

NORTHWEST SYNOD OF WISCONSIN
2025 Partnership Ministry Reports
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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"We have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." —1 John 4:16

April 2025

Dear friends in Christ,

Thank you for your dedication and faithfulness, as together we continue to share God's love throughout the world.

During the past year and a half, I had the privilege to gather with many of you at our God's Love Made Real regional conversations. Connecting with you during these events was extremely inspiring as we heard about the many ways God's love is being made real in communities across this church.

Among the stories that were shared, we heard about a congregation's "bold" decision to reconstruct a food pantry to help increase the capacity to serve more people, a Christmas in July celebration for a single mom and her five children experiencing homelessness, a Queer youth poetry open mic event described by one pastor as a tangible experience of God's Love Made Real, a partially gutted parsonage that was renovated to provide long-term housing for survivors of human trafficking, and an ecumenical ministry group that developed a community center that feeds people with meals and spiritual connections.

Our vision of a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation is being made manifest in these ministries, but these are only a few examples of what's happening throughout our church. I know this is work your congregations do every day, and I thank you for helping people know the way of Jesus to discover community, justice and love.

The world around us is changing, and our church will also experience change with the election of a new presiding bishop and a new secretary at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly this summer. Many of you will be electing a new synod bishop and other leaders.

Amid these changes, our call remains the same: to love and serve others as Jesus taught. Our church will continue our work to proclaim the gospel and to serve all of God's people.

It has been a privilege to serve as your presiding bishop. May God continue to hold us and guide us into the future.

In Christ,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



*"Y nosotros hemos llegado a saber y creer que Dios nos ama. Dios es amor.
El que permanece en amor, en Dios permanece y Dios en él" – 1 Juan 4:16*

Abril de 2025

Estimados amigos en Cristo:

Gracias por su dedicación y fidelidad, en tanto que juntos seguimos compartiendo el amor de Dios en todo el mundo.

Durante el pasado año y medio tuve el privilegio de reunirme con muchos de ustedes en nuestras conversaciones regionales de El Amor de Dios Hecho Realidad. El habernos conectado con ustedes durante estos eventos fue sumamente inspirador, ya que oímos de las muchas formas en que el amor de Dios se está haciendo realidad en las comunidades de esta iglesia.

Entre las historias que se compartieron, escuchamos sobre la decisión "audaz" que tomó una congregación de reconstruir una despensa de alimentos para ayudar a aumentar la capacidad de servir a más personas, una celebración de Navidad en julio para una madre soltera sin hogar y sus cinco hijos, un evento de micrófono abierto de poesía juvenil queer que un pastor describió como una experiencia tangible de El Amor de Dios Hecho Realidad, una casa parroquial parcialmente destruida que fue renovada para proporcionar vivienda a largo plazo a sobrevivientes de la trata de personas, y un grupo ministerial ecuménico que desarrolló un centro comunitario que alimenta a las personas con comidas y conexiones espirituales.

Nuestra visión de un mundo que experimenta la diferencia marcada por la gracia y el amor de Dios en Cristo en todas las personas y la creación está siendo manifestada en estos ministerios, pero estos son solo algunos ejemplos de lo que está sucediendo en toda nuestra iglesia.

Sé que este es el trabajo que sus congregaciones hacen todos los días, y les doy gracias por ayudar a las personas a conocer el camino de Jesús para que descubran la comunidad, la justicia y el amor.

El mundo a nuestro alrededor está cambiando, y nuestra iglesia también experimentará cambios con la elección de un nuevo obispo presidente y un nuevo secretario en la Asamblea Nacional de 2025 este próximo verano. Muchos de ustedes elegirán a un nuevo obispo sinodal y a otros líderes.

En medio de estos cambios, nuestro llamado sigue siendo el mismo: amar y servir a los demás como Jesús enseñó. Nuestra iglesia continuará su obra para proclamar el Evangelio y servir a todo el pueblo de Dios.

Ha sido un privilegio haber servido como su Obispa Presidente. Que Dios nos siga sosteniendo y guiando hacia el futuro.

En Cristo,

La Rvda. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Obispa Presidente
Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América



Mission Investment Fund

The Mission Investment Fund: Empowering communities with financial services



For more than 150 years, the Mission Investment Fund (MIF), a *financial services ministry of the ELCA*, has been a **steady and reliable financial partner** for congregations, ministries and individuals. Through times of growth and uncertainty alike, MIF has remained committed to strengthening ministries and communities through customer-centric support and flexible financial resources.

In 2024, MIF continued to support ministry growth across the ELCA. Your investments helped expand worship spaces, create new education and youth ministry areas, fund schools and programming for the next generation, start green projects and support accessibility remodeling for community spaces. These projects ensure that ELCA ministries remain welcoming, inclusive and equipped to serve their communities.

By the Numbers:

- **Total Loans Outstanding:** \$610,534,000
- **Total Investment Obligations:** \$547,491,000
- **Total Assets:** \$774,550,000
- **Net Assets & Capital Ratio:** 27.5%

Why Is MIF the Right Choice?

- **Proven Stability:** With over a century and a half of experience, MIF has weathered changing economic and political landscapes, maintaining financial strength for ELCA ministries.
- **Deep Expertise in Church and Ministry Financing:** We understand the unique needs of faith communities and have longstanding experience in congregation and ministry-building projects.
- **Competitive Rates and Terms:** Our financial offerings are structured to support ministries of all sizes.
- **A Full Suite of Financial Services:** In partnership with the ELCA Federal Credit Union, we provide a range of financial solutions for congregations, ministries, and individuals.
- **Faithful Stewardship:** Investments in MIF directly support loans that fund hundreds of capital projects across the church.

With 2025, MIF has entered a new era of modernization—enhancing our tools and financial services to better support ELCA ministries. While embracing innovation, we remain rooted in the trust and stability that have defined us for generations. Through every season, we stand with ELCA members, congregations, and ministries, walking together in faith and financial stewardship.

MIF at work in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin (as of December 31, 2024):

- 9 Mission Investment Fund loans, with a balance of \$3,308,633
- \$6,038,325 in Mission Investment Fund investment obligations

For more information about MIF capabilities, please visit our website, mif.elca.org
or contact your Regional Manager, LuAnn Ferguson: 773-380-1708 luann.ferguson@elca.org

The Impact of Our Benefits

Portico Benefit Services' Report to 2025 Synod Assemblies

As the ELCA's benefit ministry, Portico is dedicated to helping our rostered ministers and church professionals live holistically healthy lives, so they can serve others with confidence and grace. Here is a visual recap of what our community of over 52,000 plan members experienced in 2024.

52,067

Members served by Portico



2,998

Text/Virtual Health Care Visits

To 98point6®, and 699 of these were ELCA-Primary plan members new to our text-based primary care service.



198

Births & Adoptions

10th

Consecutive Year

Of our Customer Care Center being named a Center of Excellence by Benchmark Portal.



518

*Changes of Call**

1,199

Sword Health Enrollments

And nearly 26K total sessions in their Thrive, Move, and Bloom digital physical therapy and mobility programs.

\$199K

Debt Paid Off

By members via LSS of Minnesota Financial Counseling, with over \$2.4M paid off since 2008.

15.17%

of Member Income

Saved for retirement, on average, by members sponsored in the Traditional Benefits Program, thanks to employer and member contributions.*

\$209M

Made in Annuity Payments

And 515 retirements.



39

*Beginning Disability Benefits***

16K

Members and Employers Invited to Participate

In our Benefits reExamined surveys, with more than 4,100 responses.*



Nearly 10% of Our 10K ELCA Medicare-Primary Plan Members

Participated in the SilverSneakers fitness program with an average of 8 visits to a fitness center per month.*

We design our benefits to align with the needs of the church and seek to provide accessible support that enhances and improves everyday living and brings value to those who serve.

