

FOR FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

CIRCLE

Leadership

Fall 2024

NEWSLETTER

ELCA.org



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

"Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray for us as well, that God will open to us a door for the word."

—Colossians 4:2-3a

Dear friends in Christ,

Every year, when the leaves turn and the nights grow cool, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude. As many of us will soon remember around a holiday table, we have so much to be thankful for. I see this every day in my role here at the churchwide organization of the ELCA. So, while I may be a bit early, I would like to tell you what I am thankful for.

I am thankful that I am surrounded by followers of Jesus who believe in the church as a force for good in the world. I am thankful for stories of compassion and imagination in the face of challenges. I am thankful for colleagues and partners around the world who find opportunities to walk alongside our neighbors in real, sustainable ways. I am thankful for a church that believes in investing in the future and training new generations of leaders in creative and faithful ways. I am thankful for the ELCA!

This means that I am also thankful for all of you. You are the ones who make possible the stories you are about to read and so many more. Thank you for believing in this church and its work. Your gifts and witness help make God's love real — living faithfully, witnessing boldly, serving joyfully and giving abundantly.



In Christ,

Rachel Wind

Rachel Wind

Executive for Development
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

SMART WAYS TO GIVE BEFORE 2024 ENDS

Would it surprise you to hear that you can finish this year with a gift that maximizes your charitable impact and saves you money?

Discover how at
foundation.elca.org/2024-year-end



On the cover: Mischa Beary, in charge of "purposeful work" for Settled., adds a coat of paint to a tiny home at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church's "sacred settlement" in Roseville, Minn.

Photo courtesy of Settled.

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HOW TO GIVE

ONLINE:

ELCA.org/donate

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Make checks payable
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Merrifield, VA 22116-8009



Scan to support the
work of the church!



ELCA YOUTH GATHERING RAISES NEARLY HALF A MILLION DOLLARS AS PART OF GENERATION ZERO-HUNGER

The ELCA Youth Gathering took over New Orleans in July. One thing was clear: the Youth Gathering is back! Sixteen thousand Lutherans worshiped together, served in the city and were inspired by the work of their fellow Lutherans around the world. They were also excited to join Generation Zero-Hunger, raising \$100,000 at the event and continuing to raise money after returning home to their congregations. Thanks to a generous matching challenge, which includes gifts from some of you in the Leadership Circle, these funds will go twice as far and accomplish twice as much. ELCA youth were inspired to dig deep, donating “fun money,” change from meals and more. After checks, bills and coins were all counted and matched, ELCA youth (along with their friends, families and home congregations) committed almost \$500,000 in a powerful move to become Generation Zero-Hunger!

Grace Lutheran Church in Hendersonville, N.C., turned giving to Generation Zero-Hunger into a yearlong project and set a goal of \$50,000 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of ELCA World Hunger. Inspired to help, the church’s youth challenged another local congregation’s youth program to join them in raising \$10,000 before the ELCA Youth Gathering. They met and exceeded that goal!

“We did raise more than the other congregation, we do like to point that out,” noted the Rev. Jonathan Schnibben, pastor of Grace. “But it doesn’t really matter which congregation won, what matters is that we joined together to help take care of our neighbors who need food.”

“We can’t change the entire world, but we can be a part of the work in creating a better world.”

Every Sunday, Grace’s youth would carry their World Hunger piggy banks to the front of the church to add to their total and to challenge the congregation’s adults to join the effort. Though Grace has been proud to support ELCA World Hunger for many years, its leaders are excited that this challenge has

reinvigorated the congregation to get involved in justice work and give to their neighbors in need.

Ashlynn, who attended the Youth Gathering with Sheridan Lutheran Church, summed up something heard over and over at the Youth Gathering: “We can’t change the entire world, but we can be a part of the work in creating a better world.” The future is bright!



WELCOMING THE FIRST BISHOPS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE FUND FOR LEADERS

Among this year's newly elected bishops are two recipients of ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarships. What started as a dream 27 years ago at the 1997 ELCA Churchwide Assembly is now shaping our church leadership just as the fund's founders hoped.



