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CIRCLE

Leadership

Spring 2023

NEWSLETTER

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Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

(Acts 2:1-4)

Dear friends in Christ,

Recently, Christians gathered all over the world to celebrate Pentecost. This is one of my favorite liturgical days; though often overlooked in favor of high holidays such as Easter or Christmas, Pentecost invites us to observe with wonder the unbridled movement of the Holy Spirit. We witness a chaotic scene, filled with wind, fire and roaring voices. Yet, remarkably, the clarity of vision and voice cuts through the noise. Amid crowds of people with differing languages and beliefs, the Holy Spirit dwells, binding us together across discord.

In our day and age finding unity amid the dissonance can seem impossible. But in the ELCA this stunning vision of embracing diversity yet still finding common purpose is part of our everyday lives. When you support ELCA ministries, you embolden this church to speak to local people in their native languages, sing hymns with tunes they know by heart and anoint them in the Holy Spirit through a culture that feels like home. Whether you're creating innovative new housing models through ELCA World Hunger, journeying with companion churches around the world through Young Adults in Global Mission, fostering leadership in a future pastor through ELCA Fund for Leaders, or rebuilding after a storm through Lutheran Disaster Response, you bring the comfort of the Holy Spirit to your neighbors near and far. The responses may be different, but we are grounded by our shared purpose: telling the life-changing story of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit is blowing in this church and around the world, enabling each of us to share the good news of Jesus Christ with more people. Thank you for the gifts you have offered, through which the Holy Spirit continues to move.

With abundant gratitude,



Rachel Wind

Rachel Wind
Executive for Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

On the cover: Two people from St. Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) in Egypt, a ministry supported by your generosity to ELCA World Hunger. StARS provides a wide range of services to refugees, including legal assistance, psychosocial support, education and feeding programs as their clients resettle.

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HOW TO GIVE

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800-638-3522

MAIL:
Make checks payable to "ELCA" and mail to:
ELCA, P.O. Box 1809,
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

“These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also.”

(Acts 17:6)

The words above came as an accusation against the early Christians, though history would prove that, in our topsy-turvy world, these folks were turning the world right side up. Through your prayers, generosity and concern, you have continued to right the world. As part of the Leadership Circle, you have made a faithful commitment — gift by gift, action by action.

In 2022 gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response approached \$46 million, the largest combined total of all time.

We live in historic times as crises around the world near their tipping points. War breaks out; peace prevails. Prices rise; work expands. People flee violence; new neighbors are welcomed. Weather patterns change; new farming approaches are taught and people commit to climate-smart action.

As you read these updates, remember that you and others are working together to turn these situations around. You are among those righting historic injustices and preventing future calamities. Thank you for your commitment to this vital ministry.



Daniel Rift

Rev. Daniel Rift
Director, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response Funding



A community garden provides food security and income to families supported by the Iglesia Evangelica Unida en Cuba Sinodo Luterano (United Evangelical Church in Cuba Lutheran Synod). Alcides (pictured) and Mariela, who own the land, have been able to experiment with new crops and vegetables that are nontraditional but grow well. The garden's good harvests have sustained the whole community.

HOPE IN EASTERN EUROPE

In 2022 you and other supporters responded with incredible generosity, sharing over **\$12 million** to help our neighbors in Eastern Europe whose lives were so suddenly disrupted and showing them that they are not alone. Thank you! For a one-year report on the church's response to the Russia-Ukraine War visit [ELCA.org/UkraineReport](https://www.elca.org/UkraineReport).

"We had almost 100 refugees traveling through our congregation in a few days, and 41 of them are staying for a longer term, saying they are wanting to stay here until the war is over. ... In these two months I could see more miracles than in all my life. ... People are helping, they opened their hearts to help, and I could see more and more love than I ever have before."

—The Rev. Miroslav Mató



The Rev. Miroslav Mató (right) with Ukrainian refugees being hosted by his congregation in Gerlachov, Slovakia.

