

# Lenten STUDY GUIDE



ELCA World Hunger's  
**40 DAYS**  
*of Giving*



**ELCA World Hunger**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



## Dear friend in Christ,

The invitation to Lent is an invitation to journey with Christ to the cross, to remember our dependence on God and to gaze with faith toward the resurrection to come. For many Lutherans, the season is marked by four particular spiritual practices, found in the invitation to Lent:

*I invite you, therefore, to the discipline of Lent – self-examination and repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works of love – strengthened by the gifts of word and sacrament. Let us continue our journey through these forty days to the great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Leaders Desk Edition).*

This five-week study and the stories and calendar that accompany it are meant for individuals, families, congregations and groups to enter more deeply into their Lenten journey by reflecting on what the Lenten practices of repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving and works love mean for us today. Each session draws on stories from projects supported by ELCA World Hunger and includes questions for conversation or reflection.

May God bless your Lenten journey. And may your practice of the discipline of Lent enrich your faith and your commitment to sharing in the work God is doing in our world.

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## WEEK 1

Lent is a story of the journey of the people of God. It is the story of us, or more appropriately “God with us.” During the season, we remember the ancient Hebrews’ journey from slavery in Egypt and a generation spent wandering in the wilderness. We also re-enact, in our own small ways, Jesus’ journey into the wilderness, where he was tempted by the devil. The fast that many Christians commit to during Lent is a reflection of the 40-day fast Jesus undertook during this time.

In the sacred time of Lent, we are the Hebrews – wandering in the desert, living in awareness of our dependence on God, and having our faith tested in uncertain times. In the sacred time of Lent, we are Jesus – alone in the wilds of the world, purifying ourselves through the discipline of fasting, and facing head-on the temptations of the world.

Lent is a journey, or a series of journeys, but what we often forget is the part that comes after the journey. The Hebrews weren’t just wandering through the wilderness; they were being prepared to be the people of God in their new land. Jesus wasn’t merely retreating to the desert; he was prepping for the start of his ministry.

In our own Lenten season, we turn inward, reflecting on our dependence on God’s grace. But the disciplines of Lent are not the end of the journey. Through the four practices of Lent – repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving, and works of love – we turn inward so that we may turn outward, toward God

and our neighbors. Marked by ashes at the start, we enter the 40 days of Lent with penitent hearts and awareness of our need for God's mercy. Repentance and self-reflection are important practices, but it's easy to stay here, forgetting that the season is about so much more than our own self-examination.

Martin Luther captured this well. Luther defined repentance in two ways: "Repentance... consists in contrition, and in the serious acknowledgment of sin, and in taking hold of the promise." And again: "There are two elements in true repentance: recognition of sin and recognition of grace." Being marked by ashes, fasting, confession, and other penitent practices of Lent invite us to turn inward. But the spiritual practices of Lent also lead us to turn outward, "taking hold of the promise" of God as we practice the other Lenten disciplines: sacrificial giving and works of love for our neighbors. It is the proclamation of this promise that concludes Jesus' time in the wilderness: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

We are formed in the disciplines of Lent to be church – together and for the sake of the world. After a generation in the wilderness, the Hebrews came to the promised land as a people consecrated by God to be a "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). After facing down temptation, Jesus returned to Galilee and declared the "good news" to the people (Luke 4:18). The journey is not the end of the story, for them or for us.

ELCA World Hunger, as a ministry of this church, is shaped by the Lenten disciplines. In repentance, we recognize the ways sin continues to disrupt communities and contribute to hunger and poverty. Through the ancient practices of prayer and fasting, we are renewed in our commitment to "to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go

free, and to break every yoke" (Isaiah 58:6). By sacrificial giving, we support ministries around the world that give our neighbors a chance at new life and livelihoods. And in works of love, we accompany our neighbors toward a just world where all are fed.

In Lent, we "take hold of the promise" of God's grace together, knowing that the road does not end at Calvary but at an empty tomb – and the assurance of new life for us, for our neighbors and for all of God's creation.

## **PRACTICING LENT**

There are four disciplines, or spiritual practices, that guide our time during Lent. Use the questions and prompts below to reflect on the Lenten disciplines: repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving, and works of love.

### **REPENTANCE**

What are some of the challenges that make it difficult to focus on your neighbors?

### **PRAYER AND FASTING**

What fast will you choose this Lent? How will your prayers and fasting help remind you of the needs of your neighbors during the season?

### **SACRIFICIAL GIVING**

How will you support your neighbors through ELCA ministries this season? Consider committing to a giving goal for Lent, setting a portion aside each day until Palm Sunday.