*Source: Traditional Benefits Program. All other numbers and percentages are drawn from across Portico's benefit programs.

**Total as of 2023; 2024 disability claims numbers have not been finalized.



Thank you for taking the time to learn about the ministry of Region 5 as you prepare for and engage in the business of your synod assembly. This synod joins with eleven other synods in Wisconsin, Upper Michigan, Iowa, and Illinois to form Region 5: one of the 9 regions across the ELCA.

As a region, your synod bishop, staff, and other leaders gather with their colleagues throughout the year. These gatherings are a way for them to support and pray with one another; and to share their ideas, experience and expertise with one another to faithfully minister in your synod. The twelve bishops, along with the regional candidacy manager, make up a regional steering committee. Their collegiality is important in establishing great working partnerships for years to come.

The Region 5 steering committee affirmed in 2023 to work together to provide a 3 year cycle of professional ethics education-aka Boundaries Education. This 3 year cycle began in 2024 with a basic professional boundaries education event for rostered ministers and synod authorized lay leaders. Approximately 1,000 rostered ministers gathering at over 40 locations across the region engaged in this day of worship and learning. In 2025, we will focus on gender justice for our shared learning day, and the third focused topic in this rotation is racial justice, slated for 2026.

Region 5 continues to gather bishops and staff in the region on an annual basis for shared support, learning, worship and fellowship. In 2024, we gathered in Madison, WI for resource sharing and collaborations for mobility, holy closure conversations, leadership support of licensed lay leaders and synod authorized ministers, first call placement, and more. As candidacy and leadership manager for region 5, most of my time is spent working alongside synod candidacy committees. "Candidacy" is the term used to describe our process of forming and preparing people to serve as a pastor or deacon in the ELCA. Ministry also includes training for new candidacy staff and volunteer committee members in your synod.

As a region, we also share in the care of archival records. Region 5 archives are housed at Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, Iowa. Our archivist, Sue Dodd, collects records of and responds to inquiries concerning synods, deceased rostered personnel, and dissolved congregations within region 5. This work both preserves institutional records and documents the historical record of the institution within the context of the larger world. As congregations in the region make decisions to close, Sue is a resource to you in determining what records to save and how to transfer them to the archives. Thank you for your synod's participation in this shared ministry and for the privilege to serve among you.

Rev. Ramie L. Bakken, Candidacy and Leadership Manager ramie.bakken@elca.org
Sue Dodd, Region 5 Archivist sdodd@wartburgseminary.edu



2024 Annual Report to the Synods

*Wartburg College is dedicated to challenging and nurturing students
for lives of leadership and service as a spirited expression of their faith and learning.*

Guided by our vision, we are answering the call to prepare resilient leaders of positive change for service in a complex world. This will be realized by building on our distinctives and embracing new opportunities to be the leading institution in educating the whole person.

Enrollment and Student Success

- Fall 2024 undergraduate enrollment was 1,452 students from 38 U.S. states and 39 countries, which includes 184 U.S. students of color and 70 international students. More than 20 Christian denominations and several world religions are represented. Twenty-one students are enrolled in the online Master of Arts in Leadership.
- The five majors with the highest enrollment are business administration, biology, exercise science, elementary education, and music education.
- To amplify focus on the first-year experience as a key indicator in student persistence and success, Wartburg partnered with Credo, a higher education consulting firm, to participate in a five-year initiative called Moving the Needle. With the support and guidance of the Credo team, Wartburg faculty and staff will identify, further develop, and implement impactful practices to improve student retention.
- Alumni & Career Connections, a new partnership between Wartburg's Advancement and Student Life divisions, will optimize alumni engagement toward student success. Ignited by a \$1 million gift from Mike and Marge McCoy, the initiative includes a new mentoring platform, Knight Nation, and intentional programming to help students explore opportunities for their future while leveraging our alumni base.

Strategic Positioning

- Starting in fall 2024, the college launched the Wartburg Commitment, a new pricing model and value proposition designed to help students consider, afford, and experience Wartburg College. The comprehensive program includes a new competitive price, reduced financial barriers for lower- and middle-income families, and funding to increase access to immersive experiences.
- Wartburg received a \$2.3 million gift from the John Sauer '78 estate to grow the Knight's Experience Fund, a new endowed fund that helps offset the cost of experiential learning opportunities for all Wartburg students.

Academic and Co-Curricular Programs

- Wartburg was one of 25 schools and the only one in Iowa to earn a Carnegie Elective Classification for Leadership for Public Purpose. The classification acknowledges colleges and universities that have committed to campuswide efforts to advance leadership in pursuit of public goods such as justice, equity, diversity, and liberty. The designation is presented by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the American Council on Education, and the Doerr Institute for New Leaders at Rice University.
- Wartburg announced two new online graduate programs in health and human performance — a Master of Science in sport science and data analytics and a Master of Science in high performance — beginning fall 2025. The programs, which build on the college's reputation for excellence in undergraduate health sciences programs and athletic dominance, will produce students ready to lead and serve in athletic and nonathletic venues.
- Wartburg received a \$185,000 grant from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust to help transform technology in more than 60 classrooms and advance the college's vision of becoming a fully wireless campus by 2030. The five-year initiative will begin in 2025 and will equip faculty with advanced tools for effective teaching, promoting innovation and creativity in addition to creating a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

- In fall 2024, Wartburg faculty implemented a new General Education curriculum – THRIVE – which stands for Thinking Critically, Human Culture, Reasoning, Information Fluency, Vocation, and Effective Communication.
- The Wartburg-Waverly Sports & Wellness Center (The W) was renamed in honor of former president Jack Ohle and his wife, Kris. The Board of Regents approved the change in spring 2024, and the rededication of the Ohle Wartburg-Waverly Sports & Wellness Center (The W) was held during Homecoming 2024 festivities.

Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry

- Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry supports students in their journey to find connection, presence, and purpose in their life at college. We seek to meet the spiritual and religious needs of our diverse campus community while also building bridges of compassion and understanding through interfaith/ecumenical engagement. Spiritual Life and Campus Ministry oversees over 19 student groups and programs.
- Wartburg College received an \$8,100 Northeastern Iowa Synod Community Engagement Grant to help engage religiously diverse students, employees, and community members as well as grow religious literacy on campus. This grant supplements funding for our Bridge program, which equips students with skills in bridge building across differences, and is executed by our Interfaith and Religious Diversity Council.
- Kelly Sherman-Conroy, an indigenous educator, church leader, and scholar, received the 2024 Graven Award. The annual award for Christian vocation highlights the powerful and positive effect of a strong sense of Christian vocation as it interfaces with service to the community, the church, and the world.
- Nathaniel Knutson '24 received the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Fund for Leaders Direct Full-Tuition Scholarship, which will help him continue his education at Wartburg Theological Seminary.
- Dr. Caryn Riswold, professor of religion and the McCoy Family Distinguished Chair in Lutheran Heritage and Mission, published her fourth book, "ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Abortion."

