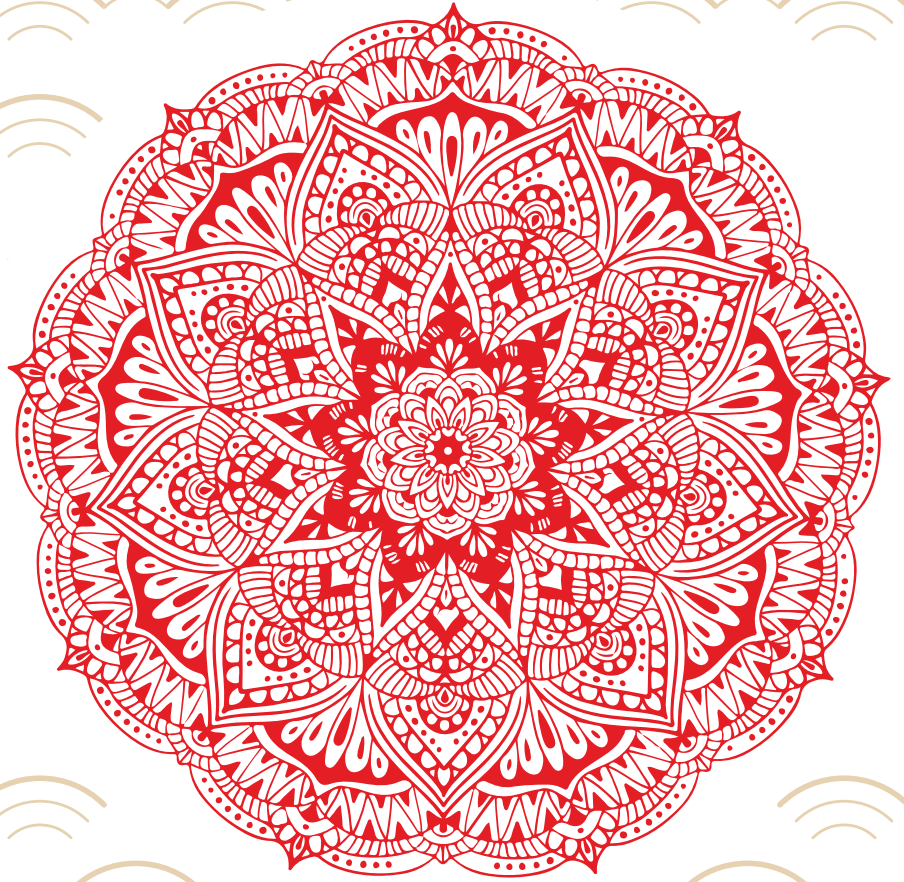


**ASIAN AND
PACIFIC ISLANDER
MINISTRY STRATEGY**

(2026-2030)



A deep love for the church ♦ A hunger for belonging ♦ A call for change

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Paul writes to the Ephesians, “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God” (2:19). As a community that includes many generations of families with deep roots in the U.S., as well as new immigrants, the Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have enriched and blessed this church and this country with all they generously have given, shared and cultivated for mission and ministry.

The API community longed to envision a more holistic embodiment of its mission and ministry for the sake of the whole church. The first API Ministry Strategic Plan, approved at the 2001 Churchwide Assembly, no longer addresses APIs’ current challenges in ministry and daily life. We now need new creativity in mission endeavors and deeper commitment to accompany our ever-growing diversity and the numbers of API people in our neighborhoods. This new strategic plan responds to the changing world, embodies our faithful discipleship and raises our collective, courageous voice to call the whole church to join us.

We are deeply grateful to the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders–Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (AAPI-ELCA) for its continued support, participation, partnership, contributions and collaboration. None of this would be possible without our listening sessions’ participants, facilitators and scribes. From these sessions, the API Ministry Strategic Planning Core Listening Team — the Rev. Ryan Lun, the Rev. Sunitha Mortha, Dr. Kao Nou Moua, the Rev. Robert Waworuntu, the Rev. Dr. Edmond Yee as adviser, the Rev. Margrethe Kleiber as facilitator and the Rev. Teresita “Tita” Valeriano as convener — gleaned all the stories, gifts, challenges and hopes used to create this plan. We are also grateful to ELCA Service and Justice and ELCA Innovation for their support, guidance and resources.

