

SUMMER 2025

EUKARYA

VOX CIVITATIS: THE MAGAZINE OF EUKARYA FAMILY CENTER

CONNECTING WITH PURPOSE

SPOTLIGHT

How missions, at home and abroad, are forming students for a life of purpose

DRAMA

One student's journey through Eukarya's drama program

ALUMNI

A graduate's path from ECA to the mission field

Rooted in Connection, Growing in Christ

There's something sacred about connection. From the beginning, God designed us for communion—not to walk alone, but to live in rhythm with one another, laboring side by side for something greater than ourselves.

Connection is not just a good idea; it's the way of the Kingdom. What a joy it is to see that Kingdom taking root across the departments of Eukarya Family Center.

In this issue of *Vox Civitatis*, we celebrate how God is deepening our mission: discipling individuals, strengthening families, and transforming communities, and impacting the world for Christ and His kingdom. And it's all happening through connection.

We're linking arms within the Eukarya community through mentor-

ships, counseling, and Bible studies that nourish hearts and grow faith.

We're reaching out into Winchester through food drives, assisted living visits, and partnerships that remind our neighbors they are seen and loved. And we're stretching across the globe to Uganda, building lasting ties with Love Fount Christian Academy.

These stories are more than highlights—they're seeds. As we sow acts of service and encouragement, we trust God for the fruit, near and far.

I hope these pages inspire you to take your place in this unfolding story—a place to serve, to connect, to grow.



Joanie Hughes
Executive Director,
Eukarya Family Center

HELP EUKARYA CONNECT

In each issue of *Vox Civitatis*, I share with you a few of our most urgent funding needs for your consideration. In addition to the ministry opportunities discussed throughout this issue, **The Learning Center (TLC) at Eukarya Christian Academy needs approximately \$5,000 in occupational therapy resources and equipment** to serve the growing number of students coming to TLC for assistance in the coming school year.

TLC serves young people both at Eukarya and from the broader community with executive functioning challenges, handwriting, fine/gross motor skill coordination, and more. The items they're looking to acquire range from a hammock (\$750), a swing and stand (\$1,000), and a spin board (\$300) to stepping stones (\$60), ankle weights (\$15), and medicine and therapy balls (\$40).

If you would like to help meet these needs, or to contribute to our mission generally, simply use the enclosed envelope to send a tax-deductible donation!



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Vox Civitatis

SUMMER 2025

Vol. 05

Vox Civitatis, which means "Voice of the People," shares stories and reports that reflect the voices of the community and ministries of Eukarya Family Center.

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A Night to Remember: Farm-to-Table Dinner Raises \$32,000 for Eukarya Christian Academy

Eukarya hosted its second Farm-to-Table Benefit Dinner and Auction this February, bringing together community members for an evening of good food, heartfelt stories, and generous giving.

Guests were treated to live music from local pianist Caleb Nei, a vocal performance by talented Eukarya students, and the short film produced by Absolute Altitude entitled *What Eukarya Means to Me*.

Throughout the video, Eukarya families describe the difference the school makes in their lives. The menu featured locally sourced ingredients, including farm-fresh produce grown by Eukarya students and donated by agriculture partner Powder Keg Farms. Additional offerings came from Bethlehem Farms, Gore's Meat Market, Tiers in Heaven, Kat's Cupboard, and Woodbine Farms. The meal was thought-

fully prepared and served by The Catering Comp-any, whose team helped ensure the evening was both delicious and seamless.

In total, through ticket sales, auction items, and donations, the event raised \$32,000 to support student scholarships and campus improvement projects that will enhance both the beauty and functionality of Eukarya's facilities.

-STACIE HAAGA



SCAN QR
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WHAT
EUKARYA
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Hearts in Action: Students Share Love and Kindness for Valentine's Day

In a heartwarming celebration of Valentine's Day, Eukarya Christian Academy students in grades 3 through 6 turned love into action through meaningful outreach and community service.

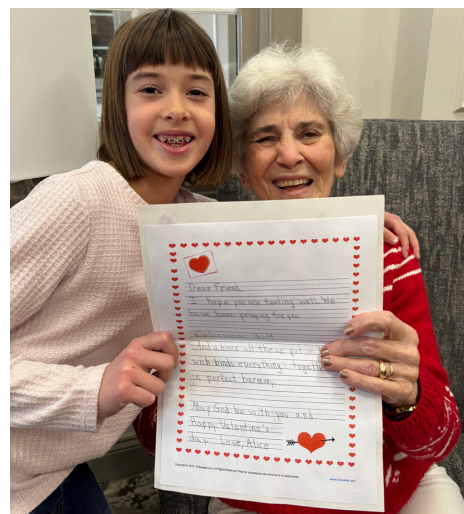
Third and fourth graders visited two local assisted living facilities—Spring Arbor and Hill Top—bringing handmade Valentine's cards and spending time with residents. The cards were a collaborative effort between Art and Handwriting classes, with students practicing legibility while crafting cheerful messages and colorful decorations. At Spring Arbor, third graders also enjoyed a fun scavenger hunt with residents,

while fourth graders at Hill Top took part in crafts and conversation.