Recognition

- Kirk Kleckner '81, Mike Mallaro, Matthew Petersen '06, and Gordon Sween '89 were elected to the Board of Regents. Kleckner of Bradenton, Fla., is founder and former president of ValuationUSA; Mallaro of Cedar Falls, Iowa, is executive chairman of the board for VGM Group; Petersen of Denver, Colo., is a partner at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner LLP; and Sween of Minneapolis, Minn., is a retired health care executive.
- The Wartburg Medal was presented to professor emeriti Gloria Campbell and Dr. Lynn Olson in December 2024. The Wartburg Medal recognizes individuals who have provided significant service to the college over a sustained period and who have a personal commitment to the college's mission, quality, and character.
- Boboya Gabu '26, a Davis United World College Scholar from South Sudan, received a \$10,000 Projects for Peace grant to carry out a summer humanitarian effort empowering individuals living with HIV/AIDS with marketable skills.
- Georgia Nissen '24 received the prestigious R.J. McElroy Graduate Fellowship, designed to encourage persons of accomplishment, intelligence, integrity, and leadership ability to pursue challenging academic careers.
- Dr. Mike Bechtel '94, associate professor of science education, received the Engaged Campus Award for Emerging Innovation from the Seed Coalition, formerly Iowa and Minnesota Campus Compact, for his work with sustainable agriculture. Also honored were Bethany Christians '24, who received the Presidents' Student Leadership Award, and Krystal Madlock, associate dean for inclusive community, who received the Presidents' Civic Engagement Leadership Award.
- Dr. Rebecca Nederhiser, conductor of the Wartburg Community Symphony, was a finalist for the American Prize's Vytautas Marijosius Memorial Award in Orchestral Programming.

Wartburg continues to find focus in a vibrant mission that transforms the entire college community as we learn, work, and serve together. Thank you for your prayers and support as we share in the work of strengthening the Lutheran traditions of higher education and Christian vocation.

Dr. Rebecca Ehretsman, President

LUTHER COLLEGE®

Greetings from Luther College and our hometown of Decorah, Iowa. In these times of challenge and change, I am honored and excited to have stepped into my role as the 12th president of Luther this February. I am proud to share with you some of the ways that our Luther community continues to live into our commitment to prepare students for lives of meaning and purpose in service to the neighbor.

Luther College is known for drawing excellence out of all its students, and we are proud to report that our alumni testimonies earned Luther the No. 1 spot for learning opportunities and community and social life among our peers in Iowa and in the Associated Colleges of the Midwest in a recent Wall Street Journal survey. Luther also scored well in areas of character development, career preparation, learning facilities and campus facilities.

Examples of significant learning opportunities from this past year abound. Faculty member Todd Pedlar earned his seventh consecutive NSF-funded physics research grant, enabling students to contribute to an international research collaboration on elementary particle physics. Our nursing program approaches its 50th year of collaboration with the Mayo Clinic. Education majors continue to fulfill their student teaching placements in locations as varied as our nationally-ranked local Decorah Community Schools; metropolitan systems like Des Moines, Chicago, or Minneapolis area schools; or recently expanding internationally in Norway. Study away entered the second year of offering J-term courses specifically for first-year students. It is all part of a larger initiative to ensure that all Luther students have access to participation in documented high impact practices, such as internships, study away opportunities, and capstone projects. As a result, 99% of our 2024 graduates reported participating in two or more of these high impact practices.

In the past year, Luther has also continued to be recognized for our commitment to sustainability. For the fifth year in a row, Luther has been named a “hidden gem” institution in Iowa and the larger Plains region. We are also proud to have been ranked among the Princeton Review’s Top 50 Green Colleges in the nation, demonstrating our deep dedication to sustainability. Luther ranked seventh in America in 2024 among baccalaureate institutions for sustainable campus practices. This past year, we earned a Bicycle Friendly University silver award by the League of American Bicyclists. Last summer, students conducted significant summer research projects in prairie ecosystem restoration and conservation, using as their laboratory our 800 camps acres of natural lands.

We recognize the cost of higher education is a concern. We continue to increase avenues and opportunities for need-based, scholarship, and merit assistance, and these efforts have resulted in an overall reduction in the average net cost of attendance at Luther for the past three years. We have expanded our Luther College Impact Award, which offers four years of free tuition for qualified students in Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. We have also joined with 18 other four-year institutions to form the Iowa Private Transfer Collaborative, a grant-funded initiative to

improve transfer pathways for students. We have been selected as one of 80 new members of the FirstGenForward Network to support first-generation students.

Our students continue to demonstrate passion for and excellence in the arts. The theme of this year's annual Christmas at Luther performance was "Seeking Refuge for a Weary World," and involved more than 400 student performers, and marked another year of exciting growth in on-campus, regional television, and livestream audiences. During the 2024-2025 academic year, three of our choirs were chosen to perform at regional and national professional conferences: Cathedral Choir at the November 2024 Minnesota American Choral Directors Association conference, Norskkor at the February 2025 Minnesota Music Educators Association midwinter conference, and Nordic Choir at the national American Choral Directors Association conference in Dallas, Texas. The Nordic Choir and Jazz Orchestra toured internationally in summer 2024 summer—to Norway and Brazil, respectively—and in summer 2025 summer our Concert Band revives a longstanding tradition of touring in Japan.

While our athletic teams continue to win championships ranging from men's soccer, women's tennis, and both men's and women's swimming and diving in the past year, our greatest pride is reserved for our impressive number of 42 all-time NCAA Postgraduate Scholarship recipients, and the 73 Norse to earn Academic All-American, one of the most recent being softball catcher Abby Spore who was also Luther's 2024 NCAA Woman of the Year nominee. Currently at 22 varsity teams, Luther is set to add women's wrestling in the fall of 2025. The ongoing renovation of the 200,000-plus square foot Gerdin Fieldhouse for Athletics and Wellness will create new opportunities for all students and the greater Decorah community.

It has been a year of celebration, growth, and transition. We want to recognize our retiring President Jenifer K. Ward, who during this year stepped into the role of president emerita and senior advisor for strategic initiatives. We are grateful for her service, wisdom, and leadership, and we wish her the best in her retirement after the close of this academic year.

We do not take for granted the wide network of support that makes all of our work possible. Thank you to all of our local and regional partners, our alumni, and our supporting congregations and Synods. In the rapidly changing landscapes both of the church and of higher education, we continue to lean into the gifts of our Lutheran identity to offer us vision and encouragement in a complicated world.

Soli Deo Gloria!

President Brad Chamberlain

Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Creation Care Team Annual Report



Meetings are held the third Wednesday of the month at 1pm.
Please email creation.nswwi@gmail.com or visit our Facebook page.

2024 Activities:

- We presented two workshops at Walking Together in February. Dr. James Boulter, presented a workshop titled, *How Can Lutherans Respond to the Climate Crisis*. John Skoug and Sandy Tauferner presented, *Installing a Solar Panel Array in Your Church*.
- In 2024, we had a booth at the EcoFaith Summit, Walking Together, Synod Assembly, the Yellowstone Art Trail and the WELCA Convention. We gave out \$1250 in eco-friendly products for people to sample. This included bamboo toilet paper, bamboo tissue, bamboo pens, bamboo toothbrushes, laundry detergent sheets, toilet bowl cleaner sheets, dishwasher sheets, hand soap tablets, and reusable produce bags. These products were all made available through Thrivent Grants.
- Our Synod co-presented, with the Northeast Minnesota Synod and the St. Paul Area Synod, the EcoFaith Summit – *Cross + Currents in the Flood: Building Arcs Together for a Livable Planet*. Pastor Karen Behling, Laurel Boyer and John Skoug represented the Synod on the planning team. It was held on April 6th, 2024 at First Lutheran Church in Duluth, MN. There were 324 people attending.
- Members of our team have written for the Northeast Minnesota Synod's Preaching Roundtable in their Green Blades Rising Newsletter and will continue in 2025.
- Our team had a few articles in the Justice Newsletter in 2024.
- Laurel Boyer and Pastor Greg Kauffman represented the synod at an EcoFaith Leader's Retreat in Onamia, MN in August. There were five ELCA synods represented at the retreat.
- We were asked to present two workshops at the WELCA Convention in Eau Claire in September. *Creating and Sustaining a Green Team* was presented by Linda Stockinger and Laurel Boyer. Luke Pederson (SAM) and Pastor Karen Behling presented a workshop introducing our Synod Creation Care team.