“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

OUR JOURNEY TO NEW VISION

In 2024 and 2025, the ELCA’s Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Ministries led a series of listening sessions across generations, regions, languages and roles. We gathered stories, wisdom and hopes from API lay leaders, youth, young adults, elders and clergy. What we heard was powerful: a deep love for the church, a hunger for belonging and a call for change.

Participants, who were aware of all the meaningful contributions already made by our many API rostered ministers and lay leaders, named both the beauty and the complexity of their identities. They spoke of faith and resilience as well as the ongoing struggles of systemic exclusion and the structural inequities in both church and society that diminish our visibility and create cultural and structural barriers toward full participation. They did not call for mere incremental adjustments or attention; they dreamed of a church in which API voices shape theology, communities, leadership and mission.

This strategic plan is rooted in that listening. It reflects the distinctiveness and diversity of API experiences and calls the wider ELCA into deeper partnership, transformation and justice. The strategic plan is composed of four major themes to guide our future endeavors with creativity and resourcefulness. Each major theme has recommendations and key actions meant to be tools for individuals (lay and rostered), congregations, synods and the churchwide organization to increase and strengthen the congregational ministries to serve the church, neighborhoods and the world with Christ’s grace and justice as a faithful response to our baptismal call.



INTRODUCTION: ROOTED AND TRANSFORMED



“We want to worship in a way that holds both our ancestors and our children.” —HMONG AND LAO LISTENING SESSION

This strategic plan for API ministries within the ELCA begins by acknowledging the complexity of the term “Asian and Pacific Islander.” The term API encompasses a range of ethnicities, languages, cultures, migration histories and lived experiences. From Native Hawaiians to South Asians, from recent refugees to transracial adoptees to multigenerational families that have lived in the United States for over a century, this umbrella term can obscure as much as it reveals. The U.S. Census uses “API” as a category to organize demographic data, and the term has also proved useful in uniting our communities for political and social advocacy. In the broader U.S. context, the Asian community is the fastest-growing population, reflecting dynamic patterns of migration, family formation and cultural adaptation. The Pacific Islander community has increased even more. Within the ELCA, there are an estimated 14,439¹ people who self-identify as API. More recent estimates are forthcoming, and this plan remains responsive to continued demographic shifts. These individuals represent heritages and experiences that span the globe and generations: foreign-born and U.S.-born people, immigrants and refugees, transracial adoptees, and mixed-race and multiracial families. API members of the ELCA worship in over 75 API-specific congregations, mission starts and synod-authorized worshipping communities (SAWCs), and many more belong to more than 2,500 white or multicultural ELCA congregations. More than 30 Asian languages are spoken in ELCA worship and ministries around the country.




I. COMMUNITIES AND LEADERSHIP

“My pastor wore all the hats—preacher, janitor, youth director, immigration advocate.” —INDONESIAN LISTENING SESSION




“I’ve been serving without a call for years because the system didn’t know where to place someone like me.” —PAN-ASIAN LISTENING SESSION

“Lay leadership is a pillar in the Asian community ministry.” —THAI LISTENING SESSION



“We hope that more Lahu will know Jesus Christ.”
—LAHU LISTENING SESSION

¹ Source: ELCA 2024 Annual Congregational Report.



We believe that the Holy Spirit is at work among us and throughout our multicultural, multiracial and multigenerational communities. Our congregations are joyful and faith-filled spaces where we celebrate our histories, languages and cultures. Yet our API communities and lay leaders and rostered ministers experience institutional racism, tokenism and structural barriers against participating in decision-making. To grow and sustain API congregations and ministries, this church must develop culturally informed candidacy pathways that honor the unique callings of API leaders, and it must invest in advocacy and education that equips our people for meaningful, faithful leadership and bold witness.

We envision robust and growing API congregations and SAWCs, equitably equipped with resources to sustain thriving ministries; API lay leaders and rostered ministers who are engaged, connected and well-supported in mind, body, spirit and community; and stronger partnerships with transpacific, ecumenical, interfaith, non-API congregations to develop strategies to support API members.

