council affirmed the updated ethnic-specific strategy plans of the following ethnic ministries at the April 2019 Church Council meeting: Asian and Pacific Islander Ministry Strategy, Latino Ministry Strategy, African Descent Ministry Strategy, and Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy. The American Indian and Alaska Native Strategic Plan remains relevant. The Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries team encourages this assembly and all expressions of the church to actively engage and support the implementation of these strategic plans to move toward the vision of more fully becoming the beloved community.

2019 statistical review

While the ELCA as a whole experienced a decline in active participation, participation of European-Americans declined at a greater rate than that of people of color; this resulted in a small proportional increase for people of color in the ELCA, from 3.7% in 2009 to 4.4% in 2017. In addition:

- 452 ELCA congregations report 30% or more active participants who are people of color.
- 55% of all people of color in the ELCA are active participants in congregations with less than 30% diversity.
- 40% of ELCA congregations report having no people of color as active participants.

Authentic diversity

The 2016 Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution calling for the convening of a Task Force for Strategic Authentic Diversity. The executive summary and recommendations of the task force can be found in section VI and will be presented at the assembly.

Developing diverse leadership

- In 2016, 100 leaders gathered for a multicultural leadership summit.
- The Latino Youth Initiative promotes second-generation ministries.
- Theological Education for Existing Ministries (TEEM) helps congregations of color identify and train the leaders they need in a way that keeps the ministries going.
- Congregational vitality training and new mission starts have specific modules for multicultural, African-descent, African national, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, and Latino ministries.
- Prompted by the Theological and Education Advisory Council (TEAC), seminaries are increasing their educational and discernment opportunities for ethnic-specific communities.
- The Small Catechism has been released with reflections from Asian and African American perspectives.

Caring for existing ethnic-specific communities

These are some of the most racially contentious times the country has experienced in recent history. The ethnic-specific team, in partnership with the six ethnic Lutheran associations, cares for communities of color, stands with them in times of trial and provides crisis management assistance when needed. Training, educational events and celebrations help support all communities with Christian love and compassion.

5. Developing the leaders the church needs to support congregational vitality

There will be no vital congregations without the development of leadership to make them happen. The church needs leaders who are called and gifted by God and theologically and holistically developed to preach the gospel and form Christian communities.

These leaders may be pastors (ministers of Word and Sacrament) or deacons (ministers of Word and Service); they may serve in a congregation, camp or community center.

Rostered ministry

Over the past three years, the ELCA has approved 82 deacons and 663 pastors for ministry. It revised the process for leading candidates into leadership by updating the Candidacy Manual and developed an entrance rite for deacons on the new roster of ministers of Word and Service.

Please note that these numbers are far fewer than the current needs of the congregations actively seeking full-time rostered ministers. This issue is being addressed by seminaries and synods as they increase efforts for discernment and reduce the cost of seminary education. The churchwide effort has included developing the Fund for Leaders, which has provided scholarships for dozens of young people to attend seminary. Despite these efforts, more leaders are needed, and the church must look increasingly to its great wealth of lay leadership.

Lay ministry

Synods increasingly look to lay leadership to help lead congregations that no longer have pastors or deacons. A network for training lay leadership is being developed to assist with the education and development of these people whom God is calling into service. This is especially true in rural areas and in places of poverty.

A wide network of schools

The network of ELCA colleges and universities has a defined Lutheran identity and seeks greater collaboration with the whole church. Seminaries and lay schools seek new ways to meet the changing needs of the church.

Directors for evangelical mission and coaching

Nearly every synod has a director for evangelical mission (DEM) to help the synod start new congregations and revitalize existing ones. The directors do this by focusing on leadership and congregational vitality through the synod's missional strategies. They have also helped with stewardship education and mission support. They embody the interdependent church, reflecting and living out both synod and churchwide identities in their work. This position has been around for 10 years; a churchwide evaluation of this role will take place in 2019.

Directors for evangelical mission also collaborate on an important new emphasis on coaching in the ELCA. To date, 409 people have been trained and certified as coaches. They meet regularly with pastors and leaders to help them accomplish what God has called them to do, asking powerful questions and providing gentle accountability.

6. Church for the sake of the world

The ELCA has a robust array of ministries that advocate for the sick, the poor, the disenfranchised, the hungry, the immigrant, the orphan and the widow. The church does this out of deep compassion and love that people know of through Jesus Christ. The church seeks not only to care for the physical needs of those in distress but also to address the larger issues of injustice that perpetuate suffering and violence. With God's power, the church seeks a more just and peaceful world in the following ways.

Alleviating hunger

From food pantries to hot meals, backpacks to jobs programs, 96 percent of all ELCA congregations participate in some form of local anti-hunger ministry. To better support these ministries, ELCA World Hunger Domestic Hunger Grants has realigned the granting process to better match the diversity of efforts focused on hunger. There are now three grant areas:

1. **Daily Bread Grants:** \$500 one-time matching grants for congregational feeding ministries.
2. **Domestic Hunger Grants:** Up to \$10,000 per year for three years for transformative, holistic and integrated ministries of congregational and partnered ministries.
3. **Big Dream Grants:** \$10,000-\$75,000 one-time investments in ministries that demonstrate innovation, excellence and best practices (by invitation only).

In 2019, nearly \$1 million will be put to work by ministry partners through these grants, with an estimated 382,000 people directly impacted through Domestic Hunger Grants alone. To learn more, visit [ELCA.org/domestichungergrants](https://elca.org/domestichungergrants) and read the Mission Advancement report in Section III.

