



"God's work. Our hands." Sunday Toolkit



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS “GOD’S WORK. OUR HANDS.” SUNDAY?

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“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) – one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Since 2013, thousands of ELCA congregations have participated in this opportunity and dedicated one day to serve communities in ways that share the love of God with all people. The date for 2015 is **Sunday, Sept. 13**. Mark your congregation’s calendar today! If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 13, please consider another time for your dedicated day of service.

We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work. Whether it’s volunteering at a shelter for people and families who are homeless, gathering food items to fill shelves at a local food pantry or advocating for peace and justice in communities, your service activities offer an opportunity for us to explore one of our most basic convictions as Lutherans: *That all of life in Jesus Christ – every act of service, in every daily calling, in every corner of life – flows freely from a living, daring confidence in God’s grace.*

“When one congregation or a group of congregations gather for service in their local communities, they are the church in that place, taking care of that part of God’s vineyard. But this is all work that we do together. When one congregation works to feed people who are hungry, that is also the entire church coming together. ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ Sunday reminds us that we are church together for the sake of the world,”
says ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.

You work every day to love your neighbors and make your community a better place. ***Let’s continue doing this work together in 2015!***

The idea for “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is this: ELCA members are called to put their faith into action by engaging in service activities in their neighborhood, surrounding community or designated area. While service opportunities are endless, ELCA members and congregations are invited to identify service projects that make sense for their local context and the congregation’s service capacity. In other words, the idea is to deepen a congregation’s and/or member’s experience in their community and offer some way for congregations to play a critical part in addressing community needs.

Although the designated day of service is targeted to take place on a Sunday, the service day should not be seen as “replacing worship.” Host your service event after worship or arrange for worship at the site you’re serving and welcome others! Also consider partnering with other ELCA congregations in your area. The possibilities are endless.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

As you begin to plan your dedicated day of service in 2015, consider what these verses mean in your context, for your congregation, your neighbors, your friends and family. In what ways does this impact the work you’ll do on “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday, Sept. 13, 2015?

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Use this toolkit as a way to help you plan “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday.

Each section contains examples and discussion questions meant to help you use your congregation’s gifts, talents and ministries to spend Sept. 13 working together in the way that makes the most sense for you. Sections include:

- I. ORGANIZE
- II. PLAN
- III. SUCCESS STORIES
- IV. SERVE
- V. CELEBRATE

After all, this designated day of service is an extension of the important ministry your congregation already does. Use this toolkit to find your own take on “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday and get creative about serving your neighbors and celebrate what we have accomplished and will continue to do together.

I. ORGANIZE

As an ELCA congregation, you no doubt already have valuable connections to your community and experiences with service. Perhaps you already have an annual clothing drive or you host a community meal. Or maybe your congregation has a quilting ministry that makes warm blankets for those experiencing homelessness or partners with a Lutheran social service organization in the community or state.

Whatever the case may be, before you begin to plan your event consider what gifts and tools your congregation already has.

TO START:

Bring together members who can help make your dedicated day of service happen. Does your congregation have a:

- Youth group?
- Small group fellowship and group leaders?
- Worship team?
- Social ministry, hunger and justice team members?
- Health team or parish nurse?
- A Women of the ELCA or men's group?

Brainstorm together about what service opportunities can work best for your congregation. What kinds of outreach, evangelism or mission work do these groups already do?

One idea would be to pass out 3x5 index cards to the congregation and invite your congregation to write down organizations, agencies or ministries in which they have a connection. This helps to identify those organizations and/or agencies that welcome volunteers.

Is your congregation large enough that each group should have a separate project? And, if so, how many projects would be appropriate in your context?

Also consider the abilities of your members. What kinds of service projects are inclusive? In other words, consider service opportunities that take into consideration people living with a disability. Your congregation can also support ELCA ministries with financial gifts and/or consider contributing to *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* at www.ELCA.org/campaign. The possibilities are endless.

