

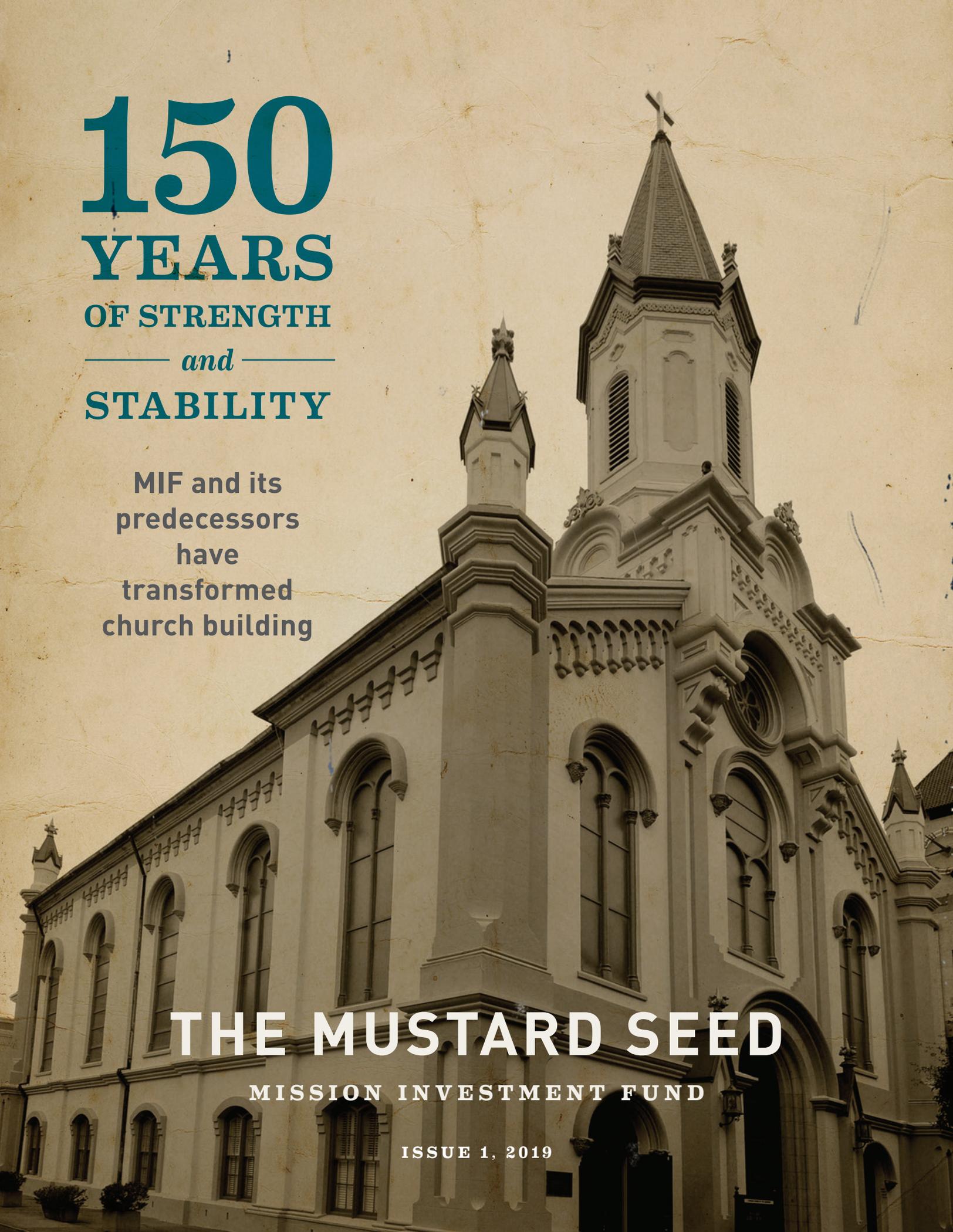
150 YEARS OF STRENGTH — *and* — STABILITY

MIF and its
predecessors
have
transformed
church building

THE MUSTARD SEED

MISSION INVESTMENT FUND

ISSUE 1, 2019





Coming to America ... Courageous Lutheran men and women arrived on these shores throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Crop failures, economic pressures, political strife and religious persecution drove their decisions to leave their European homelands. Ultimately, they were on a quest for a better life.

