



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



"God's work. Our hands." Sunday 2017 Toolkit



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

“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 2017 is **Sunday, Sept. 10**. Mark your congregation’s calendar today! If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 10, please consider another time that works best.

This year we observe the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The ELCA’s anniversary theme, “Freed and Renewed in Christ,” reminds us of the gospel’s promise that we are freed in Christ to love and serve our neighbors. This is work that you do every day – serving your community in ways that share the love of God with all of God’s people.

We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work. Whether your congregation prepares and delivers meals to people rendered homeless to thanking emergency responders, 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.*

The idea for the dedicated day of service is this: ELCA members are called to put their faith into action by engaging in a service activity in their neighborhood, surrounding community or designated area. While service opportunities are endless, ELCA members and congregations are invited to conduct their own research opportunities for service that makes sense for their local context and the congregation’s service capacity. In other words, the idea is to deepen a congregation’s and the member’s experience in their communities and offer a 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.” You are encouraged to host your service event after worship or you and your congregation can arrange for a brief worship service at the site you’re serving and welcome others to worship. Consider partnering with other ELCA congregations in your area! The possibilities are endless.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! – 2 Corinthians 5:17

As you begin to plan your dedicated day of service in 2017, consider what this verse means in your context, for your congregation, your neighbors, your friends and your family.

- In what ways has your congregation been “made new” over the years?
- In what ways does this impact the work you’ll do on “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday, Sept. 10, 2017?

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

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

Each section contains checklists, examples and discussion questions to help you use your congregation’s gifts, talents and ministries to spend Sept. 11 working together in the way that makes the most sense for you. Sections include:

- I. ORGANIZE
- II. PLAN
- III. SUCESS 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 those people in the congregation who can help make your dedicated day of service happen. Does your congregation have a:

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

Brainstorm together about what works best for your congregation. What kinds of outreach, evangelism or mission work do these groups already do? One idea would be to pass out 3 x 5 cards to the congregation and invite your congregation to write down organizations, agencies or ministries in which they have a connection. This helps leaders identify those organizations and/or agencies that welcome volunteer.

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 project 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 consider contributing to *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for the ELCA* at 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). Visit customerservice@oldlutheran or call toll free (U.S. only) at 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 or other congregations in other cities. 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 [ELCA.org/dayofservice](https://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 Immanuel Lutheran Church in Grand Ledge, Mich., donated 17 pints of blood, which helped 51 people. They collected 526 food items to contribute to the city’s food bank. They made 97 greetings cards to insert in hygiene kits and care packages for distribution to students at a local school, and they assembled 29 care packages for college students and military personnel.

“Think of all the people that these projects have touched. ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ Sunday made a difference in the Grand Ledge community,” wrote the congregation’s secretary.

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?

INCLUDE ADVOCACY IN YOUR DAY OF SERVICE

In recognition of our Lutheran commitment to both charity and justice, consider adding advocacy action to your day of service. There are many effective ways to be an advocate, and the ELCA is ready to support your efforts.

Why add advocacy to your day of service?

As the ELCA, we believe God is calling us into the world to serve together. Through our direct service, we aid immediate needs before us. Through our advocacy work, we impact systemic, long-lasting change.

Here are some great examples of a community that combined their hands with their voices for **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**:

In Gettysburg, Pa., Lutherans picked up litter, cleaned a soup kitchen, worked at a homeless shelter, served dinner at a migrant work camp, gleaned apples for the area Community Action Program and hosted an ice cream social at the Lutheran Retirement Village. To underscore their commitment to their neighbors, they wrote letters to lawmakers on issues of hunger, housing, clean air and immigration and refugees.

“Adding our voices to the ELCA’s ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ day of service challenged us to take seriously our role as advocates for justice within and beyond our community,” said the Rev. Stephen Herr, dean of the Gettysburg Conference of the Lower Susquehanna Synod. “With our hands, we helped those in need in the Gettysburg area. With our voices of advocacy, we extended that service to a wider world in need of God’s good news and justice.”