Bishop Meghan Johnston Aelabouni of the Rocky Mountain Synod joined the second-ever Fund for Leaders class, in 2001, and Bishop Tim Graham of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod joined just two years later, in 2003. For two decades now

these small, early classes have profoundly impacted congregations and partners around the world, which makes these elections a natural next step for these faithful, dedicated leaders.

Bishop Graham most recently served as senior pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne, Ind. His ministry at Messiah was known for its embrace of people wherever they found themselves in life. He believes that people deserve opportunities, and this belief is born of his own experiences. Fund for Leaders gave him a chance. Now he brings to the entire Indiana-Kentucky Synod his philosophy that "everyone means anyone, and anyone means everyone!"

Bishop Johnston Aelabouni most recently served as pastor of Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem as well as theologian-in-residence for the ELCA Middle East and North Africa desk. Reflecting on her Fund for Leaders experience, she said, "My scholarship enabled me to complete my seminary education without debt, freeing me to say 'yes' to the ministries to which God called me: youth and family ministry in Illinois, a co-pastorate in Colorado, academic leave for Ph.D. study, missionary service in Jerusalem – and now my call as bishop of the Rocky Mountain Synod. As Fund for Leaders has grown over the years, this ministry has been able to invest in the formation of pastors and deacons in this church in ways that bless these leaders, and their



Grace and greetings!

The apostle Paul calls us to "give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I am filled with profound gratitude for the many ways God has been at work through the ELCA's many ministries and for all the ways you, members of the Leadership Circle, champion these programs. I am especially grateful for the transformative work of the Christian Community and Leadership home area of the churchwide organization, made possible by your gifts this year: nurturing and empowering leaders, establishing new ministries and creating inclusive communities.

This summer we witnessed a powerful example of God's presence among us during

the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans. Over 16,000 Lutheran youth gathered to worship, serve and deepen their faith — all while building stronger relationships with each other, their congregations and Christ. The event spotlighted the wise, faithful and courageous generation already leading our church.

These gatherings are just one aspect of the broader mission of Christian Community and Leadership. Leadership programs continue to raise up leaders who guide the church with wisdom and vision. The New Ministry Development and Evangelism unit is sowing seeds of faith in communities across the nation while the Discipleship and Inclusive Communities unit works to ensure that all feel



communities, for years and decades to come.”

In her new leadership role Bishop Johnston Aelabouni hopes that Fund for Leaders will continue to grow for the sake of the church and its future leaders:

“Imagine if every person called into ministry in Christ’s church in the ELCA could answer that call in confidence that they would have all the financial support they need! Our capacity to proclaim and embody the gospel would grow in faithful and exciting ways. I pray it does.”



welcomed and valued in the body of Christ. Additionally, the Young Adult Communities unit is creating spaces for young people to explore their faith and serve others in innovative and impactful ways.

None of these ministries would be possible without your faithful support. Your generous gifts and prayers empower us to continue this transformative work, creating vibrant Christian communities that reflect the love and grace of God. As a member of the Leadership Circle, your partnership is crucial in helping us spread the message of Christ’s love and build a church that is welcoming, inclusive and alive with the Spirit.

FUND FOR LEADERS

1,200

ALUMS

THIS YEAR’S CLASS

29

 FULL-TUITION SCHOLARSHIPS

6

 MISSION DEVELOPER SCHOLARSHIPS

4

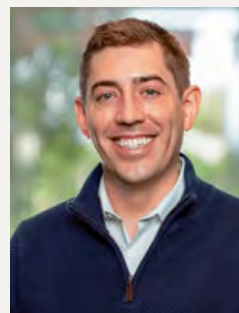
 FEDERAL CHAPLAINCY SCHOLARSHIPS

FOR **THE
FOURTH
YEAR** IN
A ROW THE
FUND FOR
LEADERS IS
DISTRIBUTING
MORE THAN

\$3

 MILLION IN SCHOLARSHIPS

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to these ministries. Your faithfulness guides our mission. Together we are living out the apostle Paul’s message to the Thessalonians, giving thanks in all circumstances as we work to share the hope and renewal found in Christ.



With a grateful heart,

Benjamin A. Hogue

Rev. Ben Hogue
Director, Christian Community
and Leadership Giving



"I showed up by God's invitation to seminary, to keep learning, growing and listening."

