



STORIES OF FAITH

IN ACTION

2017-2018



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

**Your offering supports leaders
and revitalizes congregations!**

CONTENTS

Where do leaders come from?
A message from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton 3

Where your offering goes
How Mission Support works 4

LEADERSHIP

Called and connected 6

Leading the way as a diverse, inclusive community  8

Chaplain and father inspire Marine to pursue ministry 9

VITAL CONGREGATIONS

Faith in nature  10

Finding God in a parking lot 12

We sustain each other  13

GLOBAL CHURCH

500 years later: A growing global communion 14

Telling the story in Jerusalem  16

Tiny church, big goals 17

Mission Support: Frequently asked questions 18

Stories inspire hope and generosity
A message from the Mission Support team 19

On the cover: A young man receives communion at the 500th anniversary of the Reformation ceremony at The Lutheran World Federation's 12th Assembly in Windhoek, Namibia.

Photo: Courtesy of The Lutheran World Federation



WHERE DO LEADERS COME FROM?

A message from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton

Friend in Christ,

Some were fishermen. One was a tax collector. Another, a zealot. The others—who knows? Though the 12 disciples came from different walks of life and different places, what united them was their deep commitment to following Jesus.

After he called them, Jesus sent his disciples out to heal and proclaim the good news with these instructions: “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there” (Luke 9:3-4).

No prior accommodations? Not even an extra tunic? That is a challenging call. But the disciples’ faith was strong, and they answered it.

In the pages of this year’s *Stories of Faith in Action*, you’ll find Lutheran individuals and congregations answering Christ’s call in places familiar as a parking lot (page 12) or foreign as an ancient city (page 16). These leaders are boldly living out their faith in service to our neighbors, near and far.

And here’s the best part: You are a part of these stories. You, too, make Christ known through the offering dollars you give each Sunday. A portion of those dollars, called Mission Support (page 4), funds the ministries lifted up in this publication—and so much more! They are illustrations of the many life-changing stories happening every day because of your generosity and faithfulness.

As we consider the future of the ELCA, I want you to know that your support, your weekly offering, is needed now more than ever. With more and more parish pastors retiring and seminary enrollment waning, we are on the cusp of a clergy shortage. We need more leaders like the ones in these stories to bring hearts to Christ and to revitalize our congregations.

But where do leaders come from? They are former fishermen and tax collectors and soldiers (page 9) and laypeople (page 8) who give generously of their lives to serve Christ. They are people like us—me and you.

We as a church will be focusing on leadership and congregational vitality as part of the ELCA’s Future Directions 2025 (ELCA.org/future). This is our time to work together to build up leaders, and we can do that by continuing to give generously and by noticing leaders—from all walks of life—and inviting them to consider a call to ministry. Perhaps that leader is you! Will you answer the call?

Thank you for your faithful service on behalf of this church. Together, by God’s grace, we can live generously and answer God’s call.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton,
Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



WHERE YOUR OFFERING GOES

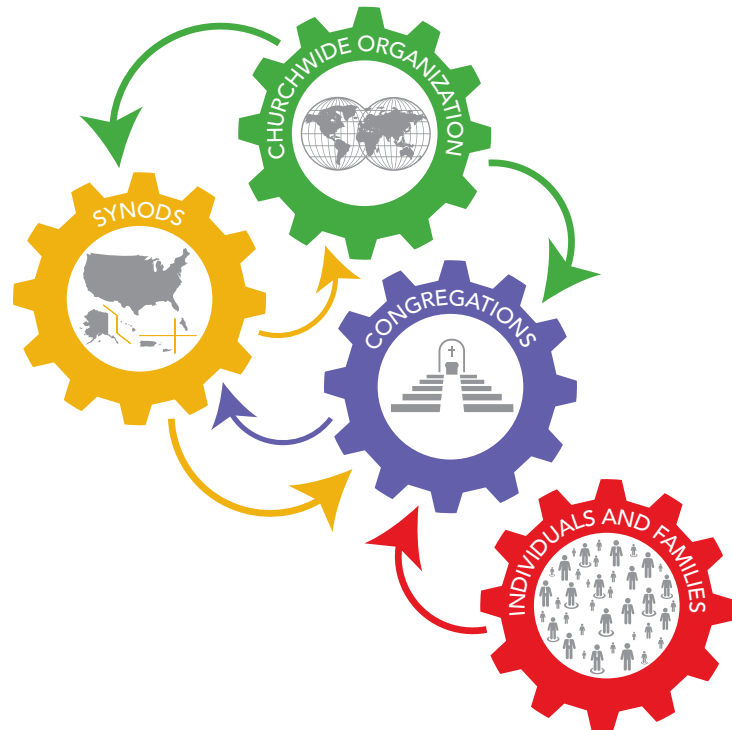
As Lutherans, we believe that Christ has freed us from sin and death, even from ourselves, so that we can love and serve our neighbors. One way we put our faith in action is by making a financial gift—an offering—to our congregation.

