



RECLAIMING EVANGELISM:

A Guide for Joyfully Sharing the Good News of God's Exuberant Love

Reclaiming Evangelism

Welcome to the community of everyday evangelists. That might sound more intimidating than it actually is. To be an evangelist is simply to be one who shares with others the good news that God, our Creator, loves all of us with the tenderness, persistence, patience and fierceness of a mother, of a father, or of a grandparent—and that God has shown us this love concretely through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You are an evangelist if you have ever shared the love of God with others through your stories, through your testimony or simply by bearing witness through your life. The word “evangelist” comes from the Greek word *euangelion* (in Latin, *evangelium*), which means good news and is translated into English as “gospel.” (See appendix 1 for a discussion on the relationship between the gospel, justice, evangelism and evangelicalism.)

In the times of the New Testament, when the Roman emperor wanted to communicate good news to his subjects, such as the success of a military campaign or a new edict beneficial to a particular community, the announcement was proclaimed with pomp and fanfare as the *euangelion* (gospel) of the Caesar. The early Christians reclaimed the word and used it to convey the enormous significance of the message they had to share with the world: a message much more important than any edict or military victory from Caesar or any other human ruler. For the first Christians, the *euangelion* was the good news of what God had accomplished for the world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah (Christ).

The *euangelion* that the church proclaims is that, despite the fallenness of humanity and the human penchant for evil, God has said yes to humanity. God chose to live among us and to take upon the divine self the infinite weight of our sin and suffering so that we can be truly free — free from the guilt and shame of sin, free from the fear of death, free from anything that keeps us from the fullness of life that God desires for all of us, and free to dedicate ourselves to lives of joyful service to our fellow humans (especially those who are most vulnerable and subjected to injustice and oppression) and the rest of God’s good creation.

To be an evangelist is to share that good news with others. We share the good news because it is good news and because we love people and want them to share in the same joy that we have. Waiting in line at a grocery store, I witnessed an employee joyfully sharing with their colleague pictures of the food from a new restaurant they had discovered. “It was so good,” they said. “You must try it.” That is what evangelizing looks like. Evangelism is not a tactic for church growth or a solution to the problem of the decline of ecclesial institutions. We do rejoice when people join our congregations, and we do want our institutions to grow and be healthy. But when evangelism becomes a means to get more “butts in the pews” or a means for institutional preservation, the heart of the gospel is lost.

We can (and must) invite people to church, but bringing about a conversion of the heart that turns people into true followers of Jesus Christ and members of his church is not within our purview or capacities. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. That is what we confess in the small catechism when we say:

I believe that my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth . . . ¹

Our responsibility as evangelists is simply to bear witness to the *euangelion*, to make the good news of the gospel available and accessible to all who are willing to listen. That can mean sharing with someone a testimony of how God has shown up in our lives in moments of great need or how a given biblical text or story has been

¹ Martin Luther, Small Catechism, in Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 1162.

particularly helpful to us. When my mother was going through a very painful situation and I was about 6 or 7, someone told her that Psalms 23 and 121 were particularly helpful, so when we got home, we kneeled in front of the bed and she taught me those Psalms: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want (23:1).” “From where shall my help come, my help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth (121:1–2).” The gospel shared with her by that anonymous evangelist gave her the strength and resilience to face that challenge and taught me, even as a little kid, that when I have to go through the valley of the shadow of death, I need not give in to fear or despair because God will be there with me.

We bear witness to the gospel with words but also through actions. When the church shows up after a disaster to help people rebuild their lives, it bears witness to the gospel. When the church raises its voice in protest against injustice and advocates in defense of the oppressed, it bears witness to the gospel. And when the church engages in ministries to alleviate poverty and address its causes, it bears witness to the gospel. But also, when individual members of the church understand their secular jobs as opportunities to exercise their Christian vocation, serving the neighbor with love and compassion, they bear embodied witness to the gospel. It is helpful, however, to be able to articulate the driving force behind those embodied expressions of the gospel, that is, to be able to share with people the faith, love and hope that motivate us. This resource booklet is meant to help you do this, so that you and your congregation can bear effective witness to the *euangelion* in the places where the Spirit of God has sent you.

How Do We Evangelize?

We must reevangelize ourselves before we can evangelize others.

“Out of the abundance of the heart ... the mouth speaks,” says Jesus (Luke 6:45). When our hearts are full to the brim and overflowing with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, it is not hard to share with others the cause of our joy. Have you ever been around someone who has recently fallen in love? They can’t stop talking about their beloved, and they want to spend as much time as possible with them, whether in person, on the phone, or, in the old days, through letters. The Holy Scriptures portray our relationship with God as two lovers passionately searching for each other until they finally meet and consummate their love (as in Song of Songs; see also Revelation 19:7–9). To reevangelize ourselves is to constantly rekindle that passion for our heavenly lover. We do that by immersing ourselves in the words we have been given from our beloved — the teachings, stories, parables, psalms, wisdom, laws, and promises that meet us in the Holy Scriptures. Through them, through the process of prayerful study and interpretation (individually and communally), our Beloved speaks to us.