They came to the Virgin Islands and America's Eastern seaboard, settling in New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia ... moving cross-country to the prairies and farmlands that became Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, the Dakotas ... and setting out on an even more adventurous trek to the Western coast.

They brought with them their language and culture. They brought their Lutheran faith.

Building churches ... These faithful settlers established Lutheran churches soon after their arrival. Congregation members often pooled their own funds to purchase land and construct church buildings. To assist these newly developing congregations, early Lutheran synods began establishing building funds and making distributions to help build new churches. In 1869, the General Synod, one of the precursors of the Lutheran Church in America, became the first to establish a Church Extension Board. This was the earliest reference to a church extension fund that we could discover while poring through historical records housed at the ELCA Archives.

Establishing a tradition of strength and stability...

The creation of church extension funds proliferated among the many Lutheran synods that eventually would become the ELCA. These funds were the predecessors of the Mission Investment Fund.

From 1869 through today ... MIF and our predecessor organizations have a 150-year history of providing assistance to build, expand, renovate and restore Lutheran churches. Together, we have created stable sources of funds to help build the Lutheran church. Since 1988, when MIF was founded with the creation of the ELCA, we have had a demonstrated track record as a strong, stable investment and lending institution for ELCA congregations, their members and related ministries.

We have strong safeguards in place to help assure the security of our investment obligations. We have an exceptional capital position; our capital ratio (net assets to total assets) is nearly 29 percent, which significantly exceeds regulatory requirements.

This special issue of MIF's Mustard Seed celebrates 150 years of strength, stability and service to the church. We are sharing stories of congregations with inspiring histories—congregations that revere their founding families and welcome new members from new lands today. These are congregations that have turned to MIF for loans to restore their historically significant sanctuaries and supported the MIF investments that fund these loans. We'll share more of these amazing stories throughout the coming year.

Lutheran Church of the Ascension, Savannah, Georgia

A stunning restoration in Savannah

Exiled from their homeland in Salzburg, Austria, by an official decree in 1731, an intrepid band of pilgrims journeyed to America to freely practice their Lutheran faith.

The Salzburgers set sail on a two-month voyage on the Atlantic. With an invitation to settle in the newest British colony, Georgia, they landed in Savannah, Georgia, on March 12, 1734. They held their first formal prayer service the following day in a small, windowless clapboard church that served several religious denominations in Savannah.

By 1741, an official congregation was organized. Twice in the early years, congregation members donated funds to purchase lots as worship sites, first building a wooden church and then renovat-

ing a courthouse for worship. After the congregation's 100th anniversary, in 1843, a new church, a one-story brick and stone building, was constructed on the second site at a cost of \$15,000.

As part of an extensive renovation in 1879, the congregation installed a poignant, brilliantly colored stained glass window above the altar. This window, depicting the Risen Jesus' ascension to heaven, inspired a new name for the congregation: Lutheran Church of the Ascension.

In April 2016, the congregation celebrated a milestone anniversary—its 275th. Then, in the summer of the following year, the beautiful Romanesque ivory stucco church found itself in an emergency situ-

ation. Water was dripping into the sanctuary, mildew was clinging to the ceiling. Lutheran Church of the Ascension, situated on one of Savannah's beautiful, tree-filled squares, had succumbed to the city's heat and humidity.

"This situation demanded immediate attention," recalls Mark Smith, president of Ascension's Congregational Council. "We received a lead gift to begin repairs, and our vision expanded from there."

