

# Seeds for the Parish

Fall 2016

Resource paper for leaders of ELCA congregations

ELCA.org



Dustin and Crystal Harris, two-time adoptive parents, created the perfect home for Isaiah and Karina through Lutheran Services in America's member organization, Upbring, a pioneer in adoption services in the U.S.

## Lutheran Services in America recognizes its network for National Adoption Awareness Month

A diverse and powerful network, Lutheran Services in America (LSA) has a strong national child-welfare presence. Of the 300 Lutheran organizations that LSA represents, more than 100 serve children, youth and families. In honor of National Adoption Awareness Month in November, LSA recognizes these organizations and the stories of those they serve.

Upbring (formerly Lutheran Social Services of the South) was one of the first agencies in the country to offer open adoption services. Coupled with free one-on-one support and counseling to birth parents, Upbring's open adoption services help transform a taxing adoption process for birth parents into a positive experience. One such birth parent is Laura Reyes, who worked with Upbring to find the right couple to adopt her baby girl.

Thanks to the organization's extensive screening process for adoptive couples, Reyes found a perfect match. "For months leading up to this moment, I thought finding the perfect parents would be too difficult, and yet here they were, in the first book [listing information about potential adoptive parents] I saw," she said.

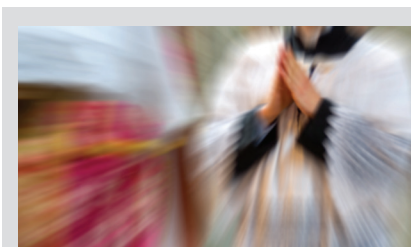
Crystal and Dustin Harris, as an adoptive couple, appreciated the way Upbring treated adoptive couples as well as birth parents.

"We were very happy with how birth mothers were treated and spoken of so well," Crystal said. "We were made to feel like actual people rather than just a number on a long list. Tanya Graham [the director of Domestic Adoptions] was great to work with. She was on top of things and even came to court with us."

Along with open adoption, LSA pioneered international adoption. Jonalyn, a teenage girl from the Philippines, was adopted by Joel and Sharon Tomski through Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan Ambassador Program. This program, like many others in the LSA network, helps older children aging out of foster care find forever families in the U.S.

These are just a few of the stories made possible by organizations in the LSA network. Thanks to the tireless effort of these organizations, thousands of children have warm homes, loving families and bright hopes for the future.

For questions about LSA members providing adoption services or LSA's children, youth and family programs, visit [lutheranservices.org/cyf](http://lutheranservices.org/cyf).



It's a beautiful thing when worship and culture weave together.

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The Lutheran World Federation is gathering women's stories of faith.

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Global resources broaden awareness and celebrate a diverse church.

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The ELCA supports veterans and their families.

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## Worship and culture: A diverse and beautiful relationship

If you have worshiped in another congregation, setting or context, you may have noticed that not every worship service is the same, even in the ELCA. While there are central things that link us around the means of grace, we worship and experience worship in a multitude of ways. Within the ELCA, we gather weekly as worshiping communities in more than 9,300 congregations with 42 languages represented.

As a church, as God's people, we center and ground ourselves and our mission in worship around word, meal and baptism. We gather to sing, pray and praise God. We bring who we are into worship. We bring our own culture and the culture of our upbringing, the cultures of our neighborhoods, the cultures we are called into ministry, mission and service with, and we join with the cultures that everyone else brings with them into worship.

### Questions that help nurture our worship life

How can the beauty and diversity of those cultures be seen as gifts in our church's worship life? How can culture help shape our liturgies and even our understanding of worship in much deeper ways? How can these intentional conversations lead us into becoming a much more richly diverse church? All of these questions, and more, are crucial to nurturing the worship life of each of our worshiping communities.