Plans for 2025:

- We hosted our 2nd Synod-Wide Creation Care Zoom Meeting on January 18th. We had good participation and felt there were some great conversations. We are hoping to do more of these!
- We started a NWSWI Creation Care Facebook page in January!
- English Lutheran Church of Bateman is hosting Dr. James Boulter, a professor of chemistry and chair of the department of Public Health and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. His wife is also an ELCA Pastor in Eau Claire. The presentation was titled, *A Conversation About Climate Change... As it Relates to our Faith*. This will be held on January 25th in Chippewa Falls.
- Linda Stockinger and Laurel Boyer will be presenting a workshop at Walking Together in March 2025. The topic will be starting and sustaining a green team.
- We plan to have a booth at the EcoFaith Summit, Walking Together, Synod Assembly and the Yellowstone Art Trail again.
- The Synod is co-presenting the EcoFaith Summit of the Upper Midwest – *Earth's Cries, Earth Call: Becoming Midwives of Hope for the Healing of Creation*. Pastor Greg Kauffman, Luke Pederson (SAM), and Laurel Boyer are representing the Synod on the planning team. It will be held on April 5, 2025 at First Lutheran Church in Duluth, MN.
- We are looking into having a Synod – Wide Creation Care Retreat at Luther Park sometime this fall.
- In August, we plan to have a few members from our Creation Care team attend the 2025 EcoFaith Leader's Retreat in Onamia, MN.

Submitted By: Laurel Boyer

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Grace and peace to you this synod assembly season. **At Global Refugee we remain committed to the work of welcome, no matter the challenges.** For 85 years, Global Refugee (formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service) has championed the work of welcome by providing support to immigrants and refugees as they rebuild their lives in the United States. Founded by heartbroken Lutherans in the United States who felt called to provide a home for those fleeing violence of the World Wars, Global Refugee has continued this good work welcoming more than 800,000 newcomers since 1939.

Our mission states, “As a witness to God’s love for all people, we stand with and advocate for migrants and refugees, transforming communities through ministries of service and justice.” With help from Global Refugee, families are welcomed into their new homes with a hot meal, adults are enrolled in English language classes, children are enrolled in school, and Global Refugee partners guide newly-arrived refugee(s) in using public transportation and accessing community resources.

Unfortunately, on January 24, 2025, Global Refugee and the 9 other national resettlement agencies received a **stop-work order** from the U.S. Department of State as it relates to our funding for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, effectively cutting off vital support to families who have already lawfully resettled in the United States. The stop-work order directly affects thousands of refugees who rely on resettlement services for essential support such as housing, food, English classes, and job placement. While we were anticipating a pause of the refugee resettlement program and work with future clients, this stop-work order for clients in our care came as an unexpected blow. However, we are committed to carrying out our mission, through our hope in the promise of the resurrection, and remain steadfast in our holy work of welcome.

Despite the challenges, we are heartened by continued and growing support faith communities are providing for our work. **More people of faith are getting involved in our work each year to meet the ever-growing need.** In fact, 85 new faith communities became supporters of Global Refugee in 2024.

With the support of these new partners and Lutheran communities like yours, in 2024 we were able to...

- Welcome **18,622+ refugees** from countries across the world.

- Empower and support **116 clients** and **67 Businesses** through personal and business loans.
- Open **a new office in Mexico** to expand our Camino A Casa programming and serve **1017 clients** start again at home.
- Write and distribute **10,000 Hope for the Holidays cards** that provided messages of welcome and hope to newcomers.
- Attend the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans where we engaged **20,000+** youth on the work of welcome and packed more than a **1000** welcome kits.

In a political season rife with anti-immigrant rhetoric and messages that villainize newcomers, we have a unique opportunity to change this narrative and refocus on all the gifts newcomers bring to community. We invite you to join us in this work!

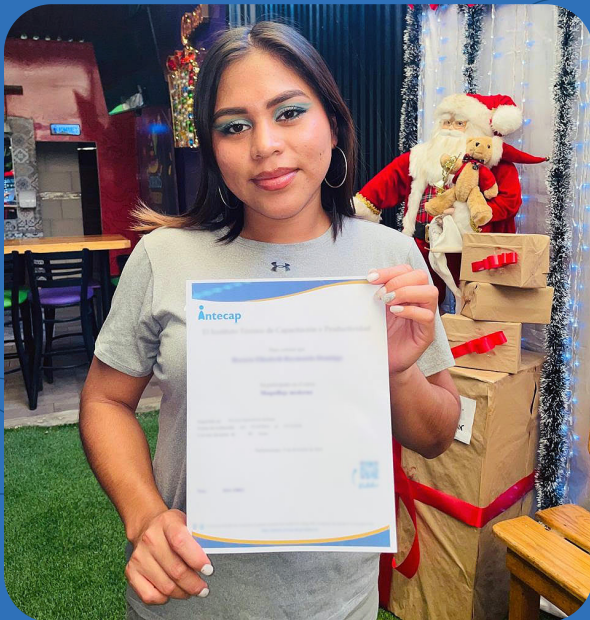
- **Support Refugees with a gift** – If you or communities you’re connected with are willing to support financially, please use/share this link: www.globalrefugee.org/give
- **Learn more and Advocate** – Explore resources with more information about executive orders and accompanying actions: www.globalrefugee.org/advocate
- **Know Your Rights** – Our partners at AMMPARO have a great resource for communities to read about their rights and those of immigrants in their care. www.blogs.elca.org/ammparo/the-latest-kyr/
- **Explore Resources** – Visit our Congregational Resources page to explore all the resources available to you: www.globalrefugee.org/congregations
- **Sign up for our Monthly E-newsletters** – Get the latest updates for faith leaders by emailing outreach@globalrefugee.org.
- **Volunteer with us** – Support refugees in your community and beyond: www.globalrefugee.org/volunteer

Thank you for your continued support. The many ways Lutheran communities embody Jesus’ ministry through the work of welcome is truly inspiring.

Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.



Deacon Sarah Kretschmann / Congregational Engagement Specialist
outreach@globalrefugee.org



January 2025

Impact Update: Camino a Casa

Our first-ever international expansion, Camino a Casa in Guatemala, had a successful first year. The program helps reintegrate young people from Central America who are returned home after attempting to seek refuge in the U.S. Now, with widescale restrictions on immigration and the threat of mass deportations in the U.S., the need for our international programming is greater than ever.

Pictured: With help from Camino a Casa, Maria is on her way to becoming a cosmetologist. Learn more about her story on reverse side.

Our Impact:

1,017
total participants

We have served, trained, and connected over a thousand individuals—giving young people the support and resources they need to start again—and start stronger—at home.

12
months of
individual support

Through one-on-one care, income assistance, and community resources, each youth receives a personal plan to achieve their educational, career, family, and mental wellness goals.

14-24
years old

We help teens and young adults address critical challenges: trauma; lack of job prospects; difficulty returning to school; family separation; and lack of access to medical services, to name a few.

NEW: Now Serving Families in Mexico

With the success of our program in Guatemala – and with immigration restrictions that are preventing more families from finding safety in the U.S. – Global Refuge has strengthened its commitment to youth and their families by expanding Camino a Casa to Mexico.

Serving Chiapas, Mexico City, and Oaxaca, the Global Refuge team has hit the ground running assisting young people who have been returned to Mexico. We help young people with:

- Family reunification
- Individual and family counseling
- Educational and vocational training
- Job readiness
- Referrals to legal and medical services
- Transportation assistance
- Financial literacy education
- And more

To support our Camino a Casa program or to learn more, visit globalrefuge.org/CaminoACasa.

