



PRE-ASSEMBLY REPORT

for the 2021 Southeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly

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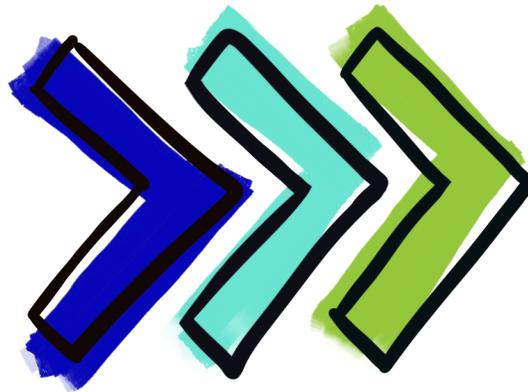
Southeastern Minnesota Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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2021 Synod Assembly Southeastern Minnesota Synod Online Only! - May 8

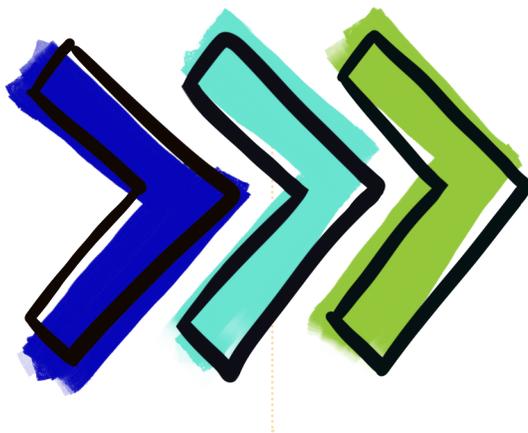
Event Website:

www.semnsynod.org/assembly

*check here regularly for details, links, tips, and more!

Share pictures, quotes, and thoughts from your assembly experience on social media (like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter) using the hashtag:

#SEM21



Spring 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Grace and peace be yours.

This past year will surely live on in our thoughts for the rest of our lives, and many of those memories will be traumatic and painful as our students, faculty, and staff have weathered the multiple pandemics of COVID-19, racial injustice, economic hardship, and the polarization in our politics. But one thing we will remember with warmth and appreciation is the extraordinary, unprecedented commitment of Augsburg faculty, staff, and students to meet this moment.

Life at Augsburg was changed in ways most couldn't have imagined in March 2020. Classes were moved online. Physical distancing practices were put in place. Many on campus began to study and work via Zoom. Athletic events were canceled. Our communal worship life shifted, like many congregations, to virtual experiences. One of the most difficult moments was moving the 2020 Commencement to a virtual format, and we promised disappointed graduates that we would plan an in-person event to celebrate the milestone when it is safe to do so. We have now extended that same promise to the Class of 2021, as their commencement this year will also be virtual. Now, we are working in a modified way with some critical employees on campus and students living in residence halls and in a limited number of in person classes, though that may ramp up with distribution of vaccines.

The murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, three miles from campus caused pain, fear, and trauma throughout the world and for our own students, faculty, and staff of color. Many in our community joined the protests. A new Critical Race and Ethnicity Studies department and a requirement that all faculty and staff complete anti-racism training are among efforts at Augsburg University to combat systemic racism. Augsburg's response was an important continuation of our ongoing work to build and maintain an equitable and inclusive campus. Our 41st Annual Augsburg Advent Vespers led by the Music Department and Campus Ministry honed in on the theme for the need of God's redeeming love in Jesus as we named the heartache of May 25 and cried out, "Come Now, Breath of God." We continue to live into the ongoing Advent of Jesus who makes all things new, the One who calls us to proclaim life and breath for all God's beloved.

Given our inability to be together in person, Augsburg decided during the holidays to support important efforts in our community to feed our neighbors. In recognition of the remarkable efforts of our faculty and staff over the past year, Augsburg made a \$5,000 gift to Soup for You, the food ministry that is based at Bethany Lutheran Church on Franklin Avenue. Soup for You continues to provide a free lunch every weekday to all. Throughout the year, the Augsburg community ran food and supply drives for those in need as well as outreach to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness. We are heartened by how our community has come together this past year even when we've been apart and look forward to the promise of life as we emerge through and from these multiple pandemics.

We are seeing a strong interest in an Augsburg education. Fall 2019 saw our largest first-year class, and Fall 2020 was the second largest, despite the impact of the pandemic. At this point, we are seeing encouraging signs for Fall 2021 as well.

We thank you for your prayerful support in the shared work to which God calls us as the body of Christ in the world. May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope.

Faithfully yours,

Paul C. Pribbenow, Ph.D.
President

Rev. Justin Lind-Ayres
University Pastor

Rev. Babette Chatman
University Pastor



ELCA Federal Credit Union **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

Celebrating our fifth anniversary as a financial ministry of the ELCA

The ELCA Federal Credit Union was founded in 2016 to provide a fuller suite of financial products and services to the members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA. The Credit Union offers a rich variety of products—from savings and checking accounts and CDs ... to loans, lines of credit and credit cards. The Credit Union is the first of the ELCA’s financial ministries to offer loans to individuals. Because we exist solely to serve our members, we can offer better rates and lower fees than many traditional banks, and we have demonstrated success in providing significant savings to our borrowers. Our strong online presence allows members to access their funds anytime, anywhere—as consumers expect today.

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, as congregations and ministries closed their doors, the Credit Union responded swiftly to growing needs for financial assistance. We took the step to become certified by the Small Business Administration to provide loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, a federal program of the CARES Act. These PPP loans—continuing compensation for pastors and staff and covering other operating expenses during the pandemic—have proved to be a lifeline for congregations and ministries experiencing diminished revenue during this unprecedented time. Cooperating with our financial partner, the Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA, we have already provided more than 350 PPP loans totaling almost \$14 million to congregations and ministries across the church. We continue working together to help PPP loan recipients file applications for loan forgiveness.

In 2021, we ushered in the third cohort of participants in the ELCA’s Resourceful Servants program, designed to improve financial wellness and assist rostered leaders in building emergency savings funds. In this matching program, ELCA rostered leaders make ongoing deposits to their Credit Union emergency savings accounts, and our partner MIF matches those funds up to an established amount. Together, we already have served more than 400 rostered ministers who, collectively, have made emergency savings deposits of more than \$1 million.

Membership is open to every ELCA member, synod, congregation and ministry—and their employees.

elcafcu.org



Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Greetings siblings in Christ of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod,

It has been a difficult year for all of us. Despite restrictive policy changes and the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, LIRS has remained committed to our biblical mandate to welcome the stranger.

In the last year:

- 2,782 refugees were welcomed through LIRS affiliates in 23 states.
- 440 unaccompanied migrant children were served through our foster care services and placed in loving homes during and after legal proceedings.
- 9,500 asylum seekers received Safe Release and Post Release services at our Southern border.

Even in these darkest of days, thousands of people from across the country partnered with LIRS to express their support for migrants and refugees through our annual programs and advocacy efforts. The compassion of our neighbors gives us hope, and we are proud to report that in the last year:

- 16,000 holiday cards and 500 gifts were sent to migrant children and families in detention through our annual Hope for the Holidays program.
- More than 600 ELCA clergy and lay leaders signed a letter drafted by the ELCA and LIRS urging Congress to work collaboratively to advance comprehensive immigration legislation.
- LIRS' work was featured on national platforms like *NPR*, the *Washington Post*, *Center for American Progress*, *Religion News Service*, *The Christian Century*, and *Sojourners*.

We are especially grateful for the congregations and communities in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod who have continued their generous and prayerful support. We could not do this work without you.

Now, that work is expanding. In the coming year, the U.S. expects to welcome 125,000 refugees to our shores. LIRS is actively looking to congregations and faith leaders to partner with us in ways big and small, including donations, volunteer work, and participation in our annual programming. **Emmaus: Congregational Discernment Network** launches this spring for congregations to discern how they can best walk alongside refugees and migrants in their community, and **Stand Up Speak Up**, coming in Pentecost, is a new interfaith prayer vigil focused on advocacy. We encourage you to stay up to date on opportunities for individual and congregational engagement at the **LIRS Action Center**, found at www.lirsconnect.org/get_involved

With your support, we will continue to live our mission: witnessing to God's love for all people, standing with and advocating for migrants and refugees, and transforming communities through ministries of service and justice. Thank you for accompanying LIRS and our migrant and refugee siblings through 2021 and beyond. God bless you.

In peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Witte".

Dr. Kristin Witte
Director for Outreach

Lutheran Men in Mission Synod Assembly Report 3-2021

Lutheran Men in Mission (LMM) has always had the goal of bringing men to Christ. Our Southeastern Minnesota Synod group is just one of many in the national organization of Lutheran Men in Mission with a web page at www.lutheranmeninmission.org. On their site you will find resources and opportunities nationally and help to set up your own congregational group of men.

As with most groups, COVID-19 affected our plans in 2020, but we searched for ways to persevere. We knew that our large and popular event in the spring of the year, Breakfast With the Bishop, at Cabela's in Owatonna was not possible. We cancelled it, but then decided we would try something by Zoom in August, when Bishop Regina Hassanally was available, so we asked the Synod office to help us with publicity, and we set 8:00 AM on Saturday August 2nd for our Zoom gathering, without of course the wonderful breakfast at Cabela's. Bishop Hassanally did a wonderful job connecting with us about her faith story, and the men who attended the on-line event were appreciative of the effort.

We then debated a fall men's retreat at Good Earth Village, and we decided to go ahead with a masked smaller group for a one-day retreat with Professor Rolf Jacobson from Luther Seminary. The Saturday October 3rd event in the Log Lodge allowed adequate spacing between participants with about 15 attending, and Professor Jacobson shared a great series of sessions on his topic: "The Peace that Passes Understanding and the Psalms. Good Earth Village was an excellent host with good food and hospitality.

I would say we experienced God's faithfulness even in these virus pandemic times in 2020, but we hope to expand our engagement with the men in our Southeastern Minnesota Synod in 2021 as the pandemic hopefully allows.

The national LMM also experienced some cancellation or postponement of events, but they adapted by hosting weekly Virtual Book and Bible Studies. LMM also hosted 2 Virtual Bold Gatherings of which video presentations are available at www.boldgathering.com. Resources also continued to be produced and distributed from www.projecttwelve.net via emails and social media, this included Advent and Lenten devotions, as well as the **Fathering in 15** series.

The national LMM Bold Gathering, open to Lutheran men from across the country has been postponed until Oct 7-9, 2022 in Omaha, Nebraska, and it would be a fun event for men from our synod to consider. Additionally, there is a LMM Bold Gathering on-line on April 17th, 2021, and you can find information on the website mentioned earlier.

We always look for support from the men across our synod to participate in our Breakfast With the Bishop and in our retreats. We would also be open to any men who would like to serve on our LMM Synod Board to offer support and input. We look for ways to encourage men in any congregation who would like to start their own group because "bringing men to Christ" is a mission for all men in their local congregations. Let us know if we can help. Our information about events and opportunities is graciously shared by Ashley Corbett on the Southeastern Minnesota Synod website.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Iverson, Secretary to LMM

In 2020, the Minnesota Council of Churches...

Provided logistical support for Twin Cities **Black church leadership** organizing **over 1,000 interfaith clergy** and others in a silent march of prayer and protest for George Floyd

Advanced racial justice with a **10-year plan** for **Truth and Reparations**

Developed broad faith leader **consultations on COVID-19** by organizing **38 top-level meetings** for judicatory executives with Minnesota Governor, Commissioners, and staff

Grew by 2 Judicatories: Presbytery of the Dakotas and Communion of Holy Christian Churches

Welcomed 92 refugees to Minnesota

Educated **over 600 families** about COVID-19 and pandemic resources

Strengthened relationships between **refugees and law enforcement** in Mankato

Assisted **192 people** with permanent residency or **citizenship applications**

Supported truth-telling, racial justice and personal transformation by conducting **22 Sacred Sites Tours**

Scheduled **10 Respectful Conversations, piloted online model** and were recommended in **Conflict Resolution Quarterly**

Witnessed to the good work of the body of Christ in **over 50 media articles**, including MN Public Radio, Star Tribune, and newspaper and TV in Duluth, Mankato, St. Cloud, Pipestone, Rochester, Northfield, Fergus Falls; Twin Cities, as well as CNN, Roland Martin Unfiltered, The Independent, Washington Post, Modern Diplomacy, Voice of America, The Week, Chicago Tribune, BBC Radio, and TPT

Brought **Christians and Muslims together in 5 online cross-cultural Ramadan Iftars**

REFUGEE SERVICES

HEALING MINNESOTA STORIES

INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS

RESPECTFUL CONVERSATIONS

JUSTICE ADVOCACY

MINNESOTA CHURCH CENTER

Minnesota Council of Churches

mnchurches.org

Supporting Those Who Serve Now More Than Ever

Portico Benefit Services is a holistic benefits ministry serving those who serve — from rostered ministers and their families to staff at social ministry organizations. We strive to help our members grow their overall well-being.

We could not have predicted this pandemic. But the virtual benefits we've introduced before and after its arrival, the benefit adjustments we've made since, our successful navigation of volatile financial markets, and the consistency of our customer service have made a powerful difference.

During this pandemic, ELCA benefits are helping to lower stress levels, create safer access to health care, and increase financial flexibility — all to strengthen the resilience of those who serve and, by extension, the resilience of this church.