Did you know that when you give an offering to your congregation, a percentage of that financial gift is shared with your synod and churchwide organization? Each year, during budget season, your congregation's council pledges to send a portion of the offerings it receives to fund ELCA ministries in your synod and beyond. In the ELCA, we call these funds Mission Support.

Mission Support enables the ELCA's **9,300 congregations** and **65 synods** to pool resources to love and serve our neighbors in ways that no individual, congregation or synod can do alone. It shows how we are church together—it's essential to who we are as the ELCA.

Through our offerings, which are shared with the wider church, **we participate in God's life-changing work** in our communities and around the world.

HOW MISSION SUPPORT WORKS



YOUR CONGREGATION

Your offering is stewarded by your congregation's council to support the work of your congregation. When your congregation votes to adopt its annual budget, you designate a portion of your offering to be shared with your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization. These funds are called Mission Support.

YOUR SYNOD

Your congregation's Mission Support dollars are then stewarded by your synod leaders to support the work of the synod. Synods use Mission Support to nurture ELCA congregations and rostered leaders and support local partners (camps, colleges, seminaries and more). Some synods support companion churches around the world. Synods also designate a portion of the Mission Support funds they receive to be sent to the churchwide organization.

YOUR CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION

Your churchwide organization stewards Mission Support dollars to respond to national and worldwide ministries and to lead ministry initiatives on behalf of the whole church. A few of those ministries are highlighted in this publication, but there are many others that together create a strong witness to the love of Christ.

In 2016, ELCA members gave \$1.75 billion in unrestricted offerings* to support God's mission and ministry through the three expressions of the ELCA. *Thank you for your generosity!*

94.4%
CONGREGATIONS

\$1.65 billion was stewarded by the ELCA's 9,300 congregations

3%
SYNODS

\$52.5 million was stewarded by the ELCA's 65 synods

2.6%
CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION

\$45.2 million was stewarded by the ELCA churchwide organization

**Unrestricted offerings do not include special offerings such as congregational capital improvements or gifts to ministries like Lutheran Disaster Response.*

Read on to see how your offering from the past year has made a difference in raising up leaders and revitalizing congregations!

CALLED AND CONNECTED

Members of St. John Lutheran Church, Dickinson, N.D., cheered when their own Kathi Nygaard was ordained there in 2015, but they weren't the only ones. Present in person or in spirit was a lifelong network of family, friends, mentors, supporters and ministries that helped shepherd Nygaard into ministry.

"Kathi exemplifies who we are as church and ... how we raise up leaders," said Sherie Heine, assistant to the bishop of the Western North Dakota Synod, where Nygaard serves.

Directly and indirectly on her path from prairie schoolgirl to pastor of Granville-Norwich Lutheran Parish, Nygaard was accompanied by the wider church. Mission Support—a portion of offering dollars from generous ELCA members that are sent to the synod and churchwide organization—made her journey possible.

"The first time somebody said I should be a pastor I was in grade school," recalled Nygaard, who grew up attending worship and Sunday school at Zion Lutheran Church in Noonan, N.D., and was confirmed at Grace Lutheran Church in Wildrose, N.D. It was a comment she heard over and over

while participating in other Lutheran activities that deepened her faith, including Upper Missouri Bible Camp in Epping, N.D., and Christus Rex Lutheran Campus Center at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks.

