

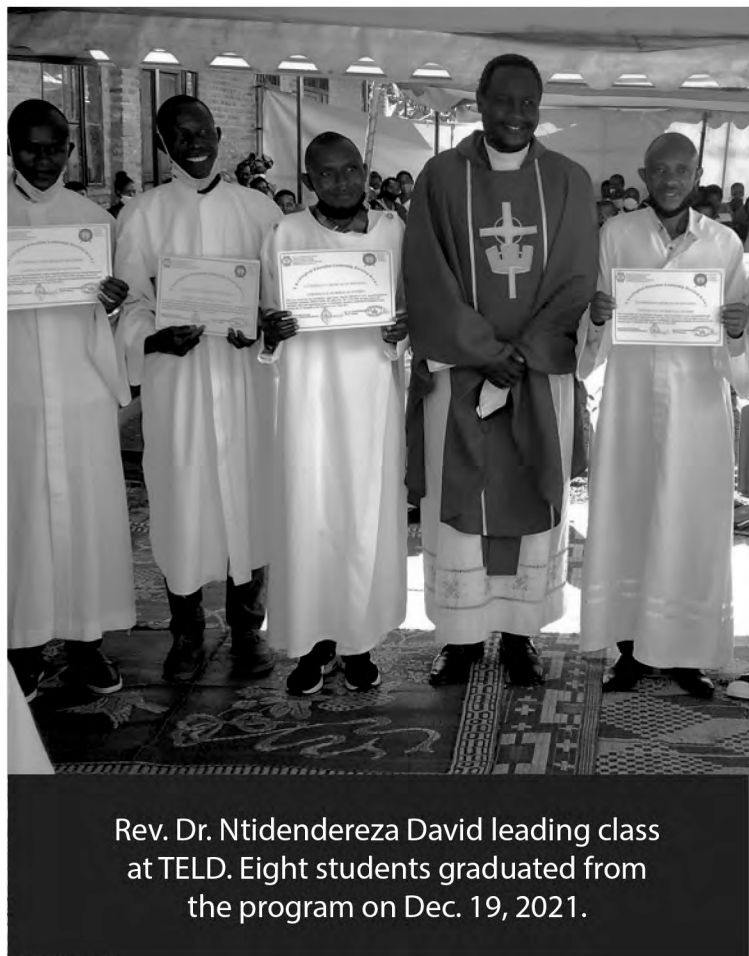
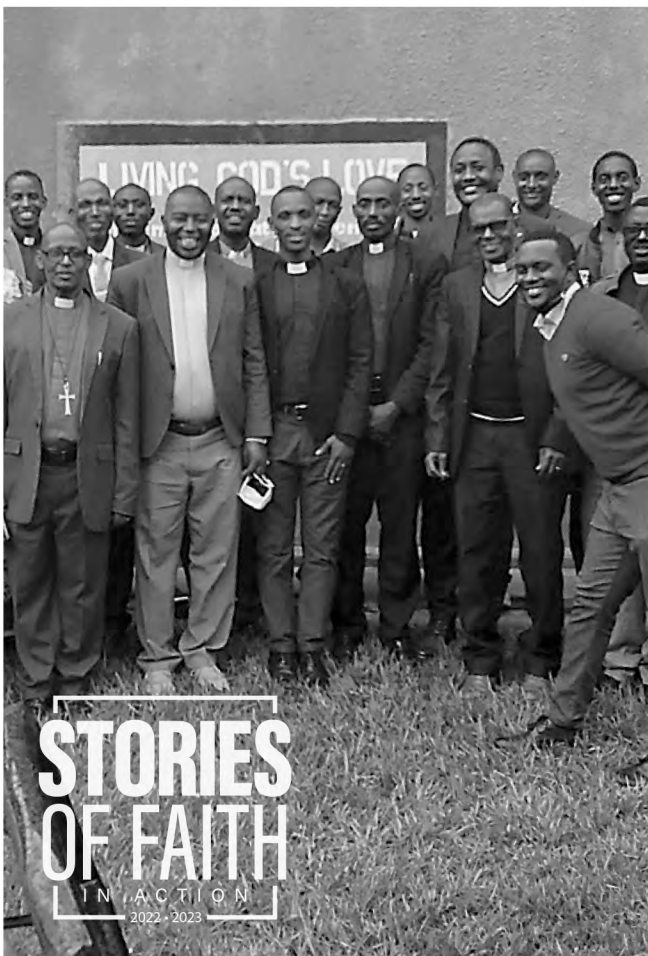
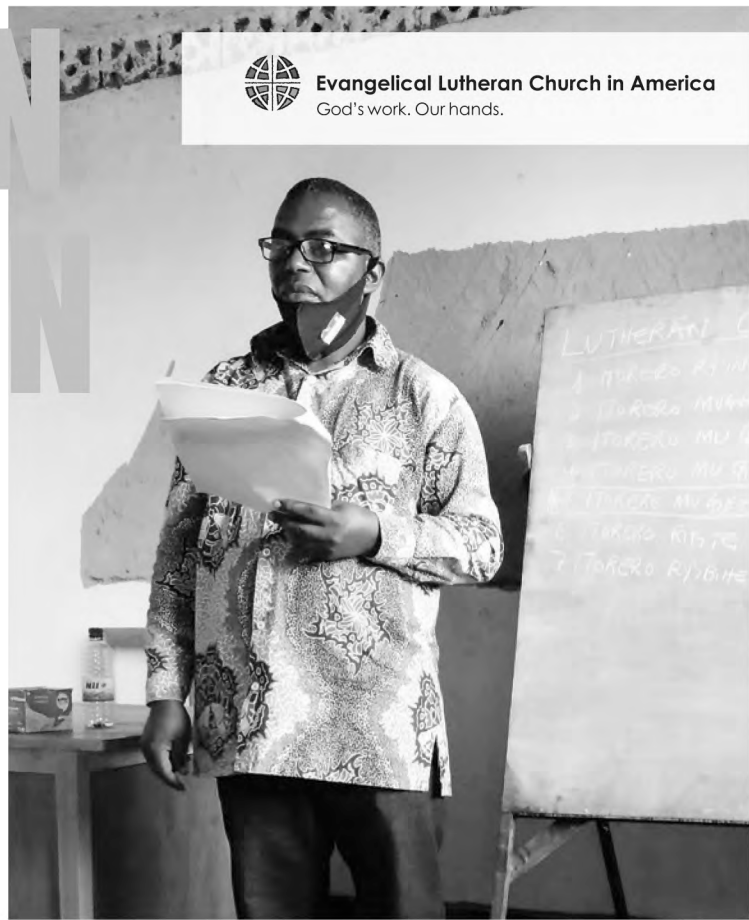
LUTHERAN CHURCH IN RWANDA

HOPES NEW SEMINARY CAN SUPPORT GROWING FAITH

By Stephanie N. Grimoldby



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



Rev. Dr. Ntidendereza David leading class at TELD. Eight students graduated from the program on Dec. 19, 2021.

The ongoing construction of Rwanda's first Lutheran seminary is sparking excitement amongst church leaders, but with an important government deadline looming ahead, that excitement has been coupled with anxiety.

In 2018, the government of Rwanda proposed a law that all ordained pastors, across denominations, must have the equivalent of a bachelor's or master's degree in theology or education to continue to serve their congregations.

Part of the pastoral emergency stems from the difference in how Rwandan churches are led, said Evalister Mugabo, bishop of the Lutheran Church of Rwanda.

"You call them pastors," Mugabo said. "Here, we have evangelists and pastors. Evangelists are the people who are serving in their [congregations], but not ordained as pastors."

Right now, the LCR has 39 pastors, Mugabo said. But the church primarily is led by non-ordained evangelists, many of whom have been trained at Rwanda's Bible school, known as Theological Education and Leadership Development (TELD).

However, TELD is only a steppingstone for those who want to become ordained. What Rwanda desperately needs is its own seminary, Mugabo said – and fortunately, the LCR is in the process of building one.

"For Rwandan Lutheran evangelists, these new regulations are a surmounting challenge," Mugabo wrote in an email sent to

Lutheran leaders around the globe. "It means traveling to study in other countries such as Tanzania. This is not only cost-prohibitive for nearly all evangelists, but it also entails the hardship of being away from their congregations, communities and families. Thus, we feel the Holy Spirit is calling us to establish [the Lutheran Theological and Leadership College]."

In 2017, the ELCA agreed to monetarily support the Bible school, and TELD's leadership development program swelled. A 3-year program culminating with a certificate in Biblical studies was quickly established that year, and in 2019, one graduate was able to join Iringa University in Tanzania to pursue a bachelor's degree in theology.

In the Rukira Parish, membership jumped from 469 to 753 members after evangelists who had received training at TELD came back, said Ntidendereza David, a pastor and principal of TELD. Similarly, the Kirehe Parish saw its membership grow from 424 to 689 members.

While growing TELD has been a primary goal for years, word of the government's new regulations led the LCR to plan an expansion of its education system. Building and staffing a seminary is now of the utmost importance, said Mugabo.

In October 2019, a commemoration stone was laid on the land secured for the Lutheran Theological and Leadership College, Mugabo said. Soon after, an administration building was



One of the TELD buildings, with a plastic water tank.

completed, and the foundation of a four-story classroom building was laid. *Through your Mission Support dollars, the ELCA shares funding for these projects.*

"LCR is a small but mighty church," said Daudi Msseemmaa, the ELCA regional representative in East Africa. "As it grows, it needs more pastors and evangelists, and they need to have the skills to support the spiritual and emotional needs of congregations carrying the generational weight of violence, displacement, and even reconciliation from their histories."

As the ELCA, we come alongside LCR through support for their Bible school, seminary scholarships and other programs to help the church be at the center of community life. It's a perfect example of our emphasis on theological education aligning with theirs."