



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1).

The UNYS-ELCA delegation is in route home. We want to first give thanks to God who has sustained our companion relationship with the ELCZ and has provided for safe travel to our delegation both to and from Zimbabwe as well as our host accompaniment team throughout the whole ELCZ.

We especially want to thank ELCZ Presiding Bishop K. Sibanda who also serves as the bishop of the Central Diocese, Bishop Mhaka V. of the Eastern Diocese, and Bishop Dube of the Eastern Diocese for their accompaniment. We are deeply grateful to ELCZ General Secretary, Mr. M.M. Dube, ELCA South Africa Regional representative, The Rev. Dr. E. Moyo, Mrs. Regai Mratu, and Mr. C. Moyo, our hosts and drivers throughout the 10 days in country for their gracious hospitality.

In December 2023 the three bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe sent an invitation to Bishop Miller for the bishop and a small team of 2-5 people to travel to the ELCZ (pronounced “E.L.C.Zed” in the Shona language) to come and see the work of the ELCA in collaboration with our companion church of the ELCZ, and to renew our synod-to-church relationship as well as the reestablishment of parish-to-congregation “twinning” relationships. While accepting this invitation meant planning an international accompaniment journey in a relatively short period of time, we wanted to honor and respect the invitation of our companions in Christ.

Bishop Lee Miller II, The Rev. Imani Olear, D.E.M. and Associate with the Bishop, led the delegation which included an invitation to The Rev. Deron Millville, Chairperson of our Global Companionship Committee, a lay leader from one of our “twinning” congregations, and Dr. Lewis Dodley, Director of the ELCA “SIMBA” and “SIMSA” outdoor ministry program which provides mentoring with at-risk African American youth throughout the ELCA. Dr. Dodley is also the father of Pr. Imani Olear. Due to the short planning window the second lay leader was unable to travel with the team.

The Synod Council approved financing for the 14-day journey from a portion of our Zimbabwe Companionship fund in addition to the General Operating fund of the synod. This allocation supported the travel of our staff members in addition to costs for the whole team related to ten nights of hotel lodging (including our hosts - that we might

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not create a burden on the ELCZ), food, bottled water, gas, expenses, and appropriate tips for drivers and hosts. Consistent with previous companionship travel, both Dr. Dodley and Pr. Milleville's airfare and personal expenses were their responsibility. Pr. Olear shared her room accommodations with her father incurring no additional hotel expenses.

Together, our UNYS team and hosts traveled more than 1,800 miles on mostly rural roads, visiting each of the three dioceses, their offices, the national church office, four church mission sites (which include primary and secondary schools, hospitals, and clinics, in addition to congregations), three church development sites, and several congregations. The team spent time with ELCZ bishops, pastors, deacons, congregation lay leaders, members, and guests of our companion church.

A post-trip evaluation and report will be posted on our website soon in addition to a special presentation at the 2024 Synod Assembly and an extended presentation online in June.

We are #churchtogether. Having received the priorities of the ELCZ, there will be a variety of ways for congregations, conferences, and individual disciples to engage with our companions in Zimbabwe. These opportunities will be outlined in full during the Assembly. If your congregation has been previously "twinned" with a companion parish, a member of the travel team will be contacting you in the weeks ahead to engage with current desires and expectations of companion congregations. The Global Companionship Committee will also continue to engage in relationship with our second global companion church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zambia.

Thanks to our Synod Council for their [resolution to renew](#) this relationship. Special thanks to Pr. Milleville and Dr. Dodley for sharing their respective areas of knowledge and experience with our companions. The whole team is looking forward to sharing their stories, experiences, and photographs. A very special thank you to everyone who prayed for the travel team and to everyone to carrying our companion church siblings in daily prayer. Most especially we are grateful to God who holds us all in God's care, and through the Holy Spirit has bound us together and companion church bodies.

"Tarirai, kunaka kwazo nokufadza kwazo Kana hama dzicigara pamne cete norugare"
(Mapisarema 133:1).



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