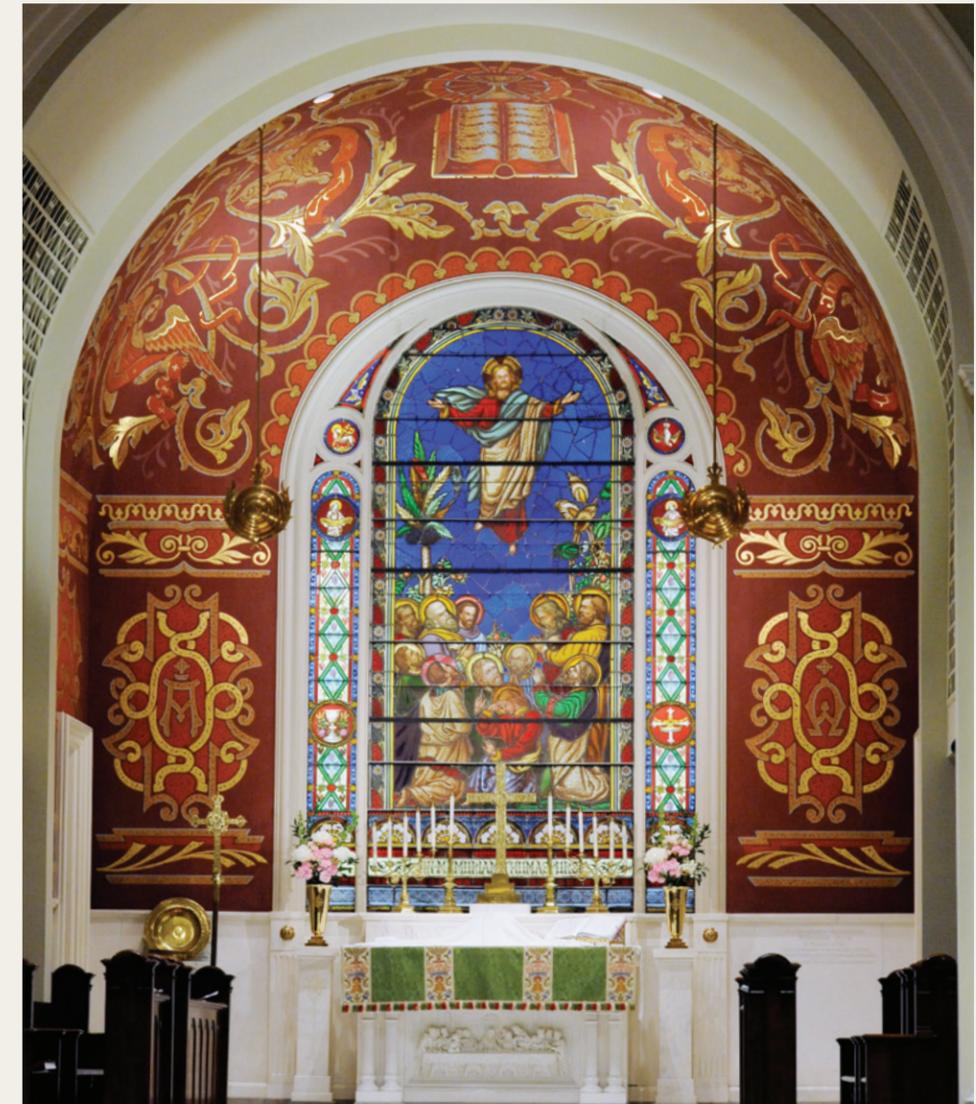
The congregation's vision emerged as a complete restoration of the church. Leading this effort were congregation members with pertinent expertise—an architect, an interior designer, a project planner, a financial expert and more. And as an additional bonus, says Margo Jones, who spearheaded interior design elements of the restoration: "Students and professors of our local Savannah College of Art and Design re-searched the architectural history of the church. They helped us return to a classic, earlier look of our interior space."