Meanwhile, sixth grade students led the school's first-ever cereal box challenge, organizing a donation drive across grades K–6. Together, students collected an impressive 274 cereal boxes, which they set up in a domino-style display before the food was delivered to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank—a powerful symbol of kindness in motion.

This year's connections mark the beginning of what we hope will become a beloved annual tradition of outreach and service.

—JODY SHIPPA



Blooming with Creativity

ECA's art teachers, Tamara Coffman, Karen Townsend, and Addie Nei, unveiled *Blooming with Creativity*, a vibrant showcase featuring over 230 student artworks. The exhibition highlighted cartoon-style self-portraits, Neurographic Art, and lower school projects inspired by Georgia O'Keefe's bold forms and

and colors. High school students contributed striking relief sculptures, collages, paintings, and drawings. Displayed in the Obsequium hallway, the show invited the community to celebrate the talent and imagination of ECA's young artists.

—TAMARA COFFMAN



FEATURED ARTWORK



From Struggle to Strength at The Learning Center

ECA and Shenandoah Valley families find support and hope

At Eukarya Christian Academy, The Learning Center (TLC) is quietly transforming the lives of students who face academic and developmental challenges—offering them not just help, but hope.

Originally created to serve Eukarya students with learning differences, TLC has expanded significantly in both scope and reach. What began as a small program offering tutoring and cognitive exercises has grown into a robust support center offering reading and dyslexia therapy, math support, speech and occupational therapy, brain integration, executive functioning help, and emotional regulation services. Joanie Hughes, Eukarya's principal, explained the evolution: "TLC began with a heart to serve our students, and now we're able to serve families beyond our school walls. That's really important to us—we want to be a help to the whole Winchester community."

The center now welcomes students from public and private schools, as well as the homeschool community. These services aren't one-size-fits-all—they're crafted to fit each child's unique needs, strengths, and struggles.

Laine Everhart, a TLC administrator, emphasized the individualized approach: "Our specialists tailor support for each student through assessments, collaboration with parents and teachers, and personalized interventions. We want every child to feel equipped and confident in their learning."

The results speak for themselves. One ninth-grade student improved from a third-grade reading level to an eighth-grade level in a single year. A first grader who couldn't read began decoding words within three months and now, years later, is excelling in middle school. "When you enable a child to reach their full potential or at least get closer to it, it affects the entire family and the life of that child forever in a positive way," Rae Cromeens, one of TLC's specialists, observed. "Their lives are changed because they do the hard work that got them there. They are proud of themselves."

TLC's mission is deeply rooted in the values of Eukarya—to disciple individuals and strengthen families. "Our tutors love the Lord and see each student as an image-bearer of God," Joanie said. "They're not just offering academic help—they're offering care, encouragement, and dignity."

While TLC continues to serve Eukarya students, its growing outreach to the wider community is central to its future. Plans include evening therapy sessions, workshops for parents and educators, and support for underserved populations, such as foster youth. "We know what it feels like to be at the end of your rope as a parent with a struggling learner," Joanie shared. "If we can bring hope to even one more child or family, that's a win."

Families can inquire about services by emailing TLC@eukaryaacademy.com.

—SARAH HYLAND

Serving Through Soccer

ECA Varsity Girls Travel to North Carolina for Hurricane Relief

When the Eukarya Christian Academy Varsity Girls Soccer team learned they wouldn't be going to Tennessee for the National Association of Christian Athletes tournament this year, they embraced the opportunity to grow in a new way. Inspired to serve, Coach Chris Osmond organized a mission trip for a small group of players to travel to Asheville, North Carolina, to assist victims of Hurricane Helene.

Through prayer and research, Coach Chris connected with Asheville Christian Academy (ACA), one of the schools most impacted by the storm. On April 27, 2025, Coach Chris, six players, and two parent volunteers arrived in Swannanoa, a community still recovering from the storm's damage. They were welcomed by ACA's athletic director, Brenton Benware, who led them on a humbling tour of the campus, where the effects of the hurricane were still visible.

That evening, the ECA and ACA girls participated in a joint practice session, exchanging gifts and forming new friendships through their shared love of soccer.

The next day, the team served at the home of one of ACA's coaches, whose family had narrowly survived the storm when trees crashed into their house. Now in the process of rebuilding, they needed help moving back in. The ECA girls stepped up, completing a long list of tasks—from cleaning and yard work to assembling furniture and unpacking boxes. Their hard work was met with gratitude and joy.