After college Nygaard took a job as a social worker while involving herself deeply in congregational and synod life in Dickinson. Eventually, God's call to ministry became irresistible. "It just became clearer and clearer that I was being called to equip people to serve," Nygaard said.

But how would she manage the time and financial commitment of seminary? The answer was the distributive learning program at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn., which enabled her to work on a Master of Divinity degree while living and working in Dickinson.

Thanks to the generosity of fellow Lutherans, the ministries that had helped form Nygaard in faith also provided financial assistance. Grace Lutheran helped her with scholarships, as did the Western North Dakota Synod Ministry Endowment Fund and the synod's Women of the ELCA. Nygaard also received scholarships at Luther.

Your Mission Support dollars are used by your synod and the ELCA churchwide organization to facilitate the rostering of leaders and the call process. These funds also support the seven ELCA seminaries that train rostered ministers.



After graduating from Luther, Nygaard awaited her first call. Meanwhile, in western North Dakota, two rural congregations were being guided by their synod in the search for a new pastor.

From the very beginning, it was clear that Nygaard was the leader they needed, said Teresa Loftesnes, who chaired the committee that called Nygaard. "Bringing in someone with that wealth of experience gave us the confidence to move forward," she said.

Once Nygaard was called, plans were made for her ordination and she was rostered by the ELCA churchwide organization

Heine said Nygaard's story demonstrates "the three expressions of the ELCA at our best." Now serving two rural congregations of Granville-Norwich Lutheran Parish, Nygaard is happy to find herself at a "country church," back where she started.

Looking back at her journey to pastoral ministry, Nygaard is thankful for the support, both financial and spiritual, she received from the three expressions of the ELCA. It enabled her to answer, at last, the call that God first put on her as a young girl.

"God's pretty persistent, no matter how many times we let the call go to voicemail," she said.





LEADING THE WAY AS A DIVERSE, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

Every Sunday after worship, members of St. Paul Thai Lutheran Church in Forest Park, Ill., take part in what might seem like an unusual tradition. They enjoy a potluck meal, and once their food is settled, they engage in some friendly competition—playing badminton. “Everybody gets to play, no genders or nationalities are excluded from that group,” said St. Paul Thai member Theodore Lietz. The beloved tradition is demonstrative of the congregation’s diverse, inclusive community, which has welcomed people of Thai and other backgrounds since 1985.

More than 30 years later, St. Paul Thai Church continues its legacy of inclusivity. The congregation is made up of 70 percent Thai first generation immigrants, and the remaining 30 percent is a mix of other races, said its pastor, Pongsak Limthongviratn. Services are conducted in Thai and English, and the congregation offers translation headsets when needed.

In the spring of 2017 the congregation was selected to try out the ELCA’s updated version of One Body, Many Members. This free resource consists of

downloadable Bible studies, discussion questions and activities aimed at supporting congregations on their journeys to welcome every racial, ethnic and class background.

“One Body, Many Members is really just about having us live out our call to go beyond our walls and share the good news and to meet people where they are and how we create worship communities that reflect the wider diversity of this world,” said Judith Roberts, ELCA racial justice ministries director and resource facilitator.

It can help any congregation facilitate conversation about diversity, regardless of its location or maturity. In the case of St. Paul Thai, the resource provided meaningful enrichment to an already thriving community.

“Diversity makes us strong,” said Monta Limthongviratn, a lay minister at St. Paul Thai. “We don’t exist only for Thai people, but because we live as a diverse community, we try to respond to the needs of other people.”

[Watch a video of St. Paul Thai’s badminton fellowship and more at ELCA.org/SOFIA.](#)

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to create resources like One Body, Many Members (ELCA.org/Onebody), which aid congregations in their efforts to reflect the diverse country the United States is becoming.

CHAPLAIN AND FATHER INSPIRE MARINE TO PURSUE MINISTRY

While deployed as a Marine in Iraq in 2005, Nathan Huffman received a visit from a chaplain that would change his life.

“He came to me and he asked me how I was doing,” Huffman said. “[I gave him the] ‘I’m fine’ typical Marine response. But he knew I wasn’t.”

When the chaplain pushed for a real answer, Huffman said he hadn’t received communion in over a month due to combat readiness. So the chaplain brought out his communion kit and offered him the sacrament before Huffman started his nightly patrol.