Clockwise from right:
In the restored church, the Ascension window that gave the church its name ... An exterior sign celebrates the church's long history ... With pastors Todd and Sara Cutter, the leaders of the congregation's restoration effort.

A loan from the Mission Investment Fund assisted in the restoration.

With a top-to-bottom restoration plan in place, the church closed for worship, and the artisans and scaffolding moved in. Congregation members turned to their Jewish neighbors "three squares to the south" and worshipped in their synagogue for six months while work continued inside Ascension.

Charlie Miller, a lifelong member of the congregation who oversaw the entire project, details the work: Peeling plaster was stripped from the ceiling, gold leaf highlights were discovered beneath layers of paint, archways were restored



to their original placement—and a new, computerized HVAC system was installed to keep humidity in check. As a final addition, new glass doors were installed at the exterior of the building to maintain the indoor air quality while keeping humidity and dust on the exterior.

"I'm so proud of our beautifully restored church," Smith says. "It's such a powerful space. It touches me, it moves me, every time I walk into the sanctuary."

"The physical restoration of our church is a great metaphor for

what our church is doing," reflects the Rev. Todd Cutter, Ascension's co-pastor. "Today, some 200 members—many fourth-, fifth- or sixth-generation congregants—attend weekly worship. Faith formation for children and youth is important work for us. Our Sunday school is a great success. We're also committed to our Grace Ministry, inviting our homeless neighbors in for coffee and bagged lunches and providing them with necessities.

"We are always discerning what God is calling us to do."



"The physical restoration of our church is a great metaphor for what our church is doing."

—The Rev. Todd Cutter



How it all began

Inside: Take a walk through 150 years of church extension fund history

MIF by the numbers

at year-end 2018

\$705.4 million
total assets

917
loans

Nearly

\$3,000,000

in annual support to ELCA ministries

\$556.6 million
total loans

13,720
total investors

9,655
individual investors

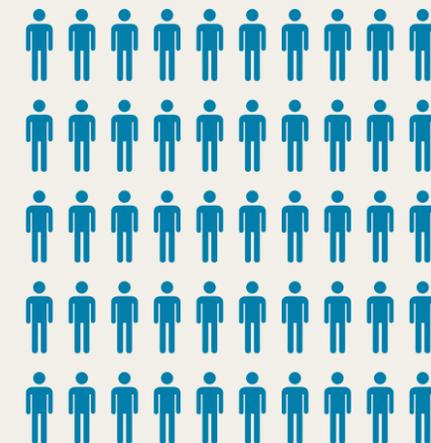


4,065
congregation and ministry investors

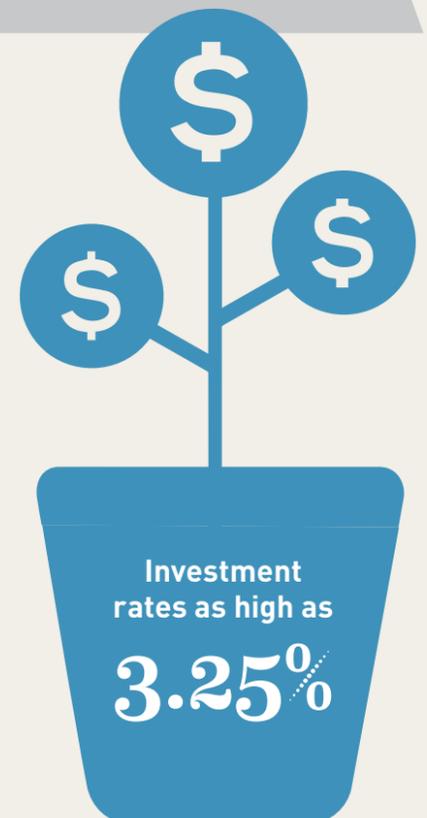
1.3%
loan delinquency ratio

\$499.1 million
investment obligations

50+ dedicated staff members



28.5%
equity ratio



“We have long passed the day of small things. A sense of the wideness of our field now possesses us and inspires to mighty effort; the possibilities of the future fire with the purpose to make them realities, to reap our harvests and enter into possession of our rightful heritage.”