—Pastor Samantha DiBiao

THE POWER OF SHOWING UP

When Samantha DiBiao graduated from college, she took a leap of faith and entered into a year of service with Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM). She left her home in Virginia for the unknown in South Africa because, as she remembers it, "I needed to learn more, to grow more and to listen more." As she practiced accompaniment in an unfamiliar culture, DiBiao began to hear a familiar calling in an unfamiliar voice. "People in the church had been telling me for years that I should go to seminary, but it didn't feel quite right," she said. The words sounded different coming from the community she served in South Africa: "After my YAGM year, I developed this deep sense that showing up — being in relationship and loving people — was my next, most faithful step on the journey."

And that is exactly what DiBiao did: "I showed up by God's invitation to seminary, to keep learning,

growing and listening." Today she is pastor of Living Faith Lutheran Church in Rockville, Md., where she was called to serve after graduating from Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, Ohio. Her seminary and internship experiences shaped her calling and allowed her to develop her gifts, but DiBiao points to her YAGM year as a defining moment when her calling felt clear and unmistakable.

When faith leaders share their call stories, they talk about an internal calling being externally affirmed. Our rostered ministers speak warmly about the communities that affirm their gifts. DiBiao's story is special, since she was affirmed by two very different communities and cultures, but there are many stories highlighting what YAGM does for those young people who step out in faith as well as for the church itself. It is forming leaders and mapping the future of the church.

In 2025 the program will celebrate its 25th anniversary!

- **25 YAGM volunteers** are serving right now in Cambodia, the United Kingdom, Central Europe, Mexico, Senegal and Argentina/Uruguay.
- **The program** has over a thousand alums!
- **The program hopes to add two more sites worldwide** and place 40-50 volunteers every year.
- **Approximately 30% of YAGM alums** go on to seminary, 50% work in nonprofits and 60% get involved in advocacy and justice-related initiatives.
- **Readying a new site and recruiting** volunteers takes two to three years.
- **Applications are open now @ ELCA.org/YAGM**

After almost 25 years of YAGM there are countless stories like DiBiaso's. Volunteers leave the program profoundly shaped by their experience as people of faith, citizens of the world and future leaders of the church. Many also discover a more particular future taking shape, a calling to serve the ELCA as rostered ministers. DiBiaso remarked that as she showed up, "God kept showing up too – through my wrestling with classes, through clinical pastoral education, through hands-on ministry during internship. And now that I am a called and ordained minister to Word and Sacrament in the ELCA, God continues to keep showing up." YAGM is far from the only pathway to leadership in the ELCA, but leaders formed by the program highlight the power of showing up.



Scan to learn more
about accompaniment!



William was one of many supportive figures during DiBiaso's year as a YAGM volunteer in South Africa.



This year's Leadership Circle

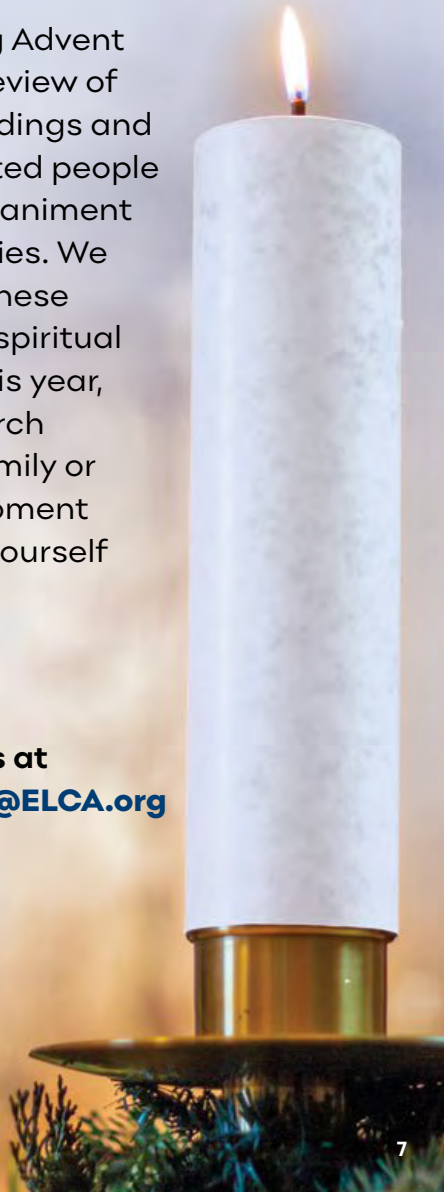
ADVENT DEVOTIONAL SERIES

will feature missionaries serving around the world.