Order **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday T-shirts** from Old Lutheran! You can personalize your T-shirts with the name of your congregation. Shirts are now available in Spanish and Arabic (in addition to English). The cost per T-shirt is \$6.50. **Please note that the last day to order personalized T-shirts for delivery prior to the dedicated day of service is Aug. 10, 2015.** Visit customerservice@oldlutheran.com or call toll-free (U.S. only) at 1-877-653-5884.

Invite the children of your congregation to get involved. A Sunday school class can reach out to other children in their community and/or other congregations in other cities or states. Encourage a class to start a “pen pal” relationship with another Sunday school class in a different location and share what they love about their respective congregations and communities.

- Designate leaders who will plan and organize your service project.
- Communicate about the day of service with the congregation. Additional resources to help promote your day are available at www.ELCA.org/dayofservice.
- Document your day with pictures, Tweets and Facebook posts and video.
- Reach out to other ELCA congregations in your area. Can you partner with them?

IDEAS THAT WORKED:

Members of Christ and Trinity Lutheran Church in Sedalia, Mo., and their pastor Kimberly Knowle-Zeller, focused on caring for their neighbors as part of their participation in the 2014 “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday. They visited with residents of Sunny Meadows Home – a home for people living with developmental disabilities – and invited residents to the church building for a homemade breakfast.

“Church members gathered in the morning to cook fresh food – eggs, bacon, French toast, biscuits and gravy, pancakes, cinnamon rolls,” says Kimberly. “Our guests enjoyed being able to choose from a variety of items.”

Aside from breakfast and the joy of communing with their neighbors, the congregation was graced with one of the residents’ piano skills.

“Following breakfast we all sat together and the residents wanted to know our favorite Bible verses. One by one, Christ and Trinity members introduced themselves and shared their stories,” Kimberly recalls. “In one hour, we realized (that) we are all members of the Body of Christ. In one hour, we had faces and names for our neighbors.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What service projects has your congregation done in the past? What worked? What didn’t? Why?
2. What gifts and talents do you have in your congregation that could be used to serve your community?
3. What kind of partnerships do you already have with other congregations and organizations in your community? Could any of these partnerships be built into your dedicated day of service?

II. PLAN

WHERE DO WE START?

Now that you've spent some time organizing the leaders in your congregation, how do you decide what kind of service project(s) may be a good fit for your congregation?

The 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly called and encouraged ELCA congregations to develop their own plans for mission.

Your congregation's mission plan is a great place to start. What kinds of community and/or neighborhood needs does your mission plan identify? Who would be most helped by your service?

If you're still working on your mission plan, begin first by listening to your community.

You might try:

Meet with organizations, congregations and social service providers with whom you already have a partnership. Let them know you're dedicating a day to service and that you want to provide an opportunity for your congregation to give of their time. For example:

Members of Grace Lutheran in Washington, N.C., decided to partner with the local Boys and Girls Club chapter of Beaufort County for their participation in the 2014 "God's Work. Our Hands." Sunday.

"On Sunday we met the co-director (of the chapter), got a tour of the facilities and heard of the many ways that they keep kids focused on healthy activities and lifestyle and succeeding in school," recalls Benjamin Kifer, pastor of Grace Lutheran. "Then, we headed outside and got to work!"

Despite the inclement weather, says Benjamin, members of Grace Lutheran were "able to tear down and haul away an old playground that had caused several injuries over the summer. (We repaired) loose boards, exposed nails, etc. We continue partnering with the club to find and write grants that will replace the area with new, safe playground equipment."

Perhaps there's an organization like this in your community with whom you could partner for "God's work. Our hands." Sunday.

Or, maybe you can use "God's work. Our hands." Sunday to build some new relationships in your community. Are there any needs identified in your mission plan that you haven't yet had the opportunity to address? Or are there any projects you've dreamed about doing but haven't found the time?