Following the day of service, the group enjoyed a team dinner and then cheered on the ACA girls during their Senior Night match. The ACA team won 1–0, and the ECA girls celebrated alongside them, offering heartfelt congratulations. The trip concluded the next morning with a shared breakfast and devotional time hosted by ACA. Coach Chris presented a \$500 donation from ECA, raised through car washes, bake sales, and gifts from the team's families and alumni, to support the rebuilding of ACA's soccer field.

This experience left a lasting impression on everyone involved. Built on faith, service, and the game of soccer, the trip forged a meaningful connection between two communities—and gave the ECA girls a memory they will carry for years to come.



ECA and ACA teams and coaches—all smiles after a joint practice!

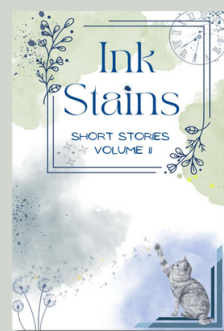
The Inklings Publish Their Third Book

"This book is a wild ride through the minds of teenagers. Teens are unpredictable because their minds are unsettled, but even when they land on an opinion with butterfly lightness, it has the potential to become the hill they are willing to die on. Their strong thoughts are embedded in a malleable shell rife with insecurity and a longing for relationship. This comes through in the stories they tell. Open these pages to meet the most diverse group of teens I've ever welcomed to write together. They did just that while respecting and encouraging each other. I'm proud of them."

—RACHEL HIMELRIGHT



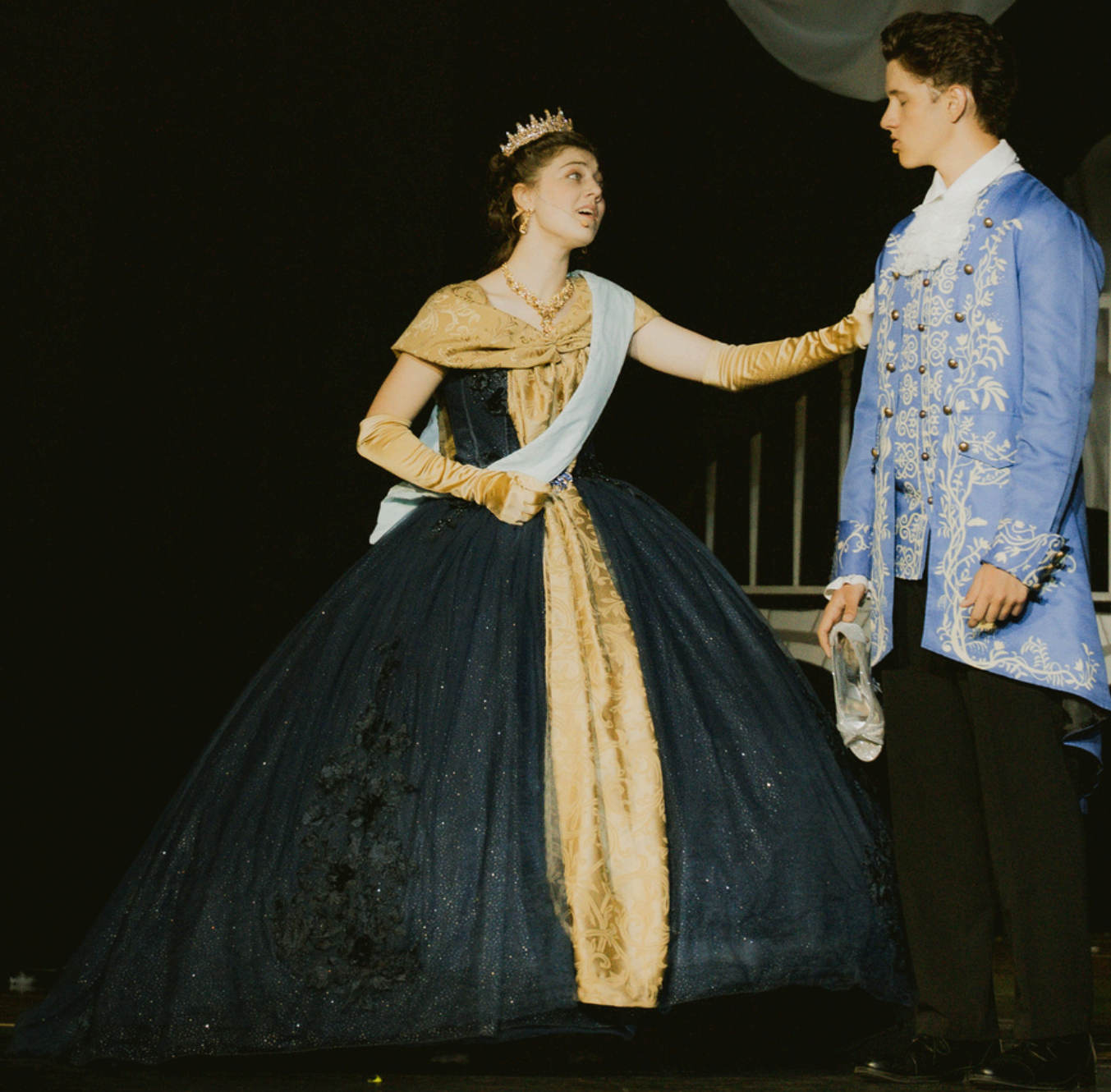
"These stories range from fantasy to drama to sci-fi, so no matter what your favorite genre is, you're bound to find it here. There may even be a romantic subplot!"



