

LIVING OUR **BAPTISM**...*Five gifts of discipleship*

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Living our baptism is our faith journey as we come from the baptismal waters to live a new life as children of God. Marked with the cross of Christ and sealed by the Spirit, we receive a new identity as followers of Jesus, and the story of Jesus becomes our story.

Our baptism sets us out on a **lifelong journey** that is characterized by our relationship to God, our relationship to our faith community, our relationships with various parts of our neighborhood and community, and our relationship to the wider world.

Living our Baptism: Five Gifts of Discipleship is an initiative to assist congregations to nurture growth in discipleship, not only as individuals in the ministry, but also in the ministry setting as well. The five gifts of discipleship (or five faith practices) are identified in the Affirmation of Baptism liturgy (see box on right).

Suggestions: Every ministry setting is unique, so the suggestions which follow are intended to spark additional ideas. Develop a strategy for your context. Additional Gifts of Discipleship resources can be found at: www.elca.org/faithpractices

1. Begin a year-long emphasis on “the meaning of baptism.” Extend that theme into worship, sermon series, confirmation classes, Sunday School, and mid-week classes. Focus on what it means to be a baptized child of God.
2. Designate one season of the church year to emphasize the five gifts of discipleship. The following ideas are described in greater detail in additional resources found on the ELCA web site. See: www.elca.org/faithpractices
 - Advent series: Emmanuel—God’s Gift to Us; or Mary’s Song—God’s Gift to the World
 - Epiphany series: Season of Aha!; “Yes I Do!” New Year’s Resolution and Prayer
 - Lent series: based on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians
 - Easter series: utilizes phrases from the liturgy of Holy Baptism
 - Pentecost: a planning process to evaluate your ministries using the five gifts
3. Organize a leadership retreat for key ministry leaders in your setting. Explore how this resource might be used in your ministry context.
4. Create outreach projects around each of the gifts of discipleship.
5. Divide into five groups with each group taking one gift of discipleship as their theme for the year. The group can lead worship periodically, organize community events, develop Bible studies, etc. around their gift of discipleship.

AFFIRMATION OF BAPTISM

Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

- to live among God’s faithful people,
- to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper,
- to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
- to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
- and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?

RESPONSE: We do, and ask God to help and guide us.

OVERVIEW

MISSION of the Evangelical Church in America

Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world.

VISION

CLAIMED by God's grace for the sake of the world,
we are a new creation through God's living word by the power of the Holy Spirit;

GATHERED by God's grace for the sake of the world, we will
Live among God's faithful people
Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper;

SENT by God's grace for the sake of the world, we will
Proclaim the good news of God in word and deed
Serve all people, following the example of Jesus
Strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

BAPTISM

At baptism, the presiding minister addresses parents and those who bring children who are not yet able to answer for themselves and entrusts them with the following responsibilities:

to live with them among God's faithful people,
bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,
teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,
place in their hands the holy scriptures,
and nurture them in faith and prayer,
so that your children may learn to trust God,
proclaim Christ through word and deed,
care for others and the world God made,
and work for justice and peace. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 228*)

LIVING OUR BAPTISM

When a baptized Christian affirms the faith (often called confirmation) the presiding minister addresses those making public affirmation of baptism and asks the question which echoes the words spoken at baptism: Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:

to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
to serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth? (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 236*)

RESPONSE: We do, and ask God to help and guide us.

And so begins a daily claiming and re-discovering of the God-given gifts of discipleship.

Unwrap these five gifts of discipleship!



Questions for discussion and reflection

When we affirm our baptism, we ask God to help and guide us as we commit to the five faith practices listed below. Each of the following has the potential to be “a gift” of immeasurable value in our lives. Like many gifts, we first need to open the gift, prayerfully ponder it, and discern a place for that gift in daily life. Thanks be to God who sends the Holy Spirit to be our guide.

Use the following questions for small group discussions or for personal devotions to begin the conversation on the five gifts of discipleship. Take your time reflecting on each gift, so you might claim and rediscover these five gifts of discipleship.

To live among God’s faithful people.

- a) What does it mean for you to live among God’s faithful people?
- b) Name someone who influenced your faith journey. Describe that person’s faith.
- c) How might “living among God’s faithful people” be considered a gift? What are the consequences, if any, if we do not allow this gift to be part of our life?
- d) **Challenge:** List seven reasons to be part of a church family.

To hear the Word of God and share in the Lord’s Supper.