“After receiving communion, I felt at peace with dying,” Huffman said. “It wasn’t because I was so brave; it was because I was confident in Christ.”

Nothing happened during that patrol, but that year Huffman’s unit lost 46 Marines and two Navy corpsmen. Now a father of three, he counts himself blessed to be alive.

After returning from deployment, Huffman was a police officer in Richmond, Va., for several years before he and his wife began talking seriously about seminary and chaplaincy. The son of a retired ELCA pastor, Huffman was very involved in church growing up and was an active member of Epiphany Lutheran Church in Richmond.

“My father’s ministry helped to illustrate the relevance of faith outside the four walls of the

sanctuary,” Huffman said. “My father and my (Epiphany’s) pastor both emphasized the importance of faith in times of challenge. I’ve carried that through my life and into ministry today.”

Because others had helped him, Huffman said he felt called to help military personnel and veterans who were suffering. “My faith had been a large part of that,” he said.

In 2012, Huffman began his studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa.), receiving generous support from his home congregation, Epiphany. As part of his journey to ordination, he applied to and was accepted in the chaplain candidate program.

Before candidates can enter a full-time specialized ministry like chaplaincy, they must have three years of pastoral experience. Huffman is currently associate pastor of St. Michael Lutheran Church in Virginia Beach, Va., where roughly half of the parishioners are former or current members of the military.

Huffman hopes his ministry can bring light to those facing challenges today. “No one needs a light in bright places, but in dark times everyone longs for light,” he said. “Christ is that flame that we carry into those dark places, and in our baptisms we are called to be the candles that carry those flames.”

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the ministry of chaplains across this church and to support the ELCA’s seven seminaries that train them.

FAITH IN NATURE

Visit New Life Lutheran Church in Dripping Springs, Texas, on a Sunday and you'll be greeted by friendly faces as well as three giant, century-old oak trees that frame their worship space—the great outdoors.

Although some might describe New Life's venue as nontraditional, its pastor, Carmen Retzlaff, says that this outdoor worshiping community is actually a return to ancient times when everyone worshiped outside. The central Texas climate makes outdoor worship possible nearly year-round, but New Life also has a large event tent and outdoor heaters to use when it's cold or raining.

How did the new congregation land on worshiping outside? In 2010, the ELCA Mission Investment Fund purchased 12 acres of land and was holding it for New Life until members had enough money to erect a building on the site. After a few years of using a rental property, the congregation decided that it had fallen in love with the land and didn't need to wait to have a building, Retzlaff said. Three years ago, they committed to using the great outdoors as their church.

"I can only credit the Holy Spirit that [our members] were so willing to know that our mission was to

reach out to people with the good news of God's love and not to build ourselves a church like the one we came from," Retzlaff said, referring to the funds her former congregation received from the ELCA churchwide organization to start New Life.

Without having to worry about constructing and maintaining a building, the congregation has more energy to focus on outreach, including its regular community-service Sundays, which have found the congregation's members cleaning up a portion of a highway and pausing for communion at the site to make their work part of the liturgy. They also reach out to their neighbors by serving coffee and fruit to day laborers weekly, hosting Bible studies in dance halls and coffee shops, and donating vegetables from their community garden to a food pantry.

Member Jenni Peterson and her husband joined New Life after attending Lutheran congregations for years. "What we found at New Life was the same grace in another setting," she said. "We all work together to care for our beautiful piece of land, and through monthly service projects, care for our community."



[Watch video footage of New Life's beautiful outdoor worship space at ELCA.org/SOFIA.](https://www.elca.org/SOFIA)

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund new congregations like New Life Lutheran Church.



FINDING GOD IN A PARKING LOT

One Sunday every month, a small group of Lutherans congregates in the parking lot of the Home Depot in Passaic, N.J., before services start at St. John Lutheran Church. They're not there to buy home supplies—they're there to worship.

Four years ago when St. John was looking for a way to become more integrated in its community, the congregation came up with the idea of a breakfast ministry. Their first attempt at breakfast after church didn't bring any visitors. Then a member suggested taking food to the Home Depot parking lot, as there were always day laborers who waited there to be picked up for jobs, and they could use a good breakfast.

