

WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER

2024



OCTOBER 2024 Mission Support Memo STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

Hallelujah

A story from the Indiana-Kentucky Synod

As you read this story, what inspires you? What new kinds of ministry are happening near you?

Imagine entering a sanctuary, hearing the joyful sounds of a praise band, the drums, keyboard, guitar and voices singing “Hallelujah,” dresses and jackets full of bright color, mostly young adult leaders, and the congregation swaying with the music. Then, you realize the words are not in English, in fact not in a language heard much in Indianapolis, Ind. It is Mara. This is the Mara Evangelical Church in Indianapolis, better known as MECI.



There are nine Mara congregations in the U.S. that are affiliated with the Mara Evangelical Church in Myanmar, a member of the Lutheran World Federation. These faith communities are made up of refugees from Myanmar and are vibrant places of community that gather hundreds to worship weekly, but most are not ELCA congregations. However, in September 2019, a group of 128 people of the Indianapolis Mara community wanted to create a more progressive congregation and approached the Indiana-Kentucky Synod with an interest in becoming part of the synod and the ELCA. So MECI became a new synod-authorized worshipping community exploration in November 2020 and needed a mission developer.

The group had an idea for a leader, Mr. Khai Cho, but he lived in South Carolina and was not an ordained minister. Khai shares that he asked for three months to pray and discern. He was especially worried whether some members might question his leadership. Yet with daily prayer, Khai felt the Spirit speak to his heart that this call was to “feed the people with the word,” and God’s word would surround and support him, so off he went to Indianapolis. In December 2020, Bishop Bill Gafkjen authorized Khai as the synod-authorized minister (SAM) for MECI. Khai was entranced into the Indiana-Kentucky Synod candidacy process in 2021 and soon began his seminary education through TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif. The synod prioritized this ministry, ensured a reasonable salary and funded seminary costs. Every week, Khai and Pastor Nancy Nyland, director for evangelical mission in the synod, met to support, strategize and learn from each other. MECI moved into being a synod-authorized worshipping community in April 2021, and it was welcomed into the synod and the ELCA as an organized congregation during the Synod Assembly, on June 7, 2024.



This active, vibrant and energetic faith community has about 80 people in worship each week, praising God in word and song. They are people of faith, dedicated to weekly 2-1/2 hour services, Saturday Bible study, home prayer gatherings, band and choir practice, and active confirmation. MECI has 45 children, with over 30 attending each week. They learn the word of God, sing loudly in church, attend vacation Bible school in collaboration with a local congregation, Resurrection Lutheran, and once a month even have Saturday school with Pastor Nancy.

The church values women and young people as leaders, including on the standing committee (council), leading the praise band and leading departments. The story would not be complete without celebrating the generosity of all these members. They raised \$200,000 in the last few years and obtained a loan from the Mission Investment Fund to purchase and move into their own space. They faithfully give Mission Support, and they show deep gratitude for the support from other congregations such as Resurrection Lutheran and Bethany Lutheran, the Mission Investment Fund, the entire Indiana-Kentucky Synod and the ELCA, which has supported MECI with ELCA new-start grants.



We look forward to experiencing the future. Khai recently finished his internship and was approved as a minister of Word and Sacrament. The shouts of joy heard at MECI on Aug. 31 when Khai was ordained and installed as Pastor Khai Cho echoed across the land. Let us celebrate and give thanks as people of God for this amazing ministry!

ENGAGE WITH US

RESOURCES ABOUND

Our Congregation and Synod Support Team provides resources just a click away. Looking for annual meeting covers? Interested in Mission Support stories? Wondering how Mission Support is distributed? Looking for a Congregation Mission Support Intent? You can find it all at www.elca.org/Resources/Stories-of-Faith-in-Action#RelevantResources.

You can learn about stewardship events, access resources and videos, and explore stewardship-focused commentary by signing up for the “Where Your Heart Is” stewardship e-letter — **subscribe [here](#)**.

GRATEFUL

This month we give thanks for the immense generosity of our congregations, members, friends and supporters who make it possible for us to steward about \$1.6 billion in Mission Support to build up Christian communities, support global ministry and strengthen the whole church. This [Deep Dive](#) shares how Mission Support is used for us to be church together. Of course, we are grateful for the immense generosity to World Hunger as it celebrates 50 years, the essential work of Lutheran Disaster Response in this time of continuing natural disasters, and individuals’ dedication to giving to our greater church in varied ways. We are grateful for all the generosity!

In deep gratitude,

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Find more stories at: www.livinglutheran.org/sofia/mission-support-memos-2024.php