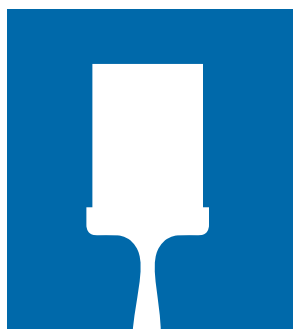




**“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**



September 10, 2023

TOOLKIT



# “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday



## INTRODUCTION

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

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

#### **Celebrating 10 years on the 10th!**

This year marks the 10th anniversary of **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**. Scheduled for Sept. 10, our annual day of service 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.

The ELCA’s first dedicated day of service, in September 2013, was held to celebrate the church’s 25th anniversary. Through the years we have embraced **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** as a way to be **church together**. On this day we bear witness to the love and concern God’s people have for one another. **Our congregations do this work every day** — loving their neighbors and improving 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.*

Mark your congregation’s calendar for Sunday, Sept. 10. If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 10, please find another time that works best.

### ON “GOD’S WORK. OUR HANDS.” SUNDAY, WIDENING THE WELCOME

We know that the gospel changes lives and that God’s power and grace are real and at work today. We live out our purpose through worship and service, in our congregations and communities, through our individual vocations and our collective work as church together. **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** offers a special opportunity to be church together and to share Jesus’ love by inviting others to join in a day of service.

Extending invitations to others is a way to widen the welcome and engage with people who may not be familiar with the ELCA but are committed to serving in their communities. Working side by side with our neighbors connects with the ELCA’s purpose to “activate each of us so that more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love,” while directly affecting the ministry goal of “engaging with new people.” This call for service unites all the ELCA expressions to focus on serving and accompanying our neighbors.

Service opportunities are endless, so ELCA members and congregations should research 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.

You may also consider partnering with other congregations in your region or synod or collaborating with a neighborhood organization. These relationships may broaden the scope of your service project and nurture meaningful connections.



*Welcoming others to be a part of your activities can lead to deeper engagement and greater opportunities to share Jesus’ love with your neighbors throughout the year.*

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 where you’re serving and welcome others to worship with you. Consider partnering with other ELCA congregations in your area! The possibilities are endless.

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT

Use this tool kit to plan your **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**.

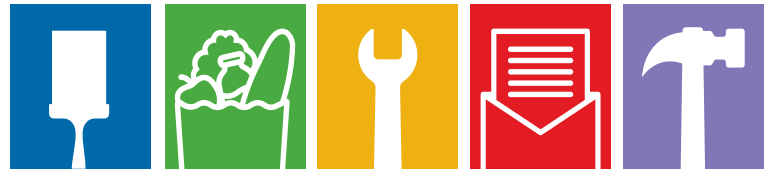
Each section contains checklists, examples and discussion questions to help you best utilize your congregation’s gifts, talents and ministries, so that you spend Sept. 10 working together in the way that makes the most sense for you.

This designated day of service extends the important ministry your congregation already does. Use this tool kit 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.

# **“God’s work. Our hands.”**

## Sunday



## I. ORGANIZE

As an ELCA congregation, you already have valuable connections in your community and experience serving your neighbors. Perhaps you already work with a local food pantry 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 realize your dedicated day of service. Does your congregation have a:

- Youth group?
- Small-group fellowship and group leaders?
- Worship team?
- Social ministry or hunger-and-justice team members?
- Health team or parish nurse?
- Men’s group or Women of the ELCA chapter?

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?

Also, consider the abilities of your members. What kinds of service projects are inclusive? What kinds of projects can be intergenerational?

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](http://OldLutheran.com), email [customerservice@oldlutheran.com](mailto:customerservice@oldlutheran.com) or place a toll-free call (United States only) to 877-653-5884.



**“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** is a wonderful way for people of different abilities and ages to work alongside one another. Projects can include writing thank-you letters and notes of encouragement to military members and first responders, making prayer shawls or tie-blankets, assembling lunches or care packages.

- 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).
- Reach out to other ELCA congregations in your area. Can you partner with them?
- 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?
- What kinds of service projects will be invitational to people in your community?

## IDEAS TO SHARE FROM 2022

### *Care of Creation*

Volunteers from Williams Bay Lutheran Church in Williams Bay, Wis., served their community by focusing on restoration of the local prairie. The group collected seeds in the Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy in Williams Bay that were planted in other parts of the conservancy to help expand the prairie. “Kishwaukee is a very popular nature preserve for people to enjoy in our community of Williams Bay,” said the Rev. Tom Dowling, pastor of the church. “It was a care of God’s creation event and an outreach event to our community.”

