

# LifeLines

Fall 2022

For supporters of  
**ELCA WORLD HUNGER  
AND LUTHERAN  
DISASTER RESPONSE**

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ELCA World Hunger



**Marie Anne Sliwinski**  
Senior Director,  
Building Resilient  
Communities



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

“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, [the Lord’s] mercies never come to an end” (Lamentations 3:21-22).

Dear friends in Christ:

ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response have always been intricately connected, but in recent months global events have reminded us again just how vital the work of God through these shared ministries is for communities around the world.

The depth of the humanitarian and refugee crisis in Ukraine and across Europe will require a yearslong response. Your incredible generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response in the wake of the Eastern European crisis and to ELCA World Hunger over the last 18 months has enabled us to temporarily expand our work in impacted regions. Because of you, we are better-equipped and better-resourced to support our global neighbors as they face great challenges.

**As the world yearns for an end to this terrible conflict and its far-reaching consequences, in this issue of “LifeLines” we lift up stories of hope, of new opportunity and of God at work even amid tragedy and instability.**

We know that the effects of the war in Ukraine are far-reaching, which makes the relationships our church has with local communities around the world so important. In this issue, you will read about a project of our companion church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in The Gambia. The church is working with women such as Anna, a caretaker of a cashew farm in The Gambia, whose story is shared in this issue, to create new opportunities for food security without reliable imports from Ukraine.

You’ll also read about Rosita in Guatemala, who at just 11 years old made the difficult journey with her father to try to migrate to the United States. In Tacoma, Wash., rapid gentrification is forcing longtime residents out of their neighborhood, but Peace Lutheran Church is seeking justice by enabling those neighbors to afford to stay or return.

We look back at the work made possible by your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response and the efforts of our companions and partners in the five years since the devastating 2017 hurricane season. And we look ahead to the work that remains in response to civil unrest, famine and drought in the Horn of Africa.

The world faces some incredibly complex challenges in the days ahead, but we know that God stirs up wellsprings of hope that inspire generosity and tireless efforts for peace, justice and a future filled with good things. Thank you for being a sign of hope through your support of ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response.

In peace,

Marie Anne Sliwinski  
Senior Director, Building Resilient Communities

**On the cover**

Ukrainian sisters at an aid station near the Hungarian border in March. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response support partners providing relief — food, shelter and other necessities — to refugees in Eastern Europe. Turn to pages 4-8 for stories of hope from refugees who are supported by your generosity.

**How to give**

**Online**  
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800-638-3522

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Make checks payable to “ELCA World Hunger” or “Lutheran Disaster Response” and mail to:  
ELCA  
P.O. Box 1809  
Merrifield, VA 22116-8009

**Contact us**

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hunger@elca.org

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# Ukrainian refugees find hope, home in Romania



## Maryna

Maryna fled Ukraine on Feb. 27 with just one bag, her identification and her two children. She was welcomed at the Romanian border and found an apartment near Bucharest from a stranger on Facebook who was offering their place to a Ukrainian family.

Upon her arrival in Bucharest, she immediately volunteered her time to help other Ukrainians fleeing the war. “I went to the railway station and helped do translation for other refugees, giving them information about where they could stay or get help to go to the hospital,” she said.

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response are providing significant support to partners in Eastern Europe. One of those partners in Romania offered Maryna a paid job translating between Ukrainian and Romanian for fellow refugees — work she had been doing as a volunteer for over a month. She has been working for our partner ever since.

Amid the challenge of leaving behind her old home and life, Maryna has made a difference in others’ lives, not only giving fellow Ukrainians hope but also finding it for herself.

Maryna is grateful that her children were able to finish this school year online in Ukrainian, and for the warm welcome they have received from other children in Romania. “The children knock on our door and invite my two [kids] to come out and play,” Maryna said.

Maryna hopes her family will be able to return to Ukraine when the war ends. Until then, she is committed to caring for her family and helping other refugees navigate their new lives in Romania.



Lutheran Disaster Response



Maryna, Simon Chambers/ACT Alliance

## Mohammad

Mohammad is a quiet, unassuming young man. He lives with his wife and infant daughter in Bucharest, Romania, where he has just secured permanent accommodation.

Mohammad is also a refugee. Twice over.