### **WORKS OF LOVE**

Martin Luther reminds us that we are not saved by works – but grace does call us to offer our works with joy and gratitude to our neighbors in need. How might you "take hold of the promise" this Lent by your works of love for others?



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## WEEK 2

In the previous session, we learned how Martin Luther wrote that repentance consists in two things: contrition for sins and “taking hold of the promise.” The “promise” here is the gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is the promise of new life in the fullness of God’s reign. It is the promise of the gospels and the prophets, the promise our ancestors in the faith clung to, and the promise that carries the people of God today into communities around the world, accompanying neighbors amid staggering challenges of poverty, hunger and injustice.

In the Gospels, Jesus not only proclaims the promise but lives it. From Galilee to Calvary, he shows us what it means to live according to the promise – boldly, courageously and with faith unceasing. In the face of religious and political persecution, Jesus lives the daring life of faith in God’s grace.

While his trial before Pilate gets more attention, Jesus’ unrelenting march toward Jerusalem is one of the clearest examples of what it means to “take hold of the promise.” He travels from town to town, “teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem” (Luke 13:22). At one stop, a group of Pharisees warns him that he must flee because Herod wants to kill him. “Go and tell that fox for me,” Jesus responds, “I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work” (Luke 13:31-32).

Herod is coming for him, and Jesus responds, “I have work to do.” Jesus showed daring confidence that not even death can

stop the work of God in the world.

It is that grace-formed confidence that many people of faith bring to the calling of the church – seeing even in the midst of death that there is work to be done.

In Akron, Ohio, the Dare to Love More Food and Resources program at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church is bringing new life out of death. In fact, as Deacon Marla Wood Kay, the director of Holy Trinity’s congregational ministries, describes, “the idea for this ministry was born in a hospice room.” When Debra Manteghi, a longtime member and tireless community advocate, died from cancer, Wood Kay and other leaders at Holy Trinity wanted to continue the ministry Manteghi had begun by opening a food pantry in her honor. Today, the DLM pantry serves 75 families each month, providing them with food, clothing, books, counseling and a safe place for children to play.

More than 82,000 people – about 15.3 percent of the population – in Summit County, where Akron is located, don’t always know where their next meal will come from. Akron faces many of the challenges other Midwestern cities face – a loss of manufacturing jobs, a rise in hunger and poverty, and air and water pollution in some communities. Yet, like other cities across the country and around the world, God is at work through local leaders, families and organizations to shape a bright future. And DLM is part of that work.

In Lent, we remember Jesus’ long walk to Jerusalem and to Calvary. But in faith, we also know that nothing can stop the work of God. Together, we “take hold of the promise” with confidence, knowing that even out of death, God will bring new life and hope to the world.

Herod wants us dead? “I am casting out demons and performing cures” (Luke 13:32).

The shadow of the cross looms ahead of us? “I must be on my way” (Luke 13:33).

A dreaded disease takes the life of a leader and friend? “The idea for this ministry was born in a hospice room.”

Poverty and hunger threaten our community? “Go and tell that fox,” God is not done with us yet.

## **PRACTICING LENT**

There are four disciplines, or spiritual practices, that guide our time during Lent. Use the questions and prompts below to reflect on the Lenten disciplines: repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving, and works of love.

### **REPENTANCE**

Think of a time when fear cast a shadow on your relationships with your neighbors. How does Christ encourage us to go outside our comfort zone to love and serve our neighbors?

### **PRAYER AND FASTING**

This week, include in your prayers ministries like Dare to Love More, which give hope to people in their communities. Give thanks for their work, and ask God to continue to strengthen their ministries.

### **SACRIFICIAL GIVING**

What goal for giving did you set for yourself or your family last week? Learn more about the ministries supported through your gifts to ELCA World Hunger, like Dare to Love More, by reading stories available at [ELCA.org/40Days](http://ELCA.org/40Days).

### **WORKS OF LOVE**

In the face of death, disease and poverty, God continues to bring new life and hope. How do you, your family and your congregation bear witness to courage and hope in an uncertain world?



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## WEEK 3

*“And the book says, ‘We might be through with the past, but the past ain’t through with us.’”*

So says the character Jimmy Gator in the 1999 film *Magnolia*. At its best, the past can evoke nostalgic memories of years gone by. At its worst, the past can seem like a burden, weighing down our prospects for the future. By faith, we look forward to God’s promise of “a future with hope” (Jeremiah 29:11). The sin that separates us from trust in the promise of God, though, needles the soul with the stark reminder: “the past ain’t through with us.”

The exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt into freedom is commemorated during Lent as a journey from an oppressive past into a hopeful, promised future. In selecting their leader, God looked not to a forward-thinking champion, though, but to Moses, a man with a past that often may have felt oppressive or constraining. The people’s journey from slavery under Pharaoh to freedom in the promised land mirrored Moses’ own transformative journey, from self-imposed exile born of guilt to a new identity as a servant of God toward a hopeful future.

Born a Hebrew at a time when Pharaoh demanded the death of all Hebrew baby boys, Moses’ mother hid him in a basket, where he was discovered by Pharaoh’s daughter. Raised by his birth mother, Moses was taken later as a son by Pharaoh’s daughter. As an adult, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. Carefully looking to make sure there were no witnesses, Moses

killed the Egyptian and buried the body to hide it. Within a day, Moses realized that he didn't get away so easily with his crime. Others knew about it – including Pharaoh, who wanted him dead. Even the Hebrews, his own people, saw him as a murderer. Knowing this, Moses fled to Midian to live out his life quietly as a shepherd.

But God had other plans. In God's hands, Moses' future wasn't limited by his past. Born a slave, separated from his family, and rejected as a criminal by both Hebrew and Egyptian, Moses' past would seem to dictate his future. But God interceded, calling Moses to return to Egypt, to "take hold of the promise," and to lead the people to freedom.

Jimmy Gator may be quoting "the book," but it certainly isn't the book of Moses' story – or ours. No matter how consequential the choices of the past, faith invites us always forward, to the future that grace lays open before us.

The effects of decisions in the past can be felt within the world in the present, today. Some, like Moses', are personal. Others are felt in the very land we inhabit. In Malawi, the consequences of the past are starkly visible in the landscape of rural villages like Chole. Deforestation, driven by a need for land for farming and wood for fires, has stripped much of the land of the very trees that are so vital for clean air and healthy soil. Without trees, factors like erosion can make it hard for farmers to cultivate the land and earn a living.

Shadrack Tsatautenda is one of those farmers. Working land that has been in his family for five generations, Shadrack knows the challenges of tending the land in Chole. But with the assistance of a business loan from a village savings and loan group established by ELCA World Hunger's local companion, Evangelical Lutheran Development Services, the environmental degradation of the past doesn't have to dictate his future.

With money and training, he planted the first seedlings in his nursery two years ago. The oldest are nearly ready to sell, and Shadrack's nursery has grown to include 1,200 trees – trees that will provide him with a livelihood and re-establish the natural resources of the land.

Caring for the land, coaxing life out of the soil and guiding it to maturity – this work connects Shadrack to the past, plants him firmly in the present and informs his vision for that future. "It is meaningful to me to look after the land of my ancestors, and I want to pass this land to future generations," he says. The training he and his neighbors received will allow them to heal the land, and with the money they earn, they will be able to send their children to school.

Despite the visible effects of past environmental decisions on the landscape of Chole, Shadrack and his neighbors know that the past does not dictate their community's future.

Lent is a story of a journey from a weighty past to a bright future – spiritually, as we receive the gift of grace from God in Christ for our salvation, and materially, as God invites us to accompany our neighbors in meeting our daily challenges with hope, courage and transformative work toward change. In their exodus, the Hebrews were set free spiritually, to be the people of God in a new land and, materially, to be a free people liberated from the yoke of the past.

The past may not be through with us. But neither is God. And that makes the difference – for Moses, for the Hebrews, for Shadrack and for us.



## PRACTICING LENT

There are four disciplines, or spiritual practices, that guide our time during Lent. Use the questions and prompts below to reflect on the Lenten disciplines: repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving, and works of love.

### REPENTANCE

When have you experienced the past as a “weight,” preventing you from seeing a hopeful future?

### PRAYER AND FASTING

This week, remember in prayer the good creation of God, which bears witness to the effects of past actions, for better and for worse, and the workers who tend and care for the land.

### SACRIFICIAL GIVING

As you continue in your commitment to support ministries like those in Chole, Malawi, reflect on the many ways your gifts – both spiritual and material – can allow others to see a hopeful future. How might your gifts to ELCA World Hunger be an investment in the hopeful future God is building for us and our neighbors?

### WORKS OF LOVE

How might you, your family or your congregation show love of God and love of neighbor to others in your community this Lent?

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## WEEK 4

At St. Matthew Trinity Lutheran Church's Lunchtime Ministry in Hoboken, N.J., about 65 people each day come through the doors for a warm meal, extra clothing, a listening ear and a brief respite from the streets many live on each day. On Mondays, volunteers provide free haircuts. On Wednesdays, Chef Bill makes special “bill-ritos” from scratch. Every day, visitors are welcomed like honored guests, treated with the respect and hospitality that can be hard to find when you are experiencing homelessness.

Hoboken is a long way from Calvary. But for people who face the threats of homelessness, hunger and poverty, the shadow of the cross looms large. The jeers of the crowd that greeted Christ on that lonely hill are echoed in the derision and dismissal so many of us and our neighbors face when living in shelters, in cars or out on the street. The threat of a legal and political system tilted against Christ is felt still today, as laws that criminalize poverty and homelessness make the challenges our neighbors face seem almost insurmountable.

It's hard to wrap our heads around crucifixion today, but it's not hard to see the many ways people are crucified by public opinion, policy, economic injustice and marginalization every day in communities around the world. For some, it is the little “deaths” of derision and stigma. For others, it is the very real death from malnutrition, disease or violence.

In either case, the cross is not just an allegory or historical symbol. The cross is a present reality – as death-dealing now as

it was 2,000 years ago.

In Lent, we journey with Christ to the foot of the cross, deepening each step with the disciplines of Lent – repentance that confesses our own role in his death, prayer and fasting that pleads for God’s mercy, sacrificial giving that recalls Christ’s own sacrifice for us, and works of love that bear a pale reflection of the love God showed us in our need.

But the disciplines of Lent are utterly empty if, in our journey to the cross of Christ, we ignore the crosses that dot the landscape of our communities today. The journey to Calvary with Christ is the journey to the cross wherever it is found, including within our own communities and communities around the world.

Part of this journey means entering into the stories of our neighbors, a ministry the volunteers and staff at St. Matthew Trinity know well. “Whatever your story is,” says Stanley Enzweiler, the program manager, “we will welcome you.” Some of these stories are of bad luck. Others are of bad decisions. But at the Lunchtime Ministry, guests are always welcome. Here, their physical and social needs are met. A warm meal – served with dignity. A new pair of socks or warm winter clothes – and someone to listen. A haircut – and respect. In each case, service goes beyond meeting a need to encountering a neighbor, sharing their story and walking with them through the challenges they face.

The journey also means bearing witness to the forgiveness and love that point beyond the cross to the promise of grace, mercy and hope that we have in Christ. In faith, we are called not just to walk with one another toward the cross but to bear witness to the future God has in store for our world, a future in which all will be welcome and all shall be fed. Our Lenten journey carries us to the cross – and beyond it, to the empty tomb, the resurrection and the fullness of the future reign of God.

This doesn’t always happen in big ways. Sometimes, it happens in the everyday ways we act toward our neighbors. At St. Matthew Trinity’s Lunchtime Ministry, it’s shown each time a guest is welcomed – or welcomed back. “Even if you break the rules at Lunchtime Ministry and have to leave our community for a few days, we will always welcome you back,” Stanley says. “Everyone messes up a time or two, but no one is beyond forgiveness. We are one lifeline that never goes away.”

Christ’s journey to the cross reminds us of the many crosses in our own midst, threats to life, safety and well-being that we and our neighbors face each day. But it also reminds us of what is to come – life abundant, here and now as God works to reconcile and heal our communities, and in the future fullness of God’s reign.

## **PRACTICING LENT**

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### **REPENTANCE**

How are people who experience homelessness, poverty or hunger treated in our community? How might we ensure that their dignity and safety are protected?

### **PRAYER AND FASTING**

This week, remember in prayer neighbors facing homelessness and hunger and the ministries that accompany them.

### **SACRIFICIAL GIVING**

Take time this week to reflect on your commitment to support the ministry of ELCA World Hunger this Lent. In what ways might your gifts provide hope to neighbors in need?

### **WORKS OF LOVE**

How have other people helped you during challenging times? How might you pay that forward this week by helping others in need?

Lent carries us with the Hebrews in search of the promised land, with Jesus into the wilderness and, ultimately, to the cross at Calvary. It is a somber season in the church year, so somber, in fact, that by the end, Christians will have gone 40 days without hearing “Alleluia” during worship. There is no other time during the church year when language in worship is so circumscribed as this. Many congregations even practice the tradition of “burying the Alleluia” at the start of the season, a ritual with ties going back to the Middle Ages by some estimates.

Burying the “Alleluia” is one way we remember the sacrifice of Christ, who “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). In the ritual burying of the “Alleluia,” we mourn the death of Jesus, and we stand in solidarity with the fellowship of believers of ages past, mourning the sin that kept us separated from God until by grace that gap was bridged. Lent is a season of this kind of tragic memory, and the entombed “Alleluia” is a visible reminder of that.

Fasting is another way we remember this sacrifice, this loss. Some early Christians believed that fasting was a form of lament, both for sin and for the death of Jesus. Christians ought, they believed, to fast on certain days or in certain seasons as a way of remembering and lamenting Christ’s death on the cross.

The disciplines of Lent that call us into lament also push us

into the world, with an openness to hear the lament of those for whom lament is a daily reality, for whom the “Alleluia” remains buried well past Easter. Spiritual practices attune us to hear the lament of our neighbors facing poverty, hunger, disease, marginalization and death.

Lent prepares us for this. But the spiritual disciplines of the season don’t stop there. Lent is not a season of lingering but of journeying in trust. The Hebrews exited Egypt in trust that a better life awaited them. Jesus faced temptation in the wilderness in trust that God would sustain him, and approached the cross in trust that not even crucifixion could derail the work of God in the world.

We, too, in Lent journey in trust, clinging by faith to the promise that outside the rhythm of our liturgical season, the “Alleluia” has been released forever by the resurrection of Christ, so that no shout of joy ought to be stifled by hunger, silenced by injustice or hidden by pain. We know that God’s intention is for our “Alleluia” to resound – forcefully, loudly, boldly – now, in this world, in this time.

As we reflect on the buried “Alleluia” this Lent, we also remember that grace continues to abound in our world through God’s continued work through our church and our neighbors.

In Burure in the Gokwe region of Zimbabwe, outbreaks of malaria compounded by deep poverty threaten the lives and well-being of both children and adults. In 2016, over 280,000 new cases of malaria were identified in Zimbabwe, and malaria remains the third leading cause of death, with young children being particularly vulnerable.

These numbers, though, belie the great progress that has been made against malaria in Zimbabwe, including through the schools, health clinic and other programs supported by

ELCA World Hunger in Burure. Recognizing that the likelihood of good health increases as a household's income increases, women in Burure have formed village savings and loan groups that enable them to pool resources to invest in their own work. The pooled resources help support vegetable farms, gardens and beehives for honey. The profits provide the means to purchase food and other necessities and invest in other activities. By drawing together their own resources, women in the groups are able to give and receive and look forward to a brighter future for themselves and their households.

The women in Burure exemplify the sort of journeying in trust shaped by the Lenten disciplines of sacrificial giving and works of love. For Christians, the practices of lament in Lent are accompanied by practices that turn us outward, toward what God is doing through and among our neighbors. That is where sacrificial giving and works of love join with the disciplines of repentance and fasting. Even for early Christians, there was a sense in which fasting was more than quiet lament. In fact, for many, fasting was at its most significant when joined with acts of charity and justice. Early Christians gave up their own food in fasting so they might sacrificially give the unconsumed food to their neighbors in need, trusting that God's abundance was sufficient to sustain all of God's creation.

In Burure, by giving of their own resources to one another, trusting in abundance and each other, and working in love for one another and the community, the women are ensuring that the "Alleluia" buried by malaria and poverty will be uncovered.

It may take place in a garden rather than a church, or next to a beehive rather than an altar, but this is the work of Lent – confronting head-on the reality of death and loss, and through giving of self and works of love, participating in the ongoing story God is weaving in human history, a story of life from death.

Even as we reflect on sin, death and our dependence on God in Lent – even as we ritually bury the "Alleluia" in our sanctuaries or sacrificially fast during the 40 days – we know that God's work in the world continues. The work of ending hunger goes on with faith in a promised future where all will be fed. We share in God's work with hope, joy and faith. And we do this work because we know by faith that when it comes to the seemingly insurmountable problems of hunger, poverty and human need, God will have the final word. And that word will be "Alleluia!"

## **PRACTICING LENT**

There are four disciplines, or spiritual practices, that guide our time during Lent. Use the questions and prompts below to reflect on the Lenten disciplines: repentance, prayer and fasting, sacrificial giving, and works of love.

### **REPENTANCE**

Where are places in your community where challenges like hunger, poverty or illness make it difficult for cries of joy to resound?

### **PRAYER AND FASTING**

This week, remember in prayer the women of Burure. Pray for blessings for their harvests and for the harvests of all those who ensure that our communities are fed.

### **SACRIFICIAL GIVING**

Early Christians believed that when people fasted, the food they gave up should be given to others in need. How might it change your idea of a fast to think of it as a gift to others, rather than as a sacrifice for yourself?

### **WORKS OF LOVE**

Where do you see God at work in your community, changing the story for neighbors in need? How can, or do, you participate in God's work in the world around you?



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