"Sure enough, they welcomed us," said Jay Unzaga, the congregation's former pastor. "From that Sunday on, St. John hasn't stopped going there in four years and feeds hot breakfast to about 40 to 50 men every week."

In addition to sharing breakfast, the community worships together once a month. "We do a

holy service of word and sacrament in about 15 minutes right there in the parking lot," Unzaga said. They call the ministry *Misión Pan de la Vida* (Mission Bread of Life).

The worship services are led in Spanish, and Unzaga always invites the men to take part by reading a lesson or helping serve communion. "Imagine how hard it is to get a reader out of a parking lot when most of them didn't go past elementary school," he said. "But the Holy Spirit always provides and these men do it for the glory of God."

Holding worship in a parking lot brings an array of variables that can't be controlled—whether it be interruptions when a van approaches to pick up some workers or if store security asks the group to move.

"To go to a parking lot and claim that as the house of the Lord is powerful and beautiful, especially in the dead of winter," Unzaga said. "To share the cup of salvation with our immigrant neighbors in the snow is just a humbling and beautiful sight."

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund new congregations like *Misión Pan de la Vida*.



WE SUSTAIN EACH OTHER

At 109 years old, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baltimore had deep roots in the community but was in danger of closing. The congregation's unstable situation was akin to many others in southeast Baltimore in 2009, the year Mark Parker, their current pastor, arrived. At the time there were approximately 25 to 30 commuter members.

Parker said it was their synod's director for evangelical mission that suggested rapidly transforming the congregation by focusing on the surrounding community. This changed St. Paul into what is now known as Breath of God Lutheran Church.

"A congregation in decline in terms of numbers and energy and people has a really hard time reversing that because you need resources in order to do different things," Parker said. "Each year [the new-start funds] gave us room to grow without a sense of scarcity or anxiety it could all fall apart next month because we couldn't pay the bills."

Breath of God is in an area that is rich in diversity: "This neighborhood has a lot of young professionals moving to it, but it also has a lot of working-class people and poor people, a big burgeoning Hispanic population, and refugees," said member Mary MacDonald. "This church is where all those different groups come together."

[Watch a video of Breath of God members discussing their ministry at \[ELCA.org/SOFIA\]\(https://www.elca.org/SOFIA\).](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support directors for evangelical mission and new congregations like *Breath of God*.

In order to grow, the congregation began to shift its focus outward to its surrounding neighborhood.

"We do a lot more community outreach than we did in the last 25 years," said longtime member Joe Burk. "The building is used every day of the week."

The new direction invigorated current members and began attracting new ones.

"I felt inspired in a way where I haven't felt before from a church," said member Jennifer Pruitt. "I wanted to find ways to be a better person, to be more open, to be a better community member."

The change in focus would not have been possible were it not for the funds *Breath of God* received through Mission Support, according to Parker. At the same time, they contribute between 10 and 12 percent of their annual offerings to Mission Support.

"It's interesting because we give Mission Support and then we're getting it back," he said. "That's how the church works; we sustain each other."

The point of church is to gather people together, to be nurtured around the word and table of God and to be sent into the world to be of some use to our neighbors and not in small ways but in big transformative ways."

500 YEARS LATER: A GROWING GLOBAL COMMUNION



As the ELCA commemorates the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we join with Lutherans from across the globe sharing what Martin Luther describes as a “living, daring confidence in God’s grace.”

The ELCA’s connection to the global Lutheran church is realized through The Lutheran World Federation (LWF), a communion of 145 churches in the Lutheran tradition representing over 74 million Christians in 98 countries. The ELCA is the communion’s only member church from the United States.

A delegation from the ELCA joined more than 800 Lutherans in May in Windhoek, Namibia, for the LWF’s 12th Assembly, which observed the historic Reformation anniversary and elected new leadership, including ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton as vice president of the LWF’s North America region.

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the ecumenical, missional work of The Lutheran World Federation.