DISASTERS IN EARLY 2023

- Lasting five weeks and two days, Cyclone Freddy was the longest tropical cyclone in recorded history. It made landfall in Madagascar and Mozambique in February and also caused profound damage in Malawi, killing at least 1,200 people. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malawi and Evangelical Lutheran Development Service, whose response includes food distribution, nutrition education, sanitation workshops, hygiene kits, and drought-resistant seeds and irrigation kits for people replanting crops.
- On Feb. 6 two powerful earthquakes devastated Turkey and neighboring Syria, collapsing thousands of buildings and damaging infrastructure. The death toll from both earthquakes has surpassed 50,000 people.

Lutheran Disaster Response contributed to ACT Alliance, which provided immediate aid to survivors, including blankets, mattresses, hot meals and hygiene kits.

- In March a powerful line of thunderstorms swept through the southern United States, spawning at least 20 tornadoes that damaged buildings and knocked out electricity across multiple states. With your gifts Lutheran Disaster Response is supporting the Southeastern Synod as it addresses the needs of disaster survivors in Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia through local congregations and partner organizations. The synod is also providing emotional and spiritual care to both survivors and responders.

With your giving to Lutheran Disaster Response, you have responded to disasters in 34 countries internationally and 25 U.S. states and territories.

Through your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, you have helped to fight hunger through projects in 25 U.S. states and territories, as well as reduce and prevent hunger in over 60 countries.



A pallet home in Faith Lutheran Church's transitional housing project.

HUNGER: BEYOND THE HEADLINES

The news can be overwhelming right now as extreme hunger increases due to drought, armed conflict and economic inflation in communities around the world. For many years extreme hunger in the world dropped steadily – in 2018 the number of those vulnerable to extreme hunger dropped to new lows. However, this decline in hunger has stopped, especially after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic. The number of people vulnerable to extreme hunger has now risen to over 850 million and is climbing toward 1 billion people.

But here's the good news: we aren't starting from scratch. Amid these alarming stories the work you have helped us do through ELCA World Hunger for so long has built resilience in many communities, allowing them to weather the storm. Close partnerships on the ground help us to navigate turmoil and maintain stability, and we already know the next steps to help people stand tall in times of challenge.

Through your persistent support ELCA World Hunger brings decades of experience to communities around the world, addressing root causes of hunger and walking alongside people as they build cooperative solutions to systemic challenges.

LOCAL ISSUES, LOCAL ACTIONS

ELCA World Hunger knows that to make the biggest impact on hunger in the United States, the church needs to act on the local level, funding congregations and organizations that pioneer new approaches to ending hunger. Recent research has shown that getting a roof over someone's head is often the key to turning their life around. Faith Lutheran Church in Everett, Wash., received an ELCA World Hunger Big Dream Grant to support the building of Faith Family Village, an innovative new transitional housing project that will consist of eight 100-square-foot pallet homes. Families will be able to occupy the units as they partner with social workers to secure permanent housing. This provides residents with not only shelter but also dignity and privacy while they seek the resources and support needed to find long-term solutions.

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger fund innovative projects such as these that give the church new models for those in transition from being unhoused. These new programs don't just provide immediate impacts – they also create models for other congregations looking to innovate.



Empowered Girls, an ELCA World Hunger partner in Tanzania, equips girls to know who they are and to live their dreams. Part of their work involves an outreach program in schools where laughter and music are part of learning.

In 2022 you were one of **5,444 households** in the Leadership Circle that shared over **\$19.5 million** for ELCA ministries! Thank you for your incredible generosity.

IN HER OWN WORDS: CATHY

Cathy is a gardener at Inspiritus in Tennessee who lives in public housing. Inspiritus is an ELCA World Hunger Domestic Hunger Grant partner.

“Your garden, through me, just did a great deed for someone. A guy was walking by as I was watering. He walked up to me really close and asked could he have some tomatoes and cucumbers. I was really scared of him – but all he wanted was food. Just goes to show how judgmental of people I am. I told him, ‘Yeah, get all you want,’ and I’m not kidding,

girl, he ate raw tomatoes and cucumbers for a good 15 minutes. He said he had a family and asked could he come back with them. I told him, ‘Of course.’ He brought his two little daughters and small son back.

“So, I fixed them about 15 ham sandwiches and put some chips, water and sodas in a backpack for them. They are staying across from the old cemetery by the old hospital. There are several people there, and they have been coming by when they’re hungry and just eat off the vines. It’s so cool. I’m going to start making a huge pot of beans and cornbread or spaghetti and garlic bread and tell them to come by on Fridays.