- a) What does it mean for you to hear the Word of God?
- b) Describe what it feels like to receive the Lord’s Supper.
- c) When did you first experience the Word of God and/or Lord’s Supper as a priceless gift from God? Explain.
- d) **Challenge:** Take a few minutes for silent prayer. Listen for a phrase, verse, or image from scripture. Share.

To proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed.

- a) What does it mean for you to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word AND deed?
- b) What prevents you from freely sharing the good news of God in Christ?
- c) How might the opportunity to proclaim the good news of God in Christ become a transformative gift to the proclaimer?
- d) **Challenge:** Turn to someone and share part of your faith story in less than five minutes.

To serve all people, following the example of Jesus.

- a) What does it mean for you to serve all people following the example of Jesus?
- b) Describe the example of Jesus as he served others. Describe what it feels like to serve others.
- c) How might the act of serving others (like Jesus) become a gift to both the server and the one who is being served?
- d) **Challenge:** Brainstorm potential partners in order to deepen and widen your service to others.

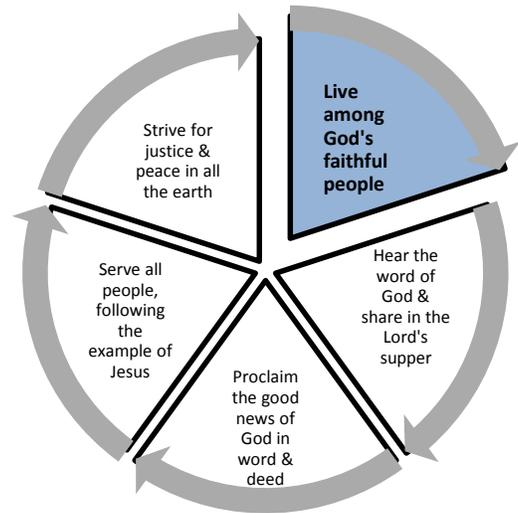
To strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

- a) What does it mean for you to strive for justice?
- b) What can we do as individuals to promote peace in all the earth?
- c) What advice would you give to someone exhausted from striving for justice and peace?
- d) **Challenge:** Select an injustice or area of strife which concerns you. Identify one thing you will commit to do to make a difference.



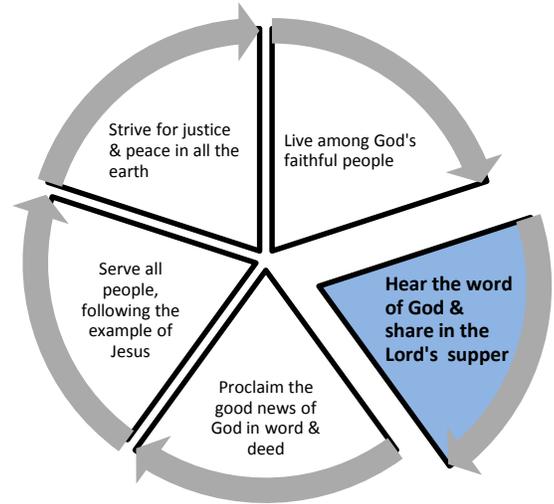
GOING DEEPER: *Live among God's faithful people*

- Host a meal or reception. Enjoy this time of fellowship with God's faithful and beloved people.
- Arrange a dialogue featuring a panel of those who are younger than 25 years old—those who were born after the ELCA was formed. Ask them to respond to the following questions: What does it mean to live among God's faithful people? How might the church be more effective in reaching others in their age group?
- Partner with one of the 145 ELCA Outdoor Ministries sites in the country. Pray regularly for the staff. Send notes to the staff and encourage them to model what it means to live among God's faithful people in Christian community. Collect an offering for their ministry. (ELCA Outdoor Ministries serves 450,000 people annually.)
- Find creative ways to recognize ELCA campus ministry sites—places where young adults are encouraged to live among God's faithful people. Contact a campus ministry site to better understand the resources they need to reach young adults. Designate a bulletin board for information about ELCA campus ministry. Pray for their work.
- Encourage each person to generously share time, talent, and treasury in order to build up the body of Christ.
- Honor those over the age of 90 with a special celebration. Thank them for the ways they have modeled what it means to live in Christian community and to support the ministry of the church. Have a special meal at the church, but also find a way to take the congregation to them. This might include a caroling session—perhaps at a time other than Christmas.
- Organize opportunities for people to form friendships: cooking groups, empty nesters, sport teams, quilting groups, and the list goes on.
- Pray with and for each other on a regular basis. Develop prayer partners in the congregation.
- Establish small groups in a ministry setting which gather and discuss ways they would like to grow in discipleship using the five gifts of discipleship. The group could go out in the community and tell their story of growth in discipleship.
- Take an inventory of gifts and talents of the congregation. Be a good steward of their gifts.



