



Related article:

Faith and action
(page 36)

Living Lutheran
November/December 2023

Reprints:

Permission is granted for individuals, small groups and congregations to reproduce this study guide for local use.

Tell us:

Do you find this guide helpful? Send comments and suggestions to rcblezard@embarqmail.com

Study guide

Faith and action

The holistic missions of Lutherans in Central America

By Robert C. Blezard

Since its beginning in 1988, the ELCA has partnered with Lutheran churches in Central America, not only to mutually enrich our faith through accompaniment but also to learn about and share in the ministries that are improving the daily lives of people there. Together we can do so much.

EXERCISE 1: ACCOMPANIMENT

In bygone years churches from more-developed, generally wealthier nations sent missionaries to poorer, less-developed countries to evangelize. Their work was largely based on the premise that *we* have something *you* need. In addition to the gospel, they also often brought their culture, values, morals and attitudes. It was a lopsided, top-down relationship.

The ELCA has embraced a different model of mission work called accompaniment, which is defined as “walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality,” according to the ELCA’s Global Mission webpage (elca.org/globalmission). “The ELCA lives out accompaniment in relationships with global companions, striving to share God’s love and participate in God’s mission together.” In accompaniment, the ELCA engages in mission *with*, not mission *to*, global partners by working together, learning from each other and engaging one another in a spirit of mutual upbuilding.

- What can you identify as the problems or limitations of the older model of missionary work, where evangelists from more-developed nations came to less developed nations not only to convert people to Christianity but to instill their “superior” developed-nation culture as well?
- What would you identify as advantages of the newer accompaniment model, where missionaries from more-developed nations work together alongside partners from the less-developed nations?
- Imagine you are a Christian from a less-developed nation. If you were engaging with a foreign missionary, which model would you find more acceptable? Enriching? Respectful? Why?
- Any strong relationship is built on the foundation stones of trust, respect, honesty, equality and mutuality. (Are there other foundation stones?) Examine both missionary models. Which one would be more conducive to establishing enriching relationships?



Study guide: **Faith and action** *continued*

EXERCISE 2: THE MISSION OF CHURCH

Which idea better reflects the primary purpose of a church? To bring people into the faith? Or to help them live better, more-fulfilling lives?

Consider: On the one hand, in the “Great Commission,” Jesus tells his followers to make disciples of all nations through baptism and education (Matthew 28:19-20). On the other hand, Jesus’ parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) directs us to prioritize meeting the daily needs of people for food, clothes, lodging, health care and relationship.

- Compare and contrast the two objectives. How are they different? What do they have in common?
- How would a church go about fulfilling the Great Commission? Specifically, how is that addressed in your congregation? In your faith life?
- How would a church go about fulfilling the objectives of Matthew 25? In reality, how is that accomplished in your congregation? In your faith life?
- Which is an easier task: making disciples or meeting needs? Explain. What are the challenges in both? What are the opportunities in both?
- Why is it a mistake for a church to focus on one of the objectives and not the other?
- How do the two objectives complement one another?
- Referring to the previous exercise, which model of missionary work—traditional or accompaniment—best blends the two objectives? Explain.
- From information in the article, how would you describe the ELCA’s “holistic mission” approach? How does it achieve a balance between the Great Commission and the parable of the sheep and goats?

EXERCISE 3: TEACHING HOW TO FISH

There’s that old saying, “If you give someone a fish, you feed them for a day. If you teach someone how to fish, you feed them for a lifetime.” Wise sayings persist because they express truth. What is the truth behind this saying?

- In light of this saying, how would you evaluate the ELCA’s holistic mission approach with our Central American Lutheran partners?
- How does education, training, advocacy and empowerment help people “fish” for themselves for a lifetime?
- Does this saying imply that we should never give direct aid—fish—to people? Explain.
- What would be a good “both/and” balance between direct aid and empowerment when it comes to helping people?

Contact us:

Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522

livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the
magazine of the Evangelical
Lutheran Church in America.





Study guide: **Faith and action** *continued*

EXERCISE 4: DAILY LIFE ISSUES

The ELCA partners with Lutherans of Central America to address problems and issues that affect their members locally. For each church, discuss:

Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS)

Agriculture, a mainstay of the Salvadoran economy, has been increasingly challenged by climate change through intensive droughts, hurricanes, floods and intensifying annual weather cycles. The ELCA supports SLS in its response through education, advocacy and direct support for agricultural communities.

