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

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Impact Report

Prepared February 2022 for:
Trinity Lutheran Church, Ventura, Calif.

Thank You Trinity Lutheran Church!

Thank you for your continued generosity to the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Your consistent and loyal commitment to the work of this church is inspiring — and we are honored that you have entrusted us with resources that enable our partners to respond to disasters across the world, aid retired pastors in times of need, and equip the leaders of the church today and in the future.

The following report will give you a glimpse of some of the ministries and people impacted by your generosity.

Global Gifts to Eastern Europe

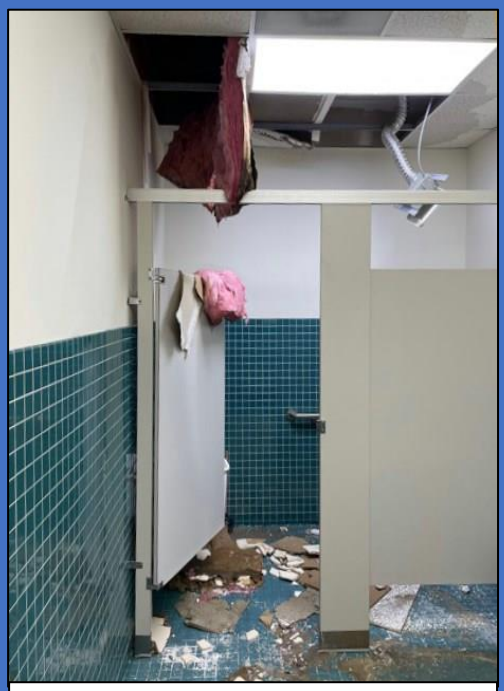
Thank you for supporting Global Gifts to Eastern Europe. Our program colleagues, Paulina Dasse, Program Director, Relationships - LAC, Europe, First Nations, and The Reverend Rachel Eskesen, Area Desk Director for Europe, will be in contact with you to personally discuss your generous and loyal support.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Lutheran Disaster Response and the reach of its response efforts were especially evident in the ongoing disasters that came upon us in 2021, including wildfires, tornadoes, storms, floods and hurricanes. Because of generous congregations like yours, our church was able to provide service in times of disaster. And, long after most disaster organizations have moved on, your gift lives on as Lutheran Disaster Response continues to offer compassion and speak for justice.

Lutheran Disaster Response is connected to a resilient set of Lutheran organizations and companion churches throughout the world. In the United States, Lutheran Disaster Response partners with the network of Lutheran social service and social ministry organizations to provide opportunities for disaster survivors to work with someone who is skilled at listening and who knows how to access help from a variety of sources, oftentimes in their own contexts and communities.

All our disaster response activities, whether based in churches, Lutheran organizations, ecumenical partnerships or interfaith connections, are made possible by the consistent support of congregations like Trinity Lutheran Church. This wide and growing endeavor exists only because of the generosity of directed giving. We show up and expand our work because of you.



Storm damage to Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church in Houston.

Severe Storms, Southern United States

Your gifts, especially in recent years, enabled us to respond to an unprecedented disaster in February 2021 – the severe winter storms in the southern United States.

Beginning February 14, a polar vortex descended over the United States, and the harsh conditions impacted southern states, such as Texas, that lack the infrastructure to handle the freezing temperatures and record-setting snow and ice. While residents were warned about the cold, nothing could have prepared them for the devastating power and water outages that swept the region. The buildings in the area and the electrical grid were not built to handle such intense, freezing temperatures.

"We woke up the next morning with no electricity, no water and a blanket of snow, an unfamiliar sight in these parts," said Bishop Mike Rinehart of the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod.

At its peak, 4.5 million homes and businesses in Texas were without power. With bursting pipes and broken water systems, around 13 million Texans faced water disruptions. And as temperatures rose, melting ice and snow caused more water damage.

"An insurance adjuster told me there have been more claims in Houston for this storm than for Hurricane Harvey," wrote Bishop Rinehart. "Who would have believed an ice storm and freezing temperatures would cost more lives and damage than a hurricane?"

Your gifts supported disaster response through the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod. The synod assisted several congregations directly impacted by the storm and congregations who used money for direct relief, such as water, food and blankets, during the widespread power outages.

