

FOR SUPPORTERS OF ELCA MINISTRIES

Summer 2026  
ELCA.org

STORIES OF CHRIST'S  
ABOUNDING LOVE AND GRACE

# Boundless



With your support, Micah 6 ministry is finding creative ways to care for our neighbors in Pontiac, Mich. — p. 8.



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America

**"Take my life that I may be consecrated,  
Lord, to thee; take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise."  
—"Take My Life, That I May Be" (ELW 583)**

## Dear friends,

Generosity is at the heart of who we are as a church. Even longer than we have been calling ourselves Lutherans, we have been answering Jesus' call to share what we have with our neighbors. Back in 1523, Luther proposed a community-funded "common chest" to care for the poor in his town. Together we have carried that legacy forward into the present day as we continue to find innovative ways to share God's abundance with all our siblings in Christ.

The idea that faith and generosity are intertwined probably isn't new to you. It wasn't new to me before I became presiding bishop of the ELCA – but I have understood it in different ways in my first few months in this role, as I have witnessed your generosity at work across our church and our world. I have had the privilege of watching your gifts grow and multiply, impacting lives and whole communities.

**Your contributions to ELCA ministries are so much more than simple donations – they are part of a cycle of generosity that is strengthening our entire fellowship.**

This issue of "Boundless" offers examples of just a few ways the gifts flowing from you are making new things possible. In Virginia, you created a stage where neurodivergent performers can share their unique talents with their community. In Brazil, you helped provide a few simple materials for a market stall – an awning, a skirt, a table – that has created a more stable future for one fisherwoman's family. In Philadelphia, you are creating space where people experiencing homelessness can bring forward their own faithful offerings. And through the Horizon International Internship program, you are walking alongside emerging leaders as they venture into the world to learn and to strengthen our global fellowship.

**Thank you** for the moments, days and gifts you have freely and faithfully given. Your generosity is flowing ceaselessly into communities all around us, creating joy, new life and even more faithful giving. I am honored to do this work with you.

With you in Christ's service,



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Yehiel Curry". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey circular background.

**YEHIEL CURRY**  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## HOW TO GIVE

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# oundless

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# Making Creative Dreams Come True

**W**hen Jennifer Quinones started to think about staging a musical with the members of her neurodivergent Creative Dreamers choir in Sterling, Va., she knew it would be a challenge. But Jennifer and the choir members had plenty of experience overcoming obstacles to make art together. With some help from donors such as you, and an ELCA Innovation grant, they were able to make their dream of a stage musical a reality this past fall.

Jennifer began the Creative Dreamers choir in 2022, in part to help her son, Gabe, develop a sense of community. Gabe is on the autism spectrum, and when he was younger, Jennifer says, he was “very hard to reach.” She remembers that one time, when he was just 7 or 8 months old, his godfather, Scott, held him in his arms and began singing “Over the Rainbow.” Usually Gabe was in constant motion, and he rarely made eye contact. But as Scott sang,

Gabe kept still and completely focused. Jennifer calls it a “God moment.” She knew then that she would connect with her son – and her son would connect with the world – through music.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gabe felt isolated. Jennifer looked for local music-therapy groups he might join, but the ones she found were extremely expensive. So Jennifer decided to start a choir that neurodivergent people could join for free. In the beginning, about eight singers came from across the community to rehearse every week at Community Lutheran Church in Sterling, where Jennifer serves as music director. Now the group has grown to include 34 dedicated members from ages 15 to over 50. It has become a place of creativity and community. “It’s more than just singing,” member Nicole Jappinen said. “It’s feeling understood, inspired and excited to grow.”

*With your support, the neurodivergent members of the Creative Dreamers choir presented the original musical The Gift. You helped build a stage where every member of the cast could share their unique gifts with the community.*



*Gabe Quinones – director  
Jennifer's son – played drums  
in the musical's live band.*



In addition to conducting the choir, Jennifer has done solo work with each member. Seeing how this helped choir members develop different skills and grow in confidence, she began to think, “Let’s take this a step further. Let’s try a musical.”