The Rev. Jeff Thiemann
President & CEO

Building Resilience in 2020

26%

More Calls to Our Financial Planners

During last year's market volatility and our introduction of target date funds.

559

Took a Penalty-Free Distribution

Thanks to quick modification of our retirement plan rules for 2020.

49

Sought Student Loan Help

Through no-cost counseling via our partner, LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling.

3,230

Medical Visits Via Text

Through 98point6, our new virtual 24/7 primary health care service — with \$0 copay.

98%

Satisfaction With New Mental Health Option

Our self-directed online program, Learn to Live.

10%

Of Members Streamed a Course

On topics like resilience, mindfulness, and beating burnout via Being, our new wellness video platform.

90%

Very Satisfied

With our Customer Care service — delivered by Portico employees working remotely.

22

Target Date Funds Introduced

To help members maintain an age-appropriate asset mix over time — and better weather volatility.

3.1%

Annuity Payment Increase

Received, in these difficult times, by ELCA annuitants during 2021.

PUBLIC CHURCH SCHOLARS

Augsburg University and Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

5 YEARS, 2 DEGREES

The **Public Church Scholars** five-year degree pathway prepares students to be intentional leaders of a multiracial, multiethnic, public church. In this educational pathway, students will take a deep dive together in Christian community to explore theological education, leadership formation, experiential learning in an internship, and preparation to be public leaders in the church. Students in this pathway will complete two degrees in five years: a Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Public Leadership from Augsburg University and a Master of Divinity from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.



UNIQUE ELEMENTS OF THE PCS PATHWAY:

- Four years of part-time, paid contextual learning and internship in a congregation
- Spanish language and theological study in Mexico
- Training in equity and inclusion, cultural competency, and vocational discernment
- Cocurricular formation including a supportive cohort of peers
- Spiritual direction practice (individual and group)
- Life coaching and professional mentors
- Accompaniment through the candidacy process for ordination
- Completion of Clinical Pastoral Education
- Distance learning and Intensive seminary classes

7233-0021



Lutheran School of
Theology at Chicago

AUGSBURG
UNIVERSITY.

augsburg.edu/religion/public-church-scholars

To find out more or to enroll in the PCS pathway,
contact **Adrienne Kuchler Eldridge**:

eldridge@augsbu.edu
612-330-1412

Section 5 - 9

WE ARE CALLED | AUGGIES



HOLISTIC APPROACH

At Augsburg University, Public Church Scholars learn to practice and lead accompaniment, interpretation, discernment, and proclamation, and this framework supports their preparation to be pastors and leaders in the church. This work is enhanced and deepened at seminary. LSTC's curriculum cultivates competencies for leadership in a public church and focuses on community engagement, public witness, and social transformation. This holistic approach to theological education breaks academic disciplines out of their silos and allows creative collaboration to flourish.

SCHOLARSHIPS AND AFFORDABILITY

This pathway addresses barriers of the overall cost of education and reduces the length of time required to complete a pastoral leadership degree: five years instead of eight. This pathway also provides college access to the ministry profession for students from underrepresented groups. We are committed to significantly reducing debt for the student when entering candidacy, seminary, and then ministry.

Students accepted to the PCS cohort are eligible to receive the Regents Scholarship, which is a minimum of \$18,500. This award is not stackable with other merit scholarships. Accepted students will also receive an additional PCS scholarship (\$1,500–2,500) that is renewable as long as students are enrolled in the PCS pathway and are in good academic standing. Students in the PCS cohort will also receive financial aid for seminary tuition in their third, fourth, and fifth years.

ENROLL NOW

Emerging leaders who are discovering their own gifts for church leadership, and who are curious about how the church is responding to God's call in the world, can enroll now. Our team is committed to identifying, recruiting, and enrolling a diverse and hopeful cohort of emerging leaders to serve in the public church for the sake of the world.

In a year that was like no other, St. Olaf College has sustained its mission of challenging students to excel in the liberal arts, examine faith and values, and explore meaningful vocation in an inclusive, globally engaged community nourished by Lutheran tradition. After pivoting to a fully-online program halfway through the Spring 2020 semester, we successfully re-opened the campus in Fall 2020 with a combination of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning. Following guidance from the CDC and the State of Minnesota, we implemented community standards for prevention, health reporting, testing, contact tracing, isolation, and quarantining, which enabled us to remain open throughout the fall as well as during the current spring term.

St. Olaf also has sustained its commitment to meeting the full demonstrated financial need of all admitted students. At present, our 2,909 undergraduates hail from all 50 states and 83 countries, with 21% self-identifying as Lutheran and another 8% as members of denominations in full communion with the ELCA. 24% of the entering class are domestic students of color, 7% are international students, and 20% are first-generation college students. Among our Class of 2020 graduates, 94% participated in an internship, mentored research experience, practicum, or other vocation-related opportunity, and 73% studied off-campus. Pandemic notwithstanding, 95% of our Class of 2020 alumni were employed, working in full-time service projects, or attending graduate school within six months of graduation, consistent with prior years.

Throughout the pandemic, St. Olaf has continued to provide live weekday chapel and Sunday worship (stolaf.edu/multimedia/streams/archive/chapel), shifting from in-person to virtual services during periods of remote learning. The College Ministry team includes two rostered ELCA pastors, an Associate Chaplain for Jewish Life, and an Associate Chaplain for Muslim Life, engaging with students of all backgrounds – including St. Olaf's ELCA Student Congregation – about faith and life. The college's weekly *Sing For Joy* radio program (stolaf.edu/singforjoy/), featuring sacred choral music for the church year, continues to be broadcast on 150 U.S., U.K., and African stations, and expanded its online audience as COVID kept so many church doors closed.

St. Olaf's new Lutheran Center for Faith, Values, and Community (stolaf.edu/lutherancenter/), now in its second year, advances understanding of global Lutheranism in the 21st century, fosters interfaith engagement, and nourishes vocational discernment at every stage of life. Its robust programming features nationally known speakers, symposia, student internships, book reads, workshops, and seminars; many events bring alumni and friends of the college together with current students, faculty, and staff. The Center's director, Dr. Deanna Thompson '89, is a nationally recognized expert in Lutheran theology and the church in the digital age, and has emerged as a thought leader on church life in this time of pandemic; her blog posts on topics ranging from virtual communion to racial justice have reached thousands of national and international readers. We invite you to sign up on the Center's website for periodic updates on its activities and upcoming programs, and to visit the college's streaming site (stolaf.edu/multimedia/) for live and archived events.

