

God's Love

IN ACTION

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LUTHERAN
WORLD RELIEF

CONNECTING LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS WITH
NEIGHBORS AROUND THE WORLD | FALL 2023

God's Love

IN ACTION

DEAR PARTNER IN MINISTRY,

You know all about hard conversations. You've held space for people as they unburdened their souls. You've prayed with them and spoken words of hope during difficult times. This is holy work.

Consider these hard conversations our neighbors face today:

How do you explain to your son that he can't play outside, because broken glass — or worse, land mines — make it too dangerous? How do you comfort your daughter when she mourns for the home, the village, the family members that are gone forever? How do you share hope with your child when you don't have any left?

So many children have had their childhoods interrupted by war, disaster or extreme poverty. Their safety and innocence — even the simple joys of play — have been taken from them.

Your congregation is an enormous blessing to these precious children. Your compassion shows them they are not forgotten. **No matter how far from home or normalcy they are, you surround them with God's love in many ways. A full belly. A warm quilt. A safe place to sleep.**

This is holy work, too. **Thank you.**

In faith,



Daniel Speckhard

**AMBASSADOR
DANIEL SPECKHARD**
President and CEO

P.S. This newsletter highlights some of the ways your congregation cares for children around the world ... Until your love reaches every neighbor.



ABOVE: A boy and his grandmother make traditional Ukrainian dolls during an art therapy session. Although they consented to have their photo shared, they were hesitant to give their names — a new fear the war has unlocked.

ON COVER: Erkan and Seyda Halal sit in front of their family's new container home in Kirikhan, Türkiye. Thanks to your love, they now have safe shelter, hot meals and clean running water.

YOUR COMPASSION

makes beauty
out of ashes in Ukraine



Not long after schools reopened after COVID, war disrupted Ukrainian children's lives again. Some lost parents, others had to flee their homes, and nobody can tell them when – or if – life will go back to normal.

Congregations like yours are loving these children in many ways. First, **you are providing safe refuge, basic supplies and nourishing meals at six sanatoriums.** (In Ukraine, sanatoriums are like retreat centers that offer medical services. Today, many serve as shelters for the displaced.) To date, you have helped more than 10,000 people have at least one, if not many, safe nights of sleep.

But meeting physical needs is just the start. **You're also fostering hope through counseling and psychological care.** LWR's Tetyana Medvid, an expert in trauma and gender-based violence, says, "These people have suffered ... Our task is to show them that life goes on."

Your compassion blesses children through art therapy sessions. By working with their hands, they can express their feelings and learn that they can create something beautiful, even when surrounded by war.

Keeping children's and families' spirits up is critical at this stage of the war, says the sanatorium's general manager Yuriy Mosienko Borovyk. **"They need support most of all,"** he says. **"Moral support to give them hope." ■**

CHILDREN NEED A CHILDHOOD

Children around the world need congregations like yours to give them another chance to be a kid – to sleep soundly, play safely, grow up healthy and know they are loved.



\$5,300 funds a container home for one family in Türkiye



\$2,100 provides art therapy for 30 children in Ukraine

TO SHARE RESTORING HOPE WITH GOD'S CHILDREN, SEND YOUR CONGREGATION'S GIFT TO:

Lutheran World Relief,

PO Box 17061, Baltimore, MD 21297-1061

or give online at lwr.org/congregations.

Note: The dollar amounts listed represent the actual average cost of providing the respective service. Your gifts contribute to the entire mission of Lutheran World Relief, to be used where the need is greatest.



Months after the earthquakes destroyed their home, Asya, held by her father, Erkan, was enthralled with the gift of safe, running water in her family's new home.

RESTORING DIGNITY AND CHILDHOOD WONDER IN TÜRKIYE

Asya Halal may not know your name or what church you belong to. But thanks to you, the toddler knows what it's like to have a full belly, clean water and a safe place to sleep.

CHILDHOOD, INTERRUPTED

Asya was just one year old when the February earthquake rocked Türkiye. In an instant, her home was destroyed.

Family members disappeared. Her parents were frightened.

For months afterward, Asya — along with her parents and 5-year-old brother Isa — lived in a sweltering tent and drank water that made them sick. They barely slept. When LWR visited their tent this summer, Asya's parents were exhausted from their hardships.

Her father Erkan, a shoe salesman, described conflicting emotions. "We lost so many friends and relatives. On the one hand, we are very sad. On the other hand, I am happy that my family and my children are with me."

When asked about their daily life, **Asya's mother Seyda lamented, "We have no place to cook, no place to wash dishes ... No place to eat, no clothes, no place to sleep. When it rains, water gets in ... We are devastated."**

She added that personal hygiene was nearly impossible. "I haven't taken a shower for about a month," she admitted.

As for Asya and Isa, the earthquake shook their childhood off its foundations.

"The children cry all the time," Seyda said. "It's so hard."

YOU GO THE DISTANCE

When disaster strikes, our incredible Lutheran congregations never fail to extend your compassion and Christ's love. You go farther, and then stay longer, to help families get back on their feet.

Immediately after the quake, you delivered necessities including food, tents and solar lights. For families like the Halals who lost everything, your kindness carried them through those hardest days when all the children could do was cry.

But today little Asya has a reason to smile. Her family is finally moving out of their tent and into a container home that congregations like yours provided.

The community will include a homework center, laundry machines, a park and sport fields. There will also be free transportation to the city center for work and school once those are operational.



HOME SWEET HOME

The Halals' new home will be part of a 400-container community on the outskirts of their home city of Kirikhan, which was largely reduced to rubble. Each furnished container has electricity and clean running water.

Generous Lutherans funded 35 of these containers as well as 500 food packs and 500 hygiene packs to help families settle in.

Asya especially loves her family's shiny new faucet – and the stream of clean water it produces. The first time the Halals visited their new home, her face lit up whenever her father turned on the water. Her tears had turned to smiles.

While taking in the small but comfortable space, Erkan says, **"Thank you thousands of times for supporting us. God bless you all ... Thank you so much for coming this far."** ■

▶ WATCH THE VIDEO:

The Halal family is deeply relieved that your kindness is providing safe shelter, hot meals and clean running water in their new home.

To watch the video, visit lwr.org/congregations.



LUTHERAN CONGREGATIONS ARE PROVIDING:



AMENITIES:



Electricity



Plumbing



Toilet



Furniture



**Heating/
Cooling**



Sinks



Shower



**Cleaning
Supplies**

CONTAINER FACTS:



226 square feet | 4-6 people | \$5,300



CLOSING CONGREGATIONS: WHEN CLOSING YOUR BUILDING OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

St. Ansgar Lutheran Church in Portland, Maine, closed in June after 62 years of ministry.

After 62 years, St. Ansgar Lutheran Church in Portland, Maine, closed its doors in June.

Although the Rev. Tom Chittick describes himself as “a happy pew sitter” rather than the pastor, the closure was especially personal to him. He and his wife Nicky met at St. Ansgar as children, and they rejoined the congregation in 2009 after Tom retired from ministry.

Closing a church inevitably involves sorrow, but St. Ansgar was prepared to find a silver lining. Tom explains that the congregation received wonderful advice years ago: **“When you see the handwriting on the wall, act sooner rather than later, because then you will have the advantage — and the pleasure — of having legacies and assets that you can distribute.”**

For St. Ansgar, the signs became clear last year when attendance and pledges dwindled to unsustainable levels. Those who were left agreed it was time to consider their assets and talk through the impact they wanted to create.

COUNTING THEIR BLESSINGS

Supporting refugees and asylum seekers was one of the church’s key ministries for years, so they collectively agreed to support related ministries globally and close to home.