Originally from Afghanistan, where he was a TV reporter, Mohammad fled the country in August 2021 after the Taliban took control. The couple settled in Odessa, where their daughter was born. Mohammad received permanent resident status in Ukraine. Things were looking up, but just a few months later their lives were upended again as war broke out. Once more they had to flee, this time to Romania.

The drive from his home to the Western Ukrainian border ordinarily took seven hours, but because of the dense traffic, he and his wife drove for 30. Mohammad and his family connected with a Lutheran Disaster Response partner agency in Romania that maintains several small apartments for families seeking asylum in Romania. In addition to shelter and monetary support, said Mohammed, “they give us food, host activities to introduce us to Bucharest, and they helped us [with our legal matters].”



Mohammad/ACT Alliance

Mohammad and his family now have refugee status in Romania; this offers them more freedom to travel or move elsewhere in Europe should they so choose. They are planning to stay, glad that they can support themselves and send money to relatives.



These stories are shared with permission from Ukrainian refugees who have found food, shelter and other necessities from an ACT Alliance partner in Romania that has benefited from your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response.





## EASTERN EUROPE CRISIS

The Litvinov family (left) with the staff members (right) of the Lutheran Disaster Response partner accompanying the family as they resettle in Romania.

Simon Chambers/ACT Alliance



This art, painted by Ukrainian refugees during an art therapy program to help process their trauma, hangs at a Lutheran guest house in Romania that hosts about 20 Ukrainian refugees.

## ELCA WORLD HUNGER FACING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The effects of the war in Ukraine are far-reaching, but the war is far from the only crisis facing our world today. Conflict and instability, economic uncertainty, disasters, supply-chain interruptions and inflation are all creating new challenges. As Lutheran Disaster Response partners respond to these crises, the effects are impacting hunger projects around the globe. ELCA World Hunger is supporting innovative, effective solutions to meet neighbors' needs amid these new realities.

### The Litvinov family

June 6 was an important day this year for the Litvinov family, marked by smiles, tears and even a cake. This was the day that all six members of the family – Sergiy, a 37-year-old dentist; his wife, Iulia, a family doctor; their three children, ages 2 to 8; and Sergiy's mother, Ludmilla – moved out of a refugee shelter in Bucharest, Romania, and into permanent housing.

Three months earlier, on March 5, the family had fled their home in Ukraine as the war raged around them. They had been hiding in their basement as the situation deteriorated, but soon decided to leave as finding food and avoiding violence became increasingly difficult.

The journey to Romania took two and a half days. "The Romanian authorities were very helpful," Sergiy reported. Even more helpful were the staff from a Lutheran Disaster Response partner. Supported by your gifts, that partner has helped the Litvinov family with everything from food and shelter to legal assistance, cultural activities and Romanian language lessons.

The Litvinovs have now won refugee status, which makes it easier for them to secure work and housing. Sergiy is employed as a dental technician but hopes to be able to practice dentistry again.

"We want to stay in Romania," he said. Already his children feel welcome, chasing each other around their new place, playing with their mother, demanding to be picked up by Sergiy and calling for "Babushka," their grandmother.

"They can play here," Sergiy said of his children. "They play football, they do art projects. There is a school next door, and they play with children from there too."

As the Litvinovs moved into their permanent housing, secured with help from a Lutheran Disaster Response partner, they presented a cake to the staff who had supported them. Amid smiles, tears and hugs, staff members assured the Litvinovs that they would continue to be in touch.

Because of your support for Lutheran Disaster Response, the staff of our Romanian partner will continue to accompany the Litvinovs and thousands of others displaced by the war, as will so many other partners in Eastern Europe that have benefited from your generosity.

June 6 is a day the Litvinovs won't forget – a day of hope made possible by their own tenacity and courage, backed by a global network of supporters such as you.

#### UNITED STATES

Some communities have seen rent prices rise by almost 40%, while construction costs for new housing have sharply increased, creating a housing crisis across the U.S. ELCA World Hunger is accompanying partners as they adjust goals and adapt creatively to meet increasing need.

#### MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Thousands of migrants attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea each year to flee violence, hunger and poverty. An ELCA World Hunger partner conducting rescue operations has had to limit the number of missions it embarks on because of the incredibly high cost of the gas required to power its ship.