ISBN-13: 979-8323907915

In case you missed their second publication, Ink Stains Volume II is also available for purchase on Amazon.

DRAMA



The Role That Opened Doors

How Eukarya's drama program helped a newcomer find purpose **BY SARAH HYLAND**

When Sophia Ramey joined Eukarya Christian Academy for the second half of her senior year, she expected to take one class, a Wednesday “concentration” class in drama, to round out her high school experience. She didn’t expect to walk into a production, a prom, a yearbook photo—and a community.

“I’ve been homeschooled my whole life and was always very musical,” Sophia said. “I started doing choir at the Shenandoah Conservatory Arts Academy when I was seven and have done it ever since. I’d wanted to do musical theatre for a long time but never really had an opportunity.” But with a new driver’s license and a spring schedule that finally allowed room for something new, she saw an opening. “I jumped on the opportunity to join the spring musical.”

Sophia originally auditioned for the title role in ECA’s production of Rogers and Hammerstein’s *Cinderella*, but casting brought her a different surprise: Queen Constantina. “I didn’t have much of a chance to know who all of the characters were beforehand,” she explained, “but I thoroughly enjoyed the role. I definitely pulled from my experience as an older sister and from my idea of a stereotypical nurturing-but-worry-prone mother in order to portray the character well.”

Theater, it turns out, came naturally. “Having done choir for so long and then ballroom dancing for several years, it makes sense that musical theater would have been a blast for me! I loved every part of it. It was such a wonderful opportunity to make new friends and to perform in a way and on a level I never have before.”

Sophia may have been new, but the cast and crew welcomed her right way. “They were remarkable! A number of the cast

“It was such a wonderful opportunity to make new friends and to perform in a way and on a level I never have before.”

came over to meet me and made me feel welcome and like a valued member of the class.” She added that the directors made sure she had everything she needed—from the script to the music—even though she had only just enrolled.

What stood out most wasn’t just the show, but the culture behind it. “ECA is a Christian school, so everyone there keeps Christ as the center of everything,” Sophia said. “We definitely spent a good amount of time focusing on God and how we can honor Him through the arts and in how we treat one another.”

Even though she only took one class at ECA, Sophia said the school made her feel fully included. “I got to go to prom, be in the yearbook, and they even gave me the option of walking at the ECA graduation,” she said. “The most rewarding thing is how much joy it brought me and all of the relationships I built over this five-month period.”

The experience left a lasting impact. Sophia had always planned to pursue music in some form, but now she’s open to more. “After having done this and having loved it so thoroughly, and having people after the show come tell me how well I acted and that I should keep doing it, I am going to consider continuing with acting and theater in the future.”

She arrived not knowing anyone, but walked away with friendships, confidence, and a broader vision for what’s possible. That’s the power of connection—it opens doors.





WHAT THE GOSPEL *Requires*

How missions, at home and abroad, are forming
students for a life of purpose

BY JOANIE HUGHES

At Eukarya Christian Academy, education is transformation. Our efforts are spent shaping students' affections toward His truth, goodness, and beauty. Our desire is that these efforts result in students who live like Christ: sacrificially, selflessly, and with eyes fixed on others. In a culture obsessed with self, we call students into something deeper. We believe the Gospel doesn't ask for convenience. It asks for surrender, for service, and for love that gives.

Missions and outreach are not add-ons at Eukarya—they are core to who we are. Alongside academic rigor and Biblical worldview, service is one of the pillars shaping our students.

It starts early, with young students praying for pen pals in Uganda, and it continues through graduation, with upperclassmen mentoring younger students and working in teams to organize local and global service projects. Our aim is for every graduate to leave with a track record of love in action.

Why? Because humans, from the youngest age, have a propensity toward self. We do not have to teach a two-year-old to say 'me, mine, my'—their world is fully about them. Teenagers are especially vulnerable to the pressures of self-focus: anxiety, comparison, and constant digital mirrors asking "how do I look?"

