

God's Love IN ACTION

FAMILIES FACE AN IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE

Food, water or shelter? As COVID-19 eliminates their incomes, more families in Kenya's slums have to choose between necessities.

PLUS

Though your mission trips may be canceled, your congregation's love is still reaching neighbors around the world. Learn how.



LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF



Sean Hawkey for LWR

A SEASON OF HOPE

LET US HELP
YOU THIS
ADVENT.



Sermon illustrations | Powerful videos
Candle lighting litany
At-home engagement for all ages

JOIN WITH LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF as we remember our neighbors from around the world. During each week of Advent, we will lift up the experience of our neighbors in each of the regions your love reaches: Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

Available at lwr.org/congregations.



LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

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DEAR PARTNER IN MINISTRY,

You have pivoted your ministry plans for over 6 months now – reimagining worship, expanding technical skills you didn't know you had, finding innovative ways to reach out to your people. I am amazed by your creativity, your faith and your stamina. And I hear you. You are tired. We want to help.



A message we continue to hear loud and clear from Lutheran congregations this year is that your love for your neighbors around the globe continues to grow during this pandemic ... and yet you can't quite engage in outreach ministry the way you always have.

Our staff is still on the ground in the hardest to reach places around the world ensuring that your love — and the love of thousands of other Lutheran congregations — is still reaching our neighbors. This edition of *God's Love in Action* provides a variety of ways for your congregation to tap into this ministry.

- **Give your families an opportunity to travel around the world from their kitchen table as they dive into our Advent resources.** Sermon illustrations, videos, a candle-lighting litany and at-home engagement materials are ready for you now.
- **Share Lilian's story with your congregation and inspire generosity. Find all the tools you need online by using our congregational update kit.** Assure your mission-minded members that our staff are your hands and feet on the ground.
- **Identify an LWR Ambassador in your congregation.** As a leader of your congregation, we know your responsibilities and time-commitments run deep. This is exactly why we're seeking lay leaders to become the connectors between your congregation and God's love in action around the world.

All of these resources — and more — can be found at lwr.org/congregations.

It is our deep joy to be in partnership with you and help your congregation bring God's kingdom into this world. We won't stop ... until your congregation's love reaches every neighbor.

REV. LISA KIPP
Sr. Manager, Congregations
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LWR Ambassador Program

Is there someone in your congregation who is passionate about sharing love with our neighbors in need around the world?

In a world of plenty, where those who have the very least are the most forsaken, we rely on strong partnerships with our Lutheran congregations to share God's love. This year, we're launching a new LWR Ambassadors program to help connect Lutheran congregations with our neighbors around the world. As a leader of your congregation, we know your responsibilities and time-commitments run deep.

This is why we're seeking lay leaders to become the connectors between your congregation and God's love in action around the world.

Do you have someone in your congregation with:

- A passion for loving God's people?
- A desire to help your congregation make a difference in a world of need?
- A willingness to tell the stories of God's love in action around the world?
- An eagerness to invite local neighbors to share their love with their global neighbors?

Visit lwr.org/congregations to learn more and begin to identify a possible LWR Ambassador for your congregation.



LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

AMBASSADOR



Sean Hawkey for LWR

THEY HAVE LOVE IN THEIR HOME, BUT NOT CLEAN WATER

Lilian Mutheu grew up in Mukuru, one of the largest slums in Nairobi, Kenya. The living conditions in Mukuru are some of the worst imaginable. The streets are littered with trash and waste, and **communicable diseases like COVID-19 spread quickly due to cramped conditions and a lack of clean water and sanitation**. Hunger is a persistent struggle for thousands of children.

But Lilian was a bright girl, and she did everything she could to lift herself out of poverty. She studied hard and got a job, but she ran into challenge after challenge in trying to rise above her circumstances. The men at work sexually harassed her, making it clear she would advance only if she gave into their demands.

Still, Lilian persisted. She continued working and hoped to save money for her future, but soon her mother began demanding all of Lilian's wages. When Lilian wouldn't comply, her mother packed Lilian's belongings into a single suitcase and threw her onto the street.

Lilian had tried to do everything right, but now she was alone, forsaken. Years later, she still breaks down in tears whenever she remembers. Her only option was to move in with her boyfriend. Before long, Lilian became pregnant, and her rise out of poverty became even steeper.

A better life, starting with water

Lilian looks at her son Nevil, now four years old, with deep love in her eyes, and she would not trade him for the world. She continues to work hard with the hope of giving him everything she didn't have in life — opportunity, unconditional love, a safe place to call home. She has even become a mentor to other young girls, offering advice and support to help them make healthy choices.



But, despite her efforts and hard work, Lilian and Nevil still live in the slum. **And though they have love, they do not have clean water at home.**

Safe water is the most expensive item families in Mukuru have to buy, and many are forced to choose between essentials: food, water, soap, rent, medical care. It's a choice no mother should have to make.

Your congregation's love can make the difference

Through Lutheran World Relief, your love can reach anywhere — even into the slums Lilian calls home. As COVID-19 continues to threaten the health and stability of communities across the world, vulnerable neighbors like those living in Mukuru are at greatest risk.

So many are already suffering from the many effects of extreme poverty. One way you can make a difference today is with the gift of clean water so families can save money, cook and drink safely, wash their hands and avoid getting sick and even dying from waterborne illnesses.

As Lutherans, our calling is a simple one: to love our neighbors. **Will your congregation love your neighbors in Mukuru by making a gift today?**

See the enclosed envelope for ways to give. ■

Visit lwr.org/congregations for a powerful video and congregational discussion guide featuring Lilian and issues of gender justice.