**“It’s more than just singing —  
it’s feeling understood,  
inspired and excited to grow.”**

**— Nicole Jappinen, Creative Dreamers choir member**

Jennifer applied for an Innovation grant from the ELCA because she knew she would need funding for curtains, lights, costumes and more. The grant allowed her to purchase and rent the supplies she needed, and the Innovation team helped her think through how to carry out the ambitious project. Jennifer also worked with an assistant, Bethany Alves, who is specially certified to work with people on the spectrum. She came up with creative ways to help participants learn choreography and blocking.

With your support, the Creative Dreamers presented their original musical, *The Gift*, in October 2025. Jennifer wrote the script with the talents and personality of each participant in mind. One cast member,

Kelly, had taken ballet classes and belonged to a ballet troupe when she was younger, so Jennifer wrote a dance solo into the show for her. Kelly started at the back of the audience, then danced toward the stage – just her, the music and a spotlight. “When she dances, every eye is on her because she feels every moment of it,” Jennifer says. She knows Kelly’s family appreciated “that we saw her and the talents she brought, and highlighted them in a way [that] showed her beauty and the beauty she had within her.” Really, that is what she strives for with Creative Dreamers.

Jennifer hopes there will be more musicals in the future. She also wants to empower groups in other areas to make music with the neurodivergent members of their communities. “We really think we’re on to something special here,” she says.

In addition to Creative Dreamers, Jennifer leads other choirs. Though the groups have different abilities and experiences, Jennifer is struck by their similarities. By connecting to the music, the singers connect to each other too. They all find joy in coming together to create something larger than themselves.

Through your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most, you connect to something larger as well. You support innovative ministries across the ELCA that create welcoming spaces for all our neighbors. Together we’re building a community where there’s room for everyone and all the gifts they offer.



*Creative Dreamers*

# Stronger

## After the Storm



*Celia Christina Machado de Carvalho*

*Rocheli Wachtolz, FLD*

**F**ishing is in Celia Christina Machado de Carvalho's blood – though it hasn't always been an easy way to make a living. Through your generosity to Lutheran Disaster Response, you have stuck with her through many challenges that have threatened her vocation.

Celia grew up in a coastal region of Brazil where fishing supports much of the community. Her parents were fishers, and they taught her their trade. She learned how to take their boat out and fish from the lagoon near her home. When she grew up and started a family of her own, she supported them by catching and selling fish.

She and her husband had to work hard to build and maintain their fishing business. Several years ago, a land dispute forced them and all their

neighbors to relocate from their coastal homes to the outskirts of the city. Celia and her husband had no way to store their fishing boat, so they had to sell it along with their cow and chickens. "It is not possible to be a fisherman in the city," she says.

Celia began working in construction, and her husband picked up odd jobs on commercial fishing boats, in fields and wherever else he could find them. After years of saving, they were able to buy another boat, relocate to a fishing village and finally support their family through fishing again.

Then, in 2025, Celia's community was hit by the worst flood in its history. Over 180 people died, and thousands had to leave their homes for weeks. The flood destroyed Celia's home and jeopardized the livelihood she and her husband shared.



*A historic flood destroyed Celia's home and put her livelihood as a fisher in jeopardy. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response have helped her to rebuild her business, making it stronger than before.*

In the wake of this disaster, your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response helped provide the community with hundreds of food baskets along with materials to build garden plots and market stands. A local partner program provided materials for Celia to build a market stall where she can sell fish and shrimp, as well as fish cakes and rissoles that she makes herself. She also sells grains, beans and other produce. All this has helped her to earn more and maintain an income in the offseason.

This sustainable income is crucial to Celia and her family as Brazil's fishing industry continues to experience unpredictable highs and lows. In recent years, more intense rains, winds and hailstorms have made fishing more difficult and dangerous. Celia has been studying these changes in an environmental management program at a nearby university. "Some spots where we used to catch fish a few years ago are now empty," she says. "This forces us to go further out, which increases costs and also poses greater risks for those who fish."

In addition, the limited fishing season forces fishers to sit idle for months. Many of them rely on government programs for support, but these programs are slow and inefficient. By the time Celia and her husband received their benefits, she says, "our bills were all overdue, and we had to figure out how to put food on the table."



*Celia and her family can no longer live in the home that was damaged by floodwaters.*

For Celia, it makes all the difference that you are walking alongside her, ensuring that she can support her family year-round. By helping to provide her with a few simple materials – an awning, a stall skirt, a wind banner – you also helped provide her with “a new opportunity to continue in the fishing industry with a better quality of life.”