The Lutheran Center now serves as the administrative home of the St. Olaf Conference on Worship, Theology, and the Arts. The Summer 2020 CWTA conference "Scatter the Imagination of Our Hearts" was rescheduled for July 25-28, 2022, keynoted by theologian Willie James Jennings (Yale University Divinity School) and Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics Eunjoo Mary Kim (Iliff School of Theology). A virtual mini-conference introducing selected CWTA themes and speakers will be offered on July 20, 2021 (stolaf.edu/cwta/). The Lutheran Center is also home to the new initiative "Nourishing Vocation: Re-Imagining Congregational Callings in Unimaginable Times," supported by a \$1 million grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. A search is underway for the director of this exciting new program, which will convene regional and national learning communities of congregational leaders to help congregations gain clarity about their values and missions, explore and better understand the communities that they serve, and draw upon their theological traditions as they adapt ministries to meet changing needs.

We join our prayers with yours as we all consider our callings during and beyond this "unimaginable time."

David R. Anderson '74, President



Partnering in faith

The Mission Investment Fund, a financial services ministry of the ELCA, provides a strong, stable, faith-based way for individuals, congregations and ministries to achieve their financial goals.

MIF provides a range of investments for individuals, congregations and ministries. We put those investments to work to fund building and renovation loans for congregations and ministries.

The result? Impact investments, with a transformative impact on our communities: Expanded worship spaces ... new space for education and youth ministry ... much-needed day care centers for working families ... industrial-grade kitchens and fellowship halls for community meals.



During the year-long pandemic, MIF provided assistance to investors who needed immediate access to their funds and to borrowers who needed flexibility with their loan payments. We collaborated with our ministry partner, the ELCA Federal Credit Union, to offer expedited loans for congregations, ministries and individuals, as well as Paycheck Protection Program loans for congregations and ministries to keep employees on the payroll and continue operations.

Our capabilities and capacity have never been stronger. At year-end 2020, MIF had 883 loans outstanding, totaling \$596.4 million. Investment obligations totaled \$543.1 million. With total assets of \$773.8 million and net assets of \$218.2 million at year-end 2020, MIF maintains a capital ratio of 28.20 percent—positioning MIF in the top tier of well-capitalized church extension funds.

Our steadfast support continues for the members, congregations and ministries of the ELCA and the many ways you care for a world in need. We are honored and humbled to walk alongside you as a trusted partner.

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org.



MIF at work in the Southeastern Minnesota Synod (as of December 31, 2020):

- 12 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$8,552,493
- \$10,289,188 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations

MIF representative LuAnn Ferguson, Regional Manager, Tel: 651-900-3575; email: luann.ferguson@elca.org



**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

Section 5 - 12

Churchwide Organization 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

COVID-19 RESPONSE IN THE UNITED STATES



Teams from across the organization worked together to launch the COVID-19 Response Fund, which supports the ministries of this church that are most in need and best positioned to make an impact. To date, the fund has received more than \$1.8 million from generous ELCA members, which has been granted to 63 synods and has provided additional support for ELCA World Hunger's Daily Bread Grants.

- 452 vulnerable congregations considered best strategically positioned to respond in particular ministry contexts received grants.
- Priorities include pastors' salaries, children/youth ministry, virtual-technological skills and concern over the future of the local church.

As congregational feeding ministries faced increased and urgent need in their communities due to COVID-19 and its economic fallout, ELCA World Hunger responded with the launch of two emergency rounds of Daily Bread Matching Grants this past spring and fall. **Three hundred sixty grants equipped congregations across 60 synods and 41 states**, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, to fundraise online toward their ministries. Through these efforts, participating congregations **raised**

more than **\$355,000** to add to the **\$180,000** of support through Daily Bread Matching Grants, nearly tripling the impact of the grants and resulting in more than \$535,000 going directly toward local, congregation-led initiatives addressing urgent needs brought on by the pandemic. ELCA World Hunger also responded by releasing new and adapted resources, including [guides for finding community assistance resources by state](#) and an at-home adaptation for the “[On Earth As in Heaven](#)” vacation Bible school curriculum. Constituents connected with [ELCA Advocacy Alerts](#) for opportunities to raise their voices in support of COVID-19 relief legislation, aiming to ensure that efforts focus on the people and communities hit hardest by the crisis. The [ELCA World Hunger blog](#) also provides opportunities to learn about and act on the relationship between the pandemic and hunger in communities.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) identifies those who have been affected by disaster as “disaster survivors.” With COVID-19, we are all survivors in some way. Domestically, LDR responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by **supporting 32 synods** and **three Lutheran social service agencies in 40 states with grants totaling over \$900,000**. The grants supported ministries in their efforts to reach out and serve their communities with food, daily necessities and other forms of assistance.



Churchwide Organization – Technology

- IT was able to transition staff to work from home over a single weekend at start of pandemic with minimal technical issues
- Launched COVID-19 chatbot on elca.org to assist with pandemic response information and prayer requests
- Digitized expense reporting in new Workday System launched during COVID-19
- Improved collaboration using Microsoft Teams during pandemic

GLOBAL PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered worldwide turmoil and caused major setbacks in progress around food security, nutrition, health, education, gender justice and livelihood, especially in the most affected communities. LDR made a bold commitment internationally to support companion churches and ecumenical partners not only in providing immediate relief but also in continuing support for recovery, disaster preparedness, trauma counseling, implementing innovative programs to adapt to what could be the new normal, and focusing on populations pushed into vulnerable situations such as those affected by gender-based violence, people with disabilities, older adults, migrants and refugees. In 2020, LDR awarded over **\$4.79 million** in **125 grants** to **49 countries; 84 of the grants (\$2.45 million)** were in response to COVID-19, reaching nearly **800,000 people** around the world.

For example, we provided assistance to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Education for the Deaf schools in Mwanza where hearing impaired students learned through sign language, images and videos about COVID-19 in order to prevent the spread of the virus. In Lebanon, we contributed toward relief efforts led by the Contact and Resource Center for people with disabilities who are unable to leave home due to the government lockdown. Cash vouchers were provided to help pay for utilities, phone bills and drinking water. For migrants at the border of Mexico and the United States, we provided assistance to Casa del Migrante de Saltillo that provided food, hygiene kits and temporary shelter for people seeking asylum in the United States. In India, people living with HIV and AIDS



Syrian women learn how to stay safe from Covid-19 and receive education materials for their children. Photo: StARS

and transgender people are highly vulnerable to COVID-19. We supported the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India in providing food and hygiene kits, in addition to information about COVID-19 prevention, to members of these communities in Chennai. In Egypt, refugees are particularly susceptible to pervasive xenophobia and being intentionally excluded from necessary services. We supported St. Andrew's Refugee Services as it increased distribution of cash assistance, switched education programs from in-person to online, offered wellness and mental health checks, and provided COVID-19 information. And in Madagascar, we contributed to the work of the Malagasy Lutheran Health Department (SALFA) in helping patients with disabilities obtain treatment and pastoral care. Pastors, volunteers and doctors were provided sanitation supplies, masks and essential medicine for the patients. In their visits, pastors report sharing from Matthew 25:40, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

In March 2020, mission personnel were asked to return to the United States, including participants in the YAGM program. By the end of 2020, it was also decided to cancel YAGM for the upcoming 2021-22 year. A travel ban was also established for staff, who have continued engagement with companion churches and organizations online.