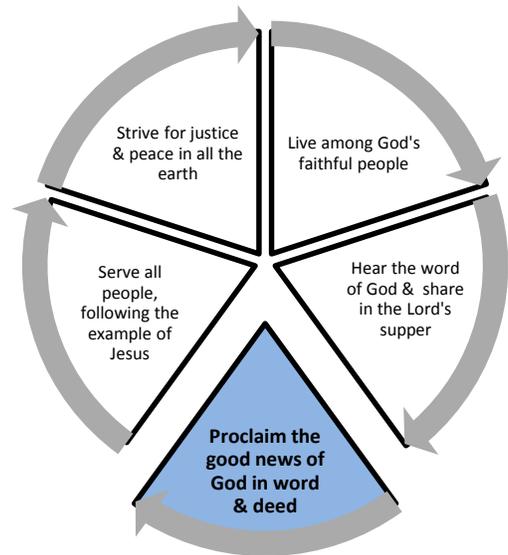
GOING DEEPER: *Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper*

- Select regular times throughout the calendar year to affirm baptism. Use the litanies, prayers and resources found at:
www.elca.org/faithpractices
- Survey your congregation to identify faith-renewing hymns and songs. Include this music in worship.
- Host a Hymn Festival or a contemporary music fest for your local community. Use music as a means to invite others to hear the word of God.
- Maximize the musical gifts of your congregation. Take an inventory to determine who has played a musical instrument or sung in a choir. See if a new choir or ensemble might be created.
- Invite the congregation to submit personal and family stories (written or videos) about the way the word of God has impacted their faith. Weave these stories into sermons. (Be sure those who submit stories realize their contributions might be shared publicly.)
- Lift up in prayer the over 9,600 ELCA congregations which provide opportunities to hear God's Word and share in the Lord's Supper. Designate a bulletin board for worship bulletins from other ELCA congregations. Include worship bulletins from vacation trips, but also encourage family and friends who worship at ELCA congregations in other locations to send a bulletin for your display.
- Evaluate the church's microphones and speakers at the church. Does the congregation have the optimal system for people of all ages to hear the word?
- Gather a creative team together to plan an upcoming season of the year. How might drama, dance, music, visual art, and social media be used to share the Word of God?
- Organize a prayer retreat to hear the word of God. Include a time for silence and discernment.
- Identify social media resources and applications which encourage daily devotions. Share those resources with others.
- Host a regular mid-week conversation at a favorite gathering place, such as a gym, restaurant, coffee shop, or park. Share favorite Bible passages. Discuss ethical situations in the workplace or a topic of interest to the group. Ponder the question: "How does the Bible call me to live my faith in daily life?"
- Designate a worship service to teach about the liturgy of Holy Communion.



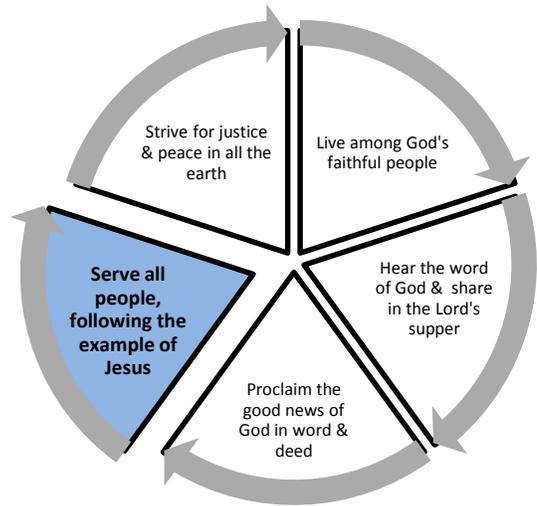
GOING DEEPER: *Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed*