Every week during Advent you'll receive a preview of that Sunday's readings and hear from dedicated people living out accompaniment in their communities. We invite you to use these devotions in your spiritual Advent journey this year, whether with church members, with family or even in a quiet moment alone, to ground yourself each week.

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Please contact us at
LeadershipCircle@ELCA.org
or 773-380-1743.





The Rev. Cecie Suknaic Saulnier is a Fund for Leaders scholar who nurtured her calling at Treehouse Ministries, the ELCA campus ministry at Texas A&M University. Her experience there fostered a belief that ministry can and should be creative. It also reinforced for her the importance of community, especially for young adults who might not easily find a home in a traditional faith community.

A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY GATHERS

The Gather Network is a ministry of ELCA Young Adults that connects young adults in cities or regions throughout the ELCA. These ministries create space for young adults to join in fellowship, worship, community and discussion. Gather invites the group to ask challenging questions of ourselves, our faith and our world. These communities have been created for young adults across race, disability, faith background, gender, sexuality and perspective to feel welcome to meet, to be, to gather. Some Gather ministries connect deeply with a local campus ministry, as well.

A common issue for young adults in the U.S. is loneliness. Young adults struggle to find community, even in big cities such as Austin, Texas. Gather:Austin is one of 16 Gather communities across the country (with 20 more currently in development) that supplement the work of local congregations and offer connection to those without a church home. Young adults from around Austin, often numbering 20 or more, meet once a month for a meal, conversation and fellowship. The group is building such a strong community that it also plans regular social outings and other events, to build relationships or just provide a night out.



Now approaching its second anniversary, Gather:Austin began as the internship project of one of its now co-leaders, the Rev. Cecie Suknaic Saulnier, pastor of Spirit in the Hills Lutheran Church

in nearby Spicewood, Texas. She co-leads with Joel Timmons, program ministry coordinator for Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Austin. Timmons appreciates that Gather doesn't shy away from the realities of young adulthood. "Here we get to sit with the liminality of life," he says. "We help our people grow in the midst and be comfortable in what's happening."

Gather:Austin creates a place for young adults to be authentically themselves. The result is real, deep, meaningful relationships that define their work together. Its members are often trying to find a faith home, and many attend Gather in addition to a local congregation. Bianca Blaney, who graduated from college during the pandemic and has struggled to find a church since, remarked, "Some of us really love traditional church, and the last thing we want is something to replace it. We need a place to find community, have Bible studies and small groups, things like that. I want the church, but it's OK to want more."

Gather:Austin is providing a faith community for Brittany Condry during a time of transition. She misses church and hopes to find one soon. "This might replace church for now, but it won't forever," she said. "For right now, it's what kept me in the church."



Suknaic Saulnier is grateful that local churches don't see Gather as competition: "Churches speak up for us; they send us their young adults. This is how the church has always worked. We're getting the people who aren't finding their space, and the church helps connect them."

While local congregations and other partners help sustain the individual communities such as Gather:Austin, your gifts to Where Needed Most strengthen these ministries through network-wide support. As the ELCA imagines new ways of connecting to future generations, these communities offer a beautiful vision of what is possible if we are willing to take a step out in faith. Many members echo a sentiment shared by Jessica Borne: "Church used to be such a big part of my life. I missed it."

One of the many reasons Suknaic Saulnier is grateful for the Gather community is the sense of hope it instills in those who show up: "This is bringing the future of church into life. We're people of the resurrection. Gather is a resurrection story."



To hear more stories from ELCA Young Adult Ministry, watch the latest fireside chat at ELCA.org/LeadershipCircle



STOCK GIFT DONOR SPOTLIGHT: ADAM SOLYST

When Adam Solyst was young, his hometown was hit by a tornado that leveled buildings and left the community without power.