ECUMENICAL & INTER-RELIGIOUS & THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT

Bilateral Dialogue with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The ELCA and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) resumed bilateral dialogue on Wednesday, March 10. The ELCA dialogue team includes Bishop Bill Gafkjen, co-chair, Pastor Bridget Piggue (Southeastern Synod), Prof. Carl Hughes (Southwestern Texas Synod), and Prof. Kris Kvam (Central States Synod). Bishop Don Kreiss (chair, EIR Committee) and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton will serve ex-officio. For details, click [here](#).

ELCA Pastoral Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World

Thank you to all who participated in the survey related to the development of pastoral guidelines for ministry in a multi-religious world, as part of the implementation of “A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment.” The survey was open from September 12-October 12, with over 2,600 responses collected – a remarkable response rate of 27%. The ad-hoc committee is actively working with the results. The first set of guidelines to be developed will focus on prayer services, as that was the primary area of need according to the survey.

THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT: JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

Quality of Call initiative

Two Justice for Women staff members are serving as director and team member on this multi-partner

initiative. The first phase focuses on responding to ways sexism affects women in calls to Word and Sacrament ministry. The strategic efforts this year are on relationships and policy.

Study Guide for *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*

About a dozen ministry sites tested the draft study guide until the end of February. The guide will help readers to engage the social statement and to act on it through group and individual activities, videos, and links to resources. It will be available in 2021.

50/40/10 ordination anniversaries

The commemoration of the anniversaries of the ordination of women

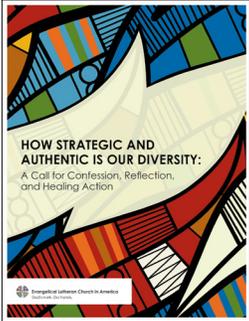
(50th and 40th) is concluding this year with a story collection featuring submissions from pastors who are women from across the ELCA. Resources from the anniversary year will remain up at [ELCA.org/50yearsofordainedwomen](https://elca.org/50yearsofordainedwomen).



Lutheran Women’s Works in Religion (LWWR)

This database is online at <https://learn.elca.org/lwvr/> and includes references to monographs, chapters, articles, and reviews; works from popular literature; sermons; Bible study guides; and more. It further connects Lutheran women in religion and serves to diversify and enrich Lutheran scholarship and teaching. Submission forms for entries are found on the website.

THEOLOGICAL DISCERNMENT: RACIAL JUSTICE



Strategic Authentic Diversity Implementation

In 2019 the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted “[How Strategic and Authentic is our Diversity?: A Call for Confession, Reflection, and Healing Action.](#)”

Lead staff across the churchwide

organization are working to implement these actions in the areas of: Theological Framing and Equipping, Healing Action, Structural Accountability, Theological Education and Leadership Development, and Partnerships with Full Communion, Ecumenical and Interreligious Partners, and Related Organizations.

Diversity Goal Reporting Tool for Synods

The churchwide organization continues to work with synods as they assist congregations in achieving those goals. The action requires annual reports to the Church Council and reports every three years to the Churchwide Assembly.

Anti-Racism and Condemning White Supremacy

The ELCA recognized June 17 as a day to commemorate the Mother Emanuel 9 and to repent of racism and white supremacy. Planning is underway for the second annual commemoration. Additional events focused on combatting white supremacy are under development.

THEOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Theological Roundtable

The Theological Roundtable, a gathering of all of the official theological networks of the ELCA, met

in March, focusing on how Covid has affected our various communities and how the networks are responding. We will also have a conversation with the CWO executives about the role of theology in the Future Church redesign.

Freedom of a Christian

We are finishing the Spanish version of the Study Guide for the Freedom of a Christian, which will be available with the English one at www.elca500.org.

Combatting White Supremacy

We are conducting research on how to proceed to develop a theological Statement on Combatting White Supremacy and a process for racial healing across the ELCA.

THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

Social Statement Task Force

In November 2020, the ELCA Task Force on Church, State, and Civic Participation began a series of intensive meetings during the listening and study phase of the social statement process. Meeting topics through March have included close attention to the social message “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy,” Lutheran theology and Confessions, as well as sessions with ELCA bishops and other ELCA staff whose work is closely tied to ELCA social teaching. Members of the task force are beginning to host listening events in order to garner input from across our church while ELCA staff are developing a network of process builders who are volunteers within synods trained to build awareness, conversation, and engagement with this process. Biographies of the 18-member task force, social statement timeline, and additional information are available [here](#).

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES & RELATIONSHIPS

2020 New Starts and Mission Developers



Children, Youth and Young Adult Ministry



Synod leaders started **30 new ministries in 2020** and **13 in 2021**, in diverse settings.

Unique partnership: Neighborhood Church, a new start in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, is training all leaders in the Milwaukee Area Synod on virtual church and partnering to train mission developer leaders across the country.

Online Congregational Vitality **training events** were held for more than **1,000 leaders**.

ELCA Children’s Ministry updated elcafaithformation.org and created resources related to ministry during the pandemic and also addressing Black Lives Matter.

Growing Young: Over **250 leaders** from across the ELCA participated in online trainings through a two-day intensive course, monthly gatherings with the ELCA Coaching Network, and the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Book Club.

ELCA Youth Ministry pivoted leadership training virtually, with the Youth Core Leadership Team meeting monthly, creating “Candletime,” a weekly online gathering and resource for youth. The ELCA Youth Leadership Summit was held virtually in November, and “Passage,” a small group, was created for graduating seniors. The ELCA Youth Ministry Network annual training event, the Extravaganza, had **1,750 leaders participate**, the highest number ever.

Abide: More than **1,000 young adults** across the country gathered for the first time in over 100 small groups, with content entirely created by young people. Young leaders led groups, created liturgies, held online graduation parties for each other, and formed a nimble, innovative community — significantly bolstering their spiritual and mental health.

#NoPlasticsforLent 2020: This initiative on creation care and intersecting issues, **created by young people and reached more than 100,000 followers** and was featured in the New Yorker magazine.