So, the ELCA has developed a resource, "Can We Talk? Engaging Worship and Culture," as a gift for you and

your congregation to use. The hope is that this resource will lead to fruitful conversations about worship and culture and will enhance your worship life and enrich the faith of the people who gather with you. This resource was mailed to every congregation and every rostered leader in August and is also available at [ELCA.org/worship](http://ELCA.org/worship).

"Can We Talk? Engaging Worship and Culture" is a resource to accompany conversations about worship and culture in our respective faith community contexts. It comes out of the realization that an important document written two decades ago still has much to contribute to worship renewal. The "Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture," written by the Department for Theology and Studies of The Lutheran World Federation in 1996, provides us with a rich description of the dynamic relationship between worship and culture and gives us lenses to help frame our conversations.

A lens alters how we perceive what is in front of us—shading when the light is too bright, magnifying what is near or too far away. In a similar way, the

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Engaging  
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CULTURE**

"Nairobi Statement" alters our vision by showing us four ways worship relates to culture: transcultural, countercultural, contextual and cross-cultural.

### An invitation to gather with worship leaders

Another way we will be engaging in this conversation about worship and culture is through an upcoming Worship at the Center event. "Worship at the Center: Engaging Worship and Culture," will be Feb. 19-21 at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Santa Monica, Calif. This three-day event will be for pastors, musicians, lay leaders and worship committees. Participants will have an opportunity to dive deeper into this resource, hear from one another about how their culture shapes liturgy and how the liturgy even shapes local culture. There will be workshops, keynotes and practical pieces to take home—all centered in worshiping together throughout the event.

Watch for more information to be posted at [ELCA.org/worship](http://ELCA.org/worship). We hope to see you there!

*Seeds for the Parish*

[ELCA.org/seeds](http://ELCA.org/seeds)  
[LivingLutheran.com/seeds](http://LivingLutheran.com/seeds)

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Current and past issues of *Seeds for the Parish* are available for download at [ELCA.org/Resources/Seeds-for-the-Parish](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Seeds-for-the-Parish).

### Contact Us

Subscriptions – 773-380-2950  
Content – [rod.boriack@elca.org](mailto:rod.boriack@elca.org)

### Mission Advancement

Christina Jackson-Skelton – Executive Director

### Editorial Staff

Rod Boriack – Editor  
Karen Dersnah – Designer

**Note:** Not all resources and program ideas listed in *Seeds for the Parish* have received official ELCA review or endorsement.

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POSTMASTER, send address changes to:  
Richard Millett  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago, IL 60631  
Email: [richard.millett@elca.org](mailto:richard.millett@elca.org)

## World AIDS Day 2016

Earlier this year, the world marked 35 years since the first reported case of what would later come to be known as AIDS. In the intervening time, there have been major strides in awareness, treatment and prevention. However, many people continue to be affected by HIV and AIDS. On Dec. 1, people from around the world will commemorate World AIDS Day to remember all those who have died due to AIDS-related illnesses in the past 35 years and the 36.7 million people worldwide UNAIDS estimates currently live with HIV.

The ELCA joins our neighbors from around the world to observe World

AIDS Day. We join the global community around the United Nations' goals to get to zero: "zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths." With faith and dedication, the church is committed to moving forward and achieving the goals set forth in the ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS.

World AIDS Day worship resources and a copy of the ELCA Strategy on HIV and AIDS will be available at [ELCA.org/hiv](http://ELCA.org/hiv) in November.



**WORLD AIDS DAY**  
DECEMBER 1<sup>ST</sup>



## Augsburg Fortress and 1517 Media

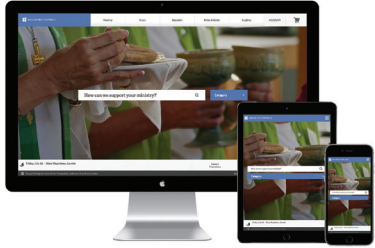
Augsburg Fortress continues its calling to develop substantive and innovative resources that support the ministries and the people of the ELCA, especially in the areas of worship, music and Lutheran-oriented faith formation for children and adults.

“Our newly rebuilt website presents the question that centers our calling and our work,” says Martin Seltz, publisher, Augsburg Fortress, “How can we support your ministry?” Earlier this summer, the publishing house of the ELCA adopted a new name—1517 Media.

### A new identity for the ELCA’s publishing ministry

“Our new identity expresses our rootedness in the Lutheran reforming movement—ignited by events in the year 1517—and the gifts this tradition continues to offer to the whole church, society and the individual,” says Beth A. Lewis, president and CEO of 1517 Media.

“For 200 years our publishing predecessors in North America have carried on a Lutheran reforming perspective under a variety of imprints, along the way reaching



ever wider audiences. And even as the reformers embraced the emerging media of their day, we embrace a wide array of media to meet the needs and support the ministries of the diverse audiences we serve. We

think 1517 Media aptly captures both our rootedness and the innovative, forward-looking commitment of this ministry and business of publishing.”

1517 Media includes three familiar publishing units. Augsburg Fortress serves Lutheran churches in North America with resources to support worship, faith formation and the congregation’s life. Fortress Press supports students and teachers with resources for the classroom or for individual study. Sparkhouse creates Christian faith formation resources for children and youth in congregations and, through Sparkhouse Family, at home. Learn more at <http://1517.media>.

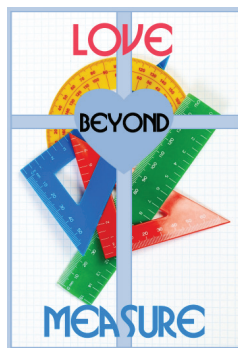
The new Augsburg Fortress website, launched on Aug. 1, offers resources developed under the Augsburg Fortress imprint, as well as a selection of resources from Fortress Press and Sparkhouse. Learn more at [augsburgfortress.org](http://augsburgfortress.org).

## ‘Love Beyond Measure’ devotional guide for Lutheran educators

God offers us love beyond measure, and in turn, we offer the same to those we come in contact with each day, especially the children in our midst.

Each year, the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA), an organization providing services for ELCA weekday schools and learning centers, publishes a devotional guide for educators. “Love Beyond Measure” is the theme for 2016-2017. It’s an easy-to-use publication with devotions written by pastors, school and center administrators, and other educators.

“Love Beyond Measure” follows the Revised Common Lectionary and offers a weekly devotion, questions for reflection



and prayer. Congregational staff, Christian education staff and volunteers, as well as school staff and volunteers will find this guide to be a great resource for personal use, leading devotions at staff and committee meetings, and in-service training.

Print copies of the devotional guide are mailed to members of the association and downloadable copies are available at no cost to everyone on the ELEA website under “Quicklinks” at [elcaschools.org](http://elcaschools.org).

Does your congregation have a weekday school or early childhood program? Become a member of ELEA. Call 800-500-7644 or visit [elcaschools.org](http://elcaschools.org) for more information.



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## The new ELCA Federal Credit Union is open to serve your financial needs



Directing the new ELCA Federal Credit Union: Chief Operations Officer Luis Reyes (left) and the Rev. Arnold Pierson, president.

“With the church as its sponsor, the ELCA Federal Credit Union operates in ways that are consistent with the church’s values, making it a socially responsible way to do your banking,” the credit union’s website, [elcafcu.org](http://elcafcu.org), explains.

The credit union opened its doors in early June to give ELCA members an alternative in banking. Now the fourth financial ministry of the ELCA, the credit union is the first to offer consumer loans—including auto loans and personal loans.

“As a not-for-profit financial cooperative, the credit union exists to serve its members—not to make a profit. Earnings are returned to members through more competitive rates on deposits and loans, fewer fees and enhanced services,” says Chief Operations Officer Luis Reyes.

### Supporting the ELCA’s mission

Creation of this ELCA-sponsored credit union supports the ELCA’s mission to promote wise stewardship of members’ financial resources. “While the ELCA Federal Credit Union is a separate entity from the ELCA churchwide organization, the credit union will operate with the church’s mission and values in mind,” says the Rev. Arnold Pierson, president of the credit union. “When you choose to participate in the ELCA Federal Credit Union, you will work with a financial institution that is rooted in your faith community. This is a socially responsible way to do your banking.”

### Who can join and what services are available?

Currently, individual members of the ELCA can join the ELCA Federal Credit Union by opening a savings account with a \$25 deposit and maintain-

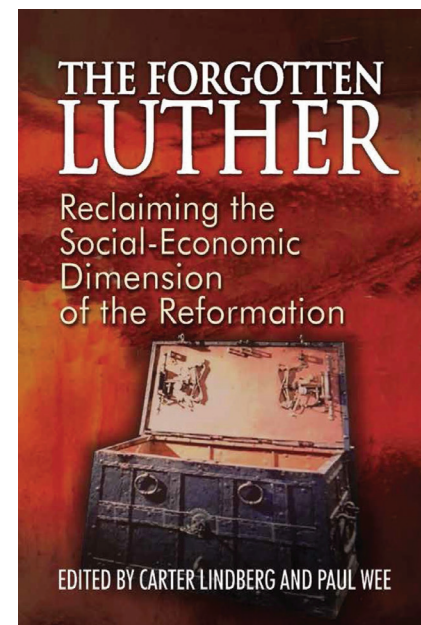
ing that \$25 balance. A more complex, robust online banking system necessary for congregations and ministries—allowing for authorization of signers—will allow those organizations to participate in 2017.

Credit union members have access to an array of financial products and services, including: savings accounts, checking accounts, certificates of deposit, auto loans, personal loans, and credit and debit cards. Members have free ATM access through a worldwide network of ATMs, and deposits are insured up to \$250,000. Auto loans start as low as 1.99 percent APR (annual percentage rate) for qualified buyers. Credit card interest rates start as low as 7.99 percent APR, and the credit union does not charge transaction fees for balance transfers or cash advances.

Members also get the convenience of online banking, online bill payment, e-statements, a mobile app, direct deposit, account-to-account transfer to link with your accounts at other financial institutions and person-to-person fund transfers.

Learn more and become a member of the credit union by visiting its website, [elcafcu.org](http://elcafcu.org).

## Poverty and economic justice not forgotten by Luther



A new book and video series, “The Forgotten Luther,” is here just in time for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Martin Luther’s critique of the church is well-known. What is less well-known is his sharp critique of an economy that left so many people in poverty.

In “The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation,” leading Lutheran theologians and scholars trace the roots of charity and justice in Luther’s writings, from his call for economic reforms to his support for job training programs, fair economic policies and service of the neighbor. The chapters also raise questions for us as Lutherans today.

“The Forgotten Luther” comes with discussion questions to guide reflection as well as videos from the Forgotten Luther Conference in 2015, supported in part by ELCA World Hunger, where the chapters were first presented. Short video interviews with each of the authors are also available.

All videos are available for free on the ELCA’s Vimeo channel at [vimeo.com/album/4043021](http://vimeo.com/album/4043021). The book can be purchased for \$15 from Lutheran University Press at [lutheranupress.org/Books/Forgotten\\_Luther](http://lutheranupress.org/Books/Forgotten_Luther).

## ‘Women on the Move: From Wittenberg to Windhoek’

Junia. Katharina von Bora. Elisabeth von Rochlitz. Elizabeth Platz. Earlean Miller. And you?

Women have always been leading and participating in the reformation of the church, but we only know a handful of their stories. Join The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) effort to share women’s stories through the global Lutheran storytelling project, Herstories. This gathering of stories of women is part of the larger LWF initiative “Women on the Move: From Wittenberg



The sculpture of Katharina von Bora at The Luther House, Wittenberg, Germany.

to Windhoek” that celebrates the leadership and participation of women in the ongoing Reformation, 1517-2017.

Send your story to the LWF’s North American regional coordinator through the ELCA Justice for Women program at [justiceforwomen@elca.org](mailto:justiceforwomen@elca.org). Submissions will be considered for both a regional collection of women’s stories in church and society and a global collection for the LWF 2017 Assembly in Namibia.

Share your story or ask someone else to share her story.

- What have you done to create reform in your congregation, church, community or society?
- What role has a woman played in your journey within the Lutheran church?
- What has been your experience as a woman in the church?
- Maximum 1,300 words. Audio submissions of five minutes or less are also acceptable.

For more information go to [lutheranworld.org/content/resource-women-move-wittenberg-windhoek-toolkit](http://lutheranworld.org/content/resource-women-move-wittenberg-windhoek-toolkit). For a story example from the LWF Central Eastern Europe region, go to [lwfherstoriesceurope.blog.com/](http://lwfherstoriesceurope.blog.com/).

## Journey with *The Campaign for the ELCA's* global church priority in 2017!

As members of the ELCA, we believe we are freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbors. Together, we do God's work of restoring and reconciling communities in Jesus Christ's name throughout the world. Next year, as we observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we have the unique opportunity to reaffirm this commitment through *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA*.

In conjunction with our anniversary celebrations, we will be lifting up the campaign's global church priority, including Missionaries and Young Adults in Global Mission, International Women Leaders and global ministries, with a variety of learning and giving activities for your congregation. We hope you will join us!

Congregations across the ELCA will be celebrating and lifting up this work through three major events in 2017:

- **International Women's Day**, March 8
- **Pentecost Sunday**, June 4



Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia sing and dance during worship.

**Always**  
being made  
**New.**  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE ELCA

- **Global Church Sunday**, October 2017 (exact date chosen by each congregation)

In addition to these events, year-round fundraising and fun, educational activities will also be available for your members, including youth and young adults. Packets

will be mailed to congregations throughout 2017, with the first packet arriving in early January. Each packet is designed to help you celebrate, share and support the important work that we are doing in the world—together.

Get involved! Visit [ELCA.org/campaign](http://ELCA.org/campaign).

## Congregation offers well of knowledge to community with a Little Free Library



Sunday school students helped fill St. Andrew's Little Free Library with books and passed out bookmarks at the grand opening ceremony in June.

Little Free Libraries are a global phenomenon. The small, front-yard book exchanges number 36,000 around the world in 70 countries—from Iceland to Tasmania to Pakistan. Now, a new Little Free Library at St. Andrew Lutheran Church in Hurst, Texas, will join the movement to share books, bring people together and create new communities of readers.

Members of St. Andrew designed the library in the shape of a well. They were inspired by the story of the well in John 4 in which Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well while she is drawing water. He then offers her living water, his unconditional love and forgiveness.

St. Andrew members seek to offer God's love to their community in as many ways as possible. They hope the Little Free Library on their front lawn will provide the gifts of knowledge, escape, adventure and fulfillment that books bring, as well as become a beacon of God's love in the daily routines of their neighbors.

The library has books for adults, youth and children in both English and Spanish. Neighbors and people passing by are welcome to stop and browse, borrow a book and even contribute books.

The Little Free Library nonprofit organization has been honored by the Library of Congress, the National Book Foundation and the American Library Association. To learn more about using a Little Free Library to reach and serve your community, visit [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org).

## A wealth of global resources at your fingertips



ELCA Glocal Musicians offer a lively, creative reflection of the diverse gifts of the body of Christ and the world in which we live and serve.

The hymn "We Are Many Parts," written by Marty Haugen, reminds us that "We are many parts, we are all one body." Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's statement describing the ELCA as "being church together for the sake of the world" involves growing in awareness and celebrating each part of God's church throughout the world. Focusing on God's global church is a part of entering more

we share as people of God. For the pastor looking to explore issues related to culture for their sermons, a worship leader seeking out hymns from different parts of the world or a youth minister seeking to bring deeper values of accompaniment to summer mission trips, there are a wealth of resources that can be easily adapted and make our local ministries and worship more vibrant.

fully into God's mission for the world. The ELCA's Global Mission unit creates resources to help congregations and leaders better understand the complexities of our world and receive the gifts of the global church.

Often, Global Mission staff are approached at Glocal Events or synod assemblies by church leaders who are passionate and excited about deepening an awareness of the global connections

These resources are available for download at [ELCA.org/en/Resources/Global-Mission](http://ELCA.org/en/Resources/Global-Mission).

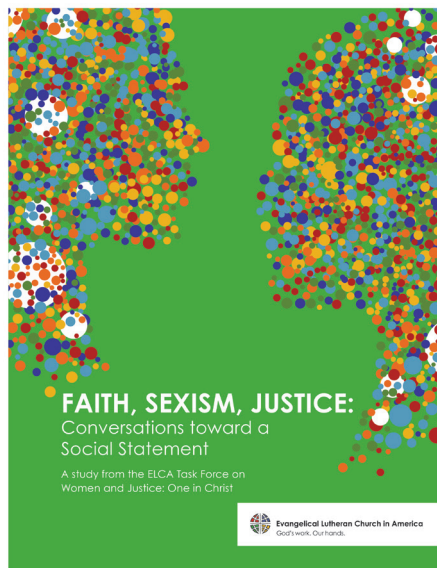
The educational resources offered by Global Mission provide information filled with Scripture, Bible study topics and strong theological questions that promote conversation. These resources are available in PDF format and are focused on topics such as:

- accompaniment
- short-term mission
- culture
- cross-generational engagement
- social action
- global mission 101
- music and mission
- radical hospitality

Additionally, for those who are interested in learning how the Spirit works through us via music, there is access to recordings and teachings of glocal (global + local) music led by the Glocal Musicians.

"For the world is full of God and his works. He is everywhere present with his gifts." – Martin Luther

## Join the conversation on faith, sexism and justice



Imagine if you could have a conversation with people throughout the ELCA!

You can, as a participant in the new study, “Faith, Sexism and Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement.” In this study prepared by the ELCA Task Force on Women and Justice: One in Christ, individuals, adult forums, youth groups, faculty groups and others will join a conversation about issues related to women and justice in church and society.

Seven modules form the study, and each explores one of these questions:

1. Why do we need to talk about women and justice together?
2. What problems do women face, and what does justice require?
3. How is sexism personal, and how are we the body of Christ together?
4. What does economic sexism look like, and how can we seek equity for all?
5. How can we address violence against women and girls?

6. Why do images and words for God matter?
7. How do we challenge the misuse of Scripture against women and girls?

Your thoughts and responses can be shared with the task force through an online or paper survey for each module. The response period runs until Aug. 31. Responses will inform and help members of the task force as they prepare a draft social statement.

“Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations Toward a Social Statement” can be downloaded free at [ELCA.org/womenandjustice](http://ELCA.org/womenandjustice). Print copies are available at [ELCA.org/resources](http://ELCA.org/resources) or by calling 800-638-3522. The cost is \$4 per copy, plus shipping. Questions? Send an email to [womenandjustice@elca.org](mailto:womenandjustice@elca.org).

## We can raise healthy boys

A 2014 study of sex trafficking in Minneapolis found that the sex-trade industry operates on the basic market rules of supply and demand. Sex buyers (the demand) rely on traffickers to provide them with juvenile victims (supply). The study concludes that one way to stop sex trafficking is to prevent the “demand.” And it states that men must drive that movement.

Cherish All Children, a nonprofit organization affiliated with the ELCA, is seeking to engage men in this movement to “end the demand” and is urging congregations to view the movie, “The Mask You Live In.” Last spring, 13 congregations in the Minneapolis Area Synod hosted screenings of the documentary with discussions afterward to move this effort forward. “It was so well received by those who viewed it. I wish even more could see it—parents, youth, young adults—everybody! It’s really a transformational film. It moves people,” said one pastor.

“The Mask You Live In” ([therepresentationproject.org/film/the-mask-you-live-in](http://therepresentationproject.org/film/the-mask-you-live-in)) explores how we as a society can raise healthier boys. According to the film, the media, parents, coaches, friends and even our schools create messages that cause boys to disengage from their feelings and avoid real friendships. Boys learn to objectify and devalue women and to use violence to solve conflict. But it doesn’t have to remain so; we can raise and influence boys to be caring, respectful and able to develop healthy relationships throughout their lives.

Start a conversation in your congregation about how to raise healthy boys. For more information, contact Cherish All Children at [ahartman@cherishchildren.org](mailto:ahartman@cherishchildren.org), or call Amy Hartman at 612-280-1259. The film is available on Netflix and Amazon and is appropriate for ages 16 and older.

## Connecting Christ’s love with military service members, veterans and their families

Our nation continues to endure its longest war at 15 years and counting. Though large-scale deployments of troops to Iraq and Afghanistan have ebbed, people in uniform continue to deploy to more than 30 countries. More than 2 million men and women are veterans of combat deployments since 9/11. Many of them and their families are members of our congregations.

### The ELCA cares

In the ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop, the director for federal chaplaincies has launched the Centurion Connection, a synod- and congregation-based network of people reaching out to military service members, veterans and their families. Twenty synods have an identified local Centurion contact. Using a volunteer network, they use a collaborative website available to all ELCA congregations, [elcachaps.com](http://elcachaps.com).

Centurion contacts offer ideas and resources for how to honor and care for the needs of veterans and their families. They use resources available through the website, including scholarships for seminarians interested in chaplaincy, worship resources and ideas, information on how to deal with post-traumatic stress syndrome, suicide prevention and more. Visit the website

for the list of Centurion contacts or check with your synod office.

### Our church acts

In concert with a memorial, or proposal, passed at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, the voices of our church will be raised in prayer to God on the Sunday closest to Veterans Day and other national holidays. We seek ordered civic life and respect for the dignity and worth of each person created in the image of God. We remember the impact of family separation and mobility for veterans, those currently serving and their families. We pray for the right use of power and just pursuit of peace. Through our prayers, we support and encourage the witness of our ELCA pastors in chaplaincy. Prayer is powerful, and knowing your church remembers you in prayer creates and embodies hope.

There are opportunities for pastors and interested lay leaders to receive training to support active military and veterans. Visit [elcachaps.com](http://elcachaps.com) or talk to a Centurion contact. The church is also discovering among its active and veteran military, people skilled in reaching young people, dealing with pluralism, reacting



positively to disasters and other areas of ministry. These are men, women and young adults ready for active roles in congregations and communities. Seek them out in your congregations or through the ELCA Federal Chaplaincy Ministry Updates Facebook page.

Christ’s love is inclusive, active and most effective when we engage all of God’s people in our ministry and service in the world.

## Inspire, thank and educate with Stories of Faith in Action



Stories of Faith in Action  
YOUR OFFERING AT WORK



Stories of Faith in Action is a free, annual publication that highlights how we are church together through your Mission Support offering.

Each year ELCA congregations vote to set aside a percentage of their finances for Mission Support, which is shared by synods and the churchwide organization. Members may wonder how their

Mission Support offering is being used by the wider church.

Through stories and photographs, Stories of Faith in Action shows the impact of our shared ministry as the ELCA, and it is now available to order at [ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action). All you'll have to cover is shipping!

Here are a few ways you can use Stories of Faith in Action to thank and inspire your congregation:

- **Use it as part of your stewardship emphasis.** Distribute Stories of Faith in Action in stewardship packets and keep them near your congregation's bulletin board. Let your members know that their giving in 2015 helped make these stories possible and remind them of the impact they are making through their regular giving. Download bulletin inserts for printing and order printed copies of "Where Does My Offering Go?" to hang on a bulletin board at [ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action).
- **Share it with new and homebound members.** Share the colorful, inviting

features of Stories of Faith in Action at new-member orientations and with those who have limited mobility and help them feel more connected to the work of the wider church.

