

Freed for Service

Galatians 5:13-14, 22 – 6:10

Paul's letter to the Galatians was read during a crucial time in the life of the young church, when some of the leaders' priorities were out of order and the church was being led astray. Paul made a clear call for reformation, insisting that faith working through love is what identifies Christ at work among us.

For this and many other reasons, Martin Luther loved this text. He resonated with Paul's clear statement of justification by faith through grace. This letter informed Luther's assertion that in Christ we are free and subject to none, and at the same time servant and subject to all (Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*).

For 75 years, embracing the fruits of the spirit and led by Christ's example, we have put our belief into action through the ministry of Lutheran World Relief.

Kindness. Generosity. Faithfulness. Love.

No partiality. Free to serve. Bearing our neighbor's burdens. Persevering.

As we reflect on 75 years of faithful service and look ahead at the realities of our broken world, we cling to Paul's words in 6:9: "let us not grow weary in doing what is good." We need this encouragement to serve one another with a resilient spirit. What will it look like to live out these priorities now and in the future?

Our neighbors in Burkino Faso give us a glimpse of this resilient spirit. The West African country of Burkina Faso is among one of the poorest and least developed nations in the world. Most families rely heavily — if not solely — on growing crops for survival. Recent cycles of drought and food shortage have driven millions to the brink of famine, just as COVID-19 became a threat.

Faced with drought and failing crops for years, Diadagdou Haro and his wife Libabodimo Ouba found themselves begging for food to feed their family. But in 2018 when drought again brought withered crops, something was different. Their family was eating — not food they begged for, but food they bought with income from the sale of goats. Thanks to the love and generosity of Lutherans, Diadagdou's family was given two female goats and one male goat. With training and hard work, in just a few years they had a healthy herd of 18 goats! The four-legged superstars are Diadagdou's insurance policy. They provide an additional income stream, making his family less vulnerable to drought and other hardships.



Diadagdou Haro and Libabodimo Ouba's children, 5-year-old Haro (left) and 7-year-old Lankuande (right) hold their family's baby goats. (Jake Lyell for LWR)

Diadagdou and Libabodimo and their family exemplify patience, faithfulness and self-control. They live and thrive by perseverance, carrying their own loads and sharing the burdens of their neighbors. Your love through Lutheran World Relief, shared with neighbors in some of the furthest corners of the world, helps families become better able to withstand setbacks, put creative solutions into action, and move from surviving to thriving.

This is what God's Kingdom looks like when it comes bursting into the world in a million ways, big and small. Working together as Christ's church, we strive toward a day when our love — God's love — truly reaches every neighbor.

- 1) How does your congregation participate in the ministry of Lutheran World Relief?
- 2) In what ways do you see the fruits of the spirit, and other priorities set forth in Galatians, lived out in your community?
- 3) How might the resiliency of neighbors like Diadagdou inspire you and your congregation to persevere in the face of challenges?

To download this picture and see a video about habbanaye — pronounced hab-an-yay — the traditional West African practice of loaning and breeding livestock within a community, visit photos.lwr.org/?c=2649&k=b3fdb1955b.



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Love Your Neighbor

Luke 10:25-37

In this familiar and well-loved parable, Jesus reminds us that compassion is not limited to those on the inside or those who have privilege of class or position. We are called to come out of our comfort zones, to see both the neighbor in need and the other — unknown, sometimes feared — as bearers of Christ's light and love in the world.

For the past 75 years, you and your parents and grandparents have made up a great cloud of witnesses (Hebrews 12:1). You have been a light in the deepest darkness for our neighbors in need around the world.

You've carried God's loving presence into refugee camps, droughts, conflict zones, and systemic poverty. You have made sure the most vulnerable communities across Africa are ready for COVID-19. You've extended God's mercy through the warmth of nearly 27 million Mission Quilts, millions of pounds of food, and miles upon miles of irrigation systems. You've saved countless lives and restored hope and a future for so many. Neither cultural or religious differences, politics, or geographical boundaries have kept us from, together, crossing the road and delivering love and economic aid to our most vulnerable neighbors.

Together our love has reached neighbors like Mouhamad El Sheli and his family. When their home was bombed in Syria, they were forced into life as refugees in neighboring Lebanon. Lebanon is a country of just 4 million people and is roughly the size of Connecticut. Rather than pushing Syrian refugees into large camps, they are integrated into local communities. The influx of more than 1 million Syrians into Lebanon raised tensions as competition for jobs increased and resources were scarce.

But thanks to a simple and creative greenhouse, an unlikely and incredible partnership developed between Mouhamad and his new Lebanese neighbor, Omar Kassem al Ayoubi. Fashioned out of clear plastic stretched over steel tubing, greenhouses were erected on the property of this Lebanese farmer. Your love provided both training in growing techniques and offered market analysis tools to strengthen Mouhamad and Omar's partnership.

"There was some fear of the Syrians at first, because they were coming and might be a burden for us in our country," says Omar.



Syrian refugee Mohamad Naasan, 42 (left), and Lebanese farmer Elias Daisy, 63 (right), from the town of Deddeh near Tripoli in northern Lebanon. (Brian Clark for LWR)

"When we worked with them in the fields, we saw that they really have experience. They tell you 'this is right, this is wrong.' There is pride in their work."

Omar is grateful for the help of the project, and for his neighbor and new friend.

As we reflect on 75 years of ministry together, we celebrate the Lutheran legacy of loving our neighbor. We give thanks to God for neighbors like you, Omar and Mouhamad. And we give thanks to God for the gift of Jesus, who crossed the road for us so that we might know the abundance of his love for all.

- 1) How does your congregation participate in the ministry of Lutheran World Relief?
- 2) In what ways do you see this parable lived out in your community?
- 3) How might the open hearts and perseverance of neighbors like Mouhamad and Omar inspire you and your congregation to act with compassion in the face of fear and uncertainty?

To download this picture, visit photos.lwr.org/?c=2649&k=b3fdb1955b. To read more about the Lebanese greenhouse project, visit lwr.org/story-hub/greenhouses-unite-syrian-refugees-lebanese-farmers.



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