

FOR FAITHFUL SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

CIRCLE

Leadership

Spring 2025

NEWSLETTER

ELCA.org



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!” —2 Corinthians 5:17

Dear friends in Christ,

A blessed Easter to you! This season gives us an opportunity to live into the new reality of the resurrection and to rejoice in a God who is making all things new.

As our church faces changes, challenges and opportunities, Easter offers hope for the continued possibility of the work of the ELCA in its many forms. It brings me joy to share that hope with all of you! Your commitment to the future of this church, as well as its present, inspires me. I am also inspired by stories from around our church, like those in the pages that follow, that I have the privilege of hearing every day. These stories are the first blossoms of the year — signs of new life and reminders that winter always gives way to spring.

You make this gospel-centered, life-affirming work possible by supporting the ministry of the ELCA, from small congregations finding new ways of being church to relief organizations responding to large-scale disasters around the world. Your gifts are a shared commitment to God's vision for a better world. Together we support leaders, embolden young people, fuel ministries and champion global mission. We know that God is already at work in these places, so we move with the Spirit to make God's love real for all people.

As a church, we can do so much more than we could ever dream of doing alone. So as we join in God's work of making all things new, let's dream big dreams, hold on to hope and boldly imagine a better world — together. Thank you for your commitment to the ministries of the ELCA and for joining with us to 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

On the cover: Pastor Hieald Osorto leads a Dia de los Muertos service for the community of St. Paul's-San Pablo in Minneapolis, Minn.

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HOW TO GIVE

ONLINE:
ELCA.org/donate

PHONE:
800-638-3522

MAIL:
Make a check payable to "ELCA" and mail it using the included envelope:
ELCA, P.O. Box 1809,
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009




Scan to support the work of the church!

THE IMPACT OF YOUR GIFTS IN 2024

Thank you for your continued commitment to the ministries of the ELCA!

TOGETHER with 4,581 households that make up the Leadership Circle, you generously gave over \$15.7 million to make God's work possible, including:

113 
seminary students received ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarships.

25 
new-start congregations or ministries serving their communities.


24 
young adults served in 6 countries around the world through Young Adults in Global Mission.



340 
grants to rural and urban ministries exploring new, innovative ways to serve their communities through ELCA New Ministry Development and Evangelism.

101 
missionary families accompanying our neighbors in 35 countries.

164 
scholarships for students in the International Leadership Program from 41 countries.

ELCA World Hunger supported programs being carried out in
62  40 
countries and U.S. states and territories.

700 
young adults connecting to the ELCA through 25 Gather small groups (and 400 attending the first-ever Young Adult Gathering).

Lutheran Disaster Response coordinated responses in
53  36 
countries and U.S. states and territories.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

—Romans 15:13

Greetings in Christ!

Hope lies at the heart of our faith. It carries us forward, sustains us and calls us to share. I hope that you find hope in the story of a synod that faced a seemingly insurmountable challenge yet trusted in God’s faithfulness and embraced this challenge as an opportunity.

With the support of the Christian Community and Leadership home area of the churchwide organization, the synod invested in leadership development, reimagined possibilities for ministry and found renewed energy for mission. Its story offers a glimpse of how, through faith, obstacles can become pathways for transformation.

Thanks to your generosity, the ELCA awards annual scholarships to equip leaders for the future of the church, new ministries are forming in communities hungry for connection, and young people are serving around the

world through Young Adults in Global Mission. Changemakers and passionate disciples are leaning into leadership, making an impact in ways we never would have dreamed. I am forever grateful that God’s imagination is far, far greater than ours!

Your support is what makes this possible. Your prayers and generosity empower leaders, sustain ministries and create spaces where faith is nurtured and hope takes root. As a member of the Leadership Circle, you are part of this movement of renewal and joy. Thank you for your faithfulness.

May you be filled with the joy and peace of Christ. And, by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to abound in hope — together.

With Easter joy,



Benjamin Hogue

Rev. Benjamin Hogue
Director, Christian Community
and Leadership Giving

THERE IS ALWAYS POSSIBILITY

When churches in the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod faced a leadership shortage and a changing religious landscape, the synod saw this as not just a challenge but an opportunity. In response, the synod launched a trailblazing initiative it calls 6261 Ministry Communities.

The synod chose the name

6261 MINISTRY COMMUNITIES

because the venture brings together

6 CONGREGATIONS
to share **2 PASTORS,**

6 LAY MINISTERS & 1 DEACON

The result is one ministry community with a shared ministry focus, a model designed to be more sustainable and to free the ministry communities to better serve their

ministries. Deacon Kathleen (Kat) Tigerman, the synod’s director for evangelical mission (DEM), distills the project down to hope: “We wanted our churches to thrive, not just survive.” As with most DEMs, her work is sustained by your continued generosity to ELCA Where Needed Most.