“Sometimes I forget how good I have it and have to be reminded. Through you and what you gave me, God’s helping feed all the hungry people. Feels good to be useful again — can I get [an] ‘amen?’”



IN HER OWN WORDS: SOPHIE WARNBERG

Sophie is a current Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) volunteer in the Holy Land.

“I can’t believe I am more than halfway through my YAGM experience in the Holy Land! Each day has presented opportunities for learning and growth. I have gained confidence in my ability to request and receive help as needed, adjust to rapid changes in plans, and live in the moment. In the middle of February our YAGM cohort traveled to Jordan for our mid-year retreat. We visited Petra, Wadi Rum and Amman. ...

“I love to hike and explore new places with friends, so spending time in the desert in Wadi Rum was right up my alley! It was so freeing to embrace the wide-open spaces of the desert terrain, climb about finding various vantage points, and discover new perspectives of the barren landscape. Following a four-hour jeep ride through the desert environment, Sophie [Caeser] and I climbed the largest arch in Wadi Rum. I was amazed by all the nature that is still intact there. ...

“This experience combined my love of nature with a sense of awe, as I felt the Holy Spirit’s presence in the glory of God’s creation.”

innovation

Your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most fund new and innovative projects across the church. The ones below were launched through the churchwide organization’s Innovation team.

Congregations Lead Initiative: The Congregations Lead Initiative gathers a cohort of congregations from across the ELCA to unleash and harness their collective genius and discover new and useful ministry innovations. The first cohort of congregations is nearing the end of its time together; the final in-person learning event took place in April, during which each congregation developed a “capstone experiment” that builds on what they’ve learned from community engagement and small-scale experiments over the last 14 months. Each congregation will be eligible for a grant to help it implement this final experiment over the next six months.

Salam Radio Station Partnership: The ELCA Innovation team has been partnering with ELCA Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries to research and launch a new pilot radio station for Arabic-speaking Christian communities. The Innovation team granted \$30,000 to the Salam Group to help set up the station, which is now live with Arabic hymns and music programming. You can listen at salamgroup.co/radio.

NT-NL Virtual Community Exploration: The Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod is partnering with the ELCA Innovation team for a new experiment in the metaverse! You might have heard about the metaverse as the next big thing, or perhaps just another fad. One thing we know for sure is that people are finding and creating community in the metaverse. This is a unique opportunity to learn more about what it means to be in Christian community, while using emergent technology to connect with people who aren’t typically drawn to physical places of worship. With the help of the faith-based virtual-reality tech start-up SolaceVR, we are inviting a small group of congregational leaders to design and test a new kind of online ministry with current members and new people.

A familiar face to the Mission Funding team, the Rev. Ben Hogue has been asked to serve as interim director for Global Mission Funding. We are grateful for the leadership and service of Rahel Mwitula Williams, who previously held this role, and wish her the best as she joins the ELCA's Innovation team.

What a joy it has been to serve in this capacity with the ELCA Mission Funding team. In my short time as interim director, I have been witness to the work of the Spirit and the ways we are being knit together as a global community. I have been moved by the stories I've heard from all around the globe about how ELCA ministries positively impact lives and communities. I believe that stories shape our lives and are fundamental to our faith. The Bible is filled with stories of prophets, disciples and ordinary people doing extraordinary things. We follow in the way of Jesus Christ, the ultimate storyteller.