In the Harrisburg area, members of several congregations, including an emerging worship community, spruced up buildings and grounds at Diakon’s Wilderness Center and wrote letters in support of legislation to protect and care for immigrants and unaccompanied minors.

“‘God’s work. Our hands.’ Sunday was our very first gathering as a faith community,” said Jennifer Crist, Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg intern. “We are rooted in service and deep relationships, choosing to intentionally include advocacy in all we do. We had an advocacy component within our meal and thanksgiving as a way participants could contribute to the offering.”*

(*Jennifer Crist is now a pastor.)

How to plan your advocacy action:

1. Learn about the advocacy ministries of the ELCA by visiting [ELCA.org/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/advocacy).

Join the ELCA Advocacy network to stay informed about important issues affecting our communities in the U.S. and around the world.

If there is a Lutheran advocacy network in your state, connect with the network leader to help guide your planned efforts (see below for a list of state networks).

California:	Lutheran Office of Public Policy: director@loppca.org
Colorado:	Lutheran Advocacy Ministry: pseverson@rmselca.org
Georgia:	Southeastern Synod: haustin337@att.net
Minnesota:	Lutheran Advocacy: tammy@lcppm.org
Nevada:	Lutheran Advocacy Ministry: alorden@att.net
New Jersey:	Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry: slilja@learnj.org
New Mexico:	Lutheran Advocacy Ministry: ruth@lutheranadvocacynm.org
North Carolina:	N.C. Public Policy Network: georene@me.com
Ohio:	Hunger Network in Ohio: nick@hungernetohio.org
Pennsylvania:	Lutheran Advocacy Ministry: lampa@lutheranadvocacypa.org
Texas:	Texas Impact: sam@texasinterfaith.org
Virginia:	Virginia Interfaith Center: office@virginiainterfaithcenter.org
Washington:	Faith Action Network: Benz@fanwa.org
Wisconsin:	Lutheran Office for Public Policy: cindyc@loppw.org

2. Create a committee to plan your advocacy action and meet to discuss advocacy issues that are important or relevant to your community. Think about how you might conduct advocacy around these issues in conjunction with your day of service.
3. Check out the “**God’s work. Our hands.**” **Sunday** resource center over the summer for template letters to Congress and additional instructions on including advocacy action on your day of service.
4. Determine the advocacy action(s) you will include in your day of service and share your plans with the ELCA Advocacy network! Email washingtonoffice@elca.org or your state Lutheran advocacy network.
5. During your event, take lots of pictures of the advocacy actions taken by your community members. Share these photos with ELCA Advocacy on Facebook and Twitter! @ELCAadvocacy.

II. PLAN

WHERE TO START

Now that you've spent some time organizing the leaders in your congregation, how do you decide what kind of service project you should do?

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 neighborhood needs does your mission plan identify? Who would be most helped by your service?

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

You might try:

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

In Albany, N.Y., three ELCA congregations – First Lutheran, Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, and St. John's – joined together to paint and clean classroom space for the Refugee and Immigrant Support Services of Emmaus, which serves more than 100 adults and 80 children with English-as-a-second language class, after-school programs, dinner for families and other services to assist refugees and recent immigrants to build sustainable and independent lives in the United States.

Perhaps there's an organization like this in your community with whom you could partner for **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**, where your entire congregation could make a more substantial impact than a few volunteers typically would.

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 success stories of the work ELCA congregations and members across the country have done that have truly made a difference in the lives of their communities.

III. SUCCESS STORIES

GROWING TOGETHER

On Sunday, God's love sounded like the whine of the engine of a leaf blower, the slosh of water in the sink as the refrigerator shelves were washed, and the clink of toiletry bottles being sorted into bins, according to Pastor Christina Auch of Ascension Lutheran Church in Shelby, N.C.

"It smelled like fresh paint and wood chips and maybe a little sweat. And it looked like an aunt painting a doorframe with her middle school niece, three women organizing a storage room and three generations of one family – a grandmother, mother and her two middle school sons – painting cubbyholes.