His church still stood in the aftermath, and its members went to work for their community. They fed locals, housed the response effort and shared their worship space with a Catholic parish during the years it took the parish to rebuild. "In a time of trial, we did not simply give thanks for our blessings but shared them with those who needed them," Adam recalled. "That is what I think it means to be a Christian, and what the ELCA teaches its members." Adam is still moved by the way his congregation and the ELCA kept working and showing up long after other groups had left: "Do you know the group that was still there? The ELCA's Lutheran Disaster Response. They stayed until the end. The real end."

This story is at the heart of why Adam supports the ministries of the ELCA, especially the work of establishing and revitalizing congregations. For him the ELCA represents Christianity making a real, tangible difference in the world. He describes local congregations as "a powerful force to help reverse the trend toward apathy and distrust in this country," adding, "A lot of people, even from within their own churches, just see the worship, the

praying, the church gatherings, but there is so much more that we do. I doubt most of us know all that even our own church does. The ELCA does a lot of good."

One of Adam's preferred gifts is stock. "Gifting stock allows you to maximize the impact of your charitable giving and can reduce taxes, making it an effective way to give," he explained. His approach to philanthropy is altruistic yet practical, a common theme among Leadership Circle donors. Adam likes that stock gifts require a plan, have added tax benefits and ensure that he always has extra to give. He reminds himself and others that "stock gains are essentially just gains you receive from the hard work of others, so perhaps then it makes the most sense to give those gains back."

When asked how he might encourage other Leadership Circle members to give a gift of stock, Adam said, "Absolutely go for it. The ELCA is a diverse, powerful body with a lot of opportunities to give to a good cause, whatever you care about. And your donation will go far. They don't advertise much. They don't have flashy commercials. They just do their jobs."

He describes giving in simple but meaningful terms: "It helps convert earthly wealth into stuff more important to God." Your gifts, in every form they take, help make God's love real in your congregations and around the world.

**SAVE THE
DATE**

FEBRUARY

**27
2025**

**For our next FIRESIDE CHAT, highlighting
New Ministry Development and Evangelism!**

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Please contact us at LeadershipCircle@ELCA.org or 773-380-1743.

50 YEARS

of ELCA World Hunger



[ELCA.org/WH50](https://elca.org/WH50)

50 years



In 2024, ELCA World Hunger is commemorating its 50th anniversary! There's still time to make a gift in honor of this milestone. Here are a few ways you can give:



Join others in increasing your support to the program in honor of this anniversary.



Endow your annual gift to sustain the program for years to come.



Leave a legacy by including ELCA World Hunger in your will, trust or beneficiary designation.



Become a Monthly Partner by setting up recurring gifts to the program.



Encourage others by leading a special moment of celebration and support in your congregation.

“Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” –Luke 13:29 NRSV

For me the biblical image of a banquet is foundational to the church's work and celebration in Service and Justice. The love of God is more than just an idea; it is made very real in people's lives. That is profoundly clear from the work of missionaries who serve and accompany others in their pursuit of justice through your support.

KHADER EL-YATEEM PROVIDES NEW VISION FOR ELCA SERVICE AND JUSTICE MINISTRIES

Earlier this year a new executive director, the Rev. Khader El-Yateem, assumed leadership of the Service and Justice home area of the ELCA churchwide organization. El-Yateem spent his formative years as a Christian in a place of frequent conflict – just outside Bethlehem in the West Bank – that shaped him and imbued him with a deep passion for justice. During his first call, to Salam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, this passion was central to his faithful leadership of a community facing tremendous changes and challenges. He shepherded Salam during the years surrounding the 9/11 terror attacks, leading one of the first worship services in Brooklyn after the attacks, working proactively with fellow clergy of all faiths, helping reduce hate crimes despite high tensions, and seeing his community through a dark period with bold hope.

That hope defines El-Yateem's leadership as well as his vision for Service and Justice. In describing the home area's importance to the ELCA, he said, “We need Service and Justice so people know who we are, so they can see Christ visible in our lives, so we can love and serve our neighbors. We can be the church while responding to the needs of our neighbor, but we cannot do one without the other.”