— From the address delivered at the 40th anniversary of the Boards of Home Missions, Foreign Missions and Church Extension of the General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Harrisburg, PA, April 27-29, 1909



Augustana Synod establishes a church building fund.

United Norwegian Lutheran Church establishes a church extension fund.

Hauge Synod establishes a church extension fund.

The American Lutheran Church approves an Investment and Loan Fund.



The American Lutheran Church and the Board of American Missions of the Lutheran Church in America merge to form an investment pool of more than \$66 million in investment obligations, \$76 million in congregational loans, a fund balance of more than \$97 million and an equity ratio of 33 percent. ELCA Treasurer **George Aker** becomes the first president of the ELCA Loan Fund.

ELCA Treasurer **Richard McAuliffe** becomes president of MIF.

Investment obligations rise to more than **\$95 million.**

MissionFuture investments, now known as **MIF4KIDZ**, are introduced; MIF focuses on increasing investment obligations.



MIF begins offering significantly reduced rates to **new-start congregations** purchasing land or constructing or purchasing a first church building. MIF goes online with electronic account access for investors and ministries with loans.

MIF's loans surpass **\$400 million.** MIF debuts ELCA branding.



A bylaws change allows MIF to provide loans to the building funds of **full-communion partners.**

Eva M. Roby is elected president and CEO of MIF. This is the first time the presidency is a stand-alone position, no longer held in tandem by the treasurer of the ELCA.



MIF adds **MIF Capital Campaign Services** to assist congregations in raising funds for building projects, debt reduction and other needs. [This service was previously the ELCA's Stewardship Key Leader program.]



The **ELCA Federal Credit Union** opens its doors, offering consumer loans and federally insured savings accounts.



General Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church establishes a Church Extension Board.

Norwegian Synod establishes a church extension fund.

General Synod's fund distributes **\$175,000** to 280 churches.

American Lutheran Church kicks off a major appeal, "Building the Kingdom with Kingdom Buildings," to build churches in the post-war years as suburbs grow. Requests for loans are 10 times greater than available funds.



Lutheran Church in America's Board of American Missions creates a Division of Church Property.



The fund's name is changed to the **Mission Investment Fund**. The name change signifies the ministry's diversified array of financial products. The Mission Investment Fund begins offering **Demand Investments** (called MissionPlus) to congregations and ministries.



MIF begins providing **loans to established ELCA congregations.**

MIF offers the special service of **Church Building Consultants** (previously with the ELCA's Division of Outreach) to explore how facilities can best support mission and guide congregations through the building process.

ELCA Treasurer **Christina Jackson-Skelton** becomes MIF president.

MIF introduces a **redesigned website.**



MIF offers a \$1.5 million "challenge grant" for **Mission Developer Scholarships** through the ELCA Fund for Leaders.

MIF introduces the next generation of its website with a new web address, **mif.elca.org.**

MIF begins work in earnest to establish a new financial ministry to help provide a full array of financial services to ELCA members.



The **charter is approved** for the new ELCA Federal Credit Union.

MIF ends the year with \$556.6 million in loans, \$499.1 million in investment obligations and \$705.4 in total assets.

MIF creates an enterprising **Strategic Plan for 2019-2021** that will challenge us with new initiatives and guide us in supporting the church in compelling new ways.

“We have long passed the day of small things.”

'Hope, light and life' with a New York City church project

While many Swedish immigrants to the United States were journeying to farms in the Upper Midwest in the mid-1800s, others were putting down roots in New York City. In 1865, a group of devout Swedes began discussing the need for a Swedish Lutheran church in Lower Manhattan. The following year, this young congregation paid \$17,000 to buy a Baptist church building, and the congregation's enterprising women's Sewing Society went to work to raise more than \$32,000 to pay down the debt.