HIV and AIDS

In 2019, the ELCA will mark the conclusion of the 10-year ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS. The strategy outlined six specific areas in which the ELCA is called: biblical and theological reflection; effective prevention, treatment and care; eradicating social stigma and discrimination; walking with companion churches and partners in other countries; advocating for justice; building institutional capacity; and making strategic choices. Additionally, this church is committed to investing \$10 million as part of the world response to HIV and AIDS. As of 2018, \$10,350,000 had been spent globally and domestically through ELCA World Hunger funding; see the Global Mission report in Section III for more information.

Lutheran Services in America

As a result of the national social-service partnership with Lutheran Services in America (LSA), ELCA World Hunger touches the lives of 1 in 50 Americans each year while also raising up and tending ongoing affiliates as part of that network. In 2018, two new affiliations were created (with Care Connections Network and All-for-All, Inc.), and five social-ministry organizations underwent review and maintained their affiliations (Augustana Care, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, Compass Health Center, Good Samaritan Society and Ecumen).

ELCA Advocacy

Guided by ELCA social-teaching documents and by experiences, programs and projects in the U.S. and around the world, congregations and ministries work for change in public policy. ELCA Advocacy equips Lutherans, their congregations and their communities to speak out on current issues and future solutions.

Rooted in a grateful response to God's grace in Jesus Christ, ELCA Advocacy seeks policies that end hunger, overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, and preserve God's creation with and on behalf of the neighbor.

From 2016 to 2018, the ELCA Advocacy national network grew by over 60%, sending over 84,000 advocacy emails and letters to members of Congress and the administration. ELCA Advocacy led 626 meetings on Capitol Hill on concerns including hunger, criminal justice reform, migration policy, climate change, homelessness and disaster response. To be part of the ELCA Advocacy Network for Action Alerts and News, visit [ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://elca.org/advocacy/signup).

Farm Bill

In 2018, as the 115th Congress got to work on the farm bill and then during the government shutdown, over 120 hunger leaders converged on Capitol Hill to advocate for the farm bill as part of ELCA World Hunger's premiere training event: the ELCA World Hunger Leadership Gathering. This strong start was sustained during the year, especially through the stories of Lutheran farmers, resulting in a bipartisan farm bill that focused on nutrition, support for the farmer safety net, environmental factors and international food aid.

Unaccompanied children

When the crisis over child migrants began to swell at the U.S. southern border, over 100 ELCA bishops and Lutheran leaders gathered to pray, learn and act together as part of the 2017 national ELCA Advocacy Convening, whose focus on immigration and migration issues stressed the ELCA's AMMPARO strategy (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities); see the AMMPARO report in section III for more information.

Climate change

Through a collaborative relationship with ecoAmerica's "Blessed Tomorrow" program, ELCA Advocacy is producing impactful resources for addressing climate change in local communities. At the global level, ELCA Advocacy was present as part of united faith-community witness and action at meetings of the 23rd and 24th United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Corporate social responsibility

This program engages businesses on a range of social, environmental and financial issues and, in partnership with Portico Benefit Services, shapes ELCA investment policy in socially responsible ways. Recently, this work has included developing a new investment screen on political and civil human rights; revisions of screens related to the environment, tobacco and alcohol; and the issuance of an annual boycott report. In partnership with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, ELCA Advocacy engages with investor areas such as climate change, just transition, human trafficking and private prisons.

State advocacy offices

Since 2016 Churchwide Assembly, new public-policy advocacy ministries have taken root in Florida, Kansas, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and the states of the Southeastern Synod, for a total of 17 state offices across the U.S.

Young adults as Hunger Advocacy Fellows

Through ELCA World Hunger growth funds, nine young adults have served alongside some of the state offices as the first-ever ELCA Hunger Advocacy Fellows. Now in its second year, this yearlong, transformative work experience combines impactful advocacy with leadership development and faith formation.

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Founded in 1939 by Lutheran churches in the United States to serve people uprooted by World War II, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service has since grown into an organization internationally recognized for its innovative service to refugees, asylum-seekers, unaccompanied migrant children and families, migrants in detention, and other vulnerable populations. To date, it has helped settle some 500,000 migrants and refugees. The ELCA offers significant financial support for this ministry.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Harvey, Maria, Michael and Florence—the frequency and intensity of storms is increasing. Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) is adapting to these challenges and changes by developing a new strategy to respond to storms more quickly and work with a broader array of partners to bring relief, including synods, congregations and individuals.

In 2017, Hurricane Maria severely damaged 20 church buildings in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In cooperation with the Caribbean Synod of the ELCA, LDR was able to provide \$952,000 for repairs. To date, funding for Maria relief from the ELCA totals \$4,284,093.

Community development programs

The ELCA accompanies and supports congregations, organizations and individuals who work directly and systematically for justice. It has granted \$275,000 from endowed funds to support work programs for the youth and older adults across the country.

Conclusion

The work of this unit reaches nearly every aspect of people's lives together as church. The staff of this unit pray that, together, the ELCA will find a new focus and energy to bring the gospel to new people who will find Christian community, compassion and hope for their lives and for the world around them. With new people, the church will join in singing some new songs and some old ones. As the ELCA finds new ways to meet the needs of communities and the world, the love of God, known in Jesus Christ, the risen Savior, will find its way into the lives of more and more people.

The Rev. Philip C. Hirsch, *executive director*