Through your generosity, you walked alongside many congregations with their relief efforts, including:

- Assisting immigrant and refugee families hard hit by the freeze with food and rental assistance,
- Helping restock congregations' food pantries that were decimated by the freeze,
- Providing food bags to local families impacted by the freeze, and
- Helping repair major damages caused by the freezing temperatures and flooding to church buildings.

One of those church buildings is Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, the only African-American Lutheran church in Houston. The winter storm in Houston hit marginalized communities especially.

During the freeze, Augustana had a water pipe burst, which caused significant damage to the bathrooms and a work room with a shared a wall at the site of the leak. The carpet and walls of the classrooms in that part of the building were entirely soaked.

Augustana used synod grant funds, including your gifts, to pay for the water bill and to clear out damaged carpet, insulation, sheet rock and cabinets. With your support, they are now able to resume serving and being a gathering space for their community.

Flooding, Tennessee

During the early morning of Aug. 21, 2021, several counties in Tennessee experienced catastrophic flooding, including flash floods, from the line of rain and storms that moved through the state. The destruction was fast and widespread; it only took about 12 minutes from the time the rain started to when the flooding happened.

Twenty-two people were killed during the flooding. In one county, approximately one-third of the community's schools, businesses, houses, roads and bridges were lost. Between 200-250 homes were destroyed, some of which were washed off their foundations and located as far as a mile away. It is being reported that nearly all homeowners lacked flood insurance, as these communities were not in a flood zone. According to FEMA, nearly 1,200 survivors have applied for assistance to-date, but less than 60% of those applications have been approved.

However, with the support of your gifts, Lutheran Disaster Response was able to empower our local partner, Inspiritus, to begin relief efforts right away. With this support, Inspiritus coordinated and trained volunteers, managed a distribution center for large donations, and led efforts to remove debris, conduct necessary demolition and arrange for use of heavy equipment when needed.

A significant part of the volunteers' work is called "mucking and gutting," which involves removing damaged sheetrock, cabinetry, flooring, belongings, etc., from flooded homes. On average, these free mucking and gutting services provided by volunteers save homeowners $20,000 to $30,000 and prevent mold and electrical issues that would cause extensive additional damage if left undone.

One of these homeowners is 65-year-old Annie (name changed for privacy). After her home was damaged in the flood, Annie set out to work on the cleanup and repairs with the help of her 60-year-old sister. The sisters salvaged what they could, trying to recover meaningful personal items, such as family photos. They were reaching a point of physical and emotional exhaustion when an Inspiritus volunteer, supported by gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response, reached out and offered to help.

Annie's personal items pictured at the volunteer center.

After speaking with Annie, a volunteer team was sent to the home and assisted with muck and gut services, sprayed for mold and collaborated with the county as they did necessary electrical work. Volunteers also showed Annie and her sister how to install donated drywall, as they were eager to help. It was through this work that volunteers learned the sisters were looking for a photo of their deceased mother. The team had been collecting salvageable personal items and photos since the response efforts started, so they took the sisters to where these items were displayed in hopes that they could find their photo. Inspiritus' Disaster Relief Director, Sherry Buresh, was on site when she heard a loud wailing coming from the room. She walked in and the sisters were in tears – they had found the photo of their deceased mother, their only physical memory left of her.

"Thank you from the bottom of my heart, thank you so much," says Annie. "You really can't put a price on what you have given back to us, it is so much more than we could ever thank you for."

COVID-19 Response

Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response are also supporting responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing, evolving disaster that affects millions of people every day. With your support, Lutheran Disaster Response continues working with global companion churches, ecumenical partners and ELCA synods to address community needs brought on by the pandemic. The effects of COVID-19 will be long-lasting, and Lutheran Disaster Response will continue to accompany communities throughout the pandemic.

Lutheran Disaster Response has administered more than 90 COVID-19 responses in 50 countries as well as domestic responses in 40 U.S. states and territories. This support includes providing livelihood assistance and distributing face masks, hand-washing stations and food packages across communities in the U.S. and around the world. Your generous support makes this possible.