By 1887, the congregation saw the need for a new, larger church, and construction began on the site of the original church building. By May 1889, the new building, at a cost of \$66,000, was dedicated. This was Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church.

Today, this handsome stone church sits pressed against other New York City buildings all adorned with fire escapes. Dunkin' Donuts, a nail salon and a pizzeria are neighbors across the street. This is city life, and Gustavus Adolphus is an urban congregation.

The congregation is proud of its Scandinavian heritage. Worship

services were conducted entirely in Swedish until 1917, and in 1926, the church hosted the historic visit of Crown Prince Gustaf Adolph and Crown Princess Louise, who would become the king and queen of Sweden.



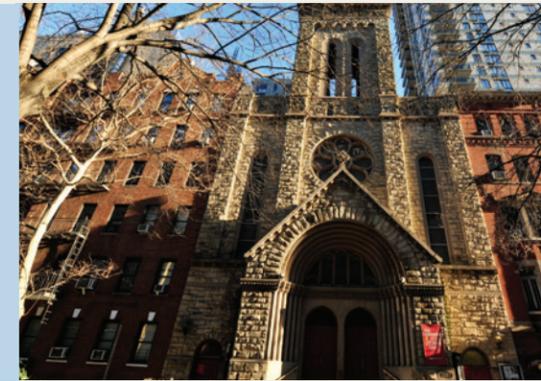
Today, the congregation is so diverse that it "looks like the United Nations," according to the Rev. Christopher Mielowski, pastor of Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church. It seems fitting, then, that the church sits just a mile and a half from the U.N. building.

"I think we're one of the most diverse congregations in the ELCA," says Pastor Mielowski. "Diverse in our backgrounds, our ethnic make-up. Young and old. Longtime New Yorkers and newcomers. People of different economic backgrounds. Gay, straight, single, married. All are welcome."

Throughout its history, an enduring feature of the church building has been a magnificent stained glass ceiling. It was recently restored for the first time, and a loan from the Mission Investment Fund helped make the restoration possible.

"The stained glass was taken apart piece by piece, re-leaded and reassembled," Pastor Mielowski says. "Now it should last another 150 years. On a sunny day, it fills the sanctuary with such a sense of hope and light and life." MIF's loan also enabled Gustavus Adolphus to alleviate flooding problems stemming from the fact that the church was actually constructed over an underground stream.

And most recently the congregation partnered with the Mission Investment Fund on another major initiative—a building renovation with an entirely new ministry in mind.



"Having a partner as strong as MIF—with its expertise—that can catch the vision and understand what we were after, made us feel less alone in taking this path of faith."

— The Rev. Christopher Mielowski

"We started exploring the idea of launching a preschool," Pastor Mielowski says, "and we realized the only way we could do it was to completely rebuild our main hall and update the fellowship hall. The loan from MIF gave us the opportunity to do it. What was a dream is now an incredibly successful program that generates significant growth income. And many families



are being helped with scholarships that make preschool possible for their children."

Just because the program has been a success doesn't mean getting there was easy. Again, Pastor Mielowski says, MIF was an invaluable partner.

"Working with New York City agencies, the department of buildings, the fire department, the board of health, we kept coming up with one issue after another. But at no point did the congregation ever say 'no.' Everybody was on board. I think having a partner as strong as MIF—with its expertise—that can catch

Clockwise from left:
The Rev. Christopher Mielowski greets congregants following Sunday worship ... The restored stained glass ceiling and beautiful sanctuary ... The brownstone church on 22nd Street in New York City ... And church acolytes with Deacon John Ogren.

the vision and understand what we were after, made us feel less alone in taking this path of faith. It was a real sense of encouragement."

