



“God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday

Sept. 12
2021



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

INTRODUCTION

*Together in Jesus Christ we are freed
by grace to live faithfully, witness boldly
and serve joyfully.*

#GodsWorkOurHands

What is “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday?

Scheduled for Sept. 12, 2021, “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 love and serve our neighbor.

Our church – and our world – continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic. But the good news is that we are beginning to experience a slow return to the daily routines and gatherings as more people become vaccinated. We look forward to gathering with family and friends once again to share God’s love in person.

Amid this ongoing situation we continue to be **church together**. Throughout the ELCA we are witnessing the love and concern God’s people have for one another. During this time, our congregations continue to support ministries that assist vulnerable people in their communities.

These acts of service allow us to explore one of our most basic Lutheran convictions: *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.*

On “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday we come together to restore and reconcile our communities. **You do this kind of work every day** –loving your neighbors and making your community a better place.

Mark your congregation’s calendar for **Sunday, Sept. 12**. If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 12, please find another time that works best.

“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday — We are church together

We believe God is calling us to reach out to the people in our communities with the message of hope we know in Jesus Christ. “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday provides an opportunity for more people to know about Jesus. As Ephesians 2:8-10 reminds us, God has created us by grace to live in union with Jesus Christ and has prepared us to live faithful, fruitful lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ, God has reconciled us to God and to each other. As we gather around word and sacraments, this life in Christ defines, shapes and guides us as a community of faith, the church. By God’s grace we can and do live confidently and generously in this community of faith and in service of others.

ELCA congregations work to strengthen their relationships with God, nurture relationships with each other and create a strong presence with their communities. “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday is one way for congregations to build on these connections.

Service opportunities are endless, so ELCA members and congregations should research service opportunities that make sense for each congregation and its capacity. The idea is to deepen the members’ experience in their community and enable congregations to play a critical part in addressing community needs.

As you explore service opportunities, consider partnering with other congregations in your region or synod. These partnerships may broaden the scope of your service project and nurture synodical connections.

We are church together for the sake of the world, and the ELCA is committed to fostering unity among all God’s children. One way to live out this commitment is to develop ecumenical and interreligious relationships in your community. “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday offers a unique opportunity to cultivate these relationships. Inviting other churches and religious groups to join in your day of service can lead to more activities together throughout the year.

The partnerships you develop with other congregations, your synod and your interreligious neighbors can deepen your relationship with God, with others in your congregation and with your community.

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 with you. Consider partnering with other ELCA congregations in your area! The possibilities are endless.



I. ORGANIZE

As an ELCA congregation, you already have valuable connections in your community and experience serving your neighbors. Perhaps you already organize an annual clothing drive or host a community meal. 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. Has your congregation collaborated with another congregation or participated in interreligious activities within the community?

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

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, or hunger-and-justice team members?
- a men's group or a chapter of Women of the ELCA?

Brainstorm about what works best for your congregation. What kinds of outreach, evangelism or mission work do these groups already do? What ecumenical or interreligious partnerships already exist for your congregation? Pass out 3-by-5-inch cards to the congregation and invite members to write down organizations, agencies or ministries with which they're connected. This will help leaders identify those organizations and agencies that welcome volunteers.

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

How to use this toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan your **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**.

Each section contains checklists, examples and discussion questions to help you best utilize your congregation's gifts, talents and ministries, so that you spend Sept. 12 working together in the way that makes the most sense for you.

This designated day of service extends the important ministry your congregation already does. Use this toolkit to find your own take on **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**, get creative about serving your neighbors and celebrate what we have accomplished and will continue to do together.

What started as a one-day event has expanded throughout the church year, with members dressed in yellow "God's work. Our hands." T-shirts helping their neighbors and serving those in need.

Also, consider the abilities of your members. What kinds of service projects are inclusive? Consider service opportunities that take into consideration people of different ages and abilities. .

Invite the children of your congregation to get involved. A Sunday school class can reach out to other children in the community or in 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 to plan and organize your service project.
- Communicate with the congregation about the day of service. Additional resources to help promote your day are available at [ELCA.org/DayOfService](https://www.elca.org/DayOfService).
- Document your day on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.
- Reach out to other ELCA congregations in your area. Can you partner with them?

Ideas that worked

We Are Still the Church

Reflecting on the 2020 day of service, Susan Brown, leader of ministry communication and coordination at New Life Lutheran Church in Bolingbrook, Ill., said, “Even in the most unsettling year, with COVID-19, racial unrest, loss of jobs, loss of normalcy, we are still the church. We are still called to go forth and serve others. We are still sent out to demonstrate the love of God for everyone in our community. We are still able to support our community in various ways. And we were still able to have our ‘God’s work. Our hands.’ Sunday weekend of service.”

Brown said the congregation’s households organized a variety of service opportunities, including in-person activities, donations of items for projects, and even sharing creativity through words and pictures. Brown emphasized that every activity made “a difference in a world that desperately needs to see kindness and compassion.”

Congregation members collected trash from a local park to provide a safe and clean outdoor space; donated blood; wrote thank-you notes to medical workers who had cared for community members during the pandemic and collected baby wipes for young families, supplies needed by a local animal

Order

Order “**God’s work. Our hands.**” **Sunday** T-shirts and other items from Old Lutheran! You can personalize your T-shirts with the name of your congregation. Shirts are available in English, Spanish or Arabic. Visit [Old Lutheran](https://www.oldlutheran.com), email customerservice@oldlutheran.com or place a toll-free call (United States only) to 877-653-5884.



shelter and items to fill goodie baskets for the five fire stations in the community. The congregation also collected more than \$200 for the local food pantry through a freewill offering at a free community car wash.

In past years, Brown said, the congregation's annual day of service had been an intergenerational gathering, bringing together members who may not have seen each other because of summer activities or travel.

"But 2020 was not a normal year," Brown said. In 2020, "**God's work. Our hands.**" Sunday "served to remind our church community that we are still the church, outside of our building. It served to remind people that they can still have something to offer even with the restrictions in our lives. It served to share with the Bolingbrook community that we can still care for each other."

Signs of Hope

If you happened to drive by Hillside Community Lutheran Church in Spring Hill, Kan., during the congregation's annual day of service in 2020, you would have witnessed members cleaning and beautifying the church grounds, which are utilized by local sports and service groups.

Inside the church, members were busy creating signs of encouragement and inspiration for people to read as they drove by the church. Those who did in the following days received such positive messages as "You are beautiful," "You are not alone," "Sure, you can," "Don't give up," "Life is tough but so are you," "Stronger together," "You have purpose" and "Share your happy."



Questions for discussion

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



Advocacy in service to our neighbor

On “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday, we put our faith into action – visible year-round and on this day as we respond to God calling us into the world to serve together. Through our direct service, we satisfy immediate needs before us. Through our advocacy engagement, we create systemic, long-lasting change.

There are many ways in which we ELCA members can use advocacy to serve our neighbor. The public policies our officials write, amend and ultimately adopt can have ongoing effects on our neighbors and neighborhoods that are struggling. By telling policy makers how Lutheran ministries help our world and urging them to advance legislation that reflects our faith-informed values and commitments, we create opportunities to overcome poverty, promote peace and dignity, preserve God’s creation, and promote racial and gender justice.

- Involved in a direct-service project that points to a policy concern? Consider advocacy action.
- Passionate about a justice issue that has been highlighted by your experience or the voices of your congregation or community? Consider advocacy action.
- Unsure how to begin addressing a situation that brings pain to God’s world? Consider ELCA advocacy tools for action.

Through advocacy ministry, we form relationships with our policy makers and can stand up for policies that move us closer to the world God envisions, one that prioritizes the health and safety of people and all creation.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Young adult leaders in the ELCA have written a guide, “[Advocacy 101: When Faith Meets Public Policy](#),” that connects policy with what might be a typical day:

In the morning, you drive to work on the freeway, stopping at a gas station to fill up. After work, you drive across a bridge to get to the state university, where you are taking general education courses. At the end of your day, you and your partner decide to eat a bite and walk in your neighborhood. At home after dinner, you shower before turning off the lights and getting some sleep.