- Climate change is necessitating new and different ways to grow food, methods that may not be readily known to farmers. How does teaching new agricultural practices help build up farmers and communities?
- Why is it part of the church's mission to help farmers grow food? Earn a living? Care for the earth?
- In what ways is it more effective to help farmers feed their own nation than to simply provide food?
- How are communities helped when their agricultural base is supported?
- Why is this work important? How does it fit into an approach for holistic ministry?

Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH)

With the ELCA, the ICLH opened technology-equipped tutoring centers to assist young people with their schoolwork. Some of the students are planning to go on to higher education for professional training.

- The tutoring centers have computers and internet connections that aren't readily available to many of the students. How could interaction and experience with technology boost a student's education and job potential?
- In both the short term and the long run, how would access to higher education and better employment benefit an individual? A family? A community?
- How does increased education fit into the church's mission for holistic ministry?

Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILAG)

In Guatemala, as in many parts of the world, girls and women don't have ready access to education, especially in rural areas. Providing educational opportunities for young women is one focus of a partnership between ILAG and all three expressions of the ELCA (churchwide, synods and congregations). The young women receive academic education as well as training in practical skills that they can bring back to their communities.

- When women are educated and trained, how does that improve their lives personally? For their families? For their communities?

Contact us:

Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.

Chicago, IL 60631

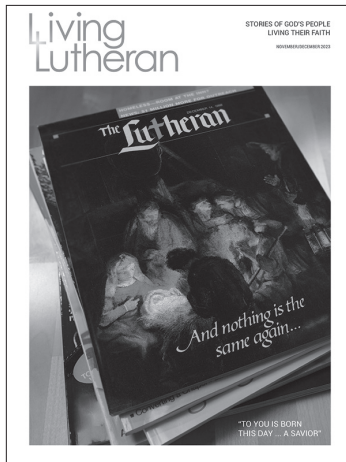
(800) 638-3522

livinglutheran@elca.org

livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.





About the study guide author:

Rob Blezard

is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Aberdeen, Md. He earned a Master of



Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has done further study at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (Pa.), now called United Lutheran Seminary.

Contact us:

Living
Lutheran

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 638-3522

livinglutheran@elca.org
livinglutheran.org

Living Lutheran is the magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



Study guide: **Faith and action** *continued*

- How might an educated mother give her children a boost through her guidance in school and life?
- How does increased education fit into the church's mission for holistic ministry?

Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE)

In North America we take for granted that men and women have more or less equal status and share household responsibilities in families, but that isn't the case everywhere. Blended in their work with communities and families, ILFE programs supported by ELCA World Hunger (elca.org/hunger) work on shaping attitudes about gender roles in order to raise the status and improve opportunities for women.

- How does it benefit a woman to have greater opportunities for education and employment? How does it benefit her family and community?
- How are family dynamics improved when a wife and husband can share household responsibilities? How do children benefit?
- How does improving the status and opportunities for women fit into the church's mission to improve the lives of people?

Faith and Action

THE HOLISTIC MISSIONS OF LUTHERANS IN CENTRAL AMERICA

*By Michael Busbey
and Paulina Dasse*



The Salvadoran Lutheran Synod equips its leaders with the tools to mitigate the effects of climate change, including greenhouse projects, such as this one in El Chilpitile.

For the last 35 years the ELCA has been a companion in the mission and ministry of five Lutheran churches in Central America:

- The Costa Rican Lutheran Church
- The Salvadoran Lutheran Synod
- The Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras
- The Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala
- The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope

Through these relationships, ELCA members have witnessed and learned about the holistic mission of these churches. Intrinsic to this mission is the strong relationship between, on the one hand, the message and ministry of the gospel and, on the other, the social, cultural and economic realities in the lives of these communities.

This holistic mission is being carried out through sustainable ministries focused on

education, agriculture, migration, integral health, youth and family, care for creation and leadership formation. The churches' ministries liberate and transform the daily reality of members and their communities, empowering them through a message of hope that proclaims the dignity of all in Jesus Christ.

The ICLH has over 220 students at eight tutoring centers, where children can come three or four days a week.

Photo: Courtesy of the Salvadoran Lutheran Synod

Salvadoran Lutheran Synod (SLS)

For years Central America has suffered severe climate extremes, almost on an annual basis: hurricanes, floods, volcanic eruptions, droughts, earthquakes, etc. However, as a result of climate change, as well as such annual phenomena as “El Niño” and “La Niña,” these climatic events have become more intense, affecting harvests and quality of life.

