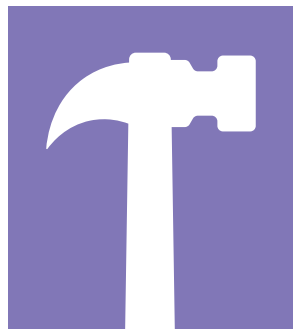
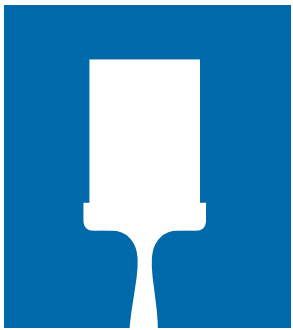




God's work. Our hands.



September 8, 2024

TOOLKIT





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

Scheduled for **Sept. 8**, “**God’s work. Our hands.**” is our annual day of service and 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.

“God’s work. Our hands.” is a way for us 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.

One of the greatest examples of how our congregations share love with their neighbors is through their feeding ministries. This year marks the **50th anniversary of ELCA World Hunger**, and we’re excited to celebrate the impact that thousands of people from our church have made on communities around the world.

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.

This year we invite you to extend your service opportunities from **Sunday, Sept. 8, through Oct. 16**, which is World Food Day. We know that, every day, our congregations are doing the work of loving their neighbors and improving their communities.

“God’s work. Our hands.” Every day.

“GOD’S WORK. OUR HANDS.”: SHARING GOD’S GRACE AND LOVE

As Lutherans, we know the difference that God’s grace and love in Christ have made in our daily lives. Because of this, we work together to help others experience that same love and acceptance.

We live out this vision through worship and service in our congregations and communities, through our individual vocations and through our collective work as church together. “**God’s work. Our hands.**” offers a special opportunity to be church together and to share Jesus’ love by inviting others to join in a day of service. 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 join in 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.

50 YEARS OF ELCA WORLD HUNGER

Since 1974 hundreds of thousands of generous people from across this church have contributed money, volunteered at local hunger ministries and advocated to change policies and systems that perpetuate injustice.

Together we have made great strides against hunger and poverty, impacting lives in our communities and in our world. But the need is still critical, and the world faces a rise in hunger that is undoing decades of progress.

Our congregations address hunger and poverty in their communities every day, and feeding ministries are often included in **"God's work. Our hands."** service projects.

This year we invite our congregations to consider ways they might expand their service activities to include hunger ministries through Oct. 16, which is World Food Day.

HOW TO USE THIS TOOL KIT

Use this tool kit to plan your **"God's work. Our hands."** service activities.

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. 8 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."** 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.



Your ELCA congregation already has 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?

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.**" 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 or place a toll-free call (United States only) to 877-653-5884.



“**God’s work. Our hands.**” 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, and assembling lunches or care packages.

You might:

- 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 with whom you might partner.

Questions for you to consider:

- 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 inviting to people in your community?

ADVOCACY IN SERVICE TO OUR NEIGHBOR

Our ministry of advocacy is a public witness to God’s love for our neighbor, ourselves and all creation. Advocacy in service to our neighbor is one way to express your congregation’s love and community presence on “**God’s work. Our hands.**”

There are many opportunities to choose from. Find one that matches your congregation’s style!

Connect Direct Service Activity and Policy Considerations

Reflect on how policy intersects with the needs to which you are responding, such as food access, clean water or affordable housing. Review experiences you’ve had and heard about while accompanying one another in times of struggle. Research relevant policy and policy makers that have influence. Then engage in advocacy action on a policy consideration to amplify your impact in a systemic, long-lasting way.

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?



Here are a few ideas to jump-start discussion of policy connections:

- Host a group study to get ideas flowing, perhaps using [Advocacy Summer School](#) videos and discussion starters or [Advocacy 101](#) activity sessions as guides.
- “[On-ramp to Advocacy](#)” can direct you to even more [faith-based engagement resources](#) and how-to tips. For example, write an opinion piece or letter to the editor, visit the office of a lawmaker or bring together partners in your advocacy action.