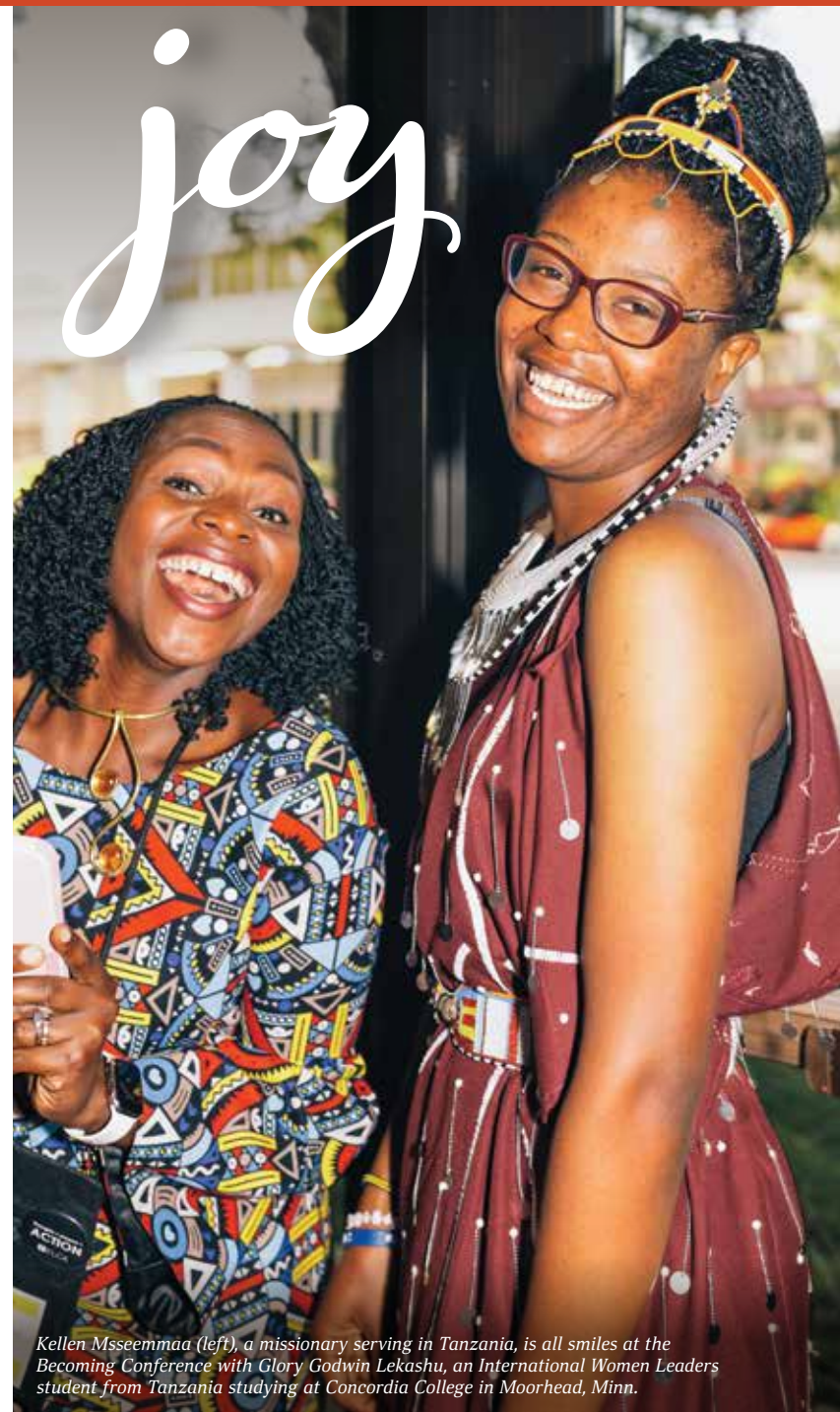
In this new role I am eager to hear your story as well and to learn why you are passionate about the global work of the church. I'm grateful for your prayers and engagement as well as your continued support and generosity. Let us continue to walk and work together, accompanying our global companions and striving to share God's love and participate in God's mission together.

Benjamin A. Hogue

Rev. Benjamin A. Hogue
Interim Director,
Global Mission Funding



We thank God for the global partnerships, faithful ministries and incredible people who serve the global church. Last year there were 131 missionary households, including 24 new missionaries. ELCA Global Mission is present in 45 countries around the world, and missionaries serve in a variety of roles, including as teachers and professors, program facilitators, pastors, worship assistants, doctors and health care coordinators, to name just a few. Your fervent prayers and generous support allow for these missionaries to accompany and impact communities.



Kellen Msseemaa (left), a missionary serving in Tanzania, is all smiles at the Becoming Conference with Glory Godwin Lekashu, an International Women Leaders student from Tanzania studying at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minn.

