

# WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER



## STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

### July 2025 Mission Support Memo

#### Chaplains Minister to All

A story about our ELCA Chaplaincy ministry

As you read this story, what inspires you?

Where have you experienced ministry to all?

On July 4th, many proudly wear red, white and blue; march in hot parades; enjoy sizzling barbeques; and watch bright, voluminous fireworks – yet it's also a day we reflect on the sacrifices made to secure our nation's freedom. Our ELCA chaplains in specialized ministry and federal chaplaincy serve to support those defending our country, in places outside church walls, tending to people of all backgrounds and showing the gratitude and love of God to all. Specialized pastoral care ministries, also called chaplaincy, reach directly into the primary social structures and institutions of our world. As they encounter people amid these everyday settings, those who serve in this specialized pastoral care seek to extend the love of God in Jesus Christ to all people at the point of their deepest need. In touching so many lives at so many points of mission, chaplaincy ministries are diverse, specialized and geographically scattered, but they all begin with human need, addressed by God's love in Jesus Christ. These ministries are missional by nature. They embody the church's initiative to minister to people in the military and those who are imprisoned, ill, conflicted and afflicted. Specialized ministries among all people embody grace and hope to others in need, their families and the staff who serve them. They reflect sensitivity to a wide variety of religious expressions without compromising the integrity of their own faith stance. They adhere to a professional code of ethics and demonstrate awareness of ethical practice. This is part of the church's outreach ministry in and for the world, seeking to foster spiritual wholeness that is integrated into the total mission of the church. Chaplains make up 10% of our ELCA roster, with 750 active and retired pastors around the world.

One of the unique chaplaincy calls is to federal chaplaincy. The Federal Chaplaincy Ministries of the ELCA recruit, endorse, deploy and support exemplary pastors to serve as federal chaplains for the U.S. military, Veterans Affairs hospitals and federal correctional institutions. These settings may be vastly different from churches, with more dust, noise and military equipment scattered about, yet federal chaplains shoulder many of the same responsibilities as any other ELCA pastor. They preach the gospel, lead worship, administer the sacraments, perform weddings, counsel, teach, and bury the dead. Just recently, three of our ELCA federal chaplains have been asked to baptize children, from a health care setting in Pennsylvania to an air force base in Alaska to a base on Kauai, Hawaii. Chaplains minister to all — everywhere they are needed.





Thirty-six years ago, in 1989, ELCA federal chaplaincy, generously supported by the Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) and the Lutheran Brotherhood, had a roster of 700 chaplains. That number is now significantly reduced, to only 150, which means that more federal chaplain positions are being filled by conservative Christian nationalists.

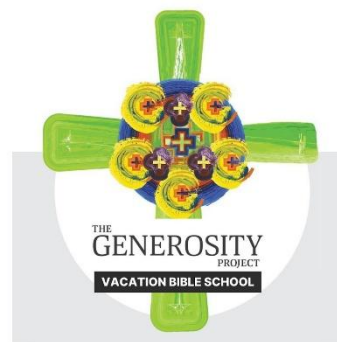
Chaplains are in a critical position to influence the systems they serve with ethical advisement, standing as progressive, inclusive endorsers in a place of rigid structures. In fact, federal chaplaincy is a ministry that works with more young adults than ever before. In federal prisons, chaplains work with a diversity of restricted people who hunger for understanding, healing, reconciliation and connections with family. Serving in medical centers places chaplains in the lives of soldiers, sailors, Marines and their families as these service members work to recover from injury, illness and physical and emotional trauma. Pastoral compassion, ethical discernment, personal resilience and entrepreneurial gifts help practicing pastors thrive in chaplaincy. Ours is a church that stands ready with support, leadership and resources for the challenging work of its chaplains, and is eager to work with people who feel they may be called to put their gifts and faith to work in federal chaplaincy. Contact the [Rev. Christopher Otten](#) to learn more.

## ENGAGE WITH US

### The Generosity Project — Vacation Bible School Format

Your congregation may be planning for or even done with vacation Bible school for this year, but do you want to consider **a new format** in the future?

[The Generosity Project](#) is a fun, interactive curriculum designed for congregations to talk about money, value and faith intergenerationally while living into God's stories of generosity. The Rev. Heather Roth Johnson manyand the Children, Youth & Family team at [Bethlehem Lutheran Church](#) (Minneapolis and Minnetonka, Minn.) decided to create a vacation Bible school program in June from the Generosity Project. It was a collaborative effort. To get a glimpse of what was done, check out the VBS—Generosity Project [video](#). You can access the rotation, content and schedule [here](#). Remember, we are caretakers of God's love.



## GRATEFUL

Summer can be a challenging time to remind people about stewardship and Mission Support. We are grateful for the communicators, storytellers, tech geniuses and everyone else who works hard during these summer months and throughout the year to keep sharing the story of how generosity changes lives and strengthens the ministry of the church. Even when we don't think as many eyes are on the stories we tell, we know that telling the stories of our ministries and our life together as the church is just as important in July as it is in December. Thank you for telling your stories and helping us share ours!

In gratitude,  
Victoria Flood, Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support  
Nick Kiger, Director for Mission Support  
Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement

