

STORIES OF CHRIST'S  
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

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Winter 2025

# Boundless



*The Grove, in Mazomanie, Wisc., is providing a safe and welcoming space for kids to learn and play. Read about this ministry on p. 12.*



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America

**“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).**

## Dear friends in Christ,

We find ourselves in a season of transition. A new year has arrived, along with the birth of our savior – which has brought us peace, joy and the power of God’s amazing grace. Even though this peace and joy can feel elusive in our world today, Christ is with us. The world is turning.

Let us take a quiet moment to look back on the previous year and look forward to the next. In this new year, I am thinking about the entire scope of our past and future as a community of faith. As I do so, I feel awe, gratitude and hope – largely thanks to the generosity of donors such as you. When I look back, I see all the ways your support has enabled the Holy Spirit to work through our church. When I look ahead, I imagine the ways the Holy Spirit will continue working through you to transform the lives of our siblings in Christ for decades to come.

This issue of “Boundless” contains stories about the power of your faithful gifts – in the past, present and future. You have supported the remarkable work of missionaries such as Karen Anderson, who has lived and worked in Chile for decades. Through ELCA World Hunger, your generosity has been at work in the United States and around the world for over 50 years. Last year, we came together to celebrate that legacy in different ways, and to build momentum in our work toward a just world where all are fed. You are also walking alongside young leaders, such as John Christensen, who will shape the future of our church. And you are helping ministries such as New Heights Lutheran Church in Wisconsin find creative and courageous ways to care for the children in their communities as these ministries preach the gospel.

Your gifts have made all this possible and more. **Thank you.** I hope these stories inspire you in this season of Epiphany as you reflect on the past and dream about what comes next. Your generosity is helping to bring about God’s promise of a future filled with hope.



With abundant gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth L. Eaton".

**ELIZABETH EATON**

Presiding Bishop

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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# Boundless

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# Hope in *Collective Action*





**W**hen Karen Anderson was called to Chile as a Lutheran missionary in 1981, she told her parents she would be back in a year. Forty-three years later, her home and her heart are still in Chile. Her shaky Spanish and lack of experience were no match for her love of the people she met. Committed to walking alongside the people of Santiago, especially women, Karen founded and still runs the community health organization Educación Popular en Salud (EPES, meaning “Popular Health Education”) with the support of ELCA World Hunger. The ripples from this project travel across generations.

When Karen arrived in Chile more than four decades ago, she was charged with training local women to be community health workers. Though initially daunting, this task became her passion because of the spirit of the women she was teaching. “I just fell in love with those women,” she says now as she looks back on those early years. “They were so unbelievably tenacious and alive despite all of the suffering that they encountered.” Their fire caught in her, and EPES was born.

*Missionary Karen Anderson (center) attends a women’s march in Chile with two of the original members of Educación Popular en Salud (EPES), the organization she founded over over 40 years ago with the support of ELCA World Hunger. Your generosity supports missionaries, such as Karen, who are deeply embedded in communities around the world.*



*Karen Anderson plays an educational game with attendees of the 12th international training program hosted by EPES.*

Her work was difficult and attracted the attention of a brutal dictatorship. Karen, her friends and her colleagues were followed, interrogated and harassed. One lost his life. EPES advocated for Chile's most vulnerable, which made it a threat. Its work continued despite the unwanted attention and even outlasted it. As she looks back on these early years, Karen remembers what drove their mission and kept them focused: "Our work wasn't trying to do anything but be a witness of the church."


Karen also credits ELCA World Hunger for its part in the work EPES was able to do, providing not only resources but also a model for how to operate in a community. "One of our most important partners since the beginning has been World Hunger," she says. "We have been blessed to work with an organization that asks questions first to understand the people and their need. We followed their example." Through your gifts, ELCA World Hunger can inspire and empower people and communities while also

supplying necessary resources. Its work, like that of EPES, has an immediate impact that ripples outward.

Now Karen is handing over leadership of EPES to women she has trained. The fire they lit in her still burns brightly as she speaks of what they mean to her. Perhaps closest to her heart is the story of the Garcia family. The matriarch, Valeria, was inspired by EPES training to finish high school in her 30s and then pursue a college degree. She took night classes on a scholarship from EPES while raising three young children and finished at the top of her class. All three of her children have graduated from college and are engaged in work to better their community. "In our own communities, in Chile, and all around the world, there are people just like the remarkable women I've worked with, who are just waiting for an opportunity to be seen," Karen says. "Our challenge is to recognize them."

As she reflects on her remarkable career, Karen wants to remind the church of the hope we find in each other and our shared work: "If all people needed was food or a doctor, our job would be easy. But it's so much more complicated than that. It's much harder to walk alongside the people who need more over many years, but this is the work that changes lives and communities.

