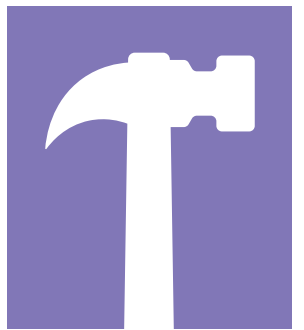
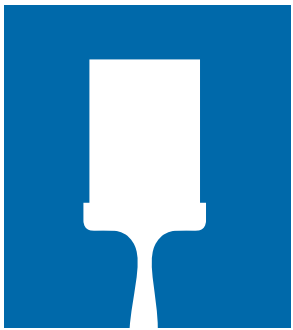




God's work. Our hands.



September 13, 2026

TOOLKIT





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

Scheduled for **Sept. 13**, “**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.

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.**” as a way to be **church together. Being church together means being connected**, as we recognize our shared calling and our shared responsibility across congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.

Through our acts of service, 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.

Service to our neighbor allows 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. 13**. If your congregation cannot participate on Sept. 13, please find another time that works best.

“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. We are connected through this shared work. The ministries we carry out in our congregations and synods belong to all of us — they are how we build relationships in our communities and across the wider church.

“**God’s work. Our hands.**” provides an opportunity to be church together, to be connected 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.



There are many ways to serve in our cities and communities, 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 and enable congregations to play a critical part in addressing community needs.

Another way to foster connection is to consider partnering with other congregations in your region or synod or collaborating with a neighborhood organization. These connections may broaden the scope of your service project and nurture meaningful relationships.

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.

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. 13 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 offer meal packs for low-income families. Maybe your congregation has a quilting ministry that makes warm blankets for those experiencing homelessness. Do you partner with a Lutheran social service organization or other human service agency in the community or state? Has your congregation collaborated with another church or participated in interreligious activities within the community?

Many of these essential service providers would benefit from increased efforts to help them meet growing community demands.

In addition to hands-on projects, you may consider a letter-writing campaign to lawmakers that advocates for those impacted by food insecurity or medical debt.

Whatever your situation allows, 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?
- 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.

Intergenerational 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.

Steps to consider:

- 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.
- Reach out to other ELCA congregations in your area with whom you might partner.

ADVOCACY IN SERVICE TO OUR NEIGHBOR

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

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

Advance Community Witness in This Election Season

There are many ways in which Christians live out their baptismal vocation in service to the world. The ELCA affirms that civic participation — including voting, public advocacy and community engagement — is one of those ways, and that, during election season, our love can shine a light that surpasses any partisan message. Election Day 2026, on Nov. 3, is right around the corner. Here are five great ideas for civic engagement this election season.

- **Prepare a reference guide with local voting information and share it on bulletin boards in your church, ministry offices and neighborhood.** ELCA Witness in Society’s [“Prepared to Vote Checklist,”](#) available from the ELCA Resource Center, is a handy template for gathering basic facts about local registration, early voting and mail-in ballots, and offers a few links for learning more.

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. How can your congregation become more visible in your community?
4. What needs in your community and neighborhood can your congregation address?
5. Who would be most helped by your service?
6. What kinds of service projects will be inviting to people in your community?
7. 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?



- **Pick an activity to help your neighbors cast their votes.** Ideas in the [ELCA Civic Engagement Guide](#) (also in [Spanish](#)) include voter registration initiatives, pledge-to-vote signups and get-out-the-vote initiatives. Merely helping people to register can be a meaningful, [nonpartisan](#) act of service.
- **Check with your local election administration leadership for ways you can pitch in.** Lutherans recognize that one way people express their Christian vocation is through dedicated, competent public service. Faith leaders can honor this vocation by thanking community leaders for the critical work they undertake. Offer support, ask what is helpful, and participate in firsthand opportunities to see how community systems work. Being proactive before and during an election can position our faith communities to be informed, trusted messengers for one another, even after Election Day.

Connect Direct Service Activity and Policy Considerations

Reflect on how policy intersects with the needs to which you are responding. Research relevant policy and influential policymakers. Is a food bank struggling with an influx of food-insecure people? Is a water project grappling with regulations that would protect or hinder this vital resource in God's world? Engage in advocacy action on a policy consideration to amplify your impact in a systemic, long-lasting way.

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

- Listen to an episode of "[Here I Pod](#)," the podcast from ELCA Advocacy.
- Host a group study to get ideas flowing, perhaps using ELCA Advocacy Starter Kit sessions on [video](#) with accompanying [conversation guides](#). Or host a session from the "[Advocacy 101](#)" guide, prepared by young adults to help them make connections as Lutherans.

Reach Out to a State Public Policy Office

ELCA-affiliated state public policy offices (SPPOs) are valued partners in faith-based advocacy, with knowledge of local 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 number among 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 influential lawmakers at a crucial time. You can:

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

Some congregations have set up computer stations to assist members with digital responses. If reaching out online doesn't match your congregation's interest, use the template letter from ELCA advocacy ministry, available among the "[God's work. Our hands.](#)" tools.

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



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. **Ask them about their current situation.** Let them know you're dedicating a day to serve and 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 connections 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 [Home - ELCA Resources](#).

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 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: Preparation

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. 13, 2026 (or another date that your congregation has selected).

Most important, why: Why is this event important to 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.

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. 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 more than 8,300 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) with the opportunity to participate in the “God’s work. Our hands.” day of service on Sept. 13. 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 change 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 2.7 million members in more than 8,300 worshiping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean. 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. Your stories and images 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!