As we forge ahead with our commitment to families in Guatemala and Mexico, we need help building a wider network of support to meet the growing need. We are in urgent need of funds to provide more social workers and psychologists, train our staff, host educational events for community members, provide financial assistance, and continue programs that strengthen families economically, so they don't feel the need to migrate.

Client Story: Maria*

Building skills towards a promising future at home with her son



Maria grew up in a close-knit, traditional village in Guatemala, where girls rarely go to school. After her father migrated to the U.S., Maria's mother became the sole provider for the family. Maria attended school until third grade—a significant accomplishment in her community—married at 17 and had a child at the age of 18.

Her husband, like so many men in her community, migrated to the U.S. to work so he could send money back home. **With the desire to reunify with her husband, Maria decided to take the dangerous journey to the U.S. with her 4-year-old son in tow. But several days into her trek, Maria and her son were detained in Mexico and returned to Guatemala.**

Having experienced extreme difficulties and dangers during her migration, Maria decided not to attempt the journey again

and sought the support of Global Refuge to help build a stable life at home.

With the assistance provided through Camino a Casa, Maria was able to enroll in a vocational institute to pursue a career in cosmetology. This opportunity has given Maria a newfound sense of confidence and drive to become financially independent and successful. Camino a Casa has also offered Maria therapeutic support as she copes with the separation from her husband, raises a son, gains her independence, and figures out a plan forward. Maria remains steadfast in her determination to create a better future for herself and her son at home, and we are here to support her throughout her journey.

**Name has been changed for our client's protection.*

To support our Camino a Casa program or to learn more, visit globalrefuge.org/CaminoACasa.

Global Refuge is a nonprofit serving newcomers seeking safety, support, and a share in the American dream. We have been a leader in resettlement for 85 years, dedicated to supporting immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees through advocacy, care, and empowerment to restore a sense of home.



January 2025

Impact Update: Immigration Legal Services

The Global Refuge Legal Services team continues to forge ahead in the fight for the legal rights of immigrant and refugee families as they navigate the complex U.S. immigration system. We know that immigrants and refugees often struggle to access immigration benefits due to cost, language and cultural barriers, case backlogs, and other factors beyond their control. Our Immigration Legal Services team is working to break down these barriers by delivering high-quality and accessible legal services — and working to improve the system for all.

2024 Impact:

325
people served

Our attorneys provided free legal consultations, case escalation advocacy, and assistance in filing immigration benefits applications to 325 individuals and families at six Afghan Support Centers across the country.

125+
SIV cases

As a leader in Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) advocacy, our team escalated over 125 pending green card cases for Afghan allies and their families.

70
legal screenings

We have provided comprehensive legal screenings involving 70 individuals and families through the federally funded Case Management Pilot (CMPP) program in Baltimore. And because of our success, Global Refuge was awarded a 29-month contract to expand CMPP to San Antonio in November 2024!

Other 2024 highlights for our Legal Service team include:

- Successfully advocating for expedited visa processing for thousands of Afghan refugees
- Helping to reopen dozens of erroneously rejected green card cases
- Representing the first-ever Special Immigrant Visas for surviving family members of Afghan allies.

What's ahead in 2025?

- **Legal Clinics**—we will partner with local organizations, faith communities, and employers to host clinics across the country
- **Local outreach**—we will ramp up our education and outreach events in communities where our services are most needed
- **New ways to serve**—we are exploring new opportunities to serve through foreign consulates, libraries, and other agencies and outlets.

Fulfilling Our Nation's Promise to a Family Torn Apart

Amir* and Aisha*'s mother was one of the tens of thousands of Afghan citizens who served as interpreters, translators, and in other key roles during our military's two-decade mission in Afghanistan. **These brave men and women risked their lives to help our country. In return, the U.S. government promised to protect them and their children** by issuing Special Immigrant Visas for Afghan allies, including Amir and Aisha's parents.

But a week before the family was set to leave for America, Amir and Aisha's parents were brutally murdered by the Taliban, leaving their young children alone, vulnerable, and in grave danger.

Amir and Aisha's aunt stepped in to raise them but struggled to provide for them without family in Afghanistan to help her. After the fall of the Afghan government to the Taliban in 2021, the aunt knew **they needed to escape**. She and their family in the United States implored the State Department to honor our country's promises to the family and bring the children to safety.

The aunt courageously relocated the children to Pakistan while she and her U.S.-based family tried to navigate a complex and uncertain immigration process. When the U.S. family met the Global Refuge team, they were desperately seeking help because the family's lives were at risk once again in Pakistan.

The Global Refuge Legal Services team was asked by the U.S. government to



help the family in their immigration processes. Over the next six months, our team:

- **Advocated for the children** – requesting the State Department review their eligibility for a new visa category
- **Advised the children's U.S.-based family on immigration options** for the aunt to remain as the children's guardian and accompany them to the U.S.
- **Coordinated with federal agencies** in the planning their relocation and arrival to the U.S.

Whether they needed legal guidance or moral support, we were with them every step of the way.

The children's turbulent journey came to a happy and emotional ending in October with the safe arrival of

Amir, Aisha and their aunt on United States soil!

As they settle into their new community, Global Refuge continues to work with partner organizations to ensure the children receive ongoing support, including assistance in enrolling Aisha and Amir in school.

Global Refuge considers it an honor to assist this family given all they have sacrificed. Despite the tens of thousands of Afghan allies still in need of family reunification following the U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, **federal funding for legal services has ended and help for many refugees in the U.S. is uncertain.**

We need as much donor support as possible to help more Afghan children like Amir and Aisha access the legal protections our country has promised them.

**Names have been changed for our clients' protection.*



New American Lending

by Global Refuge

newamericanlending.org

Global Refuge
700 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230

410 983 4000
410 230 2890
nal@globalrefuge.org

How we support economic growth and financial stability for newcomers

At Global Refuge, we believe that by empowering immigrants and refugees with access to financial resources, we can help break down systemic barriers and create pathways to success. Our **New American Lending** program was created to foster entrepreneurship and financial empowerment within our immigrant community. This work strengthens immigrant communities and helps create and sustain small businesses, benefitting the broader community by providing valuable goods and services, job creation, and growth of local economies.



After fleeing Kabul in 2021, Khalis Noori dedicated himself to assisting and resettling his fellow Afghans in the United States. Recognizing the need for a communal space, Noori opened My Kabul restaurant two years later. And with the help of New American Lending, his restaurant has evolved into a refuge, extending discounted meals to refugees from all backgrounds.

We make loans accessible to bridge the economic gap.

New American Lending is a nonprofit lender that empowers refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers on their journey towards financial independence. We offer personal and business loans that would usually be very difficult for newcomers to obtain due to limited or no credit history, increasing access to the resources and financial tools our newest neighbors need to take control of their economic futures.

We provide financial coaching to ensure that our new neighbors are set up for success.