El-Yateem's vision for Service and Justice is for these ministries to be a reminder of our Lutheran identity: “We are the interpreters of our theology and spirituality for the rest of the world.” He

I especially like this translation for its use of the active verb "eat." It encourages our work to address hunger, asking: Who is not at the table? Who is hungry? Who is left out? In times of disaster, how might the vision of a banquet unite the community and perhaps even make it more resilient in its rebuilding? These questions are central to the work of Service and Justice, whose ministries include AMMPARO Migrant Ministry, ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, Global Mission, Advocacy, Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities, and more.

As this church lives out its calling and vision in challenging days, this may be the most important moment for generosity in our lifetimes. It is an existential question being answered by your participation.

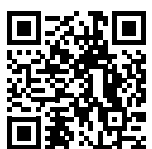


On behalf of a church that is grateful for your generous partnership at the table,
Daniel Rift
Rev. Daniel Rift
Director, Service and Justice Giving

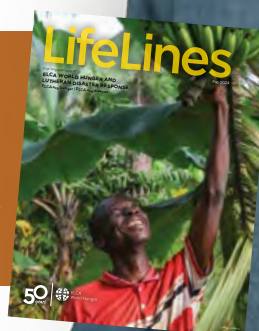
went on to say, "We are called to embody the grace shown to us in Christ in our daily life. We have remembered how to do church and forgotten how to be church. When we can tell about what Christ has done for us, people will want to hear it."

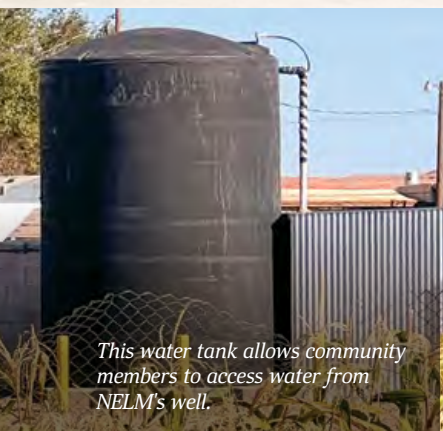
When El-Yateem speaks about your support of ELCA ministries, he smiles warmly. "You are the fuel that allows us to reach new people and communities around the world," he said. "You are part of the story of what we are doing. What you give, however you give, makes good work possible and changes lives. This is a great way of living our faith in action."

If El-Yateem could leave you with one word of encouragement and hope, it would be this: "We get distracted by current events and allow the world to define us. We define our work and who we are, not the other way around. We are called to be prophetic, we are called to be bold, we are called to be the salt of the earth, we are called to bring love and mercy to the people of the world. We do this because Jesus has called us to do this. Our generosity is bringing community and sustainability to our neighbors. It is important for us to set our own priorities, to know who we are. Our identity in Christ empowers us to lead. There is no need to be afraid, ashamed or shy. Christ has liberated us to change the world with love."



For more stories about the impact of your gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response, read the latest issue of "LifeLines."





This water tank allows community members to access water from NELM's well.

THE POWER OF FRESH FOOD, CLEAN WATER AND A STRONG COMMUNITY

Rock Point is a small community on the Colorado Plateau, in northeast Arizona. Part of the Navajo Nation, Rock Point is

located in not only a geographical desert but also an extreme food desert. The closest access to groceries and fresh produce is 50 miles away. This is only one reason why Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission (NELM) is so important to its community. As its executive director, Patterson Yazzie, explains, “Most of our siblings in the rest of the country don’t think about whether their water from the kitchen faucet is safe to drink. More than half of the homes in Rock Point do not have running water or electricity.”

First and foremost NELM is a school (Navajo Mission Preparatory School) and a worshipping community (Navajo House of Prayer). Its work in Rock Point grew out of a concern for students and their families.



As this priority became clearer, so did the need for local, Native leadership. For the first time in NELM’s 70-plus-year history, it has a Native minister, Patty Charley, and a Native executive director, Yazzie. NELM echoes the ELCA’s commitment to accompany our neighbors – to do work with people rather than for them. NELM’s work is having a tremendous impact on the community it serves, and in the process that community is changing the ELCA.