Advocacy action can be a tremendous witness to Lutheran conviction of being freed in Christ to love and serve.

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, Florida, Kansas, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and states of the ELCA Southeastern Synod. Find an online [map and list of locations](#) and reach out for guidance and ideas to shape your advocacy action.

Use a Timely Action Alert

The ELCA Action Center offers Action Alerts for timely federal issues that reflect our [priorities](#) and on which your voice can have an impact. From a laptop, smartphone or other device, use the tools and background information to send a message to lawmakers at an impactful time.

- Visit the [Action Center](#) to respond to current Action Alerts.
- Sign up to receive ELCA Advocacy Connections e-news updates and Action Alerts directly from [ELCA.org/advocacy/signup](https://elca.org/advocacy/signup).

Encourage Election Engagement

Congregations have helped patrons of their food pantries register to vote, hosted information booths to help neighbors identify their voter registration status and polling locations, and collected “pledge to vote” commitment cards, among other creative activities. Why? To encourage election participation, empowering one another quite differently than by partisan pushes. With “**God’s work. Our hands.**” occurring close to November elections, election engagement activity can be meaningful service to our neighbor.

“Over time Lutherans have learned that energetic civic engagement is part of their baptismal vocation, both as individuals and through the church’s corporate witness. Such civic participation is not simply voluntary, idealistic, or altruistic. The ELCA holds to the biblical idea that God calls God’s people to be active citizens and to ensure that everyone benefits from the good of government (Jeremiah 29:7, Romans 13:1-7).

—ELCA social message, “[Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#)”(p. 14)



Any participation by congregations in activities related to the electoral process must be strictly nonpartisan and abide by Internal Revenue Service guidelines (see “[Guidance for Churches and Clergy Participating in the Electoral Process](#)”), which allows us to be trusted partners in accessing this opportunity in the United States for the common good. The social message on government and civic engagement also reads: “This church also strongly affirms voting, guided by faith-based values, as an exercise in citizenship” (p. 16).

Want to start with a discussion of civic engagement? “[A Study Curriculum on Civic Life and Faith](#)” includes videos and questions to guide conversation.

Want to jump into a project?

- A quick start would be filling out the “[Prepared to Vote Checklist](#)” for your congregation’s location and posting it for your community to help people access local information.
- Tipsheets in the [ELCA Civic Engagement Guide](#) include:
- Voter registration initiatives.
 - “Pledge to vote” signups.
 - Get-out-the-vote (GOTV) initiatives.
- An “[Election Engagement Updates](#)” page on the ELCA Advocacy blog has opportunities and ideas to stimulate your plans (such as being a poll monitor or greeter on Election Day) and more.

Our congregations are rooted in our neighborhoods and communities, and we express the love God nurtures in our hearts in many ways. Our Christian faith informs our convictions, and our voices carry important values into public discourse and policymaking. Thank you for your advocacy in service to our neighbors!

Thank you for adding your voice.



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 donate its time.

Perhaps there are organizations in your community with which your entire congregation could partner for **"God's work. Our hands."** A large group might have a greater impact than a few volunteers.

Perhaps you can use **"God's work. Our hands."** 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:

- Do the service projects we're planning include everyone? How can children take part? Older adults? People with disabilities?
- 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 the **"God's work. Our hands."** Day of Service is available at ELCA.org/DayOfService.

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



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."** This outreach should include mass media (newspaper, radio, television), social media platforms (Facebook, 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."** 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 mass 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." 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

You can use a press release (template offered below and on the resource page) to share your congregation's plan with local mass 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. 18, 2024 (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 talk to reporters or be photographed. Make sure to arrange any media, including social media posts, with the Churchwide 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.”**

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.”** 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 mass media and on social media, the better your chances are of generating interest in your story. Provide numbers: How many people do you anticipate will join 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.”** 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 scope.

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 mass 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]



Plan a post-event activity!

Gather your congregation and other groups that participated in “**God’s work. Our hands.**” Perhaps you’ll want 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 Instagram account 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. 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, 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.**” 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!