#### NICARAGUA

Sociopolitical problems, the COVID-19 pandemic and high fuel costs are impacting an ELCA World Hunger partner's ability to access critical agricultural products – such as fertilizer – needed by the families it serves to continue their food production.

#### SIERRA LEONE

The increase in prices for fuel and building supplies led an ELCA World Hunger partner to decrease the number of water wells and toilet facilities it can build and thus the participants it has on the capacity to serve.

#### SERBIA

An ELCA World Hunger partner that accompanies refugees fleeing war, primarily from Afghanistan and Syria, responded promptly to the sudden influx of Ukrainian refugees in Serbia. It assisted in obtaining legal protections and documentation, securing access to health care services for emergency needs (i.e. injuries) and ongoing care (i.e. pregnancy), and locating shelter, psychosocial support and more.



These stories are shared with permission from Ukrainian refugees who have found food, shelter and other necessities from an ACT Alliance partner in Romania that has benefited from your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response.





Without the support from Lutheran Disaster Response, Pastor Pablo says, the fellowship hall would have been rebuilt the same as before, with a metal roof, and would have been destroyed again when a hurricane hit. "Let's use this as seed money for the future," said Pastor Pablo, "so we don't have to rebuild again after the next hurricane."

Your support of Lutheran Disaster Response provides both relief and long-term recovery – in this case, five years after a disaster. The repair of Reconciliación's fellowship hall demonstrates the importance of staying for the long term. LDR does more than bring communities back to where they were before a disaster; it builds sustainability and preparedness for whatever the future may bring.

Reflecting on the impact of your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response on his community, Pastor Pablo said, "It's hope after any disaster. Hope of getting back on your feet again."

# Renewing fellowship after Hurricane Maria

**O**n Sept. 20, 2017, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were devastated by the 100 mph winds of Hurricane Maria. Puerto Ricans were already in a state of crisis following Hurricane Irma, another Category 5 storm that had struck two weeks earlier, and Maria caused even more damage.

In Levittown, a community in San Juan, stands Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Reconciliación, one of the ELCA churches damaged by Maria. The roofs of the church's fellowship hall and sanctuary, made of sheet metal and wood, were ripped off by the hurricane winds. These rooms had been home to Bible studies, men's and women's groups, and the church's feeding ministry.

Although this was distressing, the damage gave the church an opportunity to better support its community. With funds from Lutheran Disaster Response, the church rebuilt the fellowship hall. It now has a concrete roof and stronger windows, which will help the building better withstand future hurricanes. After Maria the entire island

lost electricity and some areas were out of power for months, so the church purchased a generator to help during blackouts and after storms. With the new generator and the solar panels the church has installed, the congregation will be able to keep the lights and refrigerator on during future blackouts. The building will be stronger and more resilient. The new fellowship hall – now a storm shelter as well – gives the Rev. Pablo Quiñones, pastor of Reconciliación, hope for "a chance to do ministry beyond what was done before."

The roof of a neighboring church shows how important disaster preparedness is for communities. This roof, sheltering church offices and storage rooms, was rebuilt over 20 years ago by Lutheran Disaster Response after another hurricane. Like the new fellowship hall, it was designed to withstand severe storms and shows the importance of investing in the future rather than just restoring structures to their past condition.



**"IT'S HOPE AFTER ANY DISASTER. HOPE OF GETTING BACK ON YOUR FEET AGAIN."  
—REV. PABLO QUIÑONES**

The Rev. Pablo Quiñones outside the fellowship hall of Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Reconciliación.



Lutheran Disaster Response shares God's hope, healing and renewal with people in the United States and around the world whose lives have been disrupted by hurricanes and other disasters. Your gifts support survivors of disasters as they work to rebuild – for as long as it takes.



# Gambian women

invest in each other — and the future

**A**nna Gomez is caretaker of a cashew farm in The Gambia. Harvests give her an opportunity to work with neighbors and earn an income she can use to meet her family’s needs. The work is hard, but Anna has remained steadfast in her commitment to the farm’s success.

The war in Ukraine has made local farms and jobs even more important for Anna and her neighbors in The Gambia. Ukraine is often called “the breadbasket of Europe,” but in truth Ukrainian farmers feed people all over the world. More than 80% of The Gambia’s wheat imports come from Ukraine, and with these shipments slowed or halted, many Gambians face long-term food shortages and price inflation.