During the pandemic NELM became a small food bank, giving out more than 225 tons of food in 2023. Because of these efforts, residents can access fresh foods right in their own neighborhood rather than drive for an hour. NELM also has a small kitchen that prepares hot, healthy meals on-site. Yazzie describes this as an extension

of community: “Indigenous people have a long history of sharing and caring for our people and neighbors. With that same spirit, a small non-commercial kitchen serves over 90 healthy meals per day during the week.” Last year the mission fed two thousand families (averaging six members per family) who had traveled as far as 65 miles. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger supported this important work and will continue to help realize Yazzie’s hope for his community: “We want our students and our grandchildren to enjoy the feasts of our nation.”





NELM is an oasis for its community, an idea it takes literally with its latest project. In the desert, water is a precious commodity, but the mission has been practically giving away well water to locals who have no other access. Residents fill portable water tanks, some carrying hundreds of gallons, and drive home on treacherous roads. This water is useful but not potable (safe to consume). NELM has a plan to address this; your donations to Lutheran Disaster Response allow the mission to dream big.

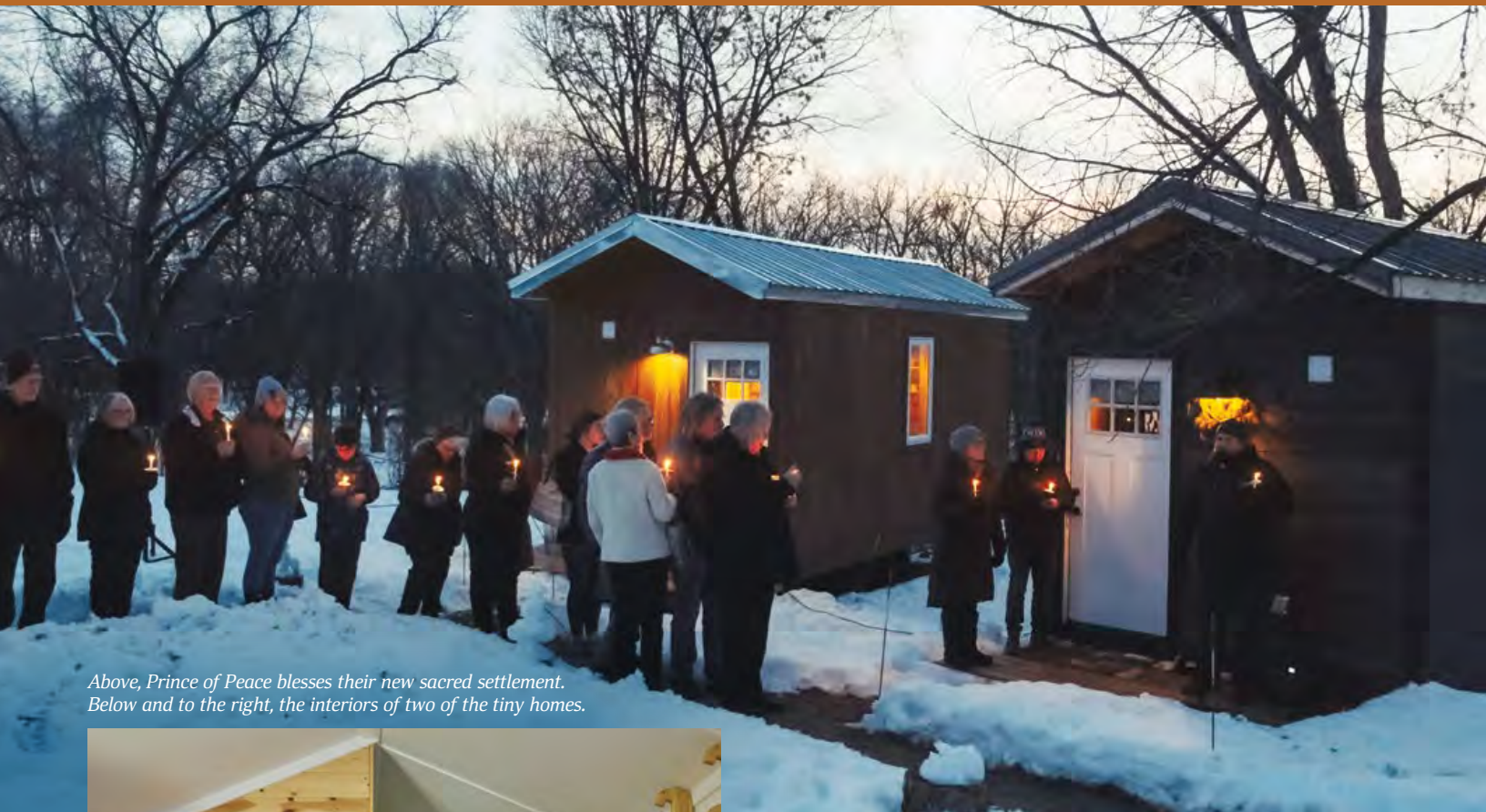


Studies are currently underway to find the most efficient method of making NELM's well water potable. Possible solutions are a filtration system or a deeper well connecting to an already-potable water source. Whatever the mission decides, your donations to Lutheran Disaster Response will have an immediate impact on the health and livelihood of individuals for miles around Rock Point. This well will prevent waterborne illness and allow the community to be more self-sufficient.

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response are empowering Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission to meet the needs of its community. As Vance Blackfox, ELCA director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, reminds us, "This is our responsibility, because these are our people. The people of Rock Point are not mouths to feed; they are people to know and lives to celebrate. And they are our siblings in Christ. Our work is just getting started, but this is indeed the work of the whole church."



*Patterson Yazzie,
executive director
of NELM.*



*Above, Prince of Peace blesses their new sacred settlement.
Below and to the right, the interiors of two of the tiny homes.*



SACRED SETTLEMENT

"You don't just wake up in four walls and think you're not homeless anymore," remarks Valerie Roy. She is the inaugural member of a tiny-home village created on the property of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Roseville, Minn., where the snowy climate makes the experience of being unhoused especially brutal. Now more than a half dozen other congregations are following suit in Minnesota alone, with more around the country stepping up to meet the needs of their communities.