Deacon Kat says that 6261 Ministry Communities began with a simple idea: “All of our congregations have strengths, and they can do so much more when they share their strengths with each other.” The synod calls ministry communities “bundles” because, like a bundle of sticks, the churches maintain their individual identities while finding strength together.



Deacon Kat likens this approach to a shared meal: “We put everything on the table. We don’t ask what’s on just our plate; we look at what we all bring to share.” Churches in a bundle determine what each has to offer and decide how to collaborate. Six churches might share not only staff and a ministry focus but also programming, worship resources, boards or even choirs.

To shoulder this daunting task, the synod sought help from the Innovation team of the ELCA churchwide organization, funded by your gifts to Where Needed Most. The Innovation team helped the synod develop tools for checking in on the bundles and their churches — assessing everything from struggles to spiritual growth to staff energy levels. Crucially the



team continues to work with the synod to identify technology that can make 6261 Ministry Communities work better for congregants and communities. Because each bundle hosts activities, including worship, at different times and locations throughout the week, Innovation is developing an app to help people find programs that interest them and that work for their schedules. This technology reflects the shared goals of 6261 Ministry Communities and helps each church and bundle do more than it could on its own. “Innovation didn’t come in and tell these churches what to do,” remembers Innovation partner Sarah Weaver. “We learned about each church and their needs, then asked ‘How can we use technology to meet these needs in a way that works for these people?’”

6261 Ministry Communities is still quite new, but the synod hopes to expand the concept to connect 120 congregations across 20 bundles by 2029. This timeline reflects not just the need for these partnerships but also the impact already being seen in the existing bundles. Deacon Kat sees 6261 as a move away from scarcity to an embrace of God’s abundance: “When we come together with the expectation that we can meet all of our needs, it is a very different conversation. Collectively we hold these concerns together. By doing that, we believe that the Holy Spirit frees us all to creativity and possibility. **Yes, there is sacrifice, but there is always possibility.**”



To hear more about 6261 Ministry Communities and other innovations, watch the recording of our most recent **FIRESIDE CHAT**, which featured New Ministry Development and Evangelism!

Interested in the work of the Innovation home area? Learn more about its work on its Instagram page, [@elcainnovation](#). If you have ideas or want to learn what your synod is doing, contact your synod office and ask for your director for evangelical mission.

REFLECTIONS FROM COLOMBIA

As a member of the Leadership Circle, you empower an incredible number of ELCA ministries and their many partners. We love telling you stories about the work you make possible, but the experience of seeing that work in person is something you will never forget. That's why we offer **donor immersion trips!** We take care of all the planning; you need only open your heart to an experience that can be inspiring, moving and at times overwhelming. If you're up for it, one of these trips will give you a new, real perspective on the lives of our global neighbors and this church's work with and among them.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (IELCO) is an active voice for justice in Colombia. The immersion group spent an entire day learning about the church's direct advocacy work, its participation in the national peace dialogue and its role in the Interethnic Dialogue Table. We were granted an inside look at our companion church's faithful witness to its ministries of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

"I felt moved as I witnessed people helping each other, lending their faith and courage, which God then multiplies and fulfills." —Rev. Charles Riggs



"I had never been to Colombia before and knew it mostly as a country through which migrants had to pass on the dangerous journey to the U.S. Then I met so many interesting and faithful Lutherans in Colombia doing God's work with migrants and other vulnerable people. I was moved by their compassion and commitment." —Rev. David Rinas

IELCO showed us how churches such as La Gracia in Bogotá are discovering new ways to be sustainable for their communities. The group learned about the central role ministries such as Vid Verdadera play in serving people with disabilities. In many communities throughout Colombia, churches as well as programs supported by ELCA World Hunger are a vital resource for vulnerable communities.

Many of us know Colombia only from the news, but this trip allowed participants to see the country through the eyes of our companion church and the Colombian people.

"My experience of the church was enlarged, rekindled and moved by simple people doing what they could to reset their lives, building up support for their kids in school, and gleaned from leadership as we worshiped, prayed and sang together in the language of the Spirit."

—Rev. Charles Riggs

"Being on the ground with the people, walking through their modest homes, treading across muddy fields and sampling strange fruits, ripened on the trees, brings home the reality of the importance of our support in a uniquely powerful way." —Rev. David Rinas



"It was a wonderful experience! I loved the stories I learned about and have shared. I think these trips are a dynamic way to see God's love in action! Please keep us in mind for other trips!"