This is what makes the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of The Gambia (ELCG), supported by your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, especially important now. The cashew project in which Anna participated is one of several initiatives aimed at building food security and creating new opportunities for Gambians. In this project, women and girls from rural areas with high rates of poverty learn how to grow and market cashew nuts for income. With the additional money, women can afford food, clothing and school fees for their children.

For the girls, many of whom had dropped out of school because they couldn’t afford to continue, the project means a new chance at getting an education. With the money they have earned, the girls have been able to pay exam fees and earn college credits so they can continue their studies.



AS OF EARLY 2022, 70% OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE TRAININGS ARE ACTIVELY BUYING AND SELLING CASHEWS, ALREADY BENEFITING NEARLY 150 PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY, WITH MORE NEIGHBORS EXPECTED TO PARTICIPATE AS THE PROJECT GROWS.



The work has not been easy or smooth. Nevertheless, they persisted. When the only cashew processing facility in The Gambia closed, the women and girls began transporting their cashews to a facility in neighboring Senegal, where they could sell the cashews for a higher price than they could in The Gambia. The leadership training provided by the ELCG gave the women confidence to transform an obstacle into an opportunity.

Now they are using their training to grow their businesses, save for the future and invest in the young girls who work with them. With greater profits, increased confidence and new business leadership skills, the women and girls are working together toward a brighter future. As of early 2022, 70% of the participants in the trainings are actively buying and selling cashews, already benefiting nearly 150 people in the community, with more neighbors expected to participate as the project grows.

The unfortunate reality of hunger is that the most vulnerable communities often have little control over the global forces impacting them. We may not be able to prevent every war or trade disruption, but the women and girls of the ELCG cashew project have demonstrated the power of investing in local communities and the change that comes from working and learning together. For Anna Gomez and her neighbors, it meant transforming a future of bleak economic forecasts into one filled with hope and new opportunities.

Women and girls around the world are more vulnerable to hunger and poverty than men are. Your support makes it possible for ELCA World Hunger to accompany ministries that equip women with tools and agricultural training to create income streams and support themselves and their families.







Photos courtesy of ELCA World Hunger partner in Guatemala.

# Holistic support network empowers children to thrive

Today, Rosita is a dedicated student and social butterfly who can always be found laughing and smiling with her friends. But she had to overcome some significant challenges to get where she is now.

In Rosita's home country of Guatemala, her father worked hard, but even with his steady job he couldn't provide for his wife and three children. Desperate to care for his young family, he decided to seek new opportunities in the United States. He had relatives who had made the journey successfully, and their experience gave him confidence that he would be successful too.

Rosita, the eldest child at just 11 years, traveled with her father on the dangerous journey from their home in Guatemala to the United States. Traveling through wilderness, on boats and even in the trunks of cars, Rosita and her father reached the U.S.-Mexico border, where they were advised to turn themselves in to U.S. immigration officials, and did. Their happiness at reaching the border evaporated as they were taken to a detention center known as a *hielera* (icebox). After a few days they were separated, and Rosita's father was deported to Guatemala. Rosita was taken alone to a shelter with children from other countries.

After weeks in the shelter, Rosita was able to get in touch with her parents by phone. Determined to get Rosita home, her parents attended an International Migrants Day event organized by the local Catholic church, where they connected with an ELCA World Hunger partner that accompanies migrant families in the process of returning home from the U.S. With support from ELCA World

Hunger, this partner helps the families – especially the children – reintegrate after the difficult time spent journeying and waiting in detention centers.

Nearly a year passed before Rosita could get home and be reunited with her family. At first she was happy to be with her grandmother, parents and siblings, but the effects of being away began to manifest in her physical and mental health.

The ELCA World Hunger partner accompanying Rosita and her family knew what kind of care Rosita would need and supported the family every step of the way. Together with psychologists and social workers, Rosita and her family received care for two full years as she regained her physical and mental wellness. The family received financial support for basic expenses, such as educational materials, school uniforms and health care. The social workers also visited Rosita's teacher to orient her to Rosita's needs.

Now Rosita plays and shares with her friends and is motivated to work hard in school. She dreams of one day getting a degree and supporting the people in her community.

In addition to all the care Rosita received, her parents were provided with training and tools for a family garden and learned how to breed chickens that they will be able to sell.