The SLS has responded with a three-pronged approach with education based on science and Scripture; advocacy for the protection of natural resources; and direct support for communities whose main source of income is agriculture.

The church has equipped its leaders with the tools and materials to mitigate the effects of climate change, and the ELCA is accompanying this holistic effort with funds from both Mission Support (a diploma program in climate change for pastors and lay leaders) and ELCA World Hunger (advocacy and community greenhouses).

Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras (ICLH)

The ICLH has a long trajectory accompanying communities in the field of education. In 2020 the government closed schools in response



Photo: Courtesy of the Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope

The Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope has a focus on gender issues in its ministry. Here Salvadoran pastor Melba Martinez (left) prays with a woman from Somoto at an annual women's retreat.

to the COVID-19 pandemic and moved toward classes on television, then online. Because many Honduran households lack a television, let alone an internet connection, many students couldn't access their classes.

The church responded. In collaboration with the ELCA, the ICLH opened four tutoring centers in 2021 in communities where it has congregations and equipped them with internet access, a computer, a printer and tutors. Local schools sent their youth to these centers to do their classwork, and during the first year of the project more than 100 students across the four centers received tutoring.

Currently the ICLH has over 220 students at eight tutoring centers, where children can come three or four days a week. Often the tutors are youth from ICLH congregations who feel called to support their communities. Many of the students are now interested in studying to become educators, social workers, engineers or administrators.

Augustinian Lutheran Church of Guatemala (ILAG)

Accessing quality education in rural areas of Guatemala is often a challenge, particularly for young women. In conversation with congregations in these communities, and with

support from the ELCA, the ILAG started Casa MILAGRO, a program for young women from across Guatemala to come together and receive specialized classes at the Lutheran Center in Guatemala City.

The hope is that, at the end of their classes, these young women will return to their communities with the skills to make a significant, positive impact.

At the Lutheran Center they take academic classes (literature, math, science, history), learn technical skills (agriculture, bread making, sewing), and continue their congregational life with music and confirmation classes.

This ministry is accompanied by the Saint Paul Area and Southeastern synods, alongside many companion congregations across the ELCA.

Nicaraguan Lutheran Church of Faith and Hope (ILFE)

Throughout its history the ILFE has focused on gender in its holistic ministries, but more recently it has incorporated these components into all its projects so that both promoters and ILFE staff are trained in new understandings of masculinity. The staff and promoters are able to share in conversations with community