BECOMING CONFERENCE

Late last summer the ELCA Service and Justice unit hosted the Becoming Conference, an event designed to strategize and prioritize the ELCA's service and justice work around five core justice foci: migration justice, economic justice, racial justice, gender justice and environmental justice. One of the largest-ever gatherings of Global Mission personnel, the weeklong conference included churchwide organization staff, international mission personnel, past and present Young Adults in Global Mission volunteers and country coordinators, ELCA missionaries, and global area desk directors, as well as international partners and Lutheran global companions.

YOUNG ADULTS IN GLOBAL MISSION

This is the first year of service for Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) since the program closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-four YAGM volunteers serve in the 2022-2023 cohort, and the program expects over 30 young adults to serve in 2023-2024. This year YAGM sent its most diverse cohort across all intersections to serve our global church partners. Next year the four existing country programs (Senegal, United Kingdom, Argentina/Uruguay and Jerusalem/West Bank) will be joined by country programs for Mexico and Central Europe.

In addition to serving alongside global partners, YAGM volunteers are integrating into their communities and developing deep relationships with local partners. They are also able to experience the sights and culture of the places they serve. Recently, at a mid-year retreat, volunteers from the Jerusalem/West Bank program traveled to Jordan, where they processed their service with one another, explored local sights and visited a Lutheran-supported refugee camp in Amman. They met with residents of all ages, including children at a nursery school and the women's leadership team, and planned programs and opportunities to support the education and empowerment of women. The YAGM program continues to highlight the strength of the ELCA's global companion relationships, the importance of accompaniment, and God's work throughout the world!



Sol Nadir Nadal-Diaz (right) is a YAGM volunteer currently serving in Senegal.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN LEADERS

The International Women Leaders (IWL) program currently accompanies 25 women at 11 ELCA colleges and universities. These young women continue to prioritize their international educational experience while engaging in communities here in the United States and at home. They also participate in school activities, including campus ministries, intramural sport leagues, social outings and clubs.

In March the International Leaders Program gathered outside Chicago for its first in-person event since 2019. The gathering was a powerful reminder of how important and impactful the work of leadership development is, both for our global companion churches and for the ELCA's own leaders. Each of these students represents diverse

communities, and the impact of your support is multiplied many times over in the ways these scholars move the needle to make the ELCA and their home churches more just and equitable.

One sentiment shared by all the scholars was their deep gratitude and appreciation for the IWL program. As one scholar, Julie C., writes in her most recent newsletter, "I would like to say thank you to all donors, ELCA staff, church members both in the United States and internationally, and all that are working on [IWL] and making it happen. Thank you for being the hands and hearts of the Lord, making [God's] plans for my life become real. I am extremely grateful for your lives, and I will keep you and this program in my prayers. Thank you!"



The International Leaders Program gathered for a retreat in March.



"We don't become leaders by accident."

—Rev. Kelsey Kresse

faith



Find out more about Rev. Kresse's story by scanning the QR code with a smart phone camera

Our church will always need theologically trained pastors and deacons to lead us in sharing Christ's love in our communities. ELCA Fund for Leaders knows that, unless we invest in their education and formation, we will not have enough of these leaders in the future. As past Fund for Leaders scholar the Rev. Kelsey Kresse put it, "We don't become leaders by accident."

For over 25 years Fund for Leaders has gathered support from generous people all across our church. Thankful for the gospel message in their lives, they wish to ensure this message will continue to be proclaimed to future generations. In 2000 we awarded our first eight scholarships, totaling less than \$100,000. **Today Fund for Leaders supports 375 students (nearly 1 out of every 3 ELCA seminarians) with over \$3 million in scholarships each year!** Still, we know that our work is not yet done. God continues to call the leaders our church needs. The Fund for Leaders mission won't be complete until we can support each and every seminarian, ensuring that they can answer God's call and begin their service free from the burden of student debt.

In 2023, ELCA Fund for Leaders will continue to share its mission and vision in synods and congregations, aided by the launch this spring of our new alum networking platform. We will also celebrate our second annual "Day of Giving" in August. Last year, in celebration of the fund's 25th anniversary, we raised over \$25,000 in just a few days — a record for our ministry! Equally important, our supporters took to social media and shared the impact of the Fund for Leaders on their own lives or the lives of leaders they admire.