Still looking for an idea? Here are some examples of the work ELCA congregations and members across the country have done that have truly made a difference.

III. SUCCESS STORIES

All Together

While members at St. Andrew Lutheran in Whittier, Calif., did not participate in the inaugural “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday in 2013, they decided to participate in 2014 to share their “excitement and passion for helping those in need,” according to Terri Robertson, youth and family ministry at St. Andrew.

“From the formation of a planning team to the congregation’s donations of school supplies and monetary gifts, and finally the weekend of assembling, packing, cutting, tying and delivering, I witnessed our congregation serve together in ways I’ve not seen before,” says Terri. “Through it all, we grew closer to one another. All ages – from our Brownie Girl Scouts to our older members, one just recovering from a stroke – we worked side by side, sharing in a common goal – to be the hands of God here in Whittier.”

Participants filled 100 large lunch bags with food to deliver to people throughout the city; assembled 24 backpacks full of school supplies for the local elementary school; cut and pieced together 10 fleece blankets for Lutheran World Relief; and wrote more than 75 letters and cards for veterans living in veterans’ homes throughout Southern California.

“On Sunday, when we delivered food bags to those in need throughout our community, we had the chance to see the face of God over and over again,” recalls Terri. “Many were inspired to work in the days and weeks ahead to serve in this way on a consistent and more frequent basis.” After the day of service, one 10-year-old member summed it up best: “It feels good to give!”

Fellowship on a Sunday

In Colorado Springs, Colo., five local ELCA congregations – Grace Lutheran Church, Ascension Lutheran Church, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Christ the King Lutheran Church and Mount Calvary Lutheran Church – joined together to participate as a group. More than 100 members completed 11 projects across the city.

“We organized activities according to exertion level and made sure we had service projects for all ages and abilities,” says Daniel Smith, associate pastor at Ascension. The activities included cleaning up parks, sorting food and supplies for Care and Share Food Bank, working with Habitat for Humanity, organizing a food pantry, and painting for several partner social ministry agencies.

“At the end of the day, folks reconvened at Ascension for a fellowship celebration, viewed a video compilation of photos from the day and had a brief time of reflection and worship,” says Daniel. “We all met new friends, connected with partner congregations and fantastic ministries in our city, serving in God’s name. We saw God at work.”

God's Work Is Spreading

"We had an amazing Sunday for 'God's Work, Our Hands (in 2014),'” says Sarah Cordray, senior pastor at Luther Memorial in Syracuse, Neb.

"We did yard cleanup for two abandoned houses in town. We made over 50 prayer pillows made of fleece and (inserted) a wooden heart inside the pillow,” says Sarah. “The tag on these pillows read, ‘Feel the heart inside and remember that you are loved, cared and prayed for.’ We also swept our downtown, cleaned business windows, pulled weeds and left a tag of appreciation to businesses on their front doors. We had four wagons going around town collecting food for our local food pantry. Also, our Sunday school (students) took mums to our assisted living centers, made centerpieces for our nursing home and made breakfast to go for our shut-ins and visited them. It was a joy together with over 100 of us serving!”

For Sarah, a favorite moment from the day happened after participants cleaned the yard of an abandoned home. “It was so bad that in the backyard, one of our men (had to retrieve) his tractor and large mower. Throughout the afternoon there, one set of neighbors kept watching us, and we enjoyed conversation with them. Later that night, (the group) went over to the neighbor’s house and mowed her lawn! What joy to watch God’s work spread!”

A place for everyone

An important part of “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is, of course, committing one day when the nearly 4 million-member church serves and share God’s love with neighbors – together.

Whatever project or projects you choose for your dedicated day of service, be sure to offer an opportunity for all members to participate regardless of age, interest or ability.

Take, for instance, members of Cross Roads Lutheran Parish – a geo-parish of four different congregations in the ELCA Northeastern Iowa Synod in cooperative ministry – who participated in the 2014 “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday.