### *Projects to Match a Variety of Gifts*

Peace Lutheran Church in Gaylord, Mich., organized volunteers into two work groups to celebrate **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**. One service activity was located at the church for those who wanted to do God’s work but needed a project that was not overly physical. The group organized and prepared donations for school backpacks and health kits, wrote prayer cards to each of the 108 congregations in the ELCA North/West Lower Michigan Synod and prepared lunch for all of the volunteers.

At the second work site volunteers installed 260 feet of fencing for a family whose yard had been damaged in the EF3 tornado that hit Gaylord in May 2022. The fence helped create a safe and enjoyable space for a member of the family who has special needs. The congregation partnered with Otsego County United Way in Gaylord, which helped coordinate the project, and the North/West Lower Michigan Synod, which provided disaster relief funds to help defer costs.

The Rev. Megan Crouch, pastor of Peace Lutheran, said the two service projects were important because they allowed more universal participation in the congregations’ day of service: “We had folks with a variety of gifts, talents and abilities gathered together to do God’s work with our hands.”

### *Expanding the Day of Service*

Volunteers from Saint Peter Lutheran Church in Greenwood Village, Colo., expanded on **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** by developing a seven-week plan from September through mid-October. Service projects addressed issues that included: food insecurity, low-income housing and homelessness, the environment, immigration and refugee mentorship. Volunteers could participate through on-site activities and at-home projects.



## ADVOCACY IN SERVICE TO OUR NEIGHBOR

Advocacy in service to our neighbor is one way to express your congregation’s love and community presence on “**God’s work. Our hands**” Sunday or other day of service. The Latin roots of the word “advocacy” mean to “add” a “voice.” Every voice of support is a public witness to God’s love for our neighbor, ourselves and all creation.

*“In faithfulness to its calling, this church is committed to defend human dignity, to stand with poor and powerless people, to advocate justice, to work for peace, and to care for the earth in the processes and structures of contemporary society,”*

—ELCA social statement “Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective” (p. 1)

### ***Connect Congregation Efforts and Policy Considerations***

Want to pair advocacy with a direct-service project? Or motivate your congregation to answer a cry for justice? Reflect on the policies that connect with your prayerful concerns, such as food access, affordable housing or increased frequency of weather-related disasters. Based on your experience or what you have learned accompanying others, what policy change could help in time of struggle?

To jump-start discussion of policy connections, here are a few ideas:

- Host a group study to get ideas flowing, perhaps using a short video such as “ELCA Advocacy: Tips for Your Engagement” or an “Advocacy 101” activity session.
- Check out “On-ramp to Advocacy” to help navigate other faith-based engagement resources from the ELCA Witness in Society team.

Research the policy and policymakers who could have influence, then make a plan. You may want to write an opinion piece or letter to the editor, visit the office of a lawmaker or consider bringing together partners in your advocacy action. Working together can be a tremendous witness to our Lutheran conviction of being freed in Christ to love and serve. Find how-tos for such faith-based advocacy actions at [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy).

Then add your voice for systemic, long-lasting impact.

## 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?



### ***Reach Out to a State Public Policy Office***

ELCA-affiliated state public policy offices (SPPOs) are valued partners in faith-based advocacy, with local knowledge of issues and decision-making processes. These include offices in Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware/Maryland, Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin, and states of the ELCA Southeastern Synod. Find a map and locations list online.

Reach out for guidance and ideas to shape your advocacy action. Contact an ELCA-affiliated SPPO for guidance and ideas, or contact ELCA federal policy staff at [washingtonoffice@ELCA.org](mailto:washingtonoffice@ELCA.org).

### ***Use a Timely Action Alert***

The [ELCA Action Center](#) is a web page listing current Action Alerts on timely federal issues that intersect with ELCA federal policy priorities. From a computer, smartphone or other device, use the tools and background information to send a message to lawmakers of influence at an impactful time.

### ***Valuable Action to Take in 2023 — Farm Bill Reauthorization***

Among the “God’s work. Our hands” Sunday resources, find a letter template for expressing your position on an important bill being considered by Congress. The Farm Bill is omnibus legislation (meaning different parts joined together) that is critical to addressing hunger in the United States and globally. It covers federal nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) as well as environment, trade, foreign aid and rural development. Now undergoing the reauthorization process, the bill impacts the lives of Lutherans and our communities; among them are farmers, ranchers, Indigenous communities, low-income Americans and global partners.