Recommendations and key actions:

1. Engage in existing decision-making processes of churchwide units and offices regarding candidacy and call-and-mobility processes, including continued consultation with synod and churchwide staff, by the end of 2026.
2. Strategize synodical advocacy for API rostered ministers in the call-and-mobility process by the end of 2026.
3. Improve communication pathways so that API leaders are informed on synodical and churchwide processes by the end of 2027.
4. Provide API lay leaders and rostered ministers with education and training in advocacy for equity, with particular attention to strengthening leadership among youth and young adults, elders, women and members from underrepresented ethnic groups such as the Mara, Lahu, Thai and Tongan, by the end of 2027.
5. Strengthen lay leadership training on evangelism that incorporates the specific language, cultural and pedagogical considerations of the varied API communities by the end of 2027.
6. Collaborate with Lutheran Campus Ministry Network (LuMin), Asian campus ministries and youth/young-adult ministries to create second-generation leadership cohorts, rooted in cultural identity and public witness, by the end of 2028.
7. Launch a pilot mentorship, coaching and networking initiative in three synods, pairing API seminarians and lay leaders with experienced mentors and coaches across cultural contexts, by the end of 2029.
8. Revise, improve and develop specific strategies for new mission starts and existing SAWCs with a focus on multicultural, multiracial and multilingual congregations; second-generation API individuals; and communities with immigrant backgrounds by the end of 2030.
9. Develop intentional partnerships with and among transpacific partners, synods and non-API congregations with significant API members, to affirm and celebrate API identities, cultures and belonging, by the end of 2030.



II. THEOLOGY

**“My theology is shaped by my mother’s prayers and our refugee story.
That’s sacred too.” —PAN-ASIAN LISTENING SESSION**

Our cultural contexts and histories are gifts, and they reveal our relationship with God. For too long, our API communities have experienced Euro-American Lutheran theology as an oppressive tool for colonization and missionary work. We also recognize that theological education has often excluded API voices. This plan commits to co-developing pathways with seminaries to elevate contextual theology in academic and congregational spaces. We seek to reclaim Lutheran theology through an anticolonial and culturally grounded lens that honors and affirms our communities’ sacred worth. Given the growing body of work from API scholars and theologians and the deep spiritual resources of our communities, we know that API theology emerges from lived and embodied experiences, migration, memory and resilience, offering vital insight for the whole church.

We envision a multi-center API theology, emerging from our many origins, languages and cultures, that meets the spiritual and everyday needs of our communities.

Recommendations and key actions:

1. Engage current API theologians, scholars and lay leaders to identify spiritual and everyday needs of API communities by the end of 2026.
2. Partner with at least two ELCA seminaries in the United States to integrate API justice theology into curricula and field education by the end of 2027.
3. Publish more culturally informed materials and resources on theology for both academic and congregational settings by the end of 2030.
4. Develop strategic distribution of materials and resources, including audio and video, to seminaries, scholars and congregations by the end of 2030.
5. Create a video series or podcast platform featuring API theologians and storytellers for congregational use by the end of 2030.
6. Translate future and current publications into various languages, local contexts and devotional formats for small-group study by the end of 2030. This will include two resources by J. Paul Rajashekar—*Luther’s Small Catechism: An Exposition of the Christian Faith in Asian Contexts and Cultures*, and *On Being Lutheran: A Concise Introduction to the Lutheran Faith*—along with other key theological essays.



III. JUSTICE

“Sometimes it feels like we’re fighting to be seen in a church that says it’s already inclusive.” —SOUTH ASIAN LISTENING SESSION

“I didn’t know I could be queer and Asian and Christian until I found this church.” —PAN-ASIAN LISTENING SESSION

Our commitment to justice is both a calling and a communal act of faithfulness. We acknowledge API leaders and communities that have labored faithfully in the work of justice and the long history of resistance within the church and wider communities. Yet we also recognize the pervasiveness and persistence of systemic racism that marginalizes us, divides us and intentionally overlooks us and our stories. Additionally, many of us with intersecting identities related to age, ability, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and immigration status are further harmed, made invisible and provided with inequitable access to resources in our own communities and throughout the church. These inequities can be found in the candidacy and call-and-mobility processes: longer waits for a first call and subsequent calls, salaries that fall below guidelines for compensation and benefits, and limited institutional understanding of API people’s unique and varied histories and experiences. There are community tensions and challenges — relating to gender, gender expression, women’s empowerment, economic class, migration, ecological and environmental justice work, and intergenerational conflict — that remain unresolved in our own communities.