Thank you for investing in our future leaders!

Marissa H. Krey

Rev. Marissa Krey
Director, ELCA Fund for Leaders



UPDATE ON THE FUND FOR LEADERS CLASS OF 2023

Our scholarship selection committee met in March and awarded 30 new full-tuition scholarships. This year's recipients come from 23 synods and will attend five different seminaries. Twenty-four are studying to be pastors, and six are studying to be deacons. Fifty-three percent will be studying on campus, and 47% will be studying remotely.

Special thanks to the following leaders who served on this year's scholarship selection committee: Deacon Christine Yucha, the Rev. Ben Hogue, the Rev. Kelsey Brown, Rebecca Payne, the Rev. Stina Schaeffer, the Rev. Javier Goitia-Padilla, Deacon Chandler Carriker, the Rev. Emily Carson and the Rev. Nicholas Chove.

"I hope you know that by your generous gift you are giving me the ability to take the message of our Lord and Savior to hundreds of other people that I get to see and minister to on a daily basis."

—Katlin Leslie, Fund for Leaders scholar in 2020, Wartburg Seminary Class of 2022

generosity

ELCA FOUNDATION: FINDING A PLAN THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

We know that you support ELCA ministries because you believe in their work and have a passion to change the world. Many of our most faithful supporters include ELCA ministries in their estate plans, ensuring that these ministries can continue for years to come.

Sometimes people feel the need to choose between supporting the people closest to them and supporting the ministries they care about the most. But supporting ministry need not come at the cost of supporting family. The ELCA Foundation is here to help you maximize your generosity toward the people *and* the ministries that mean the most to you.

The regional gift planning team of the ELCA Foundation is here to help you explore your options through confidential, no-obligation conversations. Learn more about recent tax changes that could impact your giving, ways you can support ELCA ministries in your estate plan, and how the ELCA Foundation can become your partner in planning by visiting us at foundation.elca.org — or scan the QR code to the right to find your regional gift planner.



LEADERSHIP CIRCLE SPOTLIGHT: KATHY AND MARK HELGE



Kathy Helge grew up Lutheran and graduated from Valparaiso University, where she met her husband, Mark. Kathy was interested in being a leader in the church but grew up in a Lutheran

tradition that didn't welcome women into leadership and was never given the support to pursue a career as a pastor. Ever since then she has felt a deep need and responsibility to lift up women in the church.

A recent Facebook post about the feast of Saint Perpetua and Saint Felicity caught Kathy's attention: "St. Perpetua and St. Felicity are another reminder for me, and should be for the whole church, that women led the way in the ancient church and still do today."

"This speaks directly to why we support the International Women Leaders program of the ELCA," Kathy said.

Kathy and Mark were first introduced to the International Women Leaders (IWL) program at an ELCA conference Kathy attended a few years ago that highlighted the stories of IWL scholars. Kathy was

touched by their faith journeys: "[I] knew immediately that this was a group that our church needed, their churches needed and our world needed to continue."

Recently Kathy and Mark met with two program participants they help to sponsor, Limakatso (Kat) and Allanah.

"Both of us were inspired to hear their stories, their backgrounds, their hopes and dreams and challenges," Kathy said. "The girls we spoke with and sponsor are both typical college students and yet foreign students. Both girls have families left behind as many college students do. ... I once heard that they initially found American food somewhat difficult to like to eat."

As members of ELCA companion churches, Kat and Allanah both received scholarships to attend ELCA-affiliated universities in the United States. They are thankful for the IWL program and for the community they share with other IWL students at their school. Part of the Class of 2026, Kat and Allanah plan to use their educations within the church.

"We wish them the best in their college endeavors," said Kathy. "Remember these names of the IWL students. Pray for them. Support them. Thank God for this program and for the opportunity to make Christ known to these, our sisters in Christ, as they too will make Christ known to others."

CIRCLE *Leadership*

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Spring 2023



Thank you for your partnership!

The 2022-2023 class of Fund for Leaders scholarship recipients.



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

Visit the Leadership Circle website to access the latest updates from the ELCA's churchwide ministries.