Special Needs Retirement Endowment Fund

We're grateful for those ELCA leaders whose service helped grow our church into what it is today. And it's only fitting that we support our retired servants as they fulfill their journey and personal ministries in their retirement years. That's why the ELCA established the ELCA Special Needs Retirement Fund in 1993—to provide financial assistance for retired church workers and their surviving spouses or eligible same-gender partners who are experiencing the greatest financial need.

Many pastors and lay employees of the church work for rewards beyond financial consideration but now find their retirement savings has not kept up with inflation. Your generous gifts the Special Needs Retirement Endowment Fund allows us to support the pastors who dedicated their lives to the work of the church. Monthly payments range depending on a recipient's need.

"I had found it quite difficult to make ends meet," one recipient wrote. "Now I am so greatly relieved! I have thanked my Father in heaven for this change in my circumstances, and now I want to pass my thanks on to you."

Portico co-administers this fund with the ELCA. It serves about 40 people a year and was founded by generous donations from individuals and congregations like Trinty Lutheran Church, as well as support from the churchwide organization and Portico.

Fund for Leaders

Amazingly, this year we celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Fund for Leaders. After launching the fund in 1997, the first scholarships were awarded to eight students to cover the full cost of tuition. Today, thanks to consistent and generous givers like Trinity Lutheran Church, the fund is now over $80 million and supports over three hundred students annually. Furthermore, in the last four years alone, the endowment fund increased by over $20 million, resulting in $1 million more that we can award *each year*.

Thanks to that good news, beginning with the 2021-2022 academic year, we increased the value of our full-tuition scholarships 5.5%, to $19,000 per year, and the number of new full-tuition scholarship awards from 40 to 45. Of the 45 selectees now moving forward in the scholarship selection process, nine of them (20%) are people of color or whose first language is other than English. In related good news, this year our Fund for Leaders Federal Chaplaincy Ministry scholarship selection committee was able to award $6,000 scholarships to each of three students who applied for this academic year, double the amount of money awarded last year. All three recipients will be pursuing military chaplaincy. In addition, we have awarded 12 new Mission Developer scholarships for 2021-2022, which are $12,500 each ($8,000 for Theological Education for Emerging Ministries candidates). In total for the 2021-2022 academic year, the ELCA Fund for Leaders supports 307 students in varying amounts.

Gifts like yours make sure the funds continue to grow, getting us closer every year to our goal of providing full-tuition scholarships to every student studying to be a rostered minister in the ELCA.

Meet Clair Minson

Supported by your gift to ELCA Fund for Leaders, Clair Minson is in her second year pursuing a Master of Divinity at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. A member of St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Baltimore, North America's oldest African American Lutheran congregation, Clair is the first woman of African descent from the Delaware-Maryland Synod awarded an ELCA Fund for Leaders scholarship for rostered ministry.

Born and raised in Nassau, Bahamas, Clair moved to the United States during high school. After graduating, Clair attended college in Atlanta to pursue a degree in psychology. Later, she received a master's degree in counseling.

Over the last decade, Clair has focused on workforce development and mental health counseling in the nonprofit sector. She recently founded a change management consulting firm that provides training, consulting and thought partnership to organizations seeking to embed racial equity practices in their activities.

Clair's seminary journey began while supporting her home congregation to find a new full-time pastor. Throughout that 18-month process, she felt a deep sense of call and began her own intentional discernment process. This led to her applying to seminary, with a focus on black liberation theology.

"I'm on a journey as it relates to really understanding what it means to be liberated, to be free," shares Clair. "[For black Christians] that means allowing ourselves to just show up as fully authentic and free, tapping into our ancestral roots. It probably could be a model for what it means to have a truly inclusive and welcoming community; people who lead with love. What does it mean to embody that and live that and show that with one another? It really could be an example for how society could really live the values, our Christian values, in earnest."

The generous and loyal support of congregations like Trinity Lutheran Church to the ELCA Fund for Leaders is empowering the ELCA to take new steps toward fully embracing the diversity of our communities and the gifts and opportunities that diversity brings. Every gift you make is an investment in the future of our church and in those, such as Clair, who will lead us into the future to which God is calling us.

Trinity Lutheran Church, thank you again for your continued generosity to the ministries of this church. These gifts are vital as we live confidently and generously as a community of faith and in service to others.