Get more background and tips for writing the letter from the resource “[Advocacy in Service to Our Neighbor: Template Letter 2023](#).”

Our agricultural community is vital to our daily lives, and a reauthorized Farm Bill can support their vocations and the health of our communities now and in years to come.

Thank you for adding your voice.

***“Although we may disagree about the best ways to achieve the public good, we do not disagree about our shared responsibility to seek it. ... Still, God’s care for human society calls us to rise again each day, forgiven and nurtured through our baptism to appreciate — and do — the work of self-government.”***

—ELCA social message “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy” (p. 18)

# “God’s work. Our hands.”

## Sunday



## II. PLAN

### WHERE DO WE START?

Now that you’ve spent some time organizing the leaders in your congregation, it’s time to decide what kind of service project you should tackle.

### 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.

Perhaps there are organizations in your community with which 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](http://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?



# “God’s work. Our hands.”

## Sunday



### 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 about your congregation’s efforts and participation in **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday**. This outreach includes both traditional outlets (newspaper, radio, television), social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and other media tools your congregation uses.

Other resources are available to help you get the word out to your community, inviting neighbors to participate in your day of service. Posters and postcards are available at [ELCA.org/Resources/GWOH-Sunday](https://www.elca.org/Resources/GWOH-Sunday).

#### Step One: Gear Up

Designate someone in your congregation to take the lead on communications. This person will send specifics of the service project to the local media and share information and updates on social media.

The goal is to generate 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.

Both traditional media and social media outreach can result in stories either before the project or on the day of service. This is a great way for people in your community to learn about the day of service, to volunteer to help and to learn more about your congregation and the ELCA.

**“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** is an opportunity for your congregation to publicize its evangelical mission and witness. How are your members making a difference in your community and in the world?

#### Step Two: Prep

For traditional media you can use a press release (template offered on page 11 of this toolkit and on the resource page) to share your congregation’s plan with local media. Plan to distribute your press release to media about two weeks before your congregation’s day of service.

What makes a good story? Elements to include:

**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 the service activities taking place?

**When:** Sept. 10, 2023 (or another date that your congregation has selected).

**Most important, WHY:** Why is this event important for your congregation? For your community?



If your service project is happening at a location such as a shelter or food pantry, some recipients may be reluctant to have media present or to be photographed. Make sure to arrange any media, including social media posts, with the organization.

### ***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 is taking 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?

### ***Social media***

Post **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** event information as soon as you have a plan. Engage the community in your plan 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 publicize 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. If you create a press release, don’t forget to share it on your social media platforms.

Share your participation using the hashtag #GodsWorkOurHands on all social media platforms.

### ***Details***

The more details you provide to the media and on social media, the better your chances of generating 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?

## **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 press 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.

Update the release as often as your plans develop and **share this new information with the media and on your social media platforms.**



## TEMPLATE FOR PRESS RELEASE

### **ELCA congregations lend their hands in service to their communities**

[Insert your city, state abbreviation] (ELCA) — [Insert your congregation’s name, city and state] is one of nearly 8,700 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) with the opportunity to participate in “God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday on Sept. 10. Across the country, thousands of ELCA members will engage 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].

Since the ELCA was formed, it 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](https://www.elca.org).

#### **About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:**

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with 3 million members in more than 8,700 worshipping communities 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:

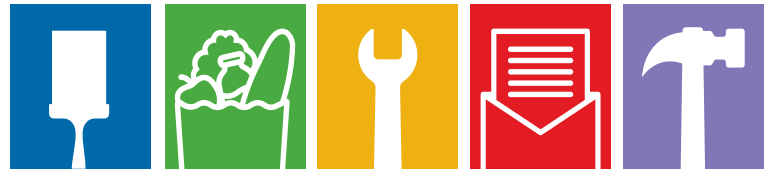
[Name]

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

[Your congregation’s website]

# **“God’s work. Our hands.”**

## Sunday



### IV. CELEBRATE

#### **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.

**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](mailto:livinglutheran@elca.org).** When you send your stories and images, they may be shared on [ELCA.org](http://ELCA.org), in resource materials for the dedicated day of service and on the ELCA’s social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram). When sharing ELCA content, use the hashtag #GodsWorkOurHands.

Please indicate if you do not want your stories or images to be published.

Thank you for using this tool kit! **“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!**