But when students are given real opportunities to serve—whether in the lunchroom, a nursing home, or across the globe—they begin to understand that their value comes from being created in the image of God, and that others are important in light of that truth. Suddenly, their passions are formed by what they can give, rather than from what they can get. This is discipleship in action. This is how future fathers, mothers, and leaders are formed, and it gives life meaning.





EUKARYA CONNECT

Our outreach model is also deeply academic. When we connect purpose with learning, students engage. A lesson in math becomes a means to calculate solar output for a school without electricity. A love for sewing becomes a way to connect women in developing countries with a life-sustaining skill. In our agriculture concentration, a passion for farming becomes a project to share sustainable practices with rural communities. And through our business concentration, students learn how businesses can provide much needed goods and services to help strengthen communities. Students are no longer asking, “When will I use this?”—they’re discovering how their God-given talents and the education and training they receive in school can meet real-world needs.

These projects aren’t hypothetical. They’re rooted in relationship. Our partnership with Love Fount Christian Academy in Uganda—which you can read about on page 14—has grown into a model of mutual learning and deep, Gospel-centered connection.

Together, we are exploring opportunities in education, agriculture, clean water, and vocational training. The students of Eukarya are not just observers—they are innovative problem-solvers, builders, and teammates in this work. And as our students watch this relationship grow, they begin to understand: missions isn’t about going far. It’s about going deep. It’s about being formed—together—for lives of purpose, wherever God may call us.

Ultimately, missions at Eukarya isn’t about charity. It’s about Christlikeness. Jesus didn’t just teach truth; He lived it—with dirt on His feet and others on His mind.

That’s the kind of life we’re forming our students to live. Whether they stay close to home or travel to the ends of the earth, we want them ready: to serve, to love, and to lead lives of Gospel-infused purpose. This is what the Gospel requires, and it is the kind of education that changes everyone.



Business concentration students organize relief materials for Asheville hurricane victims.



Shop students building benches to donate



(ABOVE): Sixth graders volunteer at food bank.



(ABOVE): Juniors and seniors packing Operation Christmas child boxes.



(ABOVE): Third graders spend Valentine's Day at Spring Arbor assisted living.

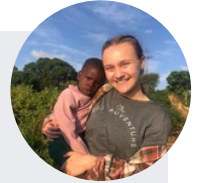


“Missions isn’t about going far. It’s about going deep. It’s about being formed—together—for lives of purpose, wherever God sends us.”

(ABOVE): Students prepare for Summit; (LEFT): Friendships in Uganda; (BOTTOM): Collecting cereal boxes for food drive



Student Spotlight



For Ana Cutshaw, missions wasn’t just something talked about in chapel or tagged onto a school calendar. It was personal.

Over her four years at ECA, Ana traveled to Uganda three times with the Missions team and spent a summer session at Summit Ministries in Colorado. But it was during a moment of childlike joy—tickling and laughing with kids in a Ugandan village—that something shifted.

“I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, ‘This is what you were created for,’” she said. “I knew in that moment I was the most joyful I had ever been and could do this for the rest of my life.”

Ana has witnessed people receive Bibles for the first time, seen poverty up close, and come home changed. “We all have Bibles collecting dust on shelves,” she said, “but these people were jumping and dancing just to hold one in their language. That image will stay with me forever.”

Her biggest takeaway? Missions isn’t only overseas. “ECA has taught me to walk in faith wherever God leads,” she said. “We can be the hands and feet of Jesus right where we are.”

—SARAH HYLAND

Rising Anxiety, Falling Connection: Why Serving Others Still Works

According to psychotherapist and author Erica Komisar, American culture has experienced a deep shift toward self-focus. Today’s teens, shaped by an environment of social media, consumerism, and weakened familial bonds, are showing higher rates of anxiety, narcissism, and disconnection. Komisar warns that our society has lost sight of

“sacrifice and obligation to others”—a loss that has real emotional and communal costs (Komisar, *Self-Focus or Sacrifice?*, 2024). Yet the data also tell another story: children and teens who serve others report higher levels of happiness, purpose, and long-term well-being. Service doesn’t just benefit those in need—it rewires the giver.

A Mission in Action

Living the Gospel through service, education, and relationship **BY JOANIE HUGHES**

After arriving in Kampala, Uganda's capital, a five-hour drive through countryside and over rivers brings you to the heart of the country and a small, remote village named Winweng in the Kwania district.

The road ends where red earth begins—rich soil that supports the life of a farming people. The village is spread out in family plots, each with a cluster of huts that house generations under one patch of sky. The huts themselves are carefully tended, some marked with hand-painted designs and neatly landscaped yards—a quiet testament to pride and care.