Where did public policy intersect with this day? Transportation infrastructure, quality controls for food and water, and public utility policy are only a few ideas.

Governments and policies can be a force for good in the world. But they can also create injustice, sustain it, and embed it into our cultural fabric.

Preparing nutritious food for a meal program? Clearing debris from a stream? Brightening the day of older adults at an assisted living center?

Reflect on how policy intersects with the needs to which you are responding, such as food access, clean water protection and affordable care. Advocacy action on a policy consideration could amplify your impact in a systemic, long-lasting way.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The Where

Depending on your setting, it may be appropriate to use common space – such as a congregation’s lobby or a booth at a service locale – to make available laptops, pens, paper, issue-background materials or other tools for advocacy action.

But advocacy action is not dependent upon physical proximity. Should circumstances prohibit in-person contact, or should you wish to include homebound members, advocacy action on your congregation’s day of service can include many participants in meaningful witness. Advocacy is a faithful way to serve our neighbors, unencumbered by physical distance.

The What

Moving from service to justice is a theme common to the resources of ELCA-affiliated state public policy offices and the ELCA Witness in Society federal advocacy center. Consider reviewing these, or the [“Advocacy 101”](#) tool, with a group, especially if you’re new to advocacy activity.

Determine an advocacy action that makes sense for your day of service. It may be:

1. Connected to action your congregation or synod is already engaged in.
2. Connected to direct service on **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** or an active congregational ministry.
3. In accompaniment with a member initiative or other local community voices.
4. Suggested by an ELCA-affiliated state public policy office.
5. Facilitated by tools prepared by the ELCA Witness in Society federal advocacy center.

A short video can be used to introduce a connection between our faith and advocacy action, such as [“ELCA Advocacy: Set Free To Do Justice”](#) or [“ELCA Advocacy: Tips for Your Engagement.”](#)

The How

If you'd like some guidance to shape your advocacy action:

- Connect with a state public policy office in the ELCA Advocacy Network, if your area has one. A [map and contact list](#) are available on the ELCA website and include offices in Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware/Maryland, Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and states of the ELCA Southeastern Synod.
- Reach out to the ELCA Witness in Society federal advocacy office at washingtonoffice@ELCA.org to help you think about how you might conduct advocacy with a national scope to address an issue with which you identify.

If you'd like to use a prepared ELCA advocacy option:

- Visit [ELCA.org/advocacy/actioncenter](https://www.elca.org/advocacy/actioncenter) to find Action Alerts on up-to-the-moment opportunities.
- Find letter-writing templates and join other ELCA members in petitioning your representatives. Instructions and downloadable, customizable letters are available among the [ELCA.org/dayofservice resources](#).

If you'd like to share your policy perspectives publicly, find suggestions at [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy) for:

- Writing an op-ed or letter to the editor.
- Holding an in-district meeting with your lawmaker (even virtually).

Then share your experience:

- Invite local lawmakers to your direct service or other activity. In this moment and in the future, the invitation makes them aware of your presence as faith-centered community partners.
- Thank policy makers on social media or through other means for their supportive action.
- Take lots of pictures and tell your congregation's **"God's work. Our hands."** Sunday story! Share these on social media and tag @ELCAadvocacy to help us connect.

Thank you for bringing your Lutheran voice into our national conversation and supporting important policies that serve our neighbor.



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 you should tackle?

How can your congregation become more visible in your community? What needs in your community and neighborhood can your congregation address? Who would be most helped by your service?

Begin by listening to your community

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 its time.

For example: In 2018, volunteers from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Somerville, N.J., joined together to help three social service organizations. Volunteers of all ages assembled tie blankets for a resource center that serves abused women and children. They filled backpacks with food for children in the county who may not have enough to eat on weekends. The volunteers also participated in the statewide program Stamp Out Despair by writing cards to detained immigrants and filling folders with stationery that detainees could use to communicate with family members in their home countries.

Perhaps there are organizations in your community with whom your entire congregation could partner for **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**, making a more substantial impact than a few volunteers might.