MEET YOUR HANDS AND

MINISTRY LOOKS DIFFERENT IN THE AGE OF COVID-19.

We are used to getting up close and personal in our service projects. We are used to sending out mission teams to share God's love with the world. But this year (and likely next year, too) your congregation's reach may feel a little shorter. Travel has been paused, and we've been asked to put distance and masks between us and the people we've been called to serve.

For those of you who may be feeling disoriented and disconnected during this time, we at Lutheran World Relief have good news. Though your mission trips are canceled and you're stuck at home, our local staff are still on the ground ensuring that the love of U.S. Lutherans continues reaching neighbors in need around the world.

We'd like you to meet **Michael Maithya**, who works in Nairobi, Kenya. Michael is a husband, a father of two and one of hundreds of people in the LWR family who continue to carry your love — God's love — to places and people who need it most.

UPDATE



Quilts and kits feared destroyed in Beirut explosion, found intact.

Visit lwr.org/congregations for the latest update.



“People living in slums are relying on well-wishers to get food, rent, medicines, protective equipment, facemasks and sanitizers.”

D FEET ON THE GROUND

One of the areas Michael serves is the Mukuru slum where Lilian Mutheu (see our feature story) lives. Michael’s primary job is to ensure mothers and babies living in poor urban areas receive the health care they need to stay healthy and thrive — from prenatal care and safe deliveries to nutrition support and vaccinations. Because here, far too many die too soon from preventable causes.

Michael says COVID-19 has caused a lot of challenges for the people he serves. In addition to the danger of the virus, there are curfews and strict travel restrictions around the city. As a result, many businesses have closed, and people are without income. “This has affected housing, medical care and food among affected families,” he says. “People living in slums are relying on well-wishers to get food, rent, medicines, protective equipment, facemasks and sanitizers.”

More than ever, families living in poverty need help.

Thankfully, with some modifications, Michael has been able to continue serving. One major change is that instead of having mothers and babies visit health centers, where they may be exposed to the virus, he’s been organizing open-air clinics in public parks and churches to ensure they get the care they need.

“This,” he says, “has made life bearable for the people we serve.”

We are so grateful for your congregation’s service to your neighbors and the world, and we know one day you’ll be able to serve again in all the ways your heart leads you. Until then, please know that Michael and hundreds more of our amazing colleagues are hard at work all around the world, carrying your love wherever it’s needed — until your love reaches every neighbor.

Will your congregation join us by praying for our Lutheran World Relief colleagues around the world?

Gracious God, we hear your call to love our neighbors. Thank you for the staff of Lutheran World Relief who answer that call and serve our neighbors across the globe. Strengthen, protect and guide them in challenging situations. Empower them as they extend the love of U.S. Lutherans to a world in need. Amen. ■



When Ruth Lunde (pictured here, center) heard about the needs of our neighbors around the world, she prayed and asked, "What can I do?" Today her generosity has inspired her congregation to make a world of difference.

HOW ONE CONGREGATION INSPIRES GENEROSITY

Like so many congregations, Immanuel Lutheran Church's relationship with Lutheran World Relief was pioneered by its quilters. Located in Eden Prairie, Minn., the Immanuel Piecemakers have quietly sent nearly 3,000 quilts around the world as an expression of God's love in action.

Today hands of all ages join in extending their love by packaging and sending LWR Personal Care Kits each Lent. Members have grown to expect and look forward to this opportunity. According to Kim Rathjen, Immanuel's coordinator of inreach and outreach, "People plan for and purchase items when they see things on sale throughout the year. Sending the personal care kits has helped open people's eyes to the global work of the church."

But Immanuel's relationship with Lutheran World Relief deepened at, of all places, a church council meeting. Pastor Paul Nelson invited someone from LWR to come and share about needs around the world. Member Ruth Lunde's heart was touched. She couldn't put the stories she heard that night out of her mind. After prayer and contemplation, Ruth asked the question, "What can I do?"

"As I have had the pleasure to get to know a number of people at Immanuel, I know that many people want to live out their faith," Ruth shares, "and part of that is doing what they can for people all across the globe."

Ruth's heart was moved to inspire generosity among her church family. In 2017, she provided a lead gift of \$5,000 for Lutheran World Relief and inspired her congregation to match it. The congregation rose to the occasion. So much so, that Ruth has continued to provide a generous lead gift every year since.

"All of the people across the world, we are all part of God's family," shares Ruth. "As I read about conditions across the world and have had the chance to visit a number of countries, it warms my heart to contribute whatever I can."

Ruth and her congregation's love have made a world of difference. In 2017, they put God's love in action by repairing bakeries in war-torn Syria so their neighbors could receive their daily bread. In 2018 and 2019, their love empowered young adult entrepreneurs in Tanzania to gain innovative agricultural skills. This year, their love will help young adults in Latin America receive education in local agriculture practices so that they can remain home and avoid the dangerous and difficult process of migrating and starting over with their families.

Pastor Paul Nelson loves that Immanuel is about the work of helping people to thrive where they are. "It's heartbreaking to see people from Latin America come here seeking refuge being turned away, finding no welcome. Wouldn't the best solution be for those people to have help to stay where they want to be, their homes? Supporting the work of LWR is one way we can help these people thrive where they are."

But Immanuel's partnership with LWR has done more than impact lives around the world. It has changed lives in their own congregation. "Our partnership with Lutheran World Relief has helped our congregation put in perspective that our neighbor isn't just who lives near us. We are responsible to our global neighbors as well," shares Kim.

Is there a Ruth in your congregation — eager to inspire generosity and grow your congregation's expression of God's love in action around the world?

To find opportunities for your congregation to get your hands busy and express generosity, visit lwr.org/congregations. ■