- Plan several events (including worship services) especially designed to attract newcomers. These events might include special music, food, or opportunities for fellowship. Encourage members to bring their friends and neighbors.
- Increase your social media presence in order to communicate the good news of God in Christ. Ask someone under 25 years of age to visit your Web site. Is it current, easy to navigate, and attractive? If not, update the site.
- Review your congregation's logo, bulletins, newsletters, and publicity flyers. Are your flyers easy to read, interesting, and attractive? How are you telling the story about your congregation?
- Consider using Natural Church Development (NCD) as a tool to assess your congregation and make plans to increase your capacity for ministry. For more information, see: www.elca.org/ncd.
- Partner with one of the eight ELCA seminaries training future leaders. Pray regularly for the faculty and administration. Consider inviting a seminarian to share with your congregation about seminary life. Discover ways the seminary is preparing pastors and leaders for the future.
- Find a map of the world. Invite children, youth, and families to use colorful dots to identify the nearly 90 countries where ELCA Global Mission supports missionaries and companion church ministries. See Web site: www.elca.org/globalmission. Offer a prayer for the work of the Lutheran World Federation. See Web site: www.lutheranworld.org.
- Seek ways to go out into your community and meet those who are not currently involved in a church. Provide water at a track meet, cookies at a Little League game, or snacks at an elderly social event. Organize a church group to volunteer at a major local festival. Go where people gather.
- Walk around the neighborhood near the church. Pray for those who live and work in the area surrounding the church. Knock on doors and introduce yourself. Ask if anyone is in need of prayer. Offer to pray with them.
- Visit a "non-traditional worship community" in your area. Observe and learn some of the strategies used to proclaim the good news to others.



GOING DEEPER: *Serve all people, following the example of Jesus*

- Designate a special offering for the ELCA World Hunger.
- Provide an update to your congregation about the success of the ELCA Malaria Campaign.
- Organize a volunteer team to respond to a disaster through Lutheran Disaster Response. Check the LDR Web site for current needs: www.ldr.org/volunteer.
- Promote the ELCA Good Gift catalog as an important way to help others in need. For more information, see: www.elca.org/goodgifts.
- Study the response of the church to pressing social issues facing the world by hosting a dialogue or a series of dialogues on the ELCA's social statements. These can be found at: www.elca.org/socialstatements.
- Gather ecumenical partners together for dialogue. Seek ways to serve your local community.
- Organize your congregation to participate in the "God's Work-Our Hands" Sunday held in September. See www.elca.org for information.
- Learn more about the local needs of your community. Invite non-profits who respond to local needs to make presentations to your congregation. Visit their sites. Get a list of volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers.
- Focus on a local non-profit each month. Pray for their work. Assist their work in some concrete way. Collect a special offering for them.
- Get involved in your local public schools. Find ways to assist children and youth who struggle with schoolwork, self-esteem, and other issues. Plan a way to support the teachers, aids, and staff.
- Arrange an inventory of your neighborhood. Take time to get know your neighbors.
- Identify areas of need and/or those who assist others. Seek partners in your local neighborhood. Partner with a church in a neighborhood different than your own.
- Host community dialogues. Become a leader in seeking solutions and finding common ground.



GOING DEEPER: *Strive for justice and peace in all the earth*

- Host a prayer vigil for peace.
- Organize a peace walk around your church neighborhood. Walk in silence and pray for peace for all whom you pass. Brainstorm and strategize ways for your congregation to become a blessing of peace within your neighborhood.
- Identify an injustice facing your local community. Take time to learn the facts and the roots of the injustice. Network with a local agency which is already addressing this issue in an effective way. Explore ways your congregation might get involved.
- Request that justice and peace issues be consistently prayed for in the life of the congregation.
- Begin a Justice and Peace Team in your congregation that focuses on ways to be better advocates for justice and peace in the world.
- Be intentional about creating a climate of mutual respect and care in the congregation. Remember that peace begins with each of us and how we interact with others.
- Offer Sunday School classes or a seminar on peace education including conflict resolution.
- Offer police/community forums in congregations to discuss how to enhance police/community relations. "Adopt a Local Precinct" and get better acquainted with police. Invite them to events at the church such as a prayer breakfast and then pray for them prior to their leaving the event.
- Organize a Neighborhood Resource Day. Invite organizations who focus on justice and peace. Offer information about volunteer opportunities in the areas of justice and peace.
- Work with ecumenical partners to seek ways to make a difference in the community.
- Contact your local school system and explore volunteer opportunities for ending bullying, or for being trained to be a mediator in the schools.
- Follow the ELCA Advocacy activities and action alerts. Visit www.ELCA.org/advocacy and ELCA Advocacy on Facebook.