Rosita's journey began with the simple hope of a better life. The risks of the journey north, the harsh realities of detention and deportation, and the trauma of separation made that life seem distant.

With the support they received, Rosita and her family were able to transform their life for the better, and the father's dreams for his children were finally realized, thanks in part to your gifts to ELCA World Hunger.

With the support they received, Rosita and her family were able to transform their life for the better, and the father's dreams for his children were finally realized, thanks in part to your gifts to ELCA World Hunger.



Around the world, millions of people have been driven from their homes by hunger, poverty, conflict and human trafficking. Thanks to your generosity, ELCA World Hunger assists people who are on the move and as they resettle.



# Housing justice in the Hilltop

Walk through the doors of Peace Lutheran Church in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma, Wash., on a Sunday morning and you'll soon learn why this congregation calls itself "a church that welcomes and serves." Worshipers greet each other warmly by name from across the aisle, sway and sing in passionate praise with the music director and provide a hospitable welcome to longtime members and first-time visitors alike.

"The Hilltop" began as a working-class neighborhood in the early 1900s, when Peace Lutheran was founded, and developed into a primarily Black community in the 1970s. Now, it is gentrifying at a tremendous rate, and longtime residents of the neighborhood are being driven out. The people who attend Peace Lutheran are a reflection of the changing neighborhood — multiethnic and socioeconomically diverse.

"How do we show our love for the neighborhood?" asked the Rev. John Stroeh, pastor of Peace Lutheran. "How do we share the love of Jesus? What are the ways that we need to teach and learn and train one other so that we can be followers of Jesus in this place, making a difference?" These were all questions from members

of the congregation as they discerned how to do faithful ministry in this context. What emerged was spirit-led and reaffirmed their commitment to the church's existing housing ministry, which they decided to expand.

At the same time, an idea emerged to plan a youth immersion week in the Hilltop, dubbed "Love to the Local," instead of embarking on their usual service-learning summer trip. Youth contributed ideas for activities and issues to explore in order to shape the weeklong program. They became passionate about justice issues in the neighborhood, particularly housing. Reflecting on the impact of the program, Director of Community Outreach and Engagement Brendan Nelson shared, "It wasn't just about opening up the Bible and doing service programs. [We were] seeing the impact right here in our community. Some of the people in the congregation in need were being served through the program, too."

That energy turned the youth into leaders, inspiring the congregation to embrace their call to dive deeper into housing justice in their neighborhood. Reflecting on this passion, Pastor John said the youth were catalysts for the congregation to come alongside others in pursuit of justice on the Hilltop.

Peace Lutheran owns three houses adjacent to its property and rents them out at affordable rates despite skyrocketing home prices in the area. "The three families who are in the three houses right now all have ties to the Hilltop prior," Pastor Stroeh explained. "With the high cost of renting here, you can't be back in the Hilltop unless you have some way in. That was true for these three families who are now able to be back in this area that they called home for a while and couldn't afford to be in anymore. So that's part of that ministry, too, if at all possible, to allow for families to stay in the neighborhood."

Peace Lutheran was invited to apply for and received one of ELCA World Hunger's Big Dream Grants. The invitation encouraged the congregation to develop an even broader vision in pursuit of housing justice in their neighborhood. For another affordable housing rental, they plan to build a 750-square-foot "detached accessory dwelling unit" on the same lot occupied by

"THIS IS NOT JUST A NICE STORY. THIS IS PART OF OUR MINISTRY — PART OF US."



one of their current homes and hope to build more when construction costs fall and supply chain issues recede.

Rebecca, a mother of three, lost her apartment to a fire a few years ago. "We were in a motel — well, two or three motels," she remembered. "But having to stay there for a month, we had to pay quite a bit. And so, I talked to Pastor [Stroeh] and said, 'I'm out of funding. What am I going to do? I don't want to be homeless with my kids.'"

Peace Lutheran had just finished renovating one of its units and was looking for tenants, so Rebecca and her kids moved in. At church, Rebecca leads the nursery and Godly Play activities and makes sure that anyone who walks through the doors at Peace Lutheran — either for the church on Sunday or for the community meal on Friday — feels welcome.

Your incredible generosity made it possible for ELCA World Hunger to award 12 Big Dream Grants this year, including the one to Peace Lutheran Church. Rebecca and her family have already found a better future because of Peace Lutheran's ministry and community of welcome and service. Your gifts bring congregations' big dreams to life as they find ways to address root causes of hunger in their communities.