A group from the parish volunteered at a local non-profit called Crisis Intervention Services in Mason City, Iowa, that assists and provides different services to survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence and/or homicide.

More than “50 members of Cross Roads, ages 4 to 87 showed up to do lawn work, painting, organizing a food pantry, assembling cleaning kits, painting walls, fixing the garage door and leaky plumbing, clearing information on cell phones, hanging blinds and washing windows,” shares Elayne Werges, diaconal minister of Cross Roads. “In the end, a few Cross Roads members have made arrangements to continue volunteering at the agency.”

AS YOU PLAN YOUR DAY OF SERVICE, ASK YOURSELF:

1. Do the service projects we're planning include everyone? How can children take part? Older adults? People with disabilities?
2. Are the gifts and talents of the congregation represented?

Get creative with the project you plan. How can you use the musicians, artists, quilters, chefs, teachers and other members of your congregation to both make an impact and bring everyone together?

FURTHER THOUGHT

You know what is most needed in your community, so whatever projects you choose are sure to have an impact.

Be sure to remind one another about what this day is all about. Consider beginning your service with a prayer or blessing.

You'll also want to think about the safety of your congregation. Many not-for-profit organizations have volunteers sign a waiver before allowing them to take part in projects. Consider having your own waiver on hand for volunteers.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What kind of impact would you like to be able to make on your community on "God's work. Our hands." Sunday?
2. What needs have you seen in your community that you'd like to see met on "God's work. Our hands." Sunday?
3. What will you do to be sure that all of your congregation can take part?

IV. SERVE

You've organized your congregation, planned a service project in your community and created a checklist of activities.

Now it's time to get the word out to the news media about your congregation's efforts and participation in "God's work. Our hands." Sunday. This media outreach section includes both traditional outlets – newspaper, radio and television – and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and other media tools.

STEP ONE: GEAR UP

Designate someone in your congregation to be the media contact. This person will communicate specifics of the service project with the local media, send updated news releases and make follow-up calls. This person will also help prepare two or three members and/or congregation staff for interviews.

The goal is to generate media interest about "God's work. Our hands." Sunday, and your congregation's community service as part of a larger service project across the country involving thousands of ELCA members all engaged in doing God's work.

We anticipate (hope) this media outreach will result in either advance stories to run prior or on the day of service.

"God's work. Our hands." Sunday is an opportunity for your congregation to communicate your message about your congregation's evangelical mission and witness in the community. How are your members making a difference in the world?

STEP TWO: PREP

Use the news release template on page 12 to share your congregation's plans with your local media. Plan to distribute your news release about two weeks prior to your congregation's day of service.

What makes a good story? Elements to consider:

Interviews – Choose two or three people in your congregation who will take part in “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday – it would be great to have members of different age groups, as well as someone from the church staff.

Prepare these spokespersons to speak about your event by answering the following questions:

- Who:** Who are you? Who from your organization is participating?
- What:** What is this event all about? What is the anticipated impact in your community?
- Where:** Provide information of where service activities are taking place.
- When:** Sept. 13, 2015 (or another date that your congregation has identified)
- Why?** Why is this event important for your congregation? Community?

It's important that your spokespeople are well-versed in your congregation's mission and our denomination as a whole: The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.8 million members in nearly 10,000 congregations across the 50 states and the Caribbean region. Known as the church of “God’s work. Our hands,” the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the 16th century German church reformer, Martin Luther.

If your service project is happening at a location such as a shelter or food pantry, some recipients may be reluctant to speak to the media so you may want to offer interviews with a volunteer or person connected to the organization. Make sure to arrange this in advance with the organization's spokesperson, so he/she is prepared to speak to the media.

Visuals – Strong visuals have an impact on whether the media picks up on a feature story. Does your activity entail good visuals? If so, you want to be sure to include good descriptions of what your members are planning for “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday.

