

April 2021

# Newsletter

## Keeping in Mind Global Mission In South America

### Amid this pandemic, where is God?

In times of pandemic, the problems have worsened in the five continents, where there are millions of sick people and hundreds of thousands of dead. Countries have closed borders and normal activities such as education and commerce. Global society faces unprecedented political, economic, and social challenges. There is anguish, there is hunger, there is a lack of jobs, and there is an increase in gender-based violence.

But we have also reduced environmental pollution. We have discovered the benefits and limits of video conferencing. We have witnessed the selflessness of many professionals and the solidarity actions of so many communities, churches, and anonymous people.

But amid the pandemic, where is God? The silence of God becomes very hard. Some people pray, asking for miracles, asking for an end to the pandemic, but the miracle does not come. Then, the doubt gets worse: where is God?

God is in the one who agonizes and in the one who serves others. God is in all these realities. God is with us suffering, crying, caring, investigating, working, and giving us hope. Through Jesus, God is present in the people who suffer, in the people who die, in nurses who lovingly care for the victims of this pandemic. God is in the scientists, in those who pray, helping us carry this situation with hope.

God is also in the churches that continue to preach and evangelize, and at the same time serve the needy. Companion churches in Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela and Argentina have implemented emergency assistance programs for the hungry and homeless. Churches have served their communities with food distribution and psychosocial support programs in many congregations and social services with funds provided by ELCA/Lutheran Disaster Response.

The path of faith is to continue even when the night is dark, because we know that the God of Life, of the Resurrection, does not abandon us. In his Commentary on the Magnificat of Mary, Luther says:

*On the other hand, no one is willing to look into the depths with their poverty, disgrace, squalor, misery and anguish. From these all turn away their eyes. Where there are such folk, every one takes to his heels, forsakes and shuns and leaves them to themselves; no one dreams of helping them nor of making something out of them.*

*Therefore, to God alone belongs that sort of seeing that looks into the depths with their need and misery, and is nigh unto all that are in the depths; as St. Peter says, "God resist the proud, but to the humble he gives grace."*

God is at our side in times of difficulty; let us pray for God to help us in the discouragements of life, being in solidarity and respect, and giving us strength to collaborate with the work of creation.

This pandemic can become an opportunity for us to renew our life and start a new life, simpler, not so greedy, more collaborative among all, more supportive, more respectful, and more sensitive to everything because everything is interconnected. This is what God wants, and God will continue to be present even during our difficulties.



IELB. Bolivia. Presiding Pastor Rev. German Loayza at the opening of a new congregation Jesus The Galilee, near La Paz.. April 2021.



IECO. Colombia . Food Distribution program, serving migrants women. in Bogotá



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## Churches stay to strengthen and adapt their response

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to destabilize the South American societies, ELCA companions stay to strengthen and adapt the response to meet the growing needs. According to a United Nations report on Latin America, "COVID-19 is causing the worst health, economic, social and humanitarian crisis in the region in a century." In some countries, as Brazil and Peru, the number of cases and hospitalizations is very high; the acceleration of infections implies a need for medical supplies, like oxygen, far beyond the local production capacity, which has caused hundreds of deaths.

The COVID19 pandemic and the prevention measures, such as isolation and social distancing, have deepened economic and social inequalities with the closing of commercial spaces. The most vulnerable groups have suffered the most, with huge loss or absence of family income.

The situation that most affects people's psychology is a deep feeling of insecurity and anxiety. The psychosocial support that churches have contributed tries to decrease these risks through a community approach.

Companion churches' current activities related to COVID-19 include food collection and distribution campaigns, community health campaigns, livelihoods assistance, and psychosocial support, mostly to families and the elderly.

Church leaders (ordained and non-ordained) also had to adapt to the new situation and learn to serve in a pandemic context. They put in place self-care measures, adapting their roles while helping communities, promoting careful communication, stressing the importance of self-awareness, resilience building, and self-care. Church leaders have sought to exercise effective leadership. They support and guide individuals and communities through uncertainty. Leaders also do not forget that they are also part of the "people" they are a call to care

During a crisis, church leaders have sought to operate under isolation restrictions while keeping in mind the church's needs as an organization and institution. Leaders have implemented online administrative processes to develop general church assemblies to meet the terms of eligible authorities (bishops, presidents, and boards of directors) to keep the church institution functioning.

So that, In March 2021, there have been general assemblies in the Lutheran Church of Peru.

In Colombia, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELCO) also held a general assembly, which reelected Bishop Atahualpa Hernández for five years. In April, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay held its ordinary general assembly, which elected Pastor Wilma Rommel as the first woman pastor president for 2021-2024. God, in his unconditional love, is providing the churches with valuable leadership to continue serving and proclaiming the Gospel.



**Pastora Wilma Elisabet Rommel**  
Electa Pastora Presidenta de IELU



Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida  
Argentina y Uruguay

24 DE ABRIL DE 2021  
61ª ASAMBLEA GENERAL  
**IELU 21**  
Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Unida  
Argentina y Uruguay

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Make check payable to "ELCA Global Church Sponsorship" with "Gustavo Driau GCS2045" in the memo line.

**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 new leaders in the church in Colombia, Bishop Atahualpa Hernandez, and in Argentina, Rev. Wilma Rommel, enlighten them and accompany them in times of uncertainty.

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