"These folks coming out of homelessness have years of deep-seated trauma," says Tammy Walhof, director of Lutheran Advocacy–Minnesota. "They need people who will listen, who just accept them as a child of God." Along with ELCA Witness in Society, supported by your gifts to World Hunger, Walhof helped build support among Lutherans and partners across Minnesota to ensure passage of the "sacred communities" law, which allows religious properties to host communities of micro-unit dwellings for people who have experienced chronic homelessness and for volunteers helping them reintegrate into life with a steady roof over their head.

Settled., an organization that helps faith communities develop tiny-home villages it calls "sacred settlements," provided a tiny home for Valerie at Prince of Peace, which she moved into in December 2022. Occupying another tiny home onsite are a designated volunteer family who moved out of their apartment to serve Roy and the others and to build a sense of community in the settlement. Inside the church a "common house" provides residents with such items as a hot plate, a microwave oven, a refrigerator and dishes.

“As we continue this year, the congregation will also be discerning if and when we might expand our settlement with additional tiny homes,” said the Rev. Peter Christ, pastor of Prince of Peace. “We write a lot of checks, and sometimes we roll up our sleeves and go out and help with a project. But this is different, where we’re inviting people into a campus and building a community together.

“We recognize the ways in which the presence of this community we’re building will fundamentally shape, color and add richness and vibrancy to a church that was in a place of fearfulness about our future,” he said. “As people of faith, that has been a tremendously eye-opening experience.”

Pastor Christ believes that building a sacred community has been life-changing for Prince of Peace in ways it could never have envisioned before connecting with Valerie and Settled.: “We imagined how transformative it could be for someone who has experienced chronic homelessness to be welcomed into a home and community that support them; we could easily imagine the transformation of that life. But what we had less imagination for is how much it would transform us and our community. ... [W]hen you get to become part of someone else’s healing, you too get to experience healing.”

ELCA Witness in Society works with partners to engage issues at every level of government. As our experiences, passions and convictions intersect with the world around us, advocacy – informed by such faith practices as prayerful discernment, immersion in Scripture and delving into ELCA teachings, and by deep listening in our communities and bold proclamation – can be impactful public witness to God’s love.



Adapted from an April 2024 story in Living Lutheran: <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2024/04/sacred-settlement/>



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Fall 2024



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