Fathers are present here, working beside their families. Widows, too, are strong and capable, cultivating crops and sustaining households with

dignity. Farming is not just a task; it is a way of life, passed down and shared. The food is simple and nourishing—posho, beans, bananas, and potatoes—grown close to home and cooked with what is available.

Children play freely, quick to smile and eager to greet a stranger. Their laughter mixes with the sounds of daily life: the rustle of cornfields, the clatter of garden tools, the splash of water in washing bins.

My team and I came to this place to make a connection—one that was a long time in the making. In fact, our journey to Winweng really started eight years ago when Eukarya went on its first mission trip. Let me show you.

2017 Going Global

Dominican Republic + Operation Christmas

We launched our first international mission trip to the Dominican Republic through Real Impact Missions. Led by worldview teacher Jordan Belton and a passionate team, students experienced the unexpected—serving through street drama and yielding to God's plan over their own. That same year, our school began participating in Operation Christmas Child, taking our lower school to the Dollar Tree to personally choose gifts to bless children around the world.

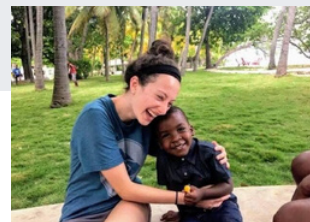


2019 Summit Calling

Spiritual Formation at Summit Ministries

With Haiti closed to travelers, we redirected our students to Summit Ministries in Colorado. This first large group trip emphasized worldview training and leadership development—equipping students to defend their faith and live it boldly.

2018 Haiti Heartbeats



Life Connection Missions + PAC Haiti

A team led by ECA mom, Deborah Fitzner, and myself, traveled to Haiti to serve in orphanages, distribute food, and share the gospel in remote villages. One unforgettable moment: teen boys sharing the Gospel that resulted in an impoverished family coming to Christ. This trip birthed our ongoing relationship with Denis Atis, founder of PAC Haiti. Students helped ship barrels of supplies and build bathroom facilities from their Friday pizza funds, in partnership with Crossroads Community Church.

2020 The World Paused

Pandemic Shutdowns

Due to COVID-19, all international and domestic trips were suspended. Yet the heart of missions continued as students served locally and cared for their own families and communities in creative ways.

2021 Local Light

YWAM West Virginia + Camp Unite

We turned our focus closer to home. Students joined Youth With A Mission (YWAM) in West Virginia and Camp Unite, a local, nondenominational camp for teens, where they experienced spiritual growth and opportunities to serve through practical work, local outreach, and mentorship.

2023 Strengthening the Bridge

YWAM West Virginia + Uganda

We continued our partnership with YWAM in Pittsburgh, and we returned to Uganda to serve and deepen relationships. At Hadassah Girls School, for instance, we began a tradition of gifting graduates sewing machines thanks to special donations from ECA families. This school and these machines provide a trade for the girls, giving independence, safety, and protection from child marriages as early as age 12. Our students helped in schools and ministry outreach, continuing the work God had started and seeing the fruit of ongoing presence. We also continued our engagement with Summit Ministries for a fourth year, with all of our students receiving leadership scholarships.



2025 Sisterhood Established Love Fount Christian Academy

After years of prayer and growing connection, our team journeyed to Winweng village in Uganda's Kwania district to deepen an emerging partnership. We came to serve at Love Fount Christian Academy, a school surrounded by farmland and faith.

Our team of three women offered instruction in Farming God's Way, classical education, Biblical worldview, and school administration. We stayed with Emmanuel, Love Fount's head of school, whose leadership and vision helped solidify what

2022 New Partnerships Begin



Uganda + YWAM Pittsburg + Summit

ECA sent its first team to Uganda, partnering with local schools through the connections of Misty Fields of In the Garden Missions. This inaugural trip sent a team of 14—including staff, alumni, and students—and laid the groundwork for an ongoing relationship with Ugandan ministries like St. Katherine's, Jehovah Primary and Technical School, and Hadassah Girls School. That same summer, additional teams served locally with YWAM Pittsburg and participated in leadership training at Summit Ministries.

2024 Deeper Roots

Uganda + Summit + YWAM Pittsburg

This summer, an all-girls team traveled to Uganda, opening a unique ministry opportunity. We spent time at an all-girls school, encouraged trafficked women, and led groups through Keys to Freedom, a Bible study by Mercy Multiplied. The intentional focus on women allowed for deeper connection, healing, and the sharing of Gospel-centered hope. Many of our students returned to Summit for a second time or their first time, and were again awarded leadership scholarships to attend, furthering their knowledge of a Biblical worldview in today's culture. This fall, we made our first connection with Love Fount Christian Academy.



we had long hoped for—a formal sister-school relationship.

Over meals, prayer, and shared purpose, we committed to walk together in faith and mission.