—Doreen Rinas



"How can you help us? See what we can do! Believe in us! Because we have the ability to move forward, but we do not have the means. And the important thing is the means."

—María Carmen Rodríguez of La Gracia

Join us

OCT 3-13

this year as we travel to **Argentina and Chile, Oct. 3-13!** We will learn from our local Young Adults in Global Mission team, meet scholarship recipients of the International Leaders Program, see the impact of ministries supporting survivors of domestic violence, worship alongside our South American Lutheran siblings, and more. To register or find more information, contact Jennifer Kenyeri, manager of development events, at Jennifer.Kenyeri@ELCA.org or 773-380-2872.

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.” –Luke 24:5

Greetings in the name of the risen Christ!

The Lenten journey is completed. We’ve walked with Christ to the cross and celebrated victory over sin and death in Christ’s resurrection. Yet the journey is not done. Jesus appears to Mary alongside the tomb and to the disciples as they are locked in a house. We find him in the doubts of Thomas, on the road to Emmaus and on the

shore of Tiberias. And then there is Pentecost — the day those early believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and their listeners hear the gospel in their native tongue.

This is a powerful reminder that God meets us where we are. As God’s church, we are called to that same task, engaging in the when and where of life. Your support enables our church to do this work, sharing the resurrection promise so that each may hear in their own way. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support ongoing work in the wake of wildfires in Maui, where one resident reflects on their experience of being “treated as a person, not someone who was

displaced.” Your generosity also allows a church serving immigrants in Minneapolis to respond to the when and where of their community, a reminder that we often learn about ourselves as we journey with others.

As the reflections of Leadership Circle members who witnessed the work of the global church in Colombia reminded us, it is a blessing — and humbling — to carry these stories entrusted to us as we continue to discover what it means to proclaim gospel hope in every corner of the world. I hope you’ll consider joining us on one of our future journeys — to South America in fall 2025 or to Central America or southern Africa

next year — so that you will have your own story to share after seeing the worldwide impact of your generosity.

Thank you for being part of our work together!

In shared mission,



Rev. John Eggen
Senior Director, Annual Giving



BUILDING BACK STRONGER

Before the smoke cleared from Maui’s devastating wildfires, the Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA) began planning its response in support of its community. Just weeks later, CNHA opened Kākoio Maui Relief & Aid Services Center in Kahului, a nearby community with an airport and a harbor for incoming supplies. Within the first four months of its response, CNHA provided services for more than 3,000 people, almost one out of every four residents in the area.

The destruction in Maui was widespread and especially devastating in the small Lahaina community on the island’s west coast. Fires consumed a significant amount of property and claimed the lives of at least 100 residents. CNHA recognized that recovery efforts would take years. The community needed to be almost entirely redeveloped, which left its residents without homes

or even basic services. CNHA imagined that Kākoio Maui Relief & Aid Services Center could play a major role in this development if it secured funding for the location and its growing staff. Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) awarded the center a grant to extend its lease and hire a team of locals who had been directly impacted by the wildfires. This grant and others like it are funded directly by your gifts to LDR.

Your support aids organizations such as CNHA by allowing them to focus on providing supplies, housing and support to their communities rather than finding the funds to do so. For CNHA and the center, your gifts ensure that this work is staffed and led entirely by Native Hawaiians and local residents, who know their community and its needs best. Kapili Akima, a community care navigator at the center, describes the center’s local, Native leadership as providing a sense of home: “When you get here, you’re going to feel like you’re at home. That’s our goal: we want to make sure this is a place where

locals can come to and everyone they’ll see here is family.” LDR provided for the center’s employees and allowed them to provide for their neighbors.

For one local resident, the center’s impact is as simple as it is profound: **“I appreciate actually being treated as a person, not as someone who was displaced.”**

Thanks to your generous gifts to LDR, along with other partners, CNHA was able to expand its efforts to include the Kākoio Maui Workforce Development program, which has trained more than 400 locals in new skills and trades. Many of the program’s graduates are now engaged in the area’s redevelopment. CNHA is empowering its people not only to rebuild but also to remember what it means to be a community and to reimagine what is possible for their shared future.

In addition to helping local residents find sustainable, long-term work, a primary focus of the center going forward will be building homes. Hawaii had a shortage of available homes even before the wildfires. As the center continues to house more than 900 people, it is building 126 modular homes in addition to supporting the work of other organizations with architectural plans and permits. “These are not just homes, they are actually symbols of hope, endurance, and a testament to what’s possible when we all come together,” says CNHA CEO Kūhiō Lewis. In addition to new construction, CNHA has also refurbished 450 homes, ensuring that those who lost their possessions could know stability as well as comfort when they were able to move back. Your support of LDR allows CNHA not only to meet its community’s

immediate needs but also to dream about and realize its future in the years to come.

“With a long journey ahead of us, empowering the people of Maui is the key to keeping them here,” Lewis says. One sign of hope for Maui’s future came in CNHA’s short-term housing solutions program: a healthy new baby with all needs met and a caring community all around.



LDR is committed to aiding those affected by recent wildfires in California. Just one week after losing her own home in the fires, Bishop Brenda Bos of the Southwest California Synod told its members, “In this time of great uncertainty and anger and sorrow, God is here, ready to feel it with us, hold us in it and guide us through it.” LDR is committed to that same work! To give directly to LDR’s efforts in California and around the world, scan this QR code.



ST. PAUL'S-SAN PABLO – AN IMMIGRANT CHURCH FOR MORE THAN 135 YEARS

More than 135 years ago, St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minn., began as a church serving the city's growing Swedish population. Today the growing Spanish-speaking population served by the church knows it as San Pablo. Though the neighborhood the church serves might look different now, St. Paul's commitment to its neighborhood has not changed. "St. Paul's-San Pablo has always been an immigrant church," says its current pastor, the Rev. HieraId Osorto. "Our ministry reflects our neighborhood. That was true 100 years ago; it's true today."

St. Paul's considerable experience working with immigrants has made it an important resource for those hoping to settle in Minneapolis. Rather than compete with other resource providers, St. Paul's offers help that is hard to get from other organizations. In addition to providing legal aid to the people it serves, St. Paul's embodies the ELCA's accompaniment model as a support system throughout the immigration process. Pastor HieraId says that the church looks to be compassionate as well as practical: "We offer firsthand guidance from people who have walked that path and will walk alongside their neighbor."

One of St. Paul's greatest assets is its century-old building, which is hard to miss in the midtown Phillips neighborhood. The church is a starting point for anyone in the community who is interested in organizing a meeting with politicians or the police, engaging youth in the arts or even finding free health care, thanks to students from the nearby University of Minnesota. In providing a facility for so much good work, St. Paul's has become a fixture in its community. Its neighbors know and trust that the church will be there for them. Bishop Jen Nagel of the Minneapolis Area Synod sees the congregation's devotion to its neighborhood rippling through the synod: "Pastor HieraId and the leaders at St. Paul's-



San Pablo show up for their neighbors, and they show up around the synod. Our synod's focus is 'church together,' and they embody hospitality, inclusion, wisdom and joy. It's palpable!"

Of all St. Paul's programs and partnerships, Pastor HieraId is most proud of the church's commitment to raising up leaders from within its own community: "We provide meaningful experiences for our community to see what leadership feels like. Spanish-speaking immigrants and their families are not just our neighbors but our siblings in faith, and they are the future of this church!" His pride in the people of St. Paul is clear when he says, "My community has a tremendous amount to contribute. They show up consistently and steadily as living symbols of the faithfulness of God."

Ministries such as St. Paul's-San Pablo are able to do their important work only because of your gifts to Where Needed Most. The congregation receives grants that enable it to focus on ministry rather than paying its bills. "We wouldn't be able to show Christ's love to our neighbors without this support," Pastor HieraId wants Leadership Circle members to know. "And this multilingual, multicultural congregation could not afford a pastor." His passion for his community and our shared mission is unmistakable, which gives Pastor HieraId a strong voice for the ELCA's continued commitment to its churches as well as its neighbors: "The work of the church remains the same. We provide sanctuary because that is what the church does. Loving our neighbor, whoever they are, is what the church does. If the church cannot own our gospel identity when it matters most, then what are we doing?"



"Our ministry reflects our neighborhood. That was true 100 years ago; it's true today."



The ELCA's AMMPARO Migrant Ministry is one way our church shows its commitment to accompanying migrant families today and in the future. You can learn more at [ELCA.org/AMMPARO](https://elca.org/AMMPARO) and hear stories from program staff and congregations in the AMMPARO network by listening to the fireside chat for June 2024.



Be sure to attend the next **FIRESIDE CHAT** for more stories from around the church. **Join us on July 10 to hear from Global Mission!** To update your email address and ensure that you receive your invitation, contact us at events@elca.org or 773-380-2872.

CIRCLE *Leadership*

Spring 2025

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Chicago, IL 60631-4101
ELCA.org



Leadership Circle members consistently show up for ELCA churchwide ministries, so we're making it a little easier! **Use the envelope inside the next time you want to make a gift to the ministries you love.**

Wherever you choose to give, you are making more stories like those inside possible.

Thank you!



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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.