Thank you for showing up for Celia and her neighbors after the flood – and for remaining with them in the days, months and years that follow.

# Your Gifts in Action: 2025 IN REVIEW



ELCA New Ministry Development and Evangelism Grants empowered **351** rural and urban ministries to explore new, innovative ways of serving their communities.

Communities in the Gather Network connected more than **1,000** young adults through **52** small groups across the ELCA.

*With support from donors such as you, Micah 6 ministry in Pontiac, Mich., is hosting worship services, growing vegetables, sharing food and school supplies with neighbors, and more.*

# Thank You!

The International Leaders Program provided scholarships for **182** students from **63** global companion churches to study at **126** colleges and universities.



*Thanks to your generosity to ELCA Where Needed Most, Laura Saravia (center) has been able to follow the Holy Spirit and serve her community in El Salvador as a deacon.*



Mahedere Yemoanfilm/ACT

Last year, ELCA World Hunger awarded **340 international grants** to partners in **59 countries**, as well as **142 Domestic Hunger Grants** and **665 Daily Bread Grants** throughout every ELCA synod.

*Your generosity to ELCA World Hunger helps farmers adapt to harsh, changing climates in countries such as Ethiopia. Some of the seedlings exchanged at this market will be planted to help revive degraded farmland for many years to come.*

Lutheran Disaster Response was at work in **52 countries** around the world and **35 states and territories** in the United States and the Caribbean, responding to hurricanes, tornadoes, conflict and migration.



*Sophia (right) sustained damage to her home in Monroe County, Miss., when it was hit by a tornado in 2023. Your gifts to Lutheran Disaster Response helped provide construction materials needed to repair her home and give her a safe place to live again.*



*Thanks to the support of donors such as you, participants in the Young Adults in Global Mission program have returned to Cambodia for the first time since 2020. You have made it possible for young adults such as Tim Hoffstaetter (second from left) to live, work and build relationships there.*

Y. Franklin Ishida

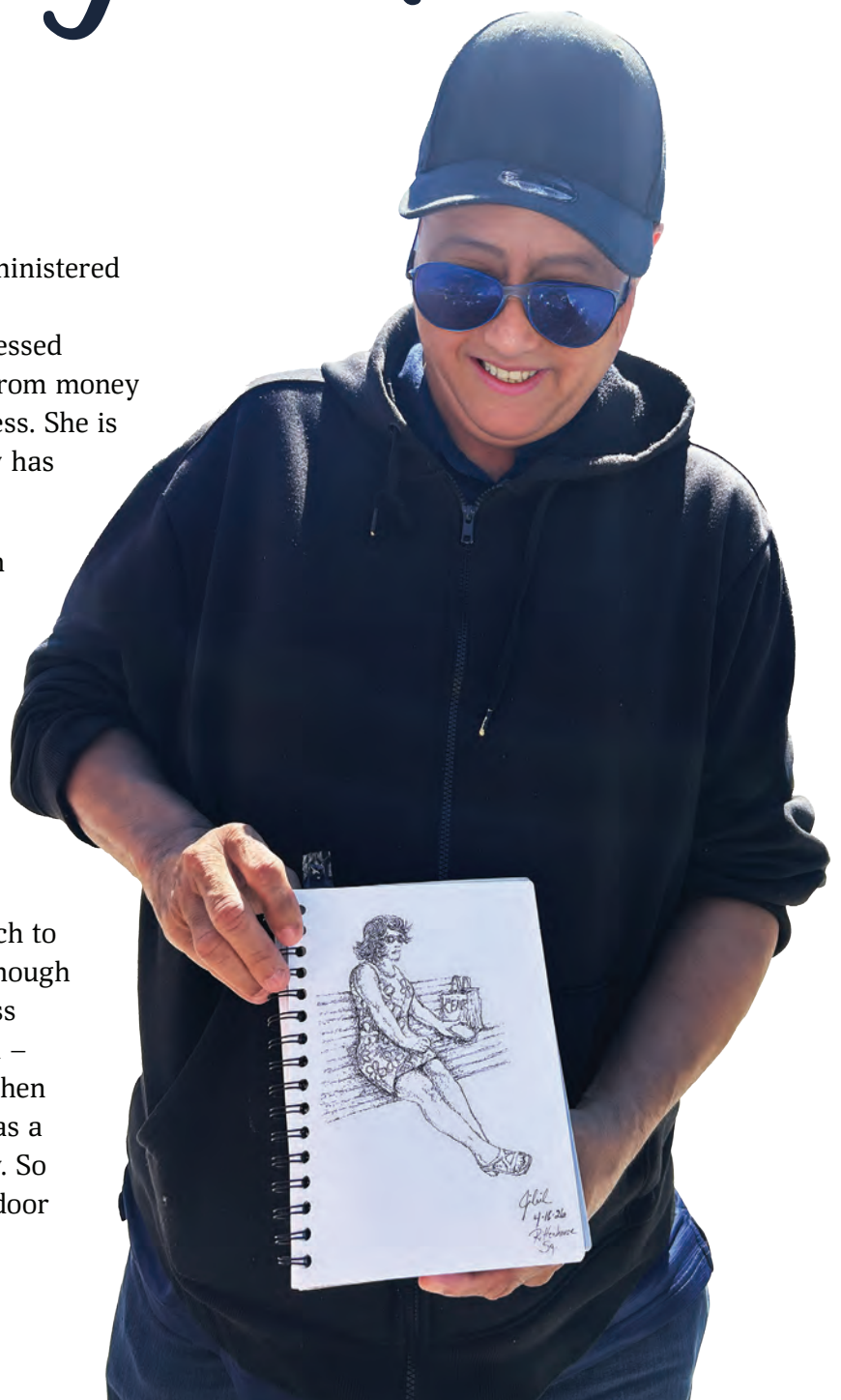
**68 long-term missionaries** were at work in **37 countries** around the world, and **24 YAGM volunteers** served in six country programs.

# "Everybody Has Something To Give"

**A**s the Rev. Violet Little has ministered among people experiencing homelessness, she has witnessed many kinds of offerings – from money to artwork to acts of kindness. She is reminded again and again that “everybody has something to give.”

Violet leads the Welcome Church, a church without walls for people experiencing homelessness and chronic poverty in Philadelphia, Pa. She began building relationships in this community over 30 years ago, while she was leading a traditional congregation.

When Violet’s first call ended and she was discerning what to do next, she found some space at a downtown Lutheran church to open the Welcome Center. It offered just enough room for people experiencing homelessness to use the bathroom and have a cup of tea – she didn’t intend to start a ministry. But when people visiting the center found out she was a pastor, they began asking for a Bible study. So Violet began leading Bible studies and outdoor worship services.





*Artist Jibril is a leader at the Welcome Church, a ministry for people experiencing homelessness and chronic poverty in Philadelphia, Pa. Your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most have sustained this ministry and given Jibril a place to flourish as an artist and an individual.*

Then Violet connected with the ELCA's Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod and learned, to her surprise, that she was a mission developer: a leader exploring innovative ways to minister to new people in a specific community. Thanks to the support of donors such as you, the synod was able to invest in Violet's leadership. Her organically grown ministry became a synod-authorized worshipping community, and her work there became a call.

With your support, the Welcome Church facilitates weekly Bible studies led by people in the community and hosts an outdoor worship service every Sunday. It also provides art therapy, hosts a winter women's shelter, leads knitting circles, serves coffee to people at the local public transit station and does whatever else it can to meet the needs of the unhoused community in Philadelphia. "As soon as there's a





little bit of trust,” Violet explains, “the first thing people want to do is give back. The best thing we can do is to set up a place to receive the gifts.”

One Welcome Church member finding creative ways to give back to the community is Jibril. He started coming to Bible studies a few years ago, after a series of devastating losses in his personal life ultimately cost him his house. He didn’t say much at first, but Violet noticed him doodling on scraps of paper. Over time, she learned that Jibril had gone to art school – but in his grief, he had lost his ability to use many of the techniques he learned there.

“If you really believe you are unconditionally loved, that grace is freely given and not earned, that changes your life.”



As Jibril kept coming back to the Welcome Church, he found himself again, as both an artist and a person. He became a leader in the community, assisting with weekly coffees at the public transit station and representing the Welcome Church at the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod assembly. He has started using more vibrant techniques in his art, which Violet sees as a sign that “his world is expanding.” This past year, Jibril worked with the ELCA’s Homeless and Justice Network to illustrate its Lenten devotional “Beauty for Ashes.” These days, Jibril can draw and paint inside because he has found a stable place to live.

Violet credits Jibril’s turnaround to the power of God’s grace, which she has seen moving in her community many times. Welcome Church



ASH WEDNESDAY  
Principle 1: Community is vital to all that we do.



LENT, WEEK 2  
Principle 3: God loves all people, no matter what.

*Jibril illustrated the Lenten devotional "Beauty for Ashes," which was produced by the ELCA's Homeless and Justice Network.*

staff and volunteers support the ministry's members in many ways. They help people to fill out paperwork so they can access resources that will provide them with safety and stability. The Welcome Church also leads advocacy efforts to demand justice for unhoused people at an institutional level. Yet Violet sees the biggest impact when members start to heal and feel good about themselves: "If you really believe you are unconditionally loved, that grace is freely given and not earned, that changes your life.

"When anybody's life is changed for the better, it affects all of us," she says. Through your generosity to ELCA Where Needed Most, you support ministries such as the Welcome Church, which are transforming the lives of our neighbors through the power of God's love. In turn, those neighbors are giving back to their communities, which makes our whole church richer.

# An International Leap of Faith



Yet the unknowns that made Katrina's Horizon year scary in the beginning also helped make it fulfilling. Making new friends and learning new things from global church leaders widened her perspective. "There are many creative ways to do church," she remarks. "Our collective impact is stronger than trying to go it alone."

Katrina worked as a nurse for many years before sensing a call to ministry, which led her to pursue a Master of Divinity degree at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. For her final year of study, she entered the Horizon International program, which is supported by your gifts to ELCA Where Needed Most. Horizon interns live and work with a companion church at an international site for an entire academic year and gain a deeper understanding of what it means to minister to others as part of a global church. Your generosity helps provide ELCA seminary students with an opportunity to have their ministry shaped by the witness of the world.

During her year abroad, Katrina – like most ELCA pastors – had multiple roles. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, she provided hospitality and chaplaincy alongside an interfaith team at the Oasis Chaplain Hospitality Space at the University of Nottingham. The rest of the week, she served a small international congregation at Trinity Lutheran Church Leicester-Nottingham. She also assisted the bishop of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain.

Through these varied responsibilities, Katrina witnessed firsthand how God works across cultures and denominations. Her vision of

**W**hen Katrina Bentsen first arrived in Nottingham, England, as a Horizon International intern in summer 2024, she, her husband and her two daughters faced a new world. Her children needed to enroll in school; the whole family needed a place to live and new routines to shape their daily lives. In her first newsletter to those supporting her international journey, Katrina described "an unsettling state of Limbo" during the family's first few weeks in England.



*"There are many creative ways to do church. ... Our collective impact is stronger than trying to go it alone."*

that she had truly grown to love Nottingham, her congregation and the friends her family had made.

Now ordained and serving Trinity Lutheran Church in Freeland, Wash., she reflects that she will be "feeling the impacts of internship forever." The experience continues to shape her commitment to ecumenical, interfaith and international collaboration. She is deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn and serve in a global setting.

When you give to ELCA Where Needed Most, you provide educational opportunities for emerging leaders such as Katrina – and so much more. Your generosity fosters resilient, globally minded Lutheran leaders who are prepared to serve the church and strengthen our international fellowship for decades to come.

collaborative ministry has been expanded by the international identity of the Lutheran Church in Great Britain and the strong ecumenical partnerships in the United Kingdom, which include collaboration with Church of England, Pentecostal, Free Church and Orthodox communities. "I learned about context," she says. "I also learned a lot about faith and trusting in God to make a way."

The year shaped her in quieter ways as well. Navigating daily life without a car, building relationships across cultures and raising her children in a new country required patience and humility. She described how the slower pace snapped her "out of rushing and instant results" and how living abroad helped her better understand the vulnerability many immigrants experience.

When the time came for her to say goodbye to England, Katrina wrote in her final newsletter that she was "an emotional mess." She reflected



*With your support, Katrina Bentsen completed her final year of seminary study in Nottingham, England, as a Horizon International intern. Through your generosity, you help to form globally minded leaders and strengthen our community of faith across countries, cultures and denominations.*

# Boundless

Summer 2026

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
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*Gabe Quinones helped inspire his mom to create the Creative Dreamers choir for neurodivergent performers. Learn more about the group and its original musical, The Gift, on p. 4.*