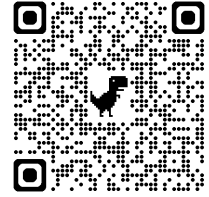




# ELCA Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities



Quarterly Report: **Q2 2026**  
June 2026

*The Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC) team assists the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in becoming more culturally diverse and anti-racist by working with ELCA congregations, synods, churchwide colleagues, communities, agencies, and institutions. Within the ELCA, the MDCC team strives to accomplish the shared goal of full partnership and participation of people from African Descent, African National, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, Indigenous, and Latino communities in the life of this church.*

*Sincerely in Christ,*

**Tammy Jackson**, MDCC Senior Director, ELCA Service & Justice Unit

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- **Multicultural Gathering:** Planning is underway for the 2027 Multicultural Gathering (Jan. 20-22 in Minneapolis, MN), which will be held in partnership with [Extravaganza 2027](#). The first planning meeting was held virtually on June 8. The planning team is comprised of MDCC Staff, Bishop Phyllis Blair Milton (Virginia Synod), Community Representatives Cetera Jacobs (North Carolina Synod), Shannon Klescewski (Alaska Synod), Josh Lee (Sierra Pacific Synod), Luis Vazquez (Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod), Gabriel Wounded Head (South Dakota Synod), Jamil Zoughbi (Northeastern Iowa Synod), and Stephanie Monjatiana (Delaware-Maryland Synod).
  - **Sharing Stories:** [Living Lutheran](#) continued highlighting ministries and leaders of color through numerous published stories including a Palestinian Christian pastor's reflections on recent travel bans, three Japanese-Americans' personal ties to internment camps and an Indigenous pastor's reframing of faith practices that's attracting new audiences and demanding an increased coffee budget. These stories and more are listed and linked at the end of this report.
  - **Current Searches:** Open searches continue for leadership roles in African Descent and African National Ministries, Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, as well as Latino Ministries.

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## Ministry Highlights:

### African Descent & African National Ministries (AD/AN)

- **Leadership Transition:** Following the retirement of [Rev. Dr. Joseph Bocko](#) in January 2026, African Descent and African National (AD/AN) Ministries were combined under one leadership position.
- **Scholarships Provided:** The AD/AN program budget is providing scholarship support for five of its community leaders to attend the ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering this July in Indianapolis, IN.
- **Leadership Search:** The ELCA Service & Justice Unit is currently seeking a new AD/AN director for MDCC. Visit the [ELCA Careers page](#) for additional details. [Click here for the full job description.](#)
- **Strategic Approach:** The new director will be expected to oversee implementation of the AD/AN strategies, strengthen congregations, support leadership development, facilitate justice work and

maintain connections with ministry networks, the African diaspora, as well as ecumenical and full communion partners.

- **Call for Applicants:** Applications for the new, unified director role must be submitted via the job posting linked above by July 4, 2026.

### Arab & Middle Eastern Ministries (AME)



- **Salam Radio:** Rev. Charbel Zgheib launched the first Arabic-speaking ecumenical Christian radio station, currently hosted at Christ Lutheran Church in Staten Island, NY. Supported by ELCA Innovation, programming includes faith formation, discipleship, mental health, immigration concerns and community dialogue, bringing together Catholic, Orthodox, Episcopal and Protestant voices. [Click here to stream Salam Radio.](#)
- **Breaking Ground:** Development began for [Our Lady of Salam](#), a new worshipping community in Staten Island, NY.
- **Leadership Development:** Jamil and Claudine Zoughbi completed their studies at Wartburg Theological Seminary and will begin internships with the Upstate New York Synod this fall, focusing on ministry among AME communities in and around Albany.
- **Advocacy:** Rev. Khader Khalilia participated in the [Churches for Middle East Peace](#) conference in Washington, DC, serving on an interfaith panel discussing Palestine and Israel. He also delivered the keynote address at the Sierra Pacific Synod's regional gathering, which focused on the Holy Land and challenges faced by Palestinian Christians.
- **Public Witness:** Khalilia, Rev. Mitri Raheb, president of Dar al-Kalima University, and Sasha Siminoff, program director for the Middle East and North Africa in Witness in Society, met with members of Congress and executive branch officials regarding the declining presence and persecution of Christians in the Holy Land.
- **East Jerusalem:** Dr. Fadi Al-Atrash, CEO of Augusta Victoria Hospital, Khalilia and Siminoff advocated with members of Congress on behalf of the East Jerusalem Hospital Network (EJHN), which is comprised of six facilities functioning as primary centers for providing specialized healthcare to the people in Palestine. These efforts made it into the [House Appropriations Committee's FY2027 report](#): "The Committee supports the work of the East Jerusalem Hospital Network and encourages the Secretary to consider providing funds for the East Jerusalem Hospital Network, consistent with the Taylor Force Act and in consideration of the national security interests of the United States."

## Asian & Pacific Islander Ministries (API)



Photo: Courtesy of Stacy Kitahata

The Kitahata family and others stand in front of a barracks in the detention camp. Stacy Kitahata's father stands on the lowest step, second from left. Her grandfather is behind him in the dark suit.