After the Gold Rush, St. John's builds on its historic past

1848, and the California Gold Rush was on!

Many Germans facing economic difficulties in their home country, as well as Americans of German heritage, were enticed by the prospect of gold and land and headed to California. A number of them came to Sacramento—a town in north-central California experiencing explosive growth. It wasn't long before this chaotic settlement of tents and shacks became a gentrified city of cobblestone streets, gas lamplights and fire-resistant brick buildings.

Whether the German immigrants lured to Sacramento by the gold

rush struck it rich or not, many wound up contributing to the region's spiritual wealth in an important way.

As the Rev. Frank Espegren, pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church in Sacramento, says of his church's founders, "After the gold rush played out, these folks looked around and realized: 'This is our new home. We need a Lutheran church here.'"

St. John's started as a congregation and conducted its first worship service in 1867. With a growing membership, the congregation sought out a larger worship space in 1873. Growth continued, and in



1910 the congregation purchased land for \$27,000 and completed a church building in 1912 for a cost of \$106,000. This is the site of St. John's current location in midtown Sacramento.

A decade ago, the church completed a massive renovation of its sanctuary, winning rave reviews from congregants as well as local residents.



Clockwise from right:
The renovated sanctuary ... The Rev. Jon Haug, associate pastor, outside St. John's Lutheran Church ... An acolyte leading the way to worship ... And the church's new copper roof.

"We returned to the sanctuary's original look. It just has a joy-of-following-Christ feel to it."

—The Rev. Frank Espegren



"The principle was to return to the sanctuary's original look, while bringing it up to modern worship standards," Pastor Espegren explains. The result infused a sanctuary that had always been awe-inspiring with lighter, airier elements, making it warmer and even more inviting. Modern technology, like a retractable video screen, was incorporated. "It just has a joy-of-following-Christ feel to it," Pastor Espegren says.

More recently, St. John's began the long-overdue replacement of the historic building's roof. After reviewing photos from church archives and consulting with local historians, St. John's is installing a period-appropriate copper roof that offers a lifetime guarantee.

The roof replacement and sanctuary renovation honor St. John's architectural significance and important place in the history of the Lutheran church in California. The two projects, along with plaster repairs and the rebuilding and resurfacing of the church's parking lot, were all supported by loans from the Mission Investment Fund.

"Anyone who serves on our finance committee does research from time to time," Pastor Espegren says, "and they



all feel that nobody can beat MIF when it comes to helping congregations do a big project. Nobody comes close. For MIF's commitment to the Lutheran church, we view MIF as a true partner in ministry—not just a provider of a financial product."

St. John's has an active, involved membership. The mix of young singles, families and seniors has long been characteristic of the congregation. In fact, Pastor Espegren says proudly, "We've never lost a generation." Today, the congregation's German roots are still visible, and Hispanic, African-American and Asian members have made the congregation more diverse than ever. Outreach is important for this

church as well. St. John's was one of the first churches in Sacramento to address homelessness and "birthed" a women's and children's shelter in 1985. St. John's remains closely tied to its "baby," St. John's Program for Real Change, now an independent non-profit social service agency.

In 2017, as the ELCA celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, St. John's was celebrating its 150th anniversary. In commemoration of this sesquicentennial, the congregation commissioned four beautiful, new stained glass windows for the sanctuary's apse—the congregation's gift to future generations.



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THE MUSTARD SEED

MISSION INVESTMENT FUND

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It's our calling.
And your call.
.....

When you invest with the Mission Investment Fund, the lending ministry of the ELCA, your investment dollars fund the loans we make to ELCA congregations and ministries.

These organizations use MIF loans to build, expand, renovate and restore churches and ministry buildings. Your investments and our loans help expand the capacity for ministry.

MIF's strong financial position helps assure our ability to provide security to our investors. Our decades of experience in church building make us the premier choice for ministry loans.

Are you ready to invest? Does your congregation need a loan? Contact us today.

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