



ELCA Fund for Leaders

Emily Norris

2017-2018 Class of Scholars

Emily Norris had been serving at Augsburg Lutheran Church's winter-overflow homeless shelter in Winston-Salem, N.C., for a few years when she heard the rumblings. Many of the guests opened up to her, told her stories. She wasn't ordained, but they saw her as their pastor. One need kept arising.

"I heard very loudly that there was a deep hunger for a faith community that looked like them," Norris said. They craved space where they could worship God and not feel judged for their housing status, their past or their appearance. Heeding their calls led Norris to Wartburg Theological Seminary, Dubuque, Iowa, to become a pastor. As a FFL scholar, Norris was able to complete her education and follow where she was being called – being a bold leader for the church who embraces different and new approaches to ministry and serving our neighbors.

By 2020, Norris was ordained and serving as the mission developer for the Dwelling, an ELCA faith community designed for, but not exclusive to, people in Winston-Salem who are or have been homeless. After assessing community needs, Norris determined that free mobile showers would be the Dwelling's anchor ministry. Visitors could take showers and receive clean underwear, socks and T-shirts donated by members of the Dwelling's synod conference.

"It was really a profound way to start," Norris said. "Showers provide a sense of dignity and are therapeutic. I don't know a better way to remind people of their baptism."

Eventually the showers became a permanent fixture and new funding allowed the faith community to hire another pastor to manage the ministry. By Christmas Eve, Covid-19 restrictions for gatherings had been relaxed, and Norris held the Dwelling's first worship service.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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