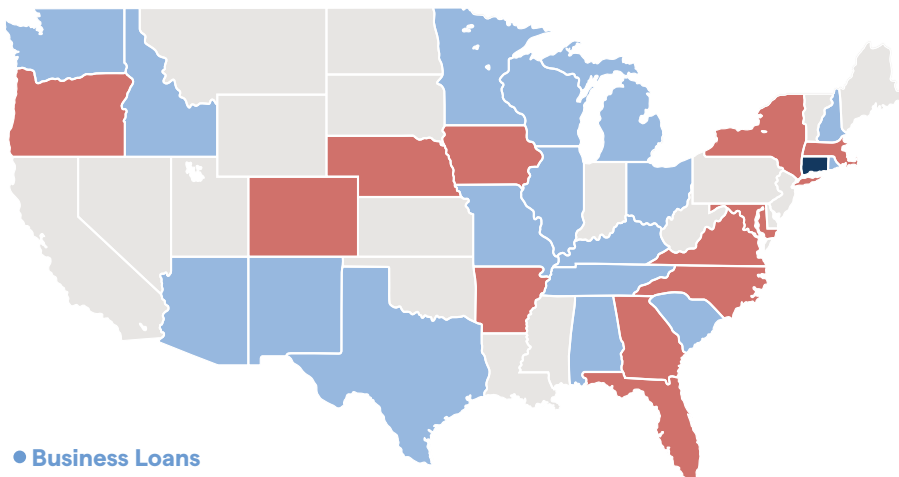
Our program offers so much more than just loans. The New American Lending team educates clients through training in financial literacy, small business management, and personal finances. We empower every single client we serve by either approving their loan application or providing clear instruction about what is needed to get the loan, and we maximize our impact for clients by offering a suite of services specifically tailored to their needs.

We support the creation and growth of small businesses to bolster local economies.

The work of New American Lending strengthens immigrant communities and helps create and sustain successful small businesses. The businesses we serve not only provide essential goods and services, but also create jobs and stimulate economic growth in our communities. When immigrant businesses succeed, we all benefit.

Where We Work

Global Refuge offers personal and business loans across the United States.



92.4%

loan approval rate



\$659,008

in loans distributed
in 2023



40%

of loans distributed
to female clients



“This loan has helped make my restaurant a place for all to come together under one roof. There is so much love here.”

Khalis Noori (also pictured on front), owner, My Kabul restaurant

Global Refuge is a nonprofit serving newcomers seeking safety, support, and a share in the American dream. We have been a leader in resettlement for 85 years, dedicated to supporting immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees through advocacy, care, and empowerment to restore a sense of home.



Preferred Refugee Employer Program

At Global Refuge, we have seen the power of meaningful employment in the lives of newly arrived refugees. A good job offers New Americans stability, independence, and a sense of purpose and belonging... but the advantages don't stop there. Companies who are committed to hiring refugee talent and willing to create an inclusive and welcoming environment reap the benefits of a strengthened workforce and economy powered by hard-working, dedicated employees.

Hiring refugees is not just good for business—it's good for everyone.



For more info, visit
globalrefuge.org/pre

Why should my company hire refugees?

Refugee employees are legally authorized to work and bring a depth of experience and education to their work. Hiring refugees creates a diverse workforce with greater capacity for innovation and global perspective.

Additionally, refugee employees have significantly higher retention rates and typically demonstrate outstanding work ethic and adaptability.

What does it mean to be a preferred refugee employer?

Preferred Refugee Employers offer support and services that are of particular help to the refugee community. To become an PRE, a company must

fulfill at least five of Global Refuge's designated refugee employment best practices, including (but not limited to):

- Free transportation or assistance purchasing a vehicle
- Cohort model of hiring and placement
- Refugee-specific recruiting pipeline
- Delineated pathway for promotion and record of advancing refugee employees
- Established annual goal for refugee hires
- Housing assistance
- Childcare subsidies
- ESOL/adult education classes
- Vocational mentorship
- A living wage and benefits package

What are the benefits of being a PRE?

PREs receive a seal from Global Refuge designating their status and are eligible for ongoing training and support from Global Refuge, as well as joint marketing opportunities. More importantly, PREs become proven pipelines for hiring and retaining refugee talent—strengthening their companies and inspiring a culture of welcome.

How can my company learn more about the program?

Take the first step by filling out our interest form at globalrefuge.org/pre and a member of our team will reach out to you!

Headquarters
700 Light Street
Baltimore, MD 21230

E info@globalrefuge.org
T 410-983-4000

x.com/GlobalRefuge
 facebook.com/GlobalRefuge
 instagram.com/GlobalRefuge_

 **Global Refuge**

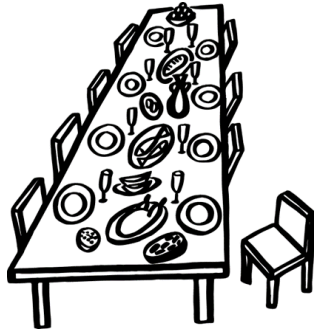
Welcome the Stranger Worship



A Family looks to their future upon arrival in the United States.

+A liturgical resource from Global Refuge+

Welcoming newcomers since 1939



Join us for a service centered on hospitality and refuge as we seek to live out our biblical call to welcome the stranger.

WELCOME

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Psalms 46:1

This day and all days we give thanks for all the incredible gifts immigrants and refugees are to communities across our country and the globe. We also lament the pain and suffering that is felt as so many people worldwide are forced to flee their homes in search of new beginnings. May we welcome with loving arms and ask God to forgive us for all the ways we have shown complacency in our failures to welcome newcomers.

Elements of our service order today were created by our ministry partners at Global Refuge, formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. 85 years ago, their work began as heartbroken Lutherans welcomed their European siblings displaced by the violence of the World Wars. Global Refuge remains grounded in faith and has grown to support more than 750,000 newcomers – responding to conflicts in Cuba, Uganda, Vietnam, The Balkans, Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Ukraine, Venezuela and more. Whether generations ago, or in recent years, we are all connected to journeys across borders. While the circumstances that force people to flee their homes may change throughout time and space, the themes of courage, hope and hospitality remain constant in every immigrant journey.

GATHERING MUSIC

- LBW 93, Jesus, Refuge of the Weary
- ELW 523, Let Us Go Now to the Banquet (Vamos todos al banquete)
- ELW 530, Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather (Sekai no tomo to te o tsunagi)
- LCC 579, Porque Hay un Mundo

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Leader: Holy God, we thank you for the love you show for all of us, showing no partiality across cultures and races.

Congregation: Give us good courage to remember that we are all your beloved children.

L: God of all, forgive us for our complacency. We acknowledge the many ways we collectively have fallen short of our calling, knowing that it is both what we do and what we do not do that can be sinful. Forgive us for all the times and places we have failed to welcome the stranger. Forgive us for the times we prioritized our comfort over expanding our knowledge and advocacy.

C: Ignite our hearts, Oh Lord, to remember that you are present in all who flee their homes and search for new opportunities.

L: God of the Trinity, we remember that you sent Jesus to Earth not only to be with refugees, but as a refugee himself. You made yourself known in human form as a Palestinian outcast, born to a poor, young woman who was forced to flee all that was familiar and dear.

C: Remind us, oh Lord, that as we welcome refugees and immigrants today, we welcome you. Forgive us for all of the ways we have individually and collectively fallen short to do this holy work of welcome.

L: God, we acknowledge that walls and all earthly systems that work to separate us from one another are not your desire for your beloved people. Give us good courage to open our arms wide and strong in welcome and

convict us to make real your kingdom of love, joy, grace, justice, and hospitality real here on Earth.

C: Forgive us, Oh God, Work through us and within us to share your love.

Please rise as you are able.

ENTRANCE HYMN

- ELW 641, All Are Welcome
- TFF 278, Praise, Praise, Praise the Lord
- ELW 530, Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather
- ELW 653, Where True Charity and Love Abide

GREETING

L: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the community of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

C: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

L: Oh God of welcome, we give you abundant thanks for our immigrant neighbors and community members. We celebrate all of the richness and diversity they bring to our world and to our communities and that you call them by name just as you call us by name. Today, as we give thanks for the gift newcomers are to our community, reconvict us to work for a justice and abounding love that is rooted in hospitality and welcoming of all. May our hospitality bring joy to not only those we work to welcome, but to us as well.