If your day of service is at a specific service location – what will be happening? Will there be members of your community receiving goods/food? Will your church community be engaged with them? What is the activity?

Details – The more details you provide the better your chances of garnering media interest in your story. Provide numbers: How many people do you anticipate will join in the day of service? Who will be impacted by your congregation's service?

TEMPLATE NEWS RELEASE

[Insert date]

Aug. 20, 2015

[Headline]

ELCA congregations work to improve communities

[Insert your city, state abbreviation] (ELCA) – [Insert your congregation’s name here, city and state] is one of nearly 10,000 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) participating in “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday, Sept. 13, 2015. Across the country, thousands of ELCA members are engaging in service work to make a positive change in their communities, build and deepen relationships and share God’s love.

Members of [insert your congregation’s name] are working to [describe your service projects and share your location of service work if beyond your church building; the names of organizations and/or agencies that you are partnering with and/or other details that shares what you’re doing that is making a positive impact among people and/or your communities].

For more than 25 years, the ELCA is a church deeply rooted in faith and in sharing its passion for making positive changes in the world. [Insert your congregation’s name] joins other ELCA congregations across the country to boldly participate in God’s work in the world – restoring and reconciling communities, and pursuing peace and justice.

[Insert a quote or two from your members describing why the dedicated day of service is so important. Why are members excited about their participation?] “ ...,” says [insert first and last name], a member of [insert your congregation’s name].

More information about the ELCA is available at www.elca.org/dayofservice.

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.8 million members in nearly 10,000 congregations across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of “God’s work. Our hands,” the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA’s roots are in the writings of the German church reformer, Martin Luther.

For information contact: [Insert your contact information here]

[Insert name]

[Insert phone number and/or email where media can reach you]

[Insert your congregation’s website]

STEP THREE: CONTACTING MEDIA/PITCHING YOUR STORY

Initial media contact should begin in August. Although you may not have all the specifics of your event, you will have information about “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday. You can use a shortened version of the news release template for this initial media outreach. Most media will love the idea that your congregation will participate in an event that has such a wide outreach!

By the week of Aug. 26 you should have more concrete details about your event, so you should begin more “intense” media pitching.

Email the news release and make follow-up phone calls to each news desk to make sure they received your release and have included the event on their planning calendar.

Weekends tend to be slower in terms of news, so weekend news producers and editors look for interesting features for their papers and programs. Pitch the event to desk editors, reporters and producers – the more people in the newsroom who are aware of the story, the better.

For broadcast media, the show producers select which stories to air during their particular newscast, so be sure to contact the morning and evening news producers to give your event a better chance of being covered.

Update the release often as your plans develop and share this new information with the media. Repetition is the name of the game! Don’t worry about contacting the media too often – you want to make sure they have the date on their planning calendars. Make follow-up phone calls every few days to connect with the news desk and reporters.

Social media – Post “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday event information as soon as you have a plan. Engage the community in your plans and ask for thoughts and suggestions as you develop the event. Update your pages as often as possible – you may want to ask some of the youth in your congregation to take on the social media updates.

CELEBRATE!

Plan an all-congregation activity!

Share in a meal. We Lutherans love potlucks!

Ask participants to:

- Share photos
- Share personal stories from the day – What touched you about your service? Did you walk in someone else’s shoes today?
- Share videos

Invite people you’ve worked with beyond your congregation to share.

Post photos/videos and stories on your Facebook page, Twitter and Pinterest throughout the following weeks.

The ELCA churchwide organization would like to hear about your experiences. Please share with us your stories, photos and videos and the impact of your work. Send these to livinglutheran@elca.org. When you send your stories and images, they may be shared on ELCA.org, resource materials for the dedicate day of service and ELCA’s social media platforms (such as the ELCA’s Facebook page). Please indicate if you **do not** want your stories and images to be utilized. **Thank you!**

Thank you for utilizing this toolkit! **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord!