

Newsletter

Keeping in Mind Global Mission In South America

Companion Churches are providing reasonably quick and effective responses to the pandemic

COVID-19 has generated huge health, social, and economic impact, which has claimed a very high number of human lives around the world. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are the current epicenter of the pandemic. In South America, the ELCA Lutheran companion churches have felt the harsh impact, many people who are members of the churches have died, also relevant leaders.

The region has become a critical zone for the pandemic, exacerbated by deep inequalities and the weakness of health and social protection structures.

Even without knowing the final number of sick and fatal victims in the region, there are at the time of publishing this newsletter, more than 8 million cases, and more than 300,000 deaths.

The consequences of COVID-19 are the illness and death of thousands of people, and the deepest economic recession in recent history.

In this context, the Lutheran churches in South America, ELCA companions, have given reasonably quick and effective responses to the best of their capacities. The churches have implemented proactive food safety and hygiene care programs in the communities and neighborhoods where they are. For example, the Lutheran Church in Bolivia implemented food and hygiene supplies distribution programs in communities in La Paz-El Alto, Cochabamba, Tarija, Cobija, and Lake Titicaca, with the Montana Synod accompaniment.

In addition community services, all the churches continued to celebrate their worships through Zoom virtual platforms and other social networks. The churches suspended face-to-face activities due to the confinement imposed by governments, but the churches found ways to continue providing services, complying with the established rules certainly.

According to their volume, the companion churches have generated community responses informing about the risks and the necessary prevention. They have distributed food and other goods effectively; they have communicated using digital platforms and applications to maintain communication with the community generating trust. For example, the Lutheran Church of Peru deployed, in Lima, Cuzco, and Piura, an information campaign to the community as a whole for the prevention of the pandemic.

The companion churches have accompanied many families who have lost loved ones; the most affected have been the elderly, who have also suffered the drama of loneliness and distance from their relatives. IELCH, in Chile, developed in several congregations an accompaniment program for older adults, which is the most affected population in some cities. The implemented programs have not required a large investment of money because the companion churches do not have those resources.



IELB. Bolivia. Cobija.
Galilea Community Center
Food security program



IL-P. Peru. Piura.
Christ The King Mission.
Food security program



Church leaders have inspired calm, confidence, and hope in stressful situations

Companions have had the decisive contribution of funds from Lutheran Disaster Response. International Grants, resources which have helped reduce panic and lack of information, and lack of food and hygiene supplies.

The pandemic makes the body sick, but also the psyche and social relationships. Therefore, it is a necessary cure and integral accompaniment. The churches have been in constant prayer and have increased their virtual meeting spaces to preach the Word, pray together, and in some cases share the sacrament of the Lord's Supper remotely.

ELCA companions have been very creative in using existing media and programs to inspire hope and closeness to care for people with material help, but even more spiritually, emotionally, and socially. Churches have sent text messages, group messages, and also social networks and platforms. For example, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia implemented remote psychosocial assistance in church programs to address the consequences of COVID-19 in vulnerable sectors, especially migrants.

Church leaders have inspired calm, confidence, and hope in stressful situations. In all cases, the communication strategies have shared reliable and verified information about COVID-19. For example, the Lutheran Diakonia Foundation in Brazil organized the "Conscious Basket" campaign to motivate donations of food and hygiene supplies in Brazilian society.

ELCA companions provided information from local public health agencies on the signs and symptoms of COVID-19. For example, IL-P in Peru actively disseminated preventive information on social media and promoted psychosocial care, using social media platforms (YouTube). IELCH, in Chile, organized the neighborhoods surrounding congregations to provide soup kitchen services to neighborhood residents.

Companion churches and congregations assembled teams of volunteers and empowered their capacities. In all the churches, there has been an organization and planning. In Latin America, the lack of work and productive activities will increase; by the end of 2020, the number of people living in poverty by 45 million (reaching a total of 230 million people), and the number of people living in extreme poverty in 28 million (reaching a total of 96 million people). Women are severely affected by the pandemic. Gender-based violence has increased dramatically due to confinement. As a result of gender injustice, women's capacity to absorb economic shocks is less, and they take charge of greater demands for care from relatives and the home.



IELCH. Chile. Santiago.
Good Samaritan Congregation.
Soup Kitchen Program



IECO. Colombia. Bogota.
Venezuelan Migrants Support Program

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ELCA missionaries have helped establish growing churches throughout the world. As a result, we are now part of a much larger story — a global community of more than 70 million Lutherans in 79 countries

PRAYER

Beloved God,

We pray for the sick, we pray for their healing. We pray for all the people who care for them

We pray for the nations in which poverty increases and illness of all kinds continue to become worse due to loss of jobs and lack of healthcare.

We pray for the leaders of the churches, for the wisdom and courage they have as they lead us during this challenging time

We pray for the church in Peru, grieving the loss of their presiding pastor Rev. Adita Torres. Be with them in their sorrow, uphold them with your strength. Amen

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