- **Let it spark discussion for new ministries in your congregation.** Before an event or meeting, assign selected reading in Stories of Faith in Action. Use the stories as a springboard for brainstorming.

Visit [ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action](http://ELCA.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action) now to:

- Order free copies of Stories of Faith in Action to be delivered to your congregation.
- Download bulletin insert designs containing selected stories from this publication.
- Download a Mission Support FAQ sheet for council, finance or congregational meetings.
- Download an electronic copy of Stories of Faith in Action.
- Download an electronic copy or order printed copies of the "Where Does my Offering Go?" resource.

## Gather magazine observes the Reformation



As the ELCA observes the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, Gather magazine is offering Bible studies that enlighten and illuminate reformation and transformation.

Gather, the magazine of Women of the ELCA, offers a mix of articles, theological reflections, devotions, and stories of comfort and challenge that help readers grow in faith and engage in ministry and action.

In the spring of 2017, Kit Kleinhans, a professor at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa, will share a four-session Reformation Bible study on "Galatians: Christian faith and Christian freedom."

"Biblical scholars describe Paul's letter to the Galatians as the Magna Carta of Christian freedom," Kleinhans writes. "Martin Luther called it 'my Katie von Bora.' Like his marriage to Katie, Luther's relationship with Galatians was a rich and lasting one."

In the summer of 2017, Kelly Fryer will explore "All Anew," a three-session Bible study that shares the theme of the 2017 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering in Minneapolis, July 13-16. A pastor, teacher, entrepreneur and communicator, Fryer has written several faith-related books, including "Reclaiming the 'L' Word: Renewing the Church from its Lutheran Core."

To get these Bible studies, subscribe to Gather magazine at [Gathermagazine.org](http://Gathermagazine.org).

## Sparkhouse Family partners with renowned paper engineer to create pop-up books

If you are looking for the perfect Christmas gift for children or the young at heart, "The Birth of Jesus" is an outstanding choice. This beautiful retelling of Jesus' birth captures the Christmas story with incredible artwork from world-renowned illustrator and paper engineer Agostino Traini. Each page of the story comes to life with captivating illustrations and intricate pop-ups, from the angel's visit to Mary

to the moment she lays baby Jesus in the manger. To order, visit [sparkhouse.org](http://sparkhouse.org).

Also, in celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, Sparkhouse Family will release a pop-up book celebrating the life of Martin Luther. From Luther's conversion to his nailing of the 95 Theses to the Wittenberg chapel door, history jumps off the page through the art of Agostino Traini. "The Life of Martin

Luther," coming in January, is an excellent gift for anyone with an interest in the history of the church.



## 'Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?' lives on!

Remember the annual Advent and Christmas booklet, "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?," published by Alternatives for more than 20 years? It still exists, and the answer to the title's question is still the same: "Jesus, not Santa. Santa's for fun. Jesus is for real!"

Though the last printed edition was in 2011, "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" continues to be available online. Alternatives' original mission also continues its focus on "equipping people of faith to

challenge consumerism, live justly and celebrate responsibly."

Alternatives had been promoting faith-based voluntary simplicity and resources like "Whose Birthday Is It, Anyway?" since 1973, until its closing in 2011. Since then, the organization has been revived and rechristened as Simple Living Works!

Simple Living Works! has been able to extend Alternatives' mission and resources—all for free and all online—

with a special focus on social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+ and Pinterest. Individuals, congregations and church groups have permission to copy, customize, use, distribute or repost all of the Alternatives and Simple Living Works! resources, as long as they are not sold for profit.

You can find Simple Living Works! and its resources at [SimpleLivingWorks.org](http://SimpleLivingWorks.org).



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