In his welcome address to the assembly, LWF General Secretary Martin Junge said, “Gathered from all over the world, we embody in tangible ways a global communion of churches, rooted in worship, grounded in our theological tradition and actively witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

But what does this global connection mean for the ELCA in our local context? Building on relationships established in the LWF, our church is connected to 85 companion churches in other countries through the ELCA churchwide organization. Each of the ELCA’s 65 synods have at least one international church companion.

For example, the ELCA Nebraska Synod is engaged in ministry with the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay and the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Photos: Courtesy of The Lutheran World Federation

“We’re grateful for the inspiration we get engaging our companion synods in Tanzania and Argentina and Uruguay, and for the models of ministry we see them using to witness to the gospel,” said Brian Maas, bishop of the ELCA Nebraska Synod. “We know true mutual benefit in these continually growing relationships, church-to-church, congregation-to-congregation and person-to-person. Our walk together as the Nebraska Synod would be greatly diminished if we weren’t also walking with these companions on the journey.”

Jennifer Kirby, a member of Ebenezer Lutheran Church in Oaks, Okla., witnessed this connection firsthand. Attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women earlier this year, she had engaged women from the LWF member churches near and far.

Kirby said the experience gave her “a greater, larger sense of community and connection in faith. It means that my church has something in common with another church in a different country. Being connected with Lutherans across the globe reminds me in Oklahoma that we are a part of something much larger than ourselves.”





TELLING THE STORY IN JERUSALEM

Years ago Lutheran missionaries were sent to start new churches around the world, and now those churches run their own seminaries and ministries. What, then, is the role of the ELCA missionary today?

Today's missionaries are doctors, nurses, teachers, educators and community organizers—and the ELCA sends them to work alongside other Lutherans only when an invitation is issued by one of the ELCA's global companion churches.

"Instead of approaching us for long-term people to help start and grow a church, [our global companions] are asking us to fill more specific technical positions," said Heidi Torgerson, ELCA director for global service. "Our fractured world needs healing. ELCA missionaries are agents of healing through the work they do."

Adrainne Gray and her husband, Ben, for example, are missionaries working in technical positions as communicators for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Whether they are taking photos, writing stories or preparing press releases, their charge is to connect the English-speaking Lutheran world to the reality of life for Arab Lutherans in Palestine, Jerusalem and Jordan. "The amazing thing is that [in spite of the conflict], our co-workers are joyful, hopeful people," Adrainne said. "They are living."

While the majority of ELCA missionaries are in their 20s, early 30s or close to retirement, the Grays are in the middle of their careers and raising their 14- and 11-year-old kids. They came to Jerusalem after Adrainne completed her training as a deaconess in 2015 and was looking for a call.

"We didn't have this part of the world on our radar at all, but when we saw the opening, we knew immediately that our talents fit its need," she said. "We wear the term 'missionary' proudly—it's central to the work of the church."

 [Follow the Gray family on their journey at thegraytones.com.](http://thegraytones.com)

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to support the work of 225 ELCA missionaries in 44 countries around the world.



TINY CHURCH, BIG GOALS

With approximately 350 baptized members, two congregations, two new outreach ministry sites, multiple ministries and big dreams, "the Lutheran Church in Cambodia (LCC) is a young church that is on the verge of doubling its mission outreach with great zeal," said Y. Franklin Ishida, ELCA global mission director for Asia and the Pacific.

Founded in 2010, the LCC is a product of the Lutheran Church in Singapore's mission work—a denomination founded in partnership with the Lutheran Church in America, an ELCA predecessor. Although outside funding from the ELCA and the church in Singapore is still important for the young church, Daniel Orn, a founding pastor said the LCC aims to be self-sufficient by 2035.

In this mostly Buddhist country, however, growing the church through direct evangelism isn't effective, Orn said. Instead, the church attracts people to the faith through the caring way its members live and through its holistic, innovative ministries. One such example is the LCC's hostel project and congregation in Phnom Penh.

The hostel met a critical need for the LCC's first congregation in Kruos Village, which had six

university students looking for affordable housing. By 2012 the hostel ministry had grown so much that the LCC was able to purchase three, three-story units.

Now the hostel has a congregation of 100 members aged 19 through 30 that represents 10 of Cambodia's 25 provinces. Most are university students like Sareoun Chum, a young adult leader and hostel volunteer.

Chum appreciates that his church not only "works with the soul" but also focuses on serving the poor. One example of this is the LCC's agriculture ministry, also started by the Kruos Village congregation, which educates people so they can grow produce in their gardens to eat and sell at the market. The ministry has helped the village become more food secure, Ishida said.

Aware of its roots as a mission start, the vibrant church is looking ahead to a time when it will engage in global mission work too. Orn said the LCC hopes "to send missionaries to serve to restore Christians in Europe in the next 20 to 30 years."

Your Mission Support dollars are used by the ELCA churchwide organization to fund global ministry work, including the support of the Lutheran Church in Cambodia.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Mission Support?

Mission Support is the portion of your congregation's regular financial offering that is shared with your synod and the churchwide organization. These gifts are used where the need is the greatest, and they also make it possible for the ELCA's 65 synods and the churchwide organization to maintain ongoing commitments to ministry partners.

What guides the churchwide organization in its decisions regarding Mission Support?

Voting members from across the ELCA meet as a churchwide assembly every three years to guide and direct the work of the churchwide organization. The ELCA Church Council is the interim legislative authority between assemblies. The churchwide organization's strategic priorities are aligned with the ELCA Future Directions 2025 that will emphasize congregational vitality and leadership development across our church. This includes accompanying the nearly 9,300 ELCA congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission and building the capacity of this church for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.

How does my congregation benefit from Mission Support?

Congregational vitality is enhanced through active participation in our church's mission to share God's love with the world. Stories of Faith in Action is filled with examples of how lives have been changed because of the generosity of ELCA members

and congregations through Mission Support. This money funds the work of the synods, and some of the portion of Mission Support that is shared with the churchwide organization comes back to your congregation and synod in the form of services, programs, resources or grants. Typically, more than 90 percent of a congregation's offering remains in the congregation to help pay for ministries, outreach, utilities and the building—supporting your congregation's vital presence in your community.

What is the distinction between Mission Support and Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA?

Mission Support is one way we act as a church together; we count on one another for the mutual work that Mission Support makes possible. Many ELCA members and congregations are called to give in other ways as well, and this is what *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* offers (ELCA.org/campaign). The campaign, approved by the 2013 Churchwide Assembly, is a way for us to do more, together, through designated gifts to the ministry priorities we are most passionate about, above and beyond regular offerings through our congregation. Campaign gifts are tracked and spent separately from the Mission Support budget. *The Campaign for the ELCA* is an investment in the future of the ELCA and an extension of our mission and ministry together.

STORIES INSPIRE HOPE AND GENEROSITY

A message from the Mission Support team

Dear partner in ministry,

We have been privileged to serve as your Mission Support team for more than a year. In this time we have visited with both synodical and congregational leaders and learned about the many ways that Mission Support dollars are making a real difference in the world.



The stories in this booklet—of ministries that are only made possible because of our work together as a church—are just snapshots of the ways God reaches the world through us. These stories inspire hope as well as generosity.

There are just as many inspirational stories within your congregation and your synod—we know, because you have been sharing them with us! We encourage you to continue telling these stories. Sharing these stories makes what we do together as church more visible for everyone.

We are deeply grateful for the way your offering dollars are shared across this church to support the mission we share. Mission Support is about the commitment we share to support ministries in places where we physically cannot be.

We encourage you to use this booklet as a springboard for telling the stories of how we are church together for the sake of the world.

Thank you for continuing to support God's work!

In peace and partnership,

Victoria Flood
Director, ELCA Mission Support

Nick Kiger
Associate Director, ELCA Mission Support

STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

2017-2018

Read these and other stories of this church at LivingLutheran.org.

Congregations are encouraged to reprint the content of Stories of Faith in Action to use in their ministries. Any reprint should include the following information: © 2017 ELCA • ELCA.org • LivingLutheran.org

To download a flipbook or printable PDF, visit ELCA.org/SOFIA.

To order free copies, call 800-638-3522 or visit ELCA.org/SOFIA.

8765 West Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631-4101
800-638-3522
ELCA.org

© 2017 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A longer version of each of the stories appearing on pages 9-12 and 16-17 was first published in Living Lutheran, the magazine of the ELCA.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.