**Karen Anderson and EPES were featured in ELCA World Hunger's 50th-anniversary celebration on World Food Day. Learn more – and find out how you can watch the event video – on page 15.**



"When people  
join in the work  
together, we  
remember that  
we're not alone.  
There's hope in  
collective action."

—Karen Anderson

When people join in the work together, we remember that we're not alone. There's hope in collective action."

Through your generosity, you join in this collective action. Support for Missionaries through ELCA Where Needed Most and for ELCA World Hunger have powered the transformative work of EPES. You are uplifting not just individuals but an entire community over generations. Thank you for sharing this hope and making a difference!

# Leading Conversations Across Generations



Albin Hillert

**Y**oung-adult and disability advocate John Christensen has been part of the ELCA for longer than he can remember – both his parents are Lutheran pastors. Yet he keeps finding new ways to get involved, grow as a leader and strengthen his community. He has participated in multiple ministries for young adults, supported by donors such as you. After each experience he asks, “OK, what’s next?”

In 2022 and 2023 – after a 30-month wait due to the COVID-19 pandemic – John participated in the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program. Through YAGM, John served as a community volunteer at a church in Wolverhampton, England. He became embedded in the local community as well as a community of volunteers from across continents and seasons. The organization that placed John in this role has been a YAGM partner for 15 years, so he has met some of the volunteers that came before him and others who came after him, continuing the work he did.

That volunteer community led John to the next chapter of his career. At a YAGM job fair, he learned about the ELCA’s new Young Adult Vocational Fellowship program, which gives young adults the opportunity to explore employment that is meaningful and empowering and that reflects the values of their faith.





Albin Hillert

*Your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most support your church's work with young adults. Through your generosity, you walk alongside passionate young leaders such as John Christensen (extreme right). As World Council of Churches project officer for disability and mental health advocacy, a job he found through the ELCA's Young Adult Vocational Fellowship program, he helps to ensure that our community of faith is safe, supportive and welcoming for all.*

Specifically, John learned about a new fellowship position: project officer for disability and mental health advocacy at the World Council of Churches (WCC), a worldwide ecumenical fellowship of churches that work together for unity, justice and peace. John felt the Holy Spirit guiding him on his vocational journey. When he heard about the role, he says, "It's like you had asked me to write my own job description."

In his vocational fellowship role at the WCC, John works to connect disability advocacy and mental health advocacy within the church. He is using both his professional communications skills and his personal experience as a person living with myelomeningocele spina bifida, which affects his lower spine and mobility. John believes that the issue of mental health is important to the work and well-being of our faith community, and that it will only get more important. He

says it's impossible to talk about climate change, water, poverty or any of the other issues we're confronting as a church without talking about the underlying issue of mental health. "And if you're talking about mental health," he says, "you should be talking about disability."

John's fellowship has also given him the opportunity to connect with the wider community of young adults in the ELCA, and with a global network of young-adult Lutheran leaders making an impact around the world. In the past year, John has participated in ecumenical events in Africa, Asia and South America, as well as the United Nations General Assembly in New York. He also attended the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, where he led workshops focused on the intersections of mental health and youth in the church. For John, who grew up sometimes feeling as if he were the only young person in his rural congregations, the most powerful part of the experience was "just getting to see the fact that there are tens of thousands of young people in the ELCA" alongside him.

By supporting ELCA Young Adult Ministry through your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most, you have invested in this growing, vital community of young people. You are connecting young leaders such as John to the work of the church, furthering our commitment to welcome all into the community of Christ. And you have become part of the intergenerational work that John believes is crucial to the future of our church. "The more we come together," John says, "the more we can do."

"OK, what's next – how do I stay involved? Where else can I go? What else can I do? How do I turn this into a full, lifelong career?"

—John Christensen

# Thank You!

## YOUR GIFTS IN ACTION

Your gifts are making a difference in the United States and around the world – but don't take our word for it. Here are just a few of the people your generosity has touched, describing the impact you have had on their lives.

### Leadership

"I am so grateful for all that Fund for Leaders has done for me. I have connected with a great group of like-minded peers who care about the gospel and serving the church. The team has been so incredibly supportive and has helped me develop an even greater passion for mission development. FFL is truly a blessing that keeps on giving."

—**Jaren Summers,**  
2023 Fund for Leaders scholar

*Your gifts enable the future leaders of our church to answer God's call to serve and build ministries they are passionate about.*



### Global Mission

"St. Andrew's and StARS are a beacon of hope and dignity for the refugee communities of Cairo."