Perhaps you can use **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday** to build new relationships in your community. Are there projects you've dreamed about but haven't found the time to pursue? Consider how activities might be broadened or continued throughout the year.

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 what this day is all about. Consider beginning your service day with a prayer or blessing. A worship resource designed for **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday** is available at [ELCA.org/DayOfService](https://www.elca.org/DayOfService).

Think about the safety of your congregation. Many nonprofit 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 **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday** to have on your community?
2. What kind of impact would you like **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday** to have on your congregation?
3. What needs in your community would you like to see met on **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday**?
4. What will you do to ensure that your entire congregation can take part?



III. 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, television), social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other media tools your congregation uses.

Other tools are available to help you get the word out to your community, inviting neighbors to participate in your day of service. Door hangers, posters and postcards are available at <https://www.elca.org/Resources/GWOH-Sunday>.

STEP ONE: GEAR UP

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

The goal is to generate media interest in **"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 their hands.

We 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 publicize its 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 and on the resource page) to share your congregation's plan with 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**. Ideally, have members from 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 about? What is the anticipated impact on your community?
WHERE:	Where are service activities taking place?
WHEN:	Sept. 12, 2021 (or another date that your congregation has selected)
MOST IMPORTANT, WHY:	Why is this event important for your congregation?

The people you pick should be 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 nearly 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 worshiping communities 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 they're prepared to speak to the media.

Visuals – Strong visuals can motivate media organizations to cover your event. Does your activity entail good visuals? If so, be sure to include vivid descriptions of what your members are planning for “God’s work. Our hands.” **Sunday**.

If your day of service will take place at a specific service location, what will be happening? Will members of your community be 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 stoking 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 for News Release

ELCA congregations work to improve communities

[Insert your city, state abbreviation] (ELCA) – [Insert your congregation’s name, city and state] is one of nearly 9,000 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) participating in **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** on Sept. 12. Across the country, thousands of ELCA members will be engaging in service work to make a positive change in their communities, build and deepen relationships, and share God’s love.

Members of [congregation’s name] are [describe your service projects and share the location of your service work (if it’s beyond your church building), the organizations and agencies you’re partnering with, and other details that communicate the positive impact on your community].

For more than 30 years, the ELCA has been deeply rooted in faith and in sharing its passion for making positive changes in the world. [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 [first and last name], a member of [congregation’s name].

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

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

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For information contact:

[Name]

[Phone number and/or email where media professionals can reach you]

[Your congregation’s website]

STEP THREE: CONTACTING MEDIA, PITCHING YOUR STORY

Initial media contact should begin in August. You may not have all the specifics of your event, but you will have general 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 professionals will love the idea that your congregation is participating in an event with such a wide outreach.

By the end of August, you should have more concrete details about your event, so begin pitching media more intensively.

Email the news release and make follow-up phone calls to each news desk to make sure it received your release and has included the event on its 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, email your press release to the assignment-desk planning editor and the assignment desk. The planning editor will make sure the event is included in the main calendar of possible stories. Follow-up phone calls should be directed to the planning editor until a couple of days before the event; then, begin to contact the assignment desk to determine whether your activity is being considered.

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.

Social media – Post “**God’s work. Our hands.**” Sunday event information as soon as you have a plan. Engage the community in your plans by asking for thoughts and suggestions as you develop the event. If you plan to partner with a service organization or community group, make sure you discuss social media plans with that group so you can share information about the project and share follow-up stories.

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.

IV. CELEBRATE

The ELCA churchwide organization would like to hear about your experiences. Please share with us your stories, your 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, in resource materials for the dedicated day of service and on the ELCA's social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). Share and tag ELCA by using the hashtag #GodsWorkOurHands.

Please indicate if you do not want your stories and images to be used.

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.

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Go in peace. Serve the Lord!



Plan a post-event activity!

Gather your congregation and other groups that participated in **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**, perhaps to share a meal.

Ask participants to share:

- photos
- videos
- personal stories (What touched you about your service? Did you walk in someone else's shoes today?)

Post these photos, videos and stories on your Facebook page and Twitter and Instagram accounts throughout the following weeks.