What began as a short trip grew into something generational: a lasting bond between two communities, and a union between schools formed by the Spirit and strengthened by shared work.

Rooted and Ready

How ECA prepared an alumnus for a life of missions **BY SARAH HYLAND**

When you've spent most of your childhood in the same school building, it becomes more than a place—it becomes home. For Elias Eyre, a 2024 graduate of Eukarya Christian Academy, ECA was exactly that.

"I had a great experience as a lower school student and an upper school student," Elias said. "I remember playing soccer with all the 'big kids' and doing mentoring with them. Then I became one of those big kids. Eukarya is definitely a great place to find great community." But the impact went even deeper than friendships and memories.

"Teachers weren't just there to help with homework — they walked with me through the hard times too," he said. "Looking back, I'm starting to see how blessed I was to be in a school where I was exposed to God's Word every day and had chapels with great speakers every week."

Just a year out from graduation, Elias is already stepping into what many would call a calling. He recently returned from five months with Youth With

A Mission (YWAM) in Orlando—three months of intensive discipleship training followed by two months of outreach in the Middle East.

"We had teachers and students from all over the world," he said. "Getting to build friendships with locals overseas and share God's Word—it changed me."

Leadership came naturally to Elias at ECA. As captain of the varsity soccer team and vice president of the student body, he found himself growing in ways he didn't expect. "Those roles really taught me how to lead, delegate, and work with others," he said. "I didn't realize it at the time, but God was preparing me."

His favorite classes? "Science with Mrs. Hoffman—Anatomy and Physiology were the hardest and most fun—and worldview with Mr. Bryan and Mrs. Sarah. That class really helped me learn how to talk about my faith in ministry."

This fall, Elias heads back to YWAM Orlando to join the School of Ministry Development, with another overseas outreach on the horizon. Long-term missions or Bible school may follow—but whatever comes next, his heart is anchored.

"Don't take being in a Christian school for granted," he said. "Go deeper with God. And take advantage of all the extras—sports, drama, student council. You won't regret it."

But that seed was planted long before he ever boarded a plane. "I remember going downtown Winchester during Mr. Hazelwood's Ministry Concentration class. We handed out cards and prayed for people," Elias said. "That's when God first started putting missions on my heart."



"Looking back, I'm starting to see how blessed I was to be in a school where I was exposed to God's Word every day and had chapels with great speakers every week."

The Power of Connection: A Lifeline for the Soul

A journey of faith, friendship, and finding home **BY LISA PETERSON**

Five years ago, my husband Steve and I made one of the biggest decisions of our lives—we moved from South Dakota to Virginia to be near our daughter and her family. It was a huge leap of faith. We were in our late 50s, and both South Dakota and Minnesota had always been home.

We left behind a lifetime of friendships, church community, professional connections, and the comfort of the familiar. To say it was daunting would be an understatement.

During that season, we prayed often—specifically that God would lead us to true connection in our new home. Not just a place to live, but people to do life with. And in His faithfulness, He began answering those prayers almost immediately. We found a church and started forming relationships. We met neighbors in our development. I joined a networking group. There was hope and momentum.

One of the most meaningful connections came from our daughters-in-law, who welcomed us into their family gatherings and made us feel at home from the beginning. Their kindness and inclusion have been a steady source of comfort and joy—especially since nearly all of our extended family are back in the Midwest. Again and again, they've shown us God's love in action.

Then the pandemic happened.

Just two months after we arrived in Virginia, the world shut down. Overnight, everything changed. No gatherings. No neighborhood events. The connections we had just begun to form seemed to freeze mid-sentence. I remember feeling tempted to retreat—to assume this season of isolation would make meaningful relationships impossible.

But God had other plans.

We kept going to church—even when it meant online services or distanced outdoor gatherings. We spent time at the lake, took walks, and waved to neighbors from across the street. One by one, friendships began to grow—sometimes slowly, and sometimes in unexpected ways, like the time I helped a neighbor I hadn't even met yet remove a snake from her basement. Today, we are close friends.

I've come to believe that when we ask God for connection and step forward in faith, He never fails to provide. It might look different than we imagined, but He always makes a way.

I've learned that connection isn't about how many people you know or how full your calendar is. It's about being seen, known, and loved—and choosing to see, know, and love others in return. True connection takes vulnerability. It takes intention.

But the reward is deep and lasting.

Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." I've read that verse countless times, but it resonates deeper now. Connection with Christ isn't a bonus for the spiritually mature—it's the lifeline for us all. And from that connection, every other relationship flows with greater purpose and clarity.

We were created for connection—with God, with one

another and with the world around us. That truth has become even more real to me since our move. Whether it's a kind word to a neighbor, a note of encouragement, or simply showing up when someone needs help, we all carry the power to build bridges right where we are—especially in uncertain times.