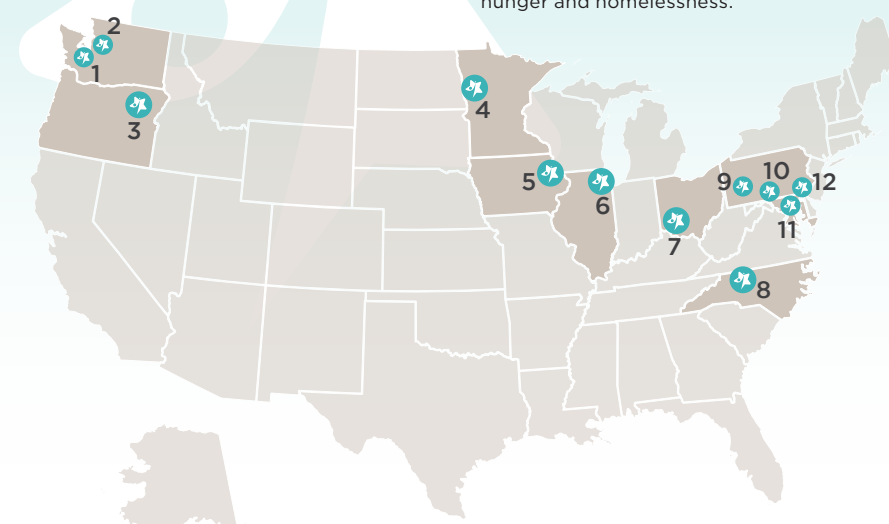
Elyse, a high schooler who urged the congregation to expand its housing ministry, is especially proud of Peace Lutheran's work. "We're actually going and helping people," she said, "and we're actually making change instead of saying, 'This is what we should do,' and not doing anything. So that's why I actually enjoy this church a lot: because we actually go out and make change."

## BIG DREAM GRANTS

ELCA World Hunger launched the Big Dream Grants program in 2019 with \$250,000 across five grants to support ministries that are building and designing innovative and lasting solutions to hunger, poverty and economic inequality.

Record giving levels to support the ministry of ELCA World Hunger made it possible to say yes to the big dreams of 12 partner ministries with support totaling nearly \$1.5 million.

As pandemic protections expire and emergency resources are depleted, low-income renters around the country are struggling more than ever. Rising inflation, skyrocketing rents and increasing homelessness have drawn the attention of ELCA World Hunger partners' work to meet the needs of their community members — more than half of Big Dream Grant recipients in 2022 are ministries working at the intersection of hunger and homelessness.



1. Peace Lutheran Church\* Tacoma, Washington
2. Faith Food Bank\* Everett, Washington
3. Zion Lutheran Church\* La Grande, Oregon
4. Churches United\* Moorhead, Minnesota
5. St. Johns Lutheran Church\* Dubuque, Iowa
6. Lighthouse Foundation of Chicagoland Chicago, Illinois
7. Tikun Farm Cincinnati, Ohio
8. The Dwelling Winston-Salem, North Carolina
9. Allegheny Valley Association of Churches\* Natrona Heights, Pennsylvania
10. Lutheran Camping Corporation Arendtsville, Pennsylvania
11. Amazing Grace Lutheran Church\* Baltimore, Maryland
12. The Welcome Church\* Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

\*Indicates ministries with a focus on housing

Homelessness and housing insecurity are tied to higher rates of food insecurity and health issues. Youth and young adults experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity often face greater challenges in school. Due to the high rate of criminalization of homelessness, people experiencing homelessness are much more likely to get caught in a hard-to-break cycle of fines and jail time that prevents them from building sustainable livelihoods. Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support programs that address root causes of hunger, including housing and homelessness.



# LifeLines

ELCA World Hunger  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago, IL 60631-4101  
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Fall 2022

For supporters of

**ELCA WORLD HUNGER AND LUTHERAN DISASTER RESPONSE**

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## New seasonal resources!

The theme for our Advent 2022 and Lent 2023 materials is

"A Journey Through the Psalms With ELCA World Hunger."

In Psalms we will find the pleas of a people — our spiritual ancestors — for renewal and transformation, for justice and peace, and for hope and comfort.