—**Rev. Bekah Davis,**  
ELCA missionary, pastor of St. Andrew's and a chaplain at StARS

*St. Andrew's United Church of Cairo is an international, ecumenical congregation that provides a safe space for individuals of all faiths, as well as those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. The church founded St. Andrew's Refugee Services, which has helped over 40,000 refugees access essential resources such as housing, education and legal aid. Your support enables the Rev. Bekah Davis (left), to serve as pastor of St. Andrew's and as a chaplain at StARS.*

# Lutheran Disaster Response



"This project [funded by Lutheran Disaster Response] has supported us in bringing us together to iron out our differences and also to find lasting ways to [resolve] the conflict between local farmers and herders."

—**Bulus James**,  
Leader in a Nigerian community where Lutheran Disaster Response supports a peace-building project to foster coexistence, understanding, tolerance and unity among herders (Fulani) and local farmers (Irigwe).

## Young Adults

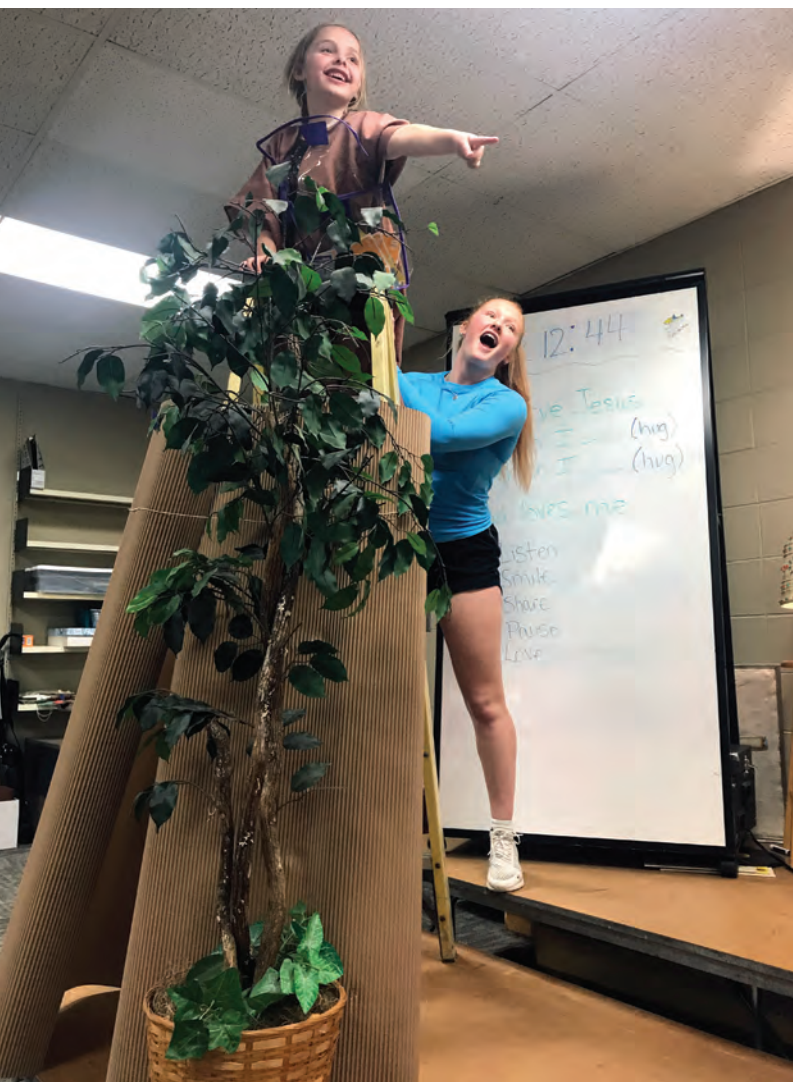
"'Nit nitay garabam' is a Wolof proverb that can be translated into English as 'People are a person's medicine.' We aren't meant to be isolationist. We are called to be together in community. A true community is built upon a foundation of acceptance and willingness to embrace our differences."

—**Micah Brandsrud**,  
YAGM Senegal volunteer

*Your support enables young people to embark on life-changing journeys of global fellowship as part of the Young Adults in Global Mission program. You walk alongside them as they go out into the world, grow as individuals and strengthen our global community of faith.*



# A nurturing space for All



*In Mazomanie, Wisc., your generosity to ELCA Where Needed Most helped provide a Faith Formation grant that was used to turn an old elementary school building into a community space where children with different backgrounds and needs can feel welcome, safe and included.*

**F**or over a decade, the people of New Heights Lutheran Church, serving the communities of Black Earth and Mazomanie, Wisc., dreamed of building a community center to provide a shared space for ministry, social services, family activities, recreation and other community events.

When a nearby elementary school went up for sale in 2022, those dreams changed direction. Instead of constructing a new building, congregation members made a leap of faith and decided to purchase the school property to convert into the community center they had been planning for so long.