Looking back, I'm amazed at how deeply rooted we've become in a place that once felt so foreign. God not only answered our prayers—He exceeded them, and He used connection as the vehicle to get us there.

So wherever you find yourself today—whether surrounded by people or feeling alone—I encourage you to reach out. Start small. Ask God to guide your steps. And trust that even the smallest seeds of connection, planted in faith, can grow into lasting relationships that bless both you and others.

Lisa Peterson is a mom, wife, and proud grandma who calls Cross Junction home with her husband of 35 years, Steve, who serves as the Facility Manager at ECA. She is the owner of Main Ideas Marketing and Communications and a passionate wellness educator.

"I've learned that connection isn't about how many people you know or how full your calendar is. It's about being seen, known, and loved—and choosing to see, know, and love others in return."



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The Learning Center
Eukarya Homeschool Academy
Athletics
Worldview
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Eukarya King's Cubs

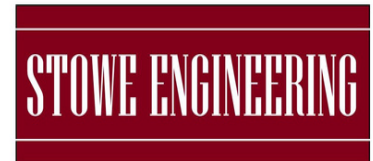
Eukarya Connect
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Beacon Hill Christian
Counseling
Marriage Institute of
Winchester

Eukarya Family Center is a passionately Christ-centered para-church organization dedicated to strengthening families and building loving relationships within communities. Our vision is rooted in the belief that families are God's chosen building blocks for His church, His Kingdom, and all of society.

Thank you to our ECA 2024-2025 PLATINUM LEVEL

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Business Built on Connection

The Butcher Family and EcoWater Systems **BY SARAH HYLAND**

For James and Dustin Butcher, connection isn't just a theme—it's a way of life. As father and son at the helm of a third-generation family business, EcoWater Systems of Winchester, they see their work as more than a service—it's a relationship built on trust, integrity, and faith.

"As a business that has been around since 1958, we value our connection to the community," James shared. "We believe in finding ways to support the community and in maintaining integrity and trust by providing top level service."

That sense of connection is deeply woven into every part of their lives, including their long-standing involvement with Eukarya Christian Academy. "Our involvement at Eukarya has simply given us another avenue to live out our Christian values," Dustin said. "We could not be happier to have seven Butcher children and six Butcher adults involved at Eukarya!"

The Butchers don't just attend Eukarya—they invest in it, as well as the broader community. From sponsoring local events like Apple Blossom's Contemporary Christian Concert and Top of Virginia Hockey to quietly serving behind the scenes, their impact is lasting.

Steve Peterson, Facility Manager at ECA, described how James donated his time and expertise countless times—from installing a whole-building water softener to fixing the air conditioning system, saving

the school tens of thousands of dollars. "James has an exceptionally generous servant's heart, and I hold him in the highest regard," Steve said. "He consistently and cheerfully responds to any plumbing issues, often providing the necessary parts himself to keep our systems running smoothly. I am deeply grateful to God for the incredible gift of James to us at Eukarya." That heart of service starts at home. "Matthew 7:12 says, 'So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them,'" James noted. "As a family business we are not perfect, but we try to abide by this principle as much as possible."

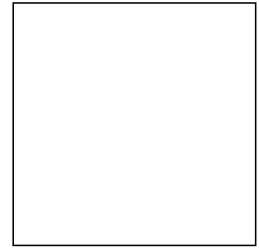
Even while operating under a national brand, the Butchers stay grounded. "Our brand, our mission and our vision is exactly that—ours," Dustin explained. "We are proud to represent the EcoWater brand but very happy to be able to let our values shine through."

Looking ahead, the Butchers see their connection to Eukarya growing stronger. "With the youngest [child] at 4 years old, we anticipate many more years supporting Eukarya in any way that we can," says Dustin. "We also like the fact that we can help shape the future of the next generation."

Their encouragement to other businesses is simple but compelling: "If you and your business operate with strong Christian values, Eukarya is an excellent opportunity to expand your ways of doing so."



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YOUR SUPPORT IN ACTION

Transforming Spaces, **ENRICHING LIVES**

Thanks to the generous support of all those who participated in our “What Eukarya Means to Me” end-of-year campaign, Eukarya Christian Academy was able to do essential work on our grounds and athletic fields! Our biggest project was resurfacing our soccer pitch to make it safe for athletes and visitors, but we are also adding picnic tables, shades, and landscaping to encourage outdoor play and class time.

What’s more, by the start of the 2025-2026 school year, we will have installed a new coded entry access and computerized visitor check-in for the main entrance. This will enhance our building’s security while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere and seamless visitor and parent experience.

Many thanks to all of our donors, who made these dreams a reality!



BUTTERFLY GARDENS ON CAMPUS