For their global ministry, they chose Lutheran World Relief. “What can I say?” Tom laughs. “We’re standard Lutherans. LWR

is part of what we believe in.” He also explained that this gift is an extension of the church’s long history of supporting the LWR Quilt & Kit Ministry.

To other congregations looking to make their closure meaningful, he reflects, **“It’s sad that we lost our building and that our congregation had dwindled down to 35. But it’s also spiritually energizing to know that we’re putting these assets to really important use.”**

As for the church members, they remain in touch to continue their fellowship and, in Tom’s words, “to take care of one another.” In other words, their small group is still a church, loving its neighbors and each other ... just in a different form. ■



The congregation chose to donate funds from their closure to Lutheran World Relief because supporting refugees was one of the church’s key ministries.

HOW FUNDING FROM CLOSING CONGREGATIONS PROVIDES NEW LIFE FOR OUR NEIGHBORS

The decision to close a church is never made easily and is always accompanied by deep grief. And yet as Christians, we cling closely to the resurrection promise that from death comes new life. In recent years, Lutheran World Relief has received more than \$1 million in gifts from congregations that have closed their doors and turned the death of their congregation into new life for our neighbors in need around the world. Meet some of your neighbors whose lives have been transformed by these gifts.



 **UKRAINE**

When the war in Ukraine began, Kristina and her children spent two weeks hiding in the basement of a school before making the decision to flee and seek safety in Poland. Thanks to caring congregations like yours, when Kristina reached Gdansk, Poland, she was able to access cash assistance to care for her children, pay for housing and afford other essentials.



 **INDIA**

The love of congregations has left a lasting impact on communities along the banks of the Gandak River in northern India. The introduction of flood safety practices allows fathers like Rajendra to keep his family safe. New farming techniques – like rooftop farming and hanging mushroom crops – mean that Annu and her sisters will have healthy meals year-round.



 **TANZANIA**

Emma has been visited by a community health worker since her daughter Ebenezer was five months old. Because of the kindness of congregations like yours, Emma learned how to prepare nutritious food for her child and knows when to seek medical care. Ebenezer is now thriving at a healthy weight and the risk of stunted growth has been greatly reduced.



 **EL SALVADOR**

Manuel earned his diploma in cocoa production through a Lutheran World Relief-supported partnership. Thanks to congregations like yours, young adults throughout Central America are participating in agricultural and entrepreneurial training. Overcoming the economic crises that young adults are facing is one of the ways that your love can help address the root causes of migration.



To learn more about how a closing congregation can provide lasting hope into the future, please contact: **Lutheran World Relief | congregations@lwr.org**



LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF
700 LIGHT ST
BALTIMORE, MD 21230

COMING SOON! MISSION OF THE MONTH RESOURCES

To receive updates, join our email list for congregational leaders at [LWR.ORG/CONGREGATIONS](https://www.lwr.org/congregations).

We've heard your feedback! We're excited to be releasing new Mission of the Month resources very soon:

- Inspiring videos
- Small group study guides
- Bulletin insert
- Children's message prompts
- Quilt & Kit blessing litany
- and more!



Sign up for the congregational leader email list today.



YOUR CONGREGATION'S COMPASSION REACHES NEIGHBORS IN THEIR TIME OF NEED, NO MATTER HOW FAR.

War has surrounded Masha Besedina, 2, for most of her little life. When Russian forces occupied her town last year, they looted and destroyed her home. For months there was no electricity, no water, no medicine, no fruit, no milk. Thanks to your loving kindness, Masha and her family have received an LWR Mission Quilt and found safe refuge and nourishing meals in a sanatorium. They don't know when or if they'll be able to return home, but your prayers and support are there to offer comfort and hope. Thank you for showing this family they are never out of reach of God's love!

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Sign-up for updates at [lwr.org/congregations](https://www.lwr.org/congregations) and we'll deliver these resources to your inbox as soon as they're ready.