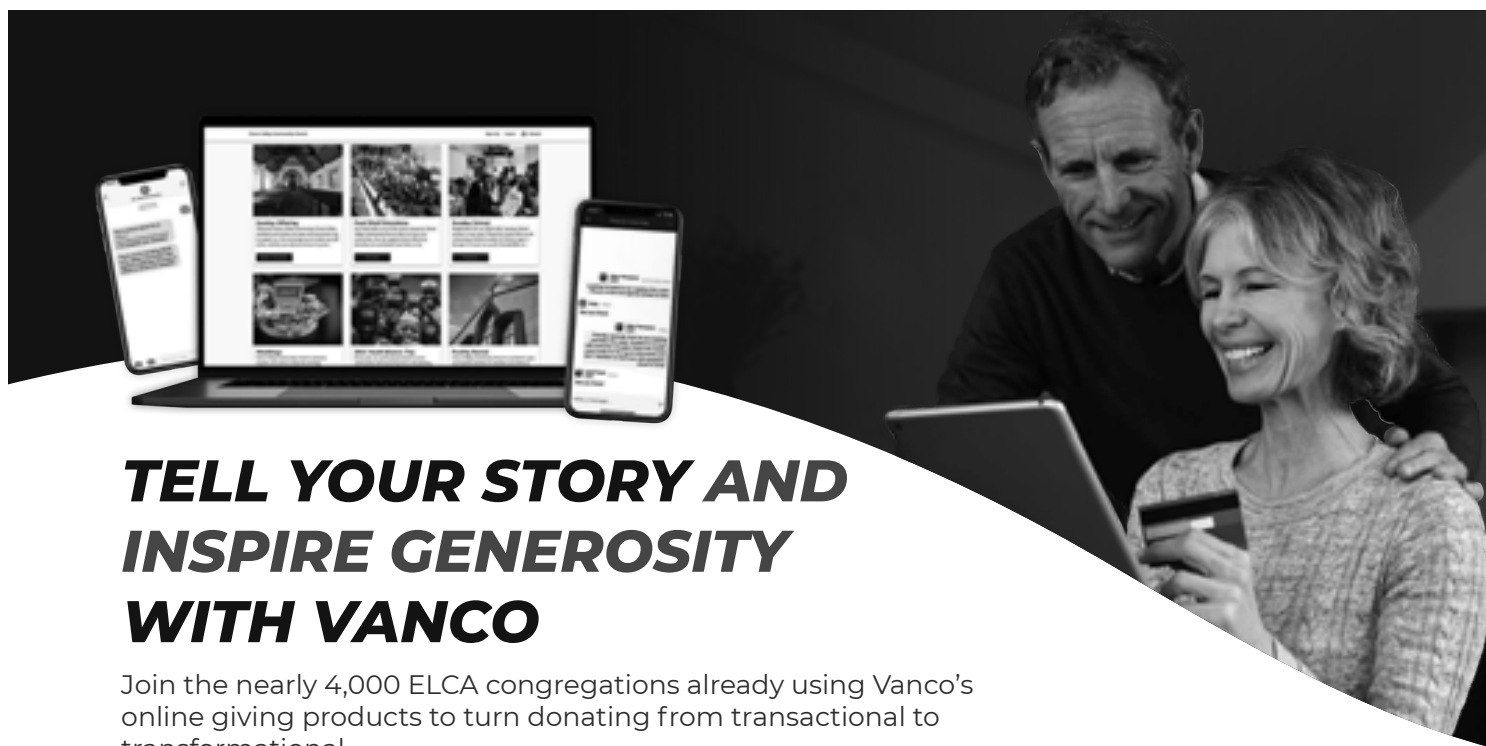


Photo: Courtesy of the Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras

The Christian Lutheran Church of Honduras accompanies communities with education assistance. Here children are tutored by youth from the Camino de Emaus in Tegucigalpa.

members around masculinities and gender roles while working on agricultural programs, irrigation systems and raising livestock—all programs supported by ELCA World Hunger.

At a recent women's gathering one participant shared that when she first attended the event six years earlier, she had to ask her



TELL YOUR STORY AND INSPIRE GENEROSITY WITH VANCO

Join the nearly 4,000 ELCA congregations already using Vanco's online giving products to turn donating from transactional to transformational.

Request your free demo at www.VancoPayments.com/eGiving/ELCA to learn more and see our exclusive ELCA rates.

You can also contact our team at **855.213.3705** or Sales@VancoPayments.com.

VANCO
FAITH

husband for permission and be sure to leave everything ready at home (food for a few days, house cleaned, etc.). This was quite a challenge.

At this year's gathering she thanked the male staff, the promoters and the pastoral body of the ILFE because her husband has grown more sensitive and aware of his privileges, taking an active role in household duties and supporting her growth spaces more. That has changed the family dynamic and set an example for their children.

In sharing the experiences of four churches in Central America, we invite ELCA members to reflect on how faith and action look in their congregations. †

To learn more

- ELCA's global mission work: elca.org/globalmission.
- **ELCA Mission Support:** elca.org/missionsupport and "Stories of Faith in Action" at livinglutheran.org/sofia.
- ELCA World Hunger: elca.org/hunger.
- Download a study guide on global mission at livinglutheran.org by clicking on the "Spiritual practices and resources" tab.



MASTER OF EDUCATION

**Put Christ at the forefront
of your lesson plan.**

Find out more at cune.edu/med.

NEXT TIME YOU COME HOME

Lisa Dordal and Milly Dordal

A newly recovered trove of letters is the source material for *Next Time You Come Home*, but the collection's true genius lies in the communion of mother and daughter across time. In distilling her late mother's letters to their loving essence, Lisa Dordal focuses not on the "nighttime mother" who drank until her speech was slurred but on the vibrant, nurturing "daytime mother" who taught her how to love the world. This is a radical compassion that heals, offering understanding without excuses or justifications, love without benchmarks or conditions. From its haunting title onward, *Next Time You Come Home* is an utter original. ~Margaret Renkl



Black
Lawrence
Press

Learn more at blacklawrencepress.com
Available wherever books are sold