We envision a just church in which API individuals and communities experience radical belonging within and beyond our own communities. This radical belonging draws strength from our diverse identities and experiences, actively challenges the narratives that diminish us, and works in solidarity with broader movements for justice throughout the church and across all communities.

Recommendation and key actions:

1. Conduct a churchwide equity audit on the candidacy and mobility experiences of API leaders, with recommendations for reform, by September 2027.
2. Strengthen old events and create new ones to educate the church about API communities, their resilience and growth, and the concerns of API communities by the end of 2027.
3. Strategize and collaborate with other leaders from ELCA Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities on key processes and protocols such as candidacy, call and mobility, just compensation, etc., and strategize to grow lay leaders by the end of 2027.
4. Call on the church to offer a public confession and communal lament for its complicity in anti-Asian racism and erasure, accompanied by repentance and repair, at the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.
5. Develop culturally informed materials about gender justice, gender expression, racial solidarity and economic justice by the end of 2029.



IV. CULTURES AND CONNECTIONS

“Our culture teaches us to serve without being seen. That’s beautiful, but it also means we’re left out of decision-making.” –FILIPINO LISTENING SESSION



“I don’t see myself in the liturgy. Not just the language, but the rhythm, the tone — it feels foreign.”” –PAN-ASIAN YOUNG ADULT SESSION

“We need partners for resources and support to connect intergenerationally with our youth and children so together we navigate our faith journey intersecting with our cultures and identities.”” –TONGAN LISTENING SESSION



“We must affirm and strengthen Asian identity and sense of belonging.” –CHINESE LISTENING SESSION

Our strength as API communities lies in the richness of our many cultures and the deeply multigenerational and intergenerational relationships that bind us across land, place and time. We yearn for intentional spaces that foster pan-API connections, where cultural pride is welcomed, celebrated and honored. This hunger for relationships is systemically hindered by communication barriers, fragmented engagement and transactional relationships with the church. We seek connections with one another and the church that are rooted in mutual respect, accompaniment and shared mission. It is very important that sufficient financial support be given to strengthen our connections with one another and to celebrate our cultural gifts that contribute to the local and wider ministries.

We envision an API community, united in Christ, that embraces multiplicity as a source of collective strength and wisdom and whose powerful witness connects and transforms the church and the world.



Recommendation and key actions:

1. Create and implement communication strategies, including social media, that meaningfully engage API ELCA members, lay and rostered, within API-specific and non-API-specific congregations and ministries by the end of 2026.
2. Develop new opportunities for transpacific relations and partnership, theological reflections on shared concerns and ministry challenges, resource development for ministry, leadership development, and theological education by the end of 2027.
3. Strengthen pan-API engagement by establishing regional or synodical API cohorts and special-interest groups for peer learning, networking, worship collaboration and strategic planning around language, leadership and justice by the end of 2028.
4. Develop a relational organizing and story-based leadership tool kit, contextualized for API congregational and lay leaders, by the end of 2028.
5. Support equitable access to grants and financial and scholarship resources to cultivate the next generation of API leaders throughout all expressions of the church — congregations, synods and the churchwide organization — by the end of 2029.
6. Develop and distribute worship resources that reflect the diversity and the multilingual and cultural needs of API communities by the end of 2029.



STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS

We look forward to working with the following partners and collaborators to implement and fulfill these visions and key actions:

AAPI-ELCA

Asian and Pacific Islander-specific congregations and communities and their respective lay leaders and rostered ministers

Asian and Pacific Islander members and rostered ministers in non-API-specific, white or multicultural congregations

The Service and Justice Unit and relevant offices of Building Resilient Communities, Witness in Society, AMMPARO, Global Mission, and Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC), especially Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries, Service and Justice Unit, MDCC

The Christian Communities and Leadership Unit—especially directors for evangelical mission—relevant offices of New Ministry Development and Evangelism, Lay Schools Network, ELCA Young Adult Ministry, ELCA Campus Ministry Network, ELCA Coaching, Community Organizing

ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary

ELCA Innovation

ELCA synods

ELCA seminaries and colleges

ELCA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and ELCA Racial Justice

ELCA Development team

Ecumenical and full communion partners