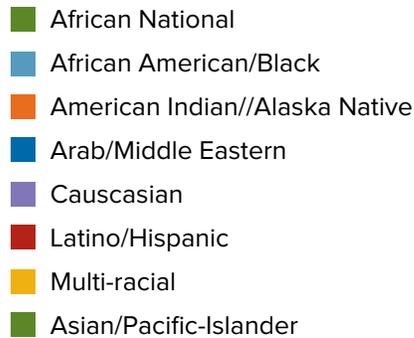
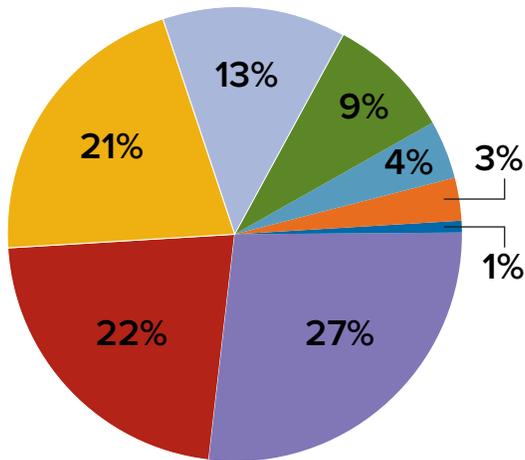
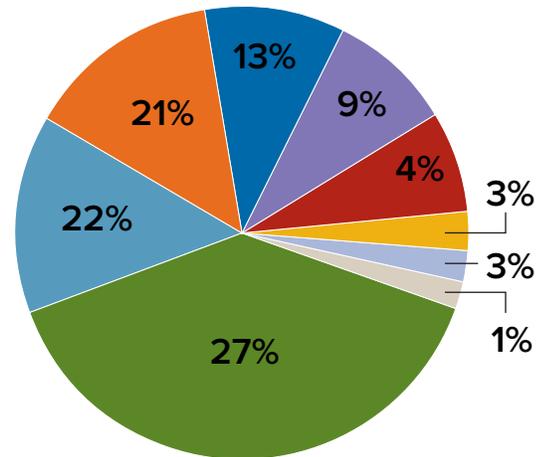
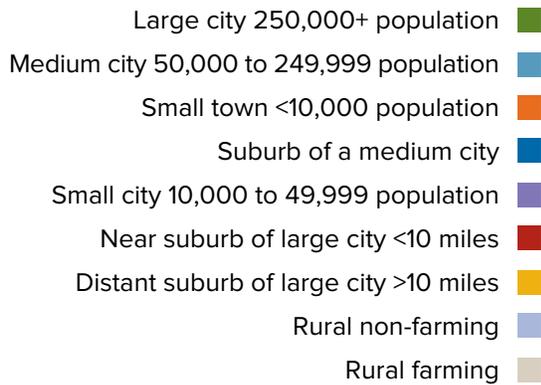
Holy Innovations



Thanks to the Campaign for the ELCA, the ELCA Congregational Vitality Team **partnered with synods** to continue **creating 21 collaborative Holy Innovation projects** that will share their learnings across the ELCA.

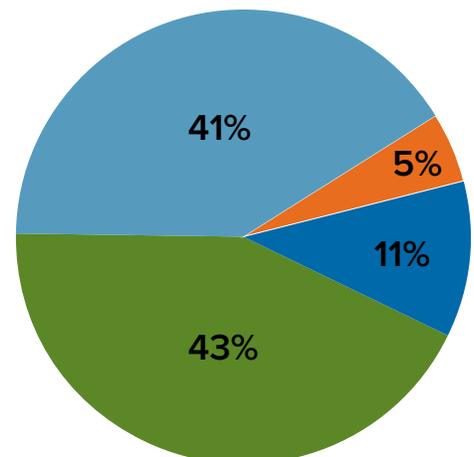
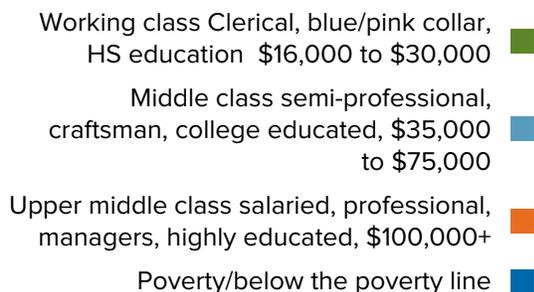
For one of these, “The Grief and Transitions Project”, ten leaders from around the country came together to share strategy and resources. This website is the culmination of the Holy Innovations project and offers a resource for all synods and leaders walking with congregations through significant change. <https://elcaresources.org/help/>

Geographic Setting of New Starts



Ethnicity of New Starts

New Starts by Economic Group Type



Latinx L3 Initiative



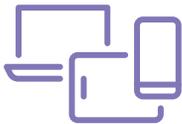
The Latinx Lutheran Leadership Initiative (L3) is a project to identify, equip and accompany Latinx leadership in the ELCA. The initiative has a goal to **create a network of 300 Latinx leaders** to feed the three expressions of our church within two years. It has three focus areas: leadership, formation and development. The preliminary launching date for this initiative is Pentecost Sunday, May 23, 2021.

Lutheran Theological Center of Atlanta (LTCA)



In order to help the ELCA reach a more diverse population, this ELCA-sponsored center will identify, support and guide lay leaders and candidates for rostered and congregational ministry, with an intentional focus on African descent leaders. It will give leaders an experience in historically black seminaries at the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta.

Digital Resources for Congregations



An additional **650 congregations signed up for services** from our preferred partners who offer digital church management and giving options.

[ELCA.org/publichealth](https://elca.org/publichealth) was created in response to the pandemic as a resource hub for congregations and members. To date, we have **nearly 80,000 page views**.

Social Media Engagement



Over the last year, ELCA social media platforms collectively saw a **20% increase** in impressions and a 30% increase in engagements from the previous year.

Twitter engagements **increased by 90%** and **Instagram increased by 150%**.

ELCA social media platforms have seen continued growth in audience size. **Facebook** has **140,000 followers**, **Twitter** has **26,000 followers**, and **Instagram** has **17,000 followers**.

In 2020, **ELCA social media accounts** had more than **55 million impressions**.