Amen.

Please be seated.

+ WORD +

FIRST READING

- Passage suggestions
 - Leviticus 19
 - Deuteronomy 10
 - Ruth 2
 - Psalm 46
 - Isaiah 58

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING

- Second Reading suggestions:
 - 2 Corinthians 6:1-13
 - Romans 14
 - Romans 15:1-13
 - Acts 10
 - 1 Timothy 5
 - Hebrews 3

L: The word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Please rise as you are able.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

- Choose your preferred Gospel Acclamation

GOSPEL READING

L: The Holy Gospel according to _____, chapter _____.

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

- Passage suggestions
 - Matthew 2: 1-15
 - Matthew 5
 - Matthew 9:35-38
 - Matthew 10
 - Matthew 25
 - Mark 6
 - Luke 10: 25-37
 - John 6

L: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ!

Please be seated.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

- Children's Book suggestions for children's message:
 - Our World is a Family, Miry Whitehill, Jennifer Jackson (Authors) and Nomar Perez (Illustrator)
 - Wombat Said Come In, Carmen Deedy
 - Other Words for Home, Jasime Warga
 - The Suitcase, Chris Naylor-Ballesteros
 - Story Boat, Kyo Maclear (Author), Rashin Kheiriyeh (Illustrator)
 - Shelter, Celine Claire (Author), Qin Leng (Illustrator)
 - Caged, Kao Kalia Yang (Author), Khou Vue (Illustrator)
 - Watercress, Andrea Wang (Author), Jason Chin (Illustrator)

- Home is in Between, Mitali Perkins (Author), Lavanya Naidu (Illustrator)

SERMON

- Sermon resources:
 - Share a video uplifting the work of Global Refuge and our call to welcome the stranger in our midst. [Browse our latest videos.](#)
 - [Explore stories of immigrants and former refugees in their own words we encourage you to share with your community.](#)

Silence for reflection.

Please rise as you are able for the Hymn of the Day.

HYMN OF THE DAY

- Hymn suggestions:
 - ELW 723, Canticle of the Turning
 - ELW 725, When the Poor Ones (Cuando el pobre)
 - TFF 59, Jesus Light of the World
 - ELW 713, O God of Every Nation
 - ELW 723, Canticle of the Turning

STATEMENT OF FAITH

L: Today, we will read together “THE IMMIGRANTS CREED” by Rev. Jose Luis Casal, former director of Presbyterian World Mission. It is an interpretation of our creeds through the lens of a newcomer.

I believe in Almighty God, who guided the people in exile and in exodus, the God of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon, the God of foreigners and immigrants.

I believe in Jesus Christ, a displaced Galilean, who was born away from his people and his home, who fled his country with his parents when his life was in danger. When he returned to his own country he suffered under the oppression of Pontius Pilate, the servant of a foreign power. Jesus was persecuted, beaten, tortured, and unjustly condemned to death. But on the third day Jesus rose from the dead, not as a scorned foreigner but to offer us citizenship in God's kingdom.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the eternal immigrant from God's kingdom among us, who speaks all languages, lives in all countries, and reunites all races. I believe that the Church is the secure home for foreigners and for all believers. I believe that the communion of saints begins when we embrace all God's people in all their diversity. I believe in forgiveness, which makes us all equal before God, and in reconciliation, which heals our brokenness.

I believe that in the Resurrection God will unite us as one people in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time. I believe in life eternal, in which no one will be foreigner but all will be citizens of the kingdom where God reigns forever and ever.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

L: With the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, let us pray for the church, those in need, and all of God's creation. For the full family of God, that it may be filled with truth and love, and by your grace be found without fault at the last day:

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the peace of the church, that our divisions may be overcome, so that, united in Christ, we may serve the world and bear witness to the good news:

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the peace of the world, that a spirit of respect and understanding may grow among nations, peoples, and faith traditions:

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the whole creation, That the life you've given us, and all its blessings, might be used to restore your Creation, bring healing to those impacted by changing climate, and breath love back into the Earth.

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For the poor, the persecuted, and the displaced; For the sick, the lonely, the forgotten, and all who suffer; for refugees, and for those seeking asylum; for prisoners, and all who are in danger; that they may be protected and relieved:

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For all of God's people, Give us eyes to see our neighbor in all settings; empower us to receive our siblings with love, and grant us strength to do so when fear and hate would have us do otherwise:

God of mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Other intercessions may be included. The presiding minister concludes the prayers with these or similar words.

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. **Amen.**

PEACE

L: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C: And also with you.

Please be seated for the announcements.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Ways to get involved in the work of welcome with Global Refuge:
 - [Circle of Welcome](#): Faith communities across the country partner with a local resettlement agency to provide wrap-around support to a family entering the United States.
 - [Fresh Change](#): In partnership with Border Servant Corps, Fresh Change offers an opportunity to welcome immigrants with a bag of new clothing.
 - Global Refuge has a monthly newsletter for congregations with all the latest updates. Email outreach@globalrefuge.org to sign up for the newsletter and visit www.globalrefuge.org/congregations to learn more.

+ THANKSGIVING +

THE OFFERING

Those looking to donate to support our shared ministry with newcomers can visit www.GlobalRefuge.org/Give/ or reach out to the Mobilization and Faith Relations team at Global Refuge to learn more about donating time, talent or other resources by emailing outreach@globalrefuge.org.

LORD'S PRAYER

L: Let us pray as our Savior Christ has taught us.

**C Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name,
 thy kingdom come,
 thy will be done,**

on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.

+ SENDING +

BLESSING

L: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy. The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.

C: Amen.

SENDING HYMN

- Hymn suggestions:
 - ACS 1062, Build a Longer Table
 - ELW 706, The People Walk (Un pueblo que camino)
 - ELW 713, O God of Every Nation
 - ELW 726, Light Dawns on a Weary World
 - ELW 708, Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love

DISMISSAL

L: Go in peace. Welcome the stranger.

C: Thanks be to God!



Dear ministry partners in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin:

The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) is grateful to share highlights from our seminary in this 2025 report to supporting synods. Thank you for your continued support of our innovative and thriving seminary. As we reflect on the past year and look ahead to 2025–2026, I am pleased to share some key highlights and our aspirations for the future:

- This year, LSTC bids farewell to [President James Nieman](#) as he retires after thirteen years of dedicated leadership. His vision and guidance have left an indelible mark on the seminary, from fostering a culture of innovation to championing LSTC's mission of theological education and social justice. In a heartfelt [video shared with the community](#), President Nieman reflected on his tenure and expressed his hope for LSTC's continued growth. As we navigate this transition, an interim president will be announced in February and the next president selected by the end of the spring semester.
- A major milestone this year was the conclusion of our 2021–2024 Strategic Plan, *For Such a Time as This*, and the introduction of our new 2024–2029 Strategic Plan, [On the Way](#). This forward-thinking roadmap reflects LSTC's commitment to remaining adaptive and innovative as we prepare future leaders for ministry and public engagement. Centered on themes of sustainability, inclusion, and mission alignment, the plan focuses on deepening partnerships, enhancing educational accessibility, and supporting the holistic formation of students. As we look to the future, this strategic framework ensures that LSTC remains a beacon of theological excellence and a force for justice in the church and the world.
- This year marked the formal establishment of the [Office of Enterprise Innovation \(OEI\)](#), a bold initiative to extend LSTC's reach and impact through digital programming. Led by Vice President Keisha Dyson, the OEI is the creative engine behind [Project Starling](#), our new commitment to and program for asynchronous learning. This initiative provides innovative opportunities for students, including Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM) and those pursuing certificates in theological education, to engage with content at their own pace. We look forward to launching the Project Starling platform in June. On this platform, we will introduce an asynchronous TEEM certificate as well as a training program for Synod Authorized Ministers. We will also provide learning resources for lay audiences interested in deepening their theological studies. By introducing professional development courses, continuing education programs, and advanced digital tools, Project Starling exemplifies our commitment to offering theological education for all.