Called the Grove, the community center is now home to a multitude of resources. It has a gymnasium, spaces for large-group gatherings, a playground, educational opportunities and social services. The Grove also houses the Heights Unlimited clothing closet and food pantry. On weekends, New Heights holds its worship services at the building, and during the week it hosts “Family Faith” nights and other activities for the congregation.





The Grove is still in the early stages of development. It already offers a plethora of activities and resources, yet there is still plenty of room for expansion.

“While the Grove’s mission to connect, gather and thrive supports our current programming, it is also a springboard to launch new opportunities and resources for families,” says Auna Lynn Nelson, director of children’s faith formation at the Grove.

Thanks to an ELCA Ministry for Children grant, supported by your gifts to the ELCA, the Grove has developed several multisensory rooms throughout its building to give young children calming, inclusive spaces where they can play. The rooms include colorful puzzles for kids, mini slides and ladders they can climb, textured murals they can touch and quiet spaces they can visit when they need a sensory break. The rooms are available not only during New Heights’ Family Faith nights and worship times but also throughout the week for families of the wider community.

The Grove’s new sensory rooms are inclusive, open to children of all ages, backgrounds and

challenges. The rooms are “uniquely designed to minister to all children, no matter where they gather, so all children could be invited into every aspect of play together.”

ELCA Ministry for Children grants offer funding for partners to further the church’s mission and purpose by engaging in faith formation with and for children. Recipients can use the grants for a wide variety of purposes: reaching out to underserved populations; conducting diversity, equity and inclusion training that relates to children; rewilding the classroom by nurturing outdoor awareness and increased green initiatives; and sourcing educational materials to help children understand Lutheranism, the Bible, theology and spirituality.

Your generosity to the ELCA supports these grants and, by extension, supports children of our church in their personal and spiritual growth. A tool of God’s ministry, the Grove sets an example for welcoming, cross-generational spaces where children and their families can connect and deepen relationships with the entire community.

# 50 years

## of ELCA World Hunger recognized



**S**ince 1974, hundreds of thousands of generous people from across this church have contributed more than \$650 million to support ELCA World Hunger.

Throughout the past year, we have commemorated this momentous anniversary by sharing stories about the ways our church and our world have been impacted by ELCA World

Hunger, and by coming together at the ELCA Youth Gathering and on World Food Day. We have looked back on our church's long tradition of meeting human needs, and we have renewed our commitment to addressing the root causes of hunger and poverty around the world.

**Thank you** for observing this milestone with us and for being a part of this life-changing work!

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger are at work in **66 countries** and **41 states and territories**. Your generosity supports projects focused on:



Health



Housing and LGBTQ+ youth homelessness



Peace, justice and human rights



Agriculture and sustainable livelihoods



A gift of goats changed Alldin Pujari's life and strengthened her whole family's future in Palsapada, India. Your generosity to ELCA World Hunger helped provide her with livestock, along with supplies and training in goat-rearing. The goats have helped her increase her income and provide for her family. Your gifts are sharing hope with individuals, families and communities through agriculture around the world!

[ELCA.org/WH50](https://www.elca.org/WH50)

Join us and be part of the story of our next 50 years together — boldly and faithfully pursuing God's promise of a just world where all are fed.



Tapestry Farms, an ELCA World Hunger partner, is an urban farm system in the Quad Cities of Iowa and Illinois that reclaims underutilized local land to grow culturally specific fresh produce and flowers. Refugees and volunteers work together in 10 plots throughout the Quad Cities to improve access to fresh, healthy food for all. Tapestry Farms also supports refugee families as they rebuild their lives with meaningful work, quality education and childcare, safe and affordable homes, good medical and mental health care, citizenship, and caring communities.

In rural western Hungary, economic opportunity is especially limited for women and the marginalized Roma people. In partnership with ELCA World Hunger, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary helps members of these vulnerable populations access the tools they need to build community and enhance their livelihoods. Program participants have learned to grow fresh vegetables and cultivate mushrooms; taken workshops in pottery, basket-weaving and other crafts for sale; bonded with their neighbors in social groups for older adults or for moms and babies; and much more.



**Food and water**



**Education and vocational training**



**Relief and preparedness**



**Community organizing and advocacy**



Last year, 16,000 attendees of the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, La., joined together to raise almost half a million dollars for ELCA World Hunger!



**Watch now!** "World Food Day: Celebrating 50 Years of ELCA World Hunger"



# Boundless

Winter 2025

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago, IL 60631-4101  
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*Missionary Karen Anderson (center) has lived and worked in Chile for over 40 years. Read more about her on p. 4.*