2020 Media Coverage

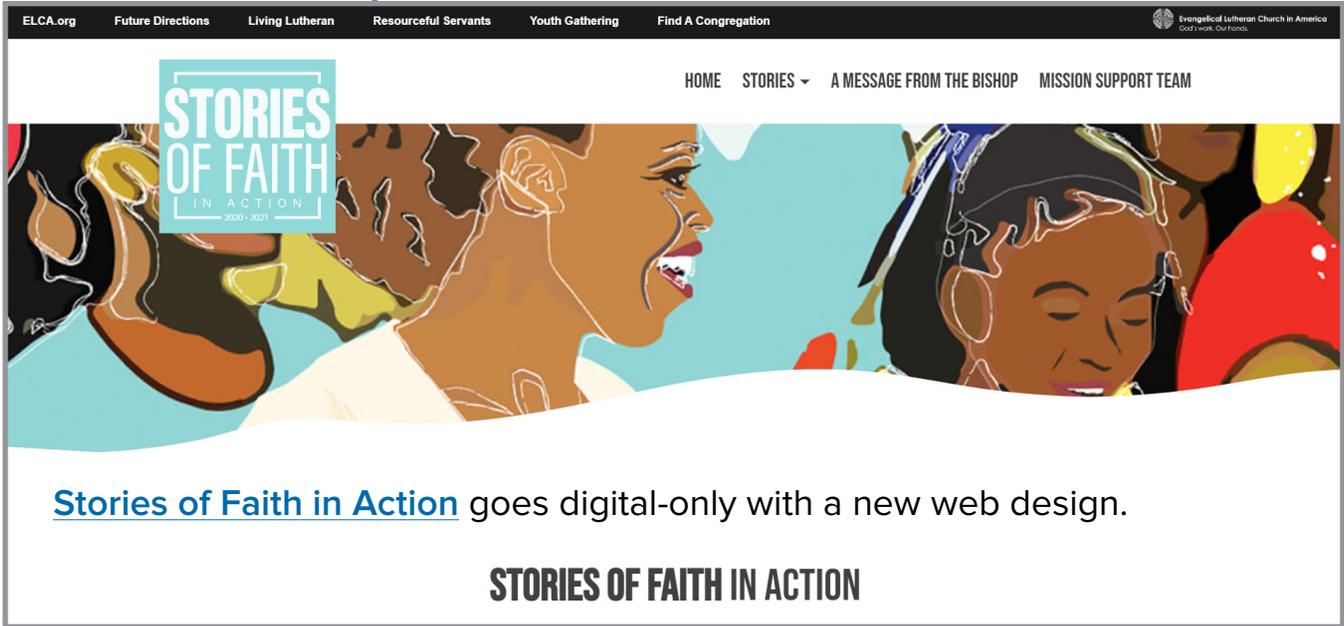


Bishop Eaton appeared on CNN to discuss navigating worship during the pandemic.

The ELCA was **mentioned in 6,570 articles**.

This is an **increase of 116%** compared to 2019 media coverage.

This media exposure resulted in **10.1 billion potential viewers** exposed to the ELCA.



Living Lutheran magazine got a fresh new look to start 2021, the year it turns five years old.



CANDIDACY AND FIRST CALL

There are currently **1,852 active candidates** in the candidacy process.

Of the nearly 300 candidates entranced into candidacy in 2020, 14% self-identified as non-white and 86% as white.

There are **107 active TEEM candidates**. They have self-identified as:



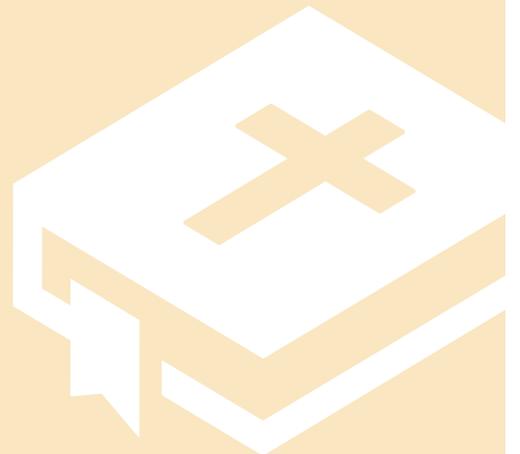
254 candidates were approved and assigned so they could begin interviewing for first calls. **232** of those candidates were candidates for **Ministry of Word** and Sacrament. **22** were candidates for **Ministry of Word and Service**.

The Candidacy Team partnered with COB and other assignment partners to redesign the Assignment Process. In Fall of 2020, the COB approved the proposed First Call Process. Following that decision, a new system of assignment was strategically implemented, the Roster Manual, Candidacy Manual and First Call documents were updated and training resources were provided to synods, seminaries and candidates to provide education about the new process.

The Horizon Apprenticeship Program, which provides summer internship opportunities for young people of color or whose primary language is that other than English, quickly pivoted to offer completely online education and community building and helped congregations identify remote internship opportunities. **14 congregations** and **29 apprentices were accepted** into the summer program in 2020; three of the participating congregations were new to the program.

Visions & Expectations

Visions & Expectations was repealed in 2020. Once Definitions and Guidelines is updated by Church Council, The Conference of Bishops will be asked again if a new document of any kind is needed and for what purpose. An update will be provided to the Church Council in the fall.





All Creation Sings is a new curated set of worship resources in the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* family, developed as part of the ELCA's commitment to the ongoing renewal of worship by supporting congregations' mission in these changing times. This supplement was released at the end of 2020 by Augsburg Fortress / 1517 Media after a nearly three-year process of research, development, editing, and a broad liturgical and theological review. Over 50 people from throughout the ELCA had direct involvement in the development, not including the gifts of the many contributors of prayers, hymn texts, and music.

All Creation Sings includes a fully bilingual Spanish-English setting of Holy Communion, a setting of Holy communion especially appropriate for evening, a service of word and prayer adaptable for many occasions, and a section of topical prayers, thanksgivings, and laments. The supplement also includes 200 hymns and songs, offering

a fresh and diverse selection to enliven worship and the people's song in a new day. Learn more at augsburgfortress.org/AllCreationSings.



GENEROSITY



Members of this church were incredibly generous in their support of ELCA ministries in 2020. Overall giving to fundraising priorities in 2020 finished the year at nearly 99% compared to 2019 totals. We saw an increase of nearly 25% in numbers of individual donors in 2020 (163,931 donors in 2019 vs. 188,735 donors in 2020). While some programs saw an understandable decrease in support due to programmatic disruption (Young Adults in Global Mission and International Women Leaders specifically), other programs saw increased support. Support for “Where Needed Most” saw an increase of nearly 23% compared to 2019 support (\$2.8 million in 2019 vs. \$3.4 million in 2020). ELCA World Hunger, due to an intentional focus mid-year as a feared decrease in support loomed, was able to not only keep pace but also surpass support levels seen in 2019. ELCA Fund

for Leaders also saw increased support compared to 2019 numbers, finishing the year with nearly \$3.7 million in donations to the program. The two most significant stories for 2020 have been the COVID-19 Response Fund and Mission Support. Despite fears that Mission Support would see a dramatic decrease due to congregations meeting virtually, the final numbers tell a different story. At year-end, total Mission Support hovers at 98% of the anticipated 2020 goal (a goal set prior to COVID-19 realities). Around \$41 million in Mission Support was shared with the churchwide organization to be used to support the ministries we do together as a church. This number is an incredible testament to the generosity of our members and the commitment we have to being church together. God is good, and our members are generous.