- **Leadership Development:** Indonesian leaders met to prepare for the new Indonesian Asian Cohort on Theological Studies (ACTS) for Evangelists and Leaders. Numerous consultations followed with Christian Community and Leadership evangelism staff, directors for evangelical mission from four synods and seminaries. ACTS was developed as a lay ministry formation program for participating synods, engaging leaders in theological studies through Asian perspectives, languages and ministry contexts in the United States for generations to come.
- **Accompaniment:** API consulted with synods on new Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities, leaders entering seminary or TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) and provided support and preaching leadership for installations of new API rostered ministers.
- **Gender Justice:** API observed International Women's Month for the third consecutive year through virtual liturgies, storytelling and truth-telling. Three API women reflected on ministry, raised awareness of LGBTQIA issues in their congregations, explored the meaning of justice for Asian women and issued a call for solidarity in church and society. Participants also shared their vision of API Gender Justice and four recommended action plans for broader collective implementation.
- **Public Policy:** In May, API leaders visited the Lutheran Office of Public Policy in Sacramento, CA, strengthening connections between API and Witness in Society ministries and expanding engagement on immigration.
- **Strategic Planning:** On April 16, Church Council affirmed the new API strategy, expressed gratitude for the ministries and API community contributions, recommending congregations work with the ELCA on shared implementation for collectively responding to a changing world through faithful discipleship. [Click here to read the plan.](#)
- **Heritage Month:** API commemorated the 80th anniversary of Japanese Americans' release from incarceration camps with a Day of Remembrance and a three-part [Living Lutheran series](#) featuring

Gail Kiyomura, Rev. Deanna Kim Bassett and Stacy Kitahata. On May 23, Hannah Limbong and Jenny Lee hosted a virtual discussion titled, "Bold Witness of Young Adults."

- **Hmong Commemoration:** API commemorated the 50th anniversary of the largest arrival of Hmong refugees to the United States. Stories highlighting Hmong communities are in development.
- **Resources:** The Chinese edition of Luther's Small Catechism: An Exposition of the Christian Faith in Asian Contexts and Cultures was released by Taosheng Publishing House for distribution in Asia and North America.

### Indigenous Ministries & Tribal Relations (ITR)



- **Theological Education:** Eight Indigenous leaders received their Certificate of [Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders \(TEIL\)](#) on May 23. Bishop Jeff Johnson, Sierra Pacific Synod, delivered the commencement to the first graduating class at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Berkeley, CA. The first-of-its-kind cohort included lay leaders and one ordained pastor serving Indigenous ministries across the country. The TEIL program began in October 2023 as an alternative model to traditional Lutheran theological education.
- **Alaska Synod Assembly:** Shannon Klescewski (Inupiaq, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Nome, AK) and Deb Nyquist (Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Christ Lutheran Church, Soldotna, AK) led the Bible study on day two of the Alaska Synod Assembly in April. Following the lighting of a seal oil lamp, participants studied Proverbs 21 using the First Nations edition of Psalms and Proverbs and each congregation received a copy of the resource. Leaders also encouraged observance of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives Day on May 5.
- **Truth Initiative:** The Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative, a working group of the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery Task Force, prepared the workshop "Truth Telling about Indian Boarding Schools" for the [Rostered Ministers Gathering](#) in July. Participants examined the history of Indian boarding schools, the role of Lutheran predecessor bodies and archival work related to Bethany Indian Mission and School in Wittenberg, WI. Small-group discussions explored the historical relationships between communities and boarding schools, as well as meaningful ways to observe the National Day of Remembrance on Sept. 30.
- **Community Building:** Woyatan Lutheran Church in Rapid City, SD, and Dacotah Oyate in Spirit Lake, ND, planned a June retreat at Outlaw Ranch to strengthen relationships, share ministry experiences and explore ways to support one another. The ministries share tribal connections across two different states. Leaders from Dacotah Oyate also planned a two-day visit to the Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center to learn more about its ministry on the Pine Ridge Reservation.
- **Ministry Review:** At the invitation of the Montana Synod director for evangelical mission, Reverends Wanda Frenchman and Miguel Gomez-Acosta will participate in a ministry site review for Our Saviour's Lutheran Church on the Rocky Boy Reservation in Box Elder, MT, on June 24.

