



Canadian Lutheran World Relief

This weekend, **Canadian Lutheran World Relief's** (CLWR) Board of Directors, leadership team and denominational leaders gathered for our annual September meeting. As we came together — completely online for the first time in our history — we were all forced to confront the fact that we are working in a new reality, one that is marked by change and new circumstances.

Everyone at CLWR is committed to meeting the challenges of this moment with humility and courage. We are steadfast in our responsibility to ensure CLWR can respond with integrity, efficiency and kindness in a time of soaring global need, and to make sure Lutherans in Canada can continue a tradition of working toward justice and peace for all people.

Based on those commitments, this weekend we made the decision to begin transitioning We Care, CLWR's long-standing and beloved commodity shipment program, with the intent that the shipping component of the program will be fully closed by the end of 2021. While many of us feel a deep, personal connection to this aspect of We Care, the decision was made with the unanimous support of everyone involved.

Despite some sadness in making this change, we are united in confidence that **this decision affirms CLWR's most deeply-held values, including responsible stewardship, shared learning and honouring the voices of those we are called to serve.** We are encouraged and optimistic at the commitment everyone at CLWR has shown to being the most responsible, effective organization we can be on behalf of Lutherans in Canada.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need experienced by our global partners has never been greater, and they are urgently calling on Lutherans in Canada to respond as generously as possible. The decision to revise the We Care program comes both in response to those calls, and as part of our deeply-held commitment to honour the kindness of our church communities, making sure to do as much good as possible.

We are proud of CLWR's long history of growth and adaptation as an organization. Since as early as the 1950s, the organization has continually adapted its efforts in response to shifting contexts, and especially to the voices of our partners. CLWR has always tried to exemplify the spirit of "*semper reformanda*" — always reforming — that has guided our faith tradition as Lutherans. Today, facing the prospect of a post-COVID world, we are united in our belief that we must not cease learning, growing and reforming.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new complications to We Care and has amplified existing challenges to a point where continuing the program in its current form would not be a responsible course. Shipping and travel restrictions have left our warehouse nearly dormant for months, despite significant donor dollars continuing to pay for the warehouse space. At the same time, the supplies provided by our current We Care program are neither a rapid nor a cost-efficient way for CLWR to respond to the immediate, critical needs faced by so many around the world.

While earlier in the program's history, We Care filled a vital gap of needed items, in the world we now face, many of you have expressed growing concern about the climate impacts of shipping supplies from Canada, especially when they are available for purchase much closer to the regions where we work.

The communities and beneficiaries we work with around the world, in places like Ethiopia, Uganda and Jerusalem, have also continued to shape our understanding of their needs. Our work began evolving long ago in response to feedback from our partners, who have taught us to listen to those we serve, to help them build and rebuild livelihoods, and to work alongside them for justice. The transition of our We Care program continues this long and continual process of examining ourselves and our work.

The We Care program, in its decades of operation, has provided comfort and care to tens of thousands of people. **To our incredible community of faithful, loyal volunteers and churches, we want to say that we are inspired by you.** Your generosity has wrapped warm quilts around those who have lost their homes, has put supplies in otherwise empty school classrooms, and has given young mothers the very first clothes their new babies will ever wear.

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

600 – 177 Lombard Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3B 0W5

Phone: 204.694.5602
1.800.661.2597
Fax: 204.694.5460

Email: clwr@clwr.org
Website: www.clwr.org



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Your efforts have made such a difference. You have our deep thanks. And we also want to say you are needed now — as much as ever.

Our warehouse will remain open for some time to allow for a transition period, and we expect one final shipment to go out this fall, with supplies that are already in the warehouse. If your congregation is holding on to supplies, we encourage you to reach out to local organizations in your community and ask what their needs are. Many are in need of these items right now. We have identified a number of local organizations who are eager for We Care items to support their critical work. We are well aware of how hard our own country has been hit by this pandemic, with food bank visits rising, many people out of work, and a cold winter coming. Please continue quilting, continue gathering supplies, and contact us if you need help finding an organization in your area who can put these supplies to good use.

Thank you for being a partner of CLWR, and of those we serve. We understand the changes to We Care will be disappointing for some, but we have heard from so many of you who cherish CLWR because of our commitment to faithful stewardship and to being responsible with the calling we have been given.

The need experienced by our global partners has never been greater or more urgent, and the COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting those who already face hunger and poverty, with millions more being pushed into extreme poverty. In this context, particularly with ongoing restrictions, it is clear to our Board, staff, and the leaders of our supporting churches, that shipping supplies from Canada is no longer an effective nor a responsible way for us to respond.

As this work evolves, we will count on your continued partnership, and we pledge to continue in our commitment to do everything we can to be faithful and responsible partners in this ministry.

If you have any questions or comments about this decision, or about what to do with existing items, CLWR's Community and Donor Relations Director, Carla Blakley, is eager to hear from you. You can reach her at **204-230-1323** or carla@clwr.org.

We invite you to join us in prayer today for the ongoing ministry of our organization, for those we serve, and in gratitude for the incredible legacy of kindness that has reached across the world for so many years through We Care.

Deepest blessings,

Cheryl Bauer Hyde
President of the Board
Canadian Lutheran World Relief

Karin Achtelstetter
Executive Director
Canadian Lutheran World Relief

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