- In Fall 2024, the LSTC Board of Directors elected Greg Lewis and Mark Bartusch as Chairperson and Vice Chairperson respectively. We have also welcomed new board members, including Teresa Cintron, Paul Erbes, Joseph Falese, Stacie Fidler, Preston Fields, Greg Kaufmann, Mercy Ndosi-Shoo, Larry Tietjen, and Patricia Cornelius Woods. Their orientation underscored our commitment to strategic governance and collaboration. We look forward to their ecumenical expertise enriching our community for many years to come.
- LSTC is thrilled to announce the appointment of [Dr. Christian Scharen](#) as the Gordon Braatz Chair of Worship. A distinguished scholar and teacher, Dr. Scharen brings deep expertise and a passion for exploring the transformative power of worship in faith communities. In this new role, he will advance LSTC's commitment to preparing leaders who are deeply rooted in liturgical tradition while engaging contemporary challenges and opportunities. His leadership will enrich the seminary's worship life and academic programs, equipping students to serve with creativity, wisdom, and a strong theological foundation.
- This year's upcoming Homecoming celebration will bring alumni, students, and faculty together for a vibrant time of reconnection and learning, anchored by the Queer Symposium. This impactful event will highlight LSTC's commitment to affirming and inclusive theological education, featuring workshops, panel discussions, and keynote presentations exploring the intersections of faith, identity, and justice. Participants will engage deeply with critical topics, fostering dialogue that strengthens our community and equips leaders for ministry in diverse contexts. The combination of Homecoming festivities and the Queer Symposium promises to create spaces where all are welcomed, valued, and empowered to serve. Visit [LSTC.edu/events](https://www.lstc.edu/events) for information about this event and others.
- We look ahead to our 165th commencement exercises, to be held again this year at St. Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church, at 4945 South Dorchester in Hyde Park. This welcoming and well-equipped venue provides an ideal setting for our commencement celebrations, offering ample space for the ceremony as well as opportunities for fellowship and connection. This year's commencement speaker will be Bishop Yehiel Curry, a steadfast leader and LSTC alumnus.

To learn more about LSTC, please visit www.lstc.edu.

Sincerely,

James Nieman, President Emeritus (retired Jan. 31, 2025)

Michael Cooper-White, Interim President

Greg Lewis, Chair, Board of Directors

"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us, for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God."

- 2 Corinthians 9:10-12

The Holy Spirit is alive and at work through our joint ministry!

Like the blessing of loaves and fishes, many gifts to LSS from congregations were (or can be) multiplied beyond their original size due to an anonymous donor's gift through the **Loving Lutherans** challenge, doubling the impact of your generosity.



Restoring Hope in the Chippewa Valley

When the former Libertas Center closed its doors after serving the community since 1977 it left a huge void in the Chippewa Valley for people struggling with addiction and mental illness. LSS is seeking to bring back much-needed services by acquiring and renovating this building and opening a 50-bed transitional treatment facility. Together, we can use our expertise and gifts to educate and motivate individuals as they struggle to heal and recover, so they can use their God-given gifts to serve. Visit www.lsswis.org/news-and-events/ for more information.

Good news: YOU CAN STILL QUALIFY as a Loving Lutheran Congregation and have 100% of your contribution matched!

We came very close to reaching the \$1 million goal in 2024, and the anonymous donor has agreed to extend the challenge until it is met. That means if your qualifying contribution reaches us before the total of \$1 million is met from Loving Lutherans Congregations, it will be matched. Visit www.lsswis.org/LovingLutherans or contact sarah.halstead@lsswis.org to learn more!



Congratulations to the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin 2024 Loving Lutherans qualifying congregations!

Visit www.lsswis.org/LovingLutherans to see if your congregation qualified!

OUR VISION

Healthy communities filled with people using their God-given gifts to serve.

OUR MISSION

Act compassionately.
Serve humbly.
Lead courageously.

President and CEO, Héctor Colón, pictured below.

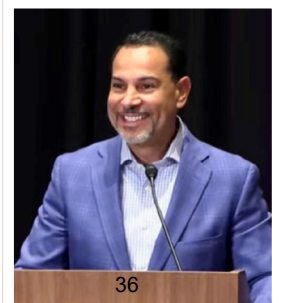
95% overall client satisfaction



30,000+
impacted



2,654
Northwest Synod area
clients served in 2024



Spring 2025

Dear friends,

Greetings from Augsburg University! As of this writing, a group of Augsburg students is packing their bags to travel to Atlanta, Georgia, where they will spend spring break serving the community in a variety of local organizations, being hosted by two ELCA congregations in Atlanta, and meeting with the staff of the Southeastern Synod. Our Alternative Spring Break tradition, led by Campus Ministry, began in 2006 with housing relief work following devastating hurricanes along the Gulf Coast, and has expanded to helping communities all across the United States in the years since. We are grateful for our students' leadership in reminding us of our calling to be with and for our neighbors in this unsettled time.

In some significant ways, we are living into a new chapter at Augsburg following major institutional milestones last year. These include the development and implementation of a new general education curriculum; the adoption of a refreshed strategic plan; and the move to a new academic structure with five schools focused on the arts, natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, business, and health. In addition, we received a successful reaffirmation of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, which occurs on a 10-year cycle; began a new fundraising campaign, *Promising Futures: Faithful and Relevant*, which aims to raise \$25 million in support of academic innovation, our vibrant reputation, and future sustainability; and launched a new doctoral program in health care leadership and scholarship, the first of its kind of Minnesota.

Both our strategic plan and the *Promising Futures* campaign recognize the importance of Augsburg's Lutheran identity, which underpins our national leadership in vocational exploration, interreligious learning, and service. We are blessed with outstanding faculty leaders in this work, including Lori Brandt Hale, an internationally known Bonhoeffer scholar who also serves as the director of our School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Najeeba Syeed, whose mentorship supported two Augsburg students in being named BRAID (Bridgebuilders Relating Across Interfaith Differences) Fellows by Interfaith America just last month. We have also been privileged to create space on campus recently for dialogue with local and national leaders on contemporary issues for people of faith, including civil rights leader Valarie Kaur and Rev. Dr. DeWayne Davis.

Augsburg also remains deeply committed to listening to the voices of young people. This theme is explored in detail in a forthcoming book developed by our Riverside Innovation Hub, an incubator for people and communities exploring the public church in the neighborhood. "Hungry for Hope: Letters to the Church from Young Adults" (Eerdmans, 2025) is a collection that speaks to the most pressing issues of our time, including climate change, mental health, marginalization, and the pursuit of abundance and intimacy in faith. It is a poignant distillation of the wisdom of young adults and a gift to the whole church.

There's no denying that these are challenging times for colleges and universities, from efforts at the federal level to dramatically reshape higher education to the rationing of state grant funds for low-income students here in Minnesota. In the midst of these uncertainties, we are profoundly grateful for the strength of our partnerships, the durability of our mission, and the diverse students we are privileged to serve. For more than 150 years, our work and our values have remained the same—to offer our students a world-class education and to challenge them to uncover their calling in the world. With your prayers and support, we will continue to do so.

Faithfully yours,

Paul C. Pribbenow, Ph.D.
President

Rev. Babette Chatman
University Pastor
Director of Campus Ministry

Rev. John Schwehn
University Pastor