"And through it all, we all said, 'To God be the glory,' because how else can we explain the holiness of the time we spent together?" said Auch.

Volunteers from Ascension helped make a difference for the residents of the Cleveland County Rescue Mission's Heart2Heart Place by putting the final touches on the newly renovated shelter that will house women and children.

"A special thanks is due to Pastor Christina and the team of volunteers from Ascension Lutheran Church for the wonderful job you did at Heart2Heart Place," said Michael Gullatte, executive director, Cleveland County Rescue Mission. "The painting, hanging blinds, planting flowers and putting together beds were especially appreciated. The extra time and effort you put in were certainly worthwhile. It will help our future residents find healing and wholeness in Christ our Lord."

EAGER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Like many other ELCA congregations, the members of Zion are eager to make a difference in the lives of our members, in the community and wherever God's spirit leads, said Pastor David Peters of Zion Lutheran Church in Tinley Park, Ill.

Volunteers from Zion prepared 200 meals for those who work with The Night Ministry's health outreach bus. The Night Ministry provides services for people experiencing poverty and homelessness in Chicago. The congregation also assembled toiletry kits for those in need, and Sunday school families made thank-you cards for local firefighters.

"This congregation is always ready to put prayers into action with the help and support and assistance we can offer," Peters said. **"God's work. Our hands.' Sunday** provided a wonderful opportunity for our congregation, which is a church for all generations, to give and share. Young and old, our folks can't get enough of these invitations to go out and do something in Jesus' name."

OUR HANDS. OUR VOICES

At Agnus Dei Lutheran Church in Gig Harbor, Wash., members put their faith in action by writing letters to Congress in support of the reduction in carbon dioxide emissions as proposed in the Clean Air Act, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act, and the Older Americans Act. Agnus Dei member Phyllis Brandt said that although the congregation “readily responds” to the needs of their neighbors, they also look for ways to help make a difference beyond their local community.

“Service projects that we undertake benefit local needs. Advocacy letter-writing tackles the root causes on a large scale. We believe that we need to do both,” said Brandt. “Concern for clean air, federal nutritional programs for children (and) programs that promote well-being for older Americans are of such a large scope. But it doesn’t mean that we throw up our hands in frustration. We need to let our voices be heard as we join with others who also share an understanding that joined together we can have an influence.”

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, artist, 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. A worship resource designed for “**God’s work. Our hands.**” Sunday is available at ELCA.org/dayofservice.

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 media about your congregation's efforts and participation in **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**. This media outreach includes both traditional outlets – newspaper, radio and television – and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and other 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 to media. This person will also help prepare two to 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 with our hands.

We anticipate (hope) this media outreach will result in stories either before the project 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 a news release (template offered below) to share your congregation's plan with your local media. Plan to distribute your news release about two weeks before 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 congregation's staff.

Prepare these people 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 on service activities locations.

WHEN: Sept. 10, 2017 (or another date that your congregation has identified)

MOST IMPORTANTLY WHY?: Why is this event important for your congregation?

It's important that the people you pick are well-versed in your congregation's mission and our denomination as a whole: The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in nearly 9,300 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 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 or 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, 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 or 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 affected by your congregation's service?

TEMPLATE NEWS RELEASE

[Insert date]

Sept. 10, 2017

[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. 10. 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 agencies that you are partnering with and other details that share what you’re doing that is making a positive impact among people and your communities].

For more than 25 years, the ELCA has been a church deeply rooted in faith and in sharing its passion for making positive changes in the world. [Insert your congregation’s name] joins with 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?] “...,” said [insert first and last name], a member of [insert your congregation’s name].

More information about the ELCA is available at ELCA.org.

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with more than 3.7 million members in more than 9,300 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 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 end of August, you should have more concrete details about your event, so 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, producers – the more people in the newsroom who are aware of the story, the better.

For broadcast media, show producers decide 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 as 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.

PLAN AN ALL-CONGREGATION ACTIVITY

Share in a meal. We Lutherans love to eat! 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 those photos and 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 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 dedicated 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 used. Thank you!

Thank you for using 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!