### Latino Ministries (LM)



- **Congratulations:** After more than 17 years of incredible and dedicated service leading the ELCA Latino Ministries (LM) program, Rev. Hector Carrasquillo has retired! We warmly welcome you to share your gratitude and well wishes with him by signing his virtual card. [Click here to sign.](#)
- **Young Adults:** Twenty-three Latino young adults representing synods and ministry contexts across the country participated in the Multicultural Young Adult Leadership Gathering. For many, it was their first churchwide ELCA event and an opportunity to better understand the connections between local, synodical and churchwide ministries. Participants explored leadership development, multicultural ministry, digital evangelization, community engagement and the future of young adult ministry, while expressing a desire for continued collaboration and greater representation throughout the church.
- **Digital Ministry:** Following the Digital Outreach and Faith Formation series, LM began planning a second phase focused on digital evangelization, online discipleship, AI-assisted ministry resources, Latino community education and ethical uses of technology. The initiative aims to strengthen Christian education, discipleship and community engagement within Latino contexts.
- **Continuing Formation:** Under the leadership of Claudia K. Santos Serrano and other emerging leaders, a six-month meeting initiative was scheduled to strengthen communication, share ministry models and best practices, identify challenges and opportunities, encourage leadership development and increase participation in churchwide and synodical gatherings.
- **Future Development:** LM began exploring the creation of a pilot cohort and a network of leaders who could receive training and coaching, share successful practices, collaborate across synods and develop culturally relevant digital resources for Latino communities throughout the ELCA.

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### Feature Story:



### Mission & Ministry: Salam Radio Station Launches

[By Joan Pinnell](#)

Community leaders, clergy and public officials gathered March 14 at Christ Lutheran Church of Staten Island, NY, to officially launch the Salam Radio Station, the first Arabic Christian ecumenical online media platform in the United States.

The launch comes as violence and conflict in and with the Middle East dominate global headlines. But organizers say Salam Radio is designed to amplify a different story—one of faith, resilience and unity among Arabic-speaking Christians whose voices are often overlooked or demonized by American media outlets.

“Salam Radio is more than just a station. It is a voice,” said Khader Khalilia, program director for Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries for the Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC) team. In keeping with MDCC’s mission to support and empower diversity in the church, he applauded the initiative founded by Charbel Zgheib, pastor of Salam Arabic Church in Brooklyn, NY, that gives a voice to the voiceless, specifically: “a voice for the Arabic Christian community. A voice of faith, hope, encouragement and connection.”

Zgheib initiated conversations about starting the new platform during the COVID-19 shutdown. The pandemic had forced him to gain new skills and familiarity with online communication platforms, which had effectively sustained his connections with church members. He felt inspired to think bigger and expand his reach. But he first wanted to know for what purpose: Who else might benefit from his faith-focused messaging? Who else needed to feel empowered in their faith? Who currently lacked access to a dynamic Arabic-speaking Christian community like the one he serves?

Khalilia remembers Zgheib sharing the full scope of his “ambitious” plan after extensive research and countless meetings with church leaders and industry experts: Launching a full digital media platform would require funding, technical infrastructure and broad institutional support.

“God will provide,” Khalilia remembers Zgheib saying.

**Read More:** [Click here to read the full story in \*Living Lutheran\*.](#)



Photo: Joe Chahwan

Charbel Zgheib (right), pastor of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., provides a tour of Salam Radio Station’s studio to Philip Hirsch, bishop of the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod. On March 14, community leaders, clergy and public officials gathered at Christ Lutheran Church in Staten Island, N.Y., for the official launch of the station ([salamgroup.co/radio](http://salamgroup.co/radio)), the first Arabic Christian ecumenical online media platform in the United States. For organizers, the station is a voice for the Arabic Christian community—a voice of faith, hope, encouragement and connection. For a longer version of this story, search for “Salam Radio Station launches” at [livinglutheran.org](http://livinglutheran.org).

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## More Stories:

### 4/20/26 - [Welcome Others Fully](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"When you turn a whole community into the bad guy, it doesn't just block travel, it deepens fear and isolation. I'm trying to pastor people through that pain while carrying it myself, and I'm praying for the day families can reunite without suspicion."

### 5/5/26 - [They Called It "Camp"](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"It's your currency as an American," she said. Her father took back his autonomy and freedom with every ballot cast.

### 5/8/26 - [Wanda Frenchman Wants You to Rethink Worship](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"A lot of them think it's white man's Jesus ... a white man's church," Frenchman said. "They don't even try to come to church. They don't even think it's an option for them."

### 5/13/26 - [What Freedom Requires](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"They had four hours," Bassett said. "Four hours to decide what to take, what to leave, and not knowing how long they'd be gone or even where they would go."

### 5/18/26 - [Salam Radio Station Launches](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Mission & Ministry*

"Salam Radio is more than just a station. It is a voice," said Khader Khalilia, program director for Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries for the Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC) team.

### 5/28/26 - [Worship Without Erasure](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"There is ... the hunger to belong." But belonging is not assimilation, and acceptance cannot come at the cost of culture.

### 5/29/26 - [Shared Experiences: Connecting history to current events](#)

#### *Living Lutheran: Voices of Faith*

"Why do all people need to know their own story?" she asked. "Because in knowing and telling their own stories ... we can see how our stories intersect. And that helps us to connect."

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## Closing Notes / Future Hopes:

*MDCC is actively contributing to the ELCA's cultural diversity and anti-racist commitments through shared events, strategic planning, ministry support, and leadership development. We appreciate your attention to our efforts and thank you in advance for your continued support. We cannot continue this invaluable, faith-focused work without your partnership.*

**Questions?** Please contact [tammy.jackson@elca.org](mailto:tammy.jackson@elca.org). Thank you.