



“God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday

Sept. 11
2022



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. 11, 2022, “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.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes to our world, and we continue to witness how communities across the globe are experiencing its impact. But one thing is certain – we continue to be **church together**. Throughout the ELCA we witness the love and concern God’s people have for one another. 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. 11**. If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 11, please find another time that works best.

On "God's work. Our hands." Sunday, We Are Church Together

The ELCA's Future Church strategy is designed to activate each of us so that more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love. **"God's work. Our hands." Sunday** offers a special opportunity to share Jesus' love by inviting members of your community to join in a day of service. 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. 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. You might also consider 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 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 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. 11 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

In 2021, volunteers from Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Des Moines, Iowa, gathered together to make yarn from plastic shopping bags and weave it into mats for a local homeless ministry. Each mat diverts 800-1,000 plastic bags from the waste stream while providing dry flooring for a homeless person in the community.

The church band from Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church in Rhinelander, Wis., gathered with musicians from area churches to perform an outdoor community concert that raises money for the local food pantry.

Volunteers from Peace Lutheran in Tomah, Wis., participated in a number of activities including decorating cookies for a community meal, yard clean-up at the local food pantry and packing kitchen, linen, cleaning and hygiene kits for Lutheran Social Services refugee resettlement. Theirs was a great day of worship, service and fellowship.

The congregation of St. Timothy Lutheran Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., made more than 800 “sacks of kindness” to hand out to local health care workers.

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.



Volunteers at Bethesda on the Bay in Bay Village, Ohio, wrapped Christmas gifts for a local ministry partner's event later in the year, at which lower-income children could find free gifts to give their parents.

Volunteers from Lord of Life in Austin, Texas, assembled care packages for hospital chaplains and wrote interfaith notes of support to medical workers.

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 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."

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

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" Sunday or other day of service. Because advocacy action requires no physical proximity, it can offer many participants the opportunity for meaningful witness should circumstances limit in-person contact or should you desire a service option for homebound members.

Connect direct service and policy considerations

Reflect on how policy intersects with the needs you hope to address, 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 policy at the forefront and influential policymakers. Then engage in advocacy action for policy that could amplify your impact in a systemic, long-lasting way.

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

- "[On-ramp to Advocacy](#)," a recent publication from the ELCA Witness in Society team, helps you navigate faith-based engagement resources.
- Host a group study to get ideas flowing, perhaps using [Advocacy Summer School](#) videos and discussion starters or "[Advocacy 101](#)" activity sessions.

These tools and others at [ELCA.org/resources/advocacy](https://www.elca.org/resources/advocacy) give ideas for what you can do and ideas for how to go about it. You might write an opinion piece or letter to the editor, visit the office of a lawmaker and 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.

Reach out to a state public policy office

With their knowledge of local issues and decision-making processes, ELCA-affiliated state public policy offices are valued partners in faith-based advocacy. They 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. Reach out for guidance and ideas to shape your advocacy action. Find a map and locations list [online](#).

"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," reads the ELCA social statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (p. 1). We have many opportunities to fulfill this calling.



Use a timely Action Alert

The ELCA Action Center is a web page listing current Action Alerts to advance our priorities on timely federal issues. Your voice can have an impact—from a computer, smartphone or other device, use the tools and background information to send a message to lawmakers of influence at a critical time.

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

Encourage civic engagement

Many Lutherans creatively empower one another and their communities through encouraging civic engagement, from registering voters from their food pantries to gathering Pledge to Vote commitment cards. With “**God’s work. Our hands.**” Sunday occurring close to November elections, civic engagement activity can be a meaningful form of service to our neighbor.

“ELCA social teaching holds that all residents of the United States have a responsibility to make government function well—not to abandon our democracy but to engage it in a spirit of robust civic duty,” reads the ELCA social message “[Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy](#)” (pg. 4). “It is based on our understanding of how God governs human society.”

When congregations participate in activities related to the electoral process, that participation must be strictly nonpartisan and abide by the guidelines of the Internal Revenue Service (see “[Guidance for churches and clergy participating in the electoral process](#)”). Find ideas and tip sheets for civic engagement at [ELCA.org/civicingagement](https://www.elca.org/civicingagement).

Thank public officials

Whether handwritten on an attractive card or typed on a website form, a note expressing thanks to an elected leader might be one advocacy action on your day of service. The [social message](#) on government and civic engagement reads, “In service of fair and compassionate government, this church expresses gratitude for its members who serve in dedicated and competent public service and commends more members to consider work in the public domain” (p. 14).

A bit of research will deepen your appreciation of an elected official’s responsibilities and guide what you can meaningfully write.

- Look up your federal lawmakers at www.govtrack.us/ or a wider range of officials from openstates.org, among other lookup tools, to find their websites and social media.
- Identify key areas on which this public servant has influence.

“**God’s work. Our hands.**” Sunday materials include a letter template that can be used in this advocacy action.

Thank you for bringing your Lutheran voice into our national conversation and supporting important policy priorities in service to 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 stationary 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 [ELCA.org/Resources/GWOH-Sunday](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. 11, 2022 (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 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?

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 8,900 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) participating in **“God’s work. Our hands.” Sunday** on Sept. 11. 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].

Since the ELCA was formed 35 years ago, 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.

About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.3 million members in more than 8,900 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]

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.

*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.



the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are illiterate has increased from 1.2 billion to 1.5 billion.

There are many reasons for this. One is that the population of the world is growing so fast that the number of people who are illiterate is increasing. Another reason is that the quality of education is so poor that many people who are literate are unable to read and write.

There are many ways to improve literacy. One way is to provide more schools and teachers. Another way is to provide more books and reading materials. A third way is to provide more training for teachers and students.

It is important to improve literacy because it is the key to economic development and social progress. People who are literate can read and write, and they can learn new skills and knowledge. They can also participate in the political process and make their voices heard.

There are many organizations that are working to improve literacy around the world. One of the most famous is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). There are also many private organizations that are working to improve literacy.

It is important to continue to work to improve literacy around the world. There are still many people who are illiterate, and they need our help. We can make a difference by providing more schools, teachers, books, and training.

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