Development Events Go Virtual

Each year, we hold more than 10 donor events, including leadership tables and immersion trips, but in 2020, the pandemic caused us to pivot to create online events where donors could still interact with programs and other donors. Here are the stats from 2020:

7 Virtual Events and **4** Virtual Leadership Tables

Total Event Reach:

172,787
constituents

Total Event Participation:

4,800
constituents

Total Event Generosity:

\$673,810

Giving

The ELCA had its best single day of fundraising on Giving Tuesday (Dec. 1) in 2020, raising more than

\$600,000!

ELCA INNOVATION LAB

Launched by Presiding Bishop Eaton in January 2020, the ELCA Innovation Lab is a space for the church to generate ideas, unleash creativity and create positive change in the world God so loves. In 2020, the ELCA Innovation Lab has provided innovation-related support, facilitation, and leadership of projects throughout the church and churchwide organization. Here are some highlights:

2020 ELCA Innovation Lab Goals

1. Develop the willingness and culture (i.e., purpose, values, rules of engagement) and ability (i.e., abrasion, resolution and agility) for innovation throughout the church.
2. Champion and drive innovation denomination: connected leaders who inspire and drive co-creation and make new and useful things.
3. Prove and encourage that a good idea can come from anywhere, take shape and be tested by co-creators at velocity.

2020 Engagement Snapshot

Participation



50% of churchwide staff have participated in a Lab project or learning event.

Reach



3,201 individuals and ministries reached by Lab projects and activities.

Leadership



Projects supported by the Lab involved the **leadership of 27 unique project leaders.**

Generosity



Secured a nearly \$1 million grant to launch the Congregations Lead Initiative.

What did the Lab learn in 2020?

Sharing our stories is an important part of generating ideas and problem solving.

The Church has always been a place for storytellers. At the Lab, we have found that telling the story of a new idea or can help us explore important questions. One activity to help shape these stories is to create your own [“origin story.”](#)

We are not always sure if we are exploring the right problem or question.

The Lab is a space to explore the biggest questions the church is facing, both today and tomorrow. Often, it can be hard to know if we are asking the right questions. At the Lab we always ask questions using the [“how might we”](#) method and if the question being asked doesn’t seem quite right, then an [abstraction ladder](#) can help to reframe the problem!

The ideas we support should take us closer to the future we want to see.

A good idea can come from anywhere! The Lab is a space for the church to co-create positive change in the world God so loves and is guided by the priorities of the [ELCA’s Future Church priorities](#).

A new chapter.

Building on the learnings from year one, the ELCA Innovation Lab is now part of the Innovation home area of the churchwide organization. Stay tuned for more!

FUTURE CHURCH

Purpose

Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.

Vision

A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.

Priority 1

**A Welcoming Church:
Engaging new, young
and diverse people**

"Your young ... shall see visions, and your old ... shall dream dreams."

Acts 2:17

Priority 2

**A Thriving Church:
Rooted in tradition and
radically relevant**

"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ... You are the light of the world."

Matthew 5:13-14

Priority 3

**A Connected,
Sustainable Church:
Raising the bar
together**

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

John 15:5

Goal

Share the story of Jesus and the ELCA by engaging with one million new people as we grow the church together.



THE ELCA FOUNDATION

It is important to begin this report by thanking our synod bishops, congregations and partners for their incredible leadership during a year of upheaval and challenges. When everything seemed to go wrong, your ability to direct the work of the church was one of the things that was right in 2020. Through it all, this church supported the work of ministering to the world with the love of Jesus Christ.

As of Dec. 31, 2020, the Foundation has crossed a major milestone — \$1 billion in assets managed in gifts and endowments for the ministry of the greater church. This achievement reflects being the church together in ways that equip congregations, organizations and individuals to live out their vocation. This landmark accomplishment was achieved through the work of the ELCA Foundation staff regularly engaging with donors, congregations and organizations along with your trust in the ELCA Foundation to manage gifts and assets for ministry. Throughout the year, despite limited travel and in-person meetings, gift planners engaged with nearly 900 congregations, synods and ELCA-related organizations. They spent time with over 1,500 individuals working on gift plans, logged over 5,500 interactions and continued to maintain partnership relationships with over 150 ELCA-related entities, including 54 synods.

Fund A distributed over \$30 million to ministry in 2020 while also growing the underlying investment to ensure that distribution is there for years to come. Fund A has neither missed nor reduced a distribution amount once it was established – including the volatile year of 2020. We know these distributions are vital to ministry and often used to support service in local communities.

- As of Dec. 31, 2020, the value of participant accounts invested in Fund A was \$904.2 million, compared to \$817.6 million on Dec. 31, 2019. There are 1,155 investing participants in Fund A, including 938 congregations and 54 synods.
- Throughout the year, 53 new endowment accounts were opened, totaling \$7.1 million, and 14 accounts were closed, totaling \$3.0 million. Investments made to new and existing Fund A accounts totaled \$31.1 million; withdrawals totaled \$18.6 million.

In addition, gift levels remained high throughout 2020: Due to the generosity of our members and donors, distributions to ministry totaled \$59 million for the year.

- The gift-planning network, including affiliates, posted solid results throughout 2020, with \$118.2 million in total gifts and endowment assets. Of that, \$78.5 million was written in future planned gifts, \$20.3 million in current gifts (including funded trusts, gift annuities and individual endowments) and \$19.4 million in new assets invested in Fund A.
- New gift plans written during the year totaled 249. In addition, gift planners stewarded over \$60.2 million in previously written plans, in some cases increasing the estimated gift to ministry.

The Foundation exists as a separately incorporated ministry, with a network of 23 regional gift planners, working in 21 partnerships, across the United States. Critical to their work and ministry funding outcomes are the Gift Administration and Financial Services (accounting and investment administration) teams. These teams are the bench strength of the deployed gift planners, providing continuous assistance to donors, beneficiaries and Fund A investors — all this despite limited access to the building due to the pandemic.

The Foundation staff continues to work with donors and beneficiaries to create individual gift plans, administer life income and endowment gifts, distribute terminated gifts and facilitate the sale of marketable assets such as land, homes, commodities and other assets.

- Regional gift planners remain available to:
 - Guide individuals in discerning how to be faithful stewards of their estates and invite them to support ministries, congregations and synods through charitable estate gifts.
 - Assist synods, congregations and related entities in investing endowment funds and other assets in the Endowment Fund Pooled Trust — Fund A, which is structured to provide distributions to support ministry today and into the future, utilizing investments that adhere to the ELCA's social purpose guidelines.
 - Advise church leaders in the development of gift acceptance policies for congregations, which often include gifts to synods.

Thank you for your continued work with the ELCA Foundation!

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ELCA Foundation Regional Partners

ELCA Churchwide Organization	Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service	Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Good Earth Village	Lutheran Campus Center, Winona	Samaritan Bethany Foundation