Therefore, the first step in preparing to engage in a ministry of evangelism is to study the Holy Scriptures regularly, prayerfully, and in community. We do not study the Scriptures alone. We have the privilege of more than two millennia of teachers who came before us and lovingly bequeathed to us the Scriptures themselves and a vast body of helpful and unhelpful ways to read, translate, interpret and apply them. As Lutherans, for instance, we rely heavily on the biblical interpretations of Luther and the Reformers, especially the Small and Large Catechisms, the explanations of the faith in the Augsburg Confessions and the other confessional documents in the Book of Concord. They do not replace the Scriptures but serve as faithful guides in our own process of studying them and opening our ears to the living Word of God that addresses us through those texts. As ELCA Lutherans, we also belong to the larger church, ecumenical and catholic (i.e. universal), and find inspiration in many resources from our ecumenical partners and from the larger tradition which we hold in common with them. The ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation have also produced helpful resources to aid us in studying the Scriptures and in discerning how they apply to important contemporary issues. In sum, we do not study the Scriptures alone even when we are by ourselves; instead, we are guided by the Holy Spirit and assisted by the communion of saints (through the resources they have left us).

Some questions to ask yourself:

- *What is your favorite text of Scripture?* (I invite you to keep a journal where you can reflect on the questions and ideas posed throughout this resource booklet.)
- *If you had to choose a Scripture text that offers the best summary of the good news of Jesus for someone unfamiliar with the gospel, what would it be?*
- *What resources have you found helpful for studying the Scriptures?* They could be a particular Bible scholar or theologian, a biblical commentary series, a blog, or something else.
- *What practices have you found to be good for delving deep into the Scriptures and connecting with the One who speaks to us from them?* Examples of such practices are: dwelling in the word, lectio divina reading practices, chanting the psalms or praying them out loud in a communal setting, enacting a biblical scene and then reflecting on the experience, being part of a traditional Bible study group, using the imagination to enter inside a biblical scene and engage the senses to experience what is taking place there, reading a theological resource — the possibilities are endless. What has worked for you in the past? What would you like to try in the future?

In addition to immersing ourselves in the Word through the study of the Scriptures as a way to reevangelize ourselves, it is also helpful to remember the ways God has shown up in our lives. One of the Lutheran Reformers, Phillip Melanchthon, said that “to know Christ is to know his benefits.”² What benefits or blessings have Christ and the Holy Spirit showered upon you?

In what ways has Christ been there for you when you needed him most? How would you describe God’s presence in your life through your lows and highs?

If someone were to ask you, “What has Christ done for you?,” how would you answer?

We don’t want to encourage a transactional, quid-pro-quo understanding of faith. In this (and in many other things), we as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America differ radically from versions of evangelicalism that promote embracing Jesus as a “get out of hell” or “go straight to heaven” card in the game of life. We do not argue that if you just believe in Christ, you will become prosperous and successful and never again have to suffer or endure tragedy.” Those are dangerous distortions of the gospel of the One, who summons us by saying: “If you want to be my disciple, deny yourself, carry your cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). The benefits of Christ are the benefits of knowing that our lives have been forever united with the life of Christ, whether we are in the depths of the “valley of the shadow of death” or in the heights of exuberant joy. The apostle Paul put it beautifully when he wrote:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-35, 37-39).

² Melanchthon, Loci Communes (1521).

This is the gospel (*euangelion*) that has touched our lives and that we wish to share with others. This is the gospel from where our church gets its name of the word “evangelical.” It should not be confused with versions of evangelicalism and derived from Christian nationalism, which that uses the holy name of Jesus and the sacred Scriptures to violently push for particular ideological and political agendas that actually contradict the very spirit of Jesus, the Scriptures, and the gospel [(see Appendix 1)]. Thus, we, as ELCA Lutherans, claim the word Evangelical “evangelical” in its original and true meaning of being good news (*euangelium*). But as we go about the task of sharing the gospel with others, we must it is important to be aware that many have become allergic to the word “evangelical” and sometimes even to the word “Christian”, because of the many ways in which groups have misused and even abused that name them. We are not innocent either, which is why the ELCA has issued several apologies and declarations to groups in whose hurt pain we have been complicit, and we are seeking ways to heal those relationships. It is the gospel itself is what allows us to face our limitations, our sins, and the evil that we have done or allowed, and not to despair but rather to trust in God’s amazing grace that promises forgiveness, healing, and transformation. Thus, in sharing the gospel of forgiveness, healing, and transformation, we are speaking of things in which we are intimately experienced. As a popular statement phrases it, evangelism (or proclamation of the gospel) is like one hungry person telling another one where they have found bread.

That is why Lutheran churches around the world are proud to call themselves “evangelical” as does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Evangelism in this sense is about rooting ourselves in the gospel and bearing witness to the gospel in fulfillment of Jesus’ commission to go to all nations and peoples (Matt 28:18–20). For generations, evangelism has been hyper spiritualized, focusing, for instance, on saving souls for eternal life and paying little attention to the holistic nature of the salvation that is ours in Jesus Christ. Evangelism and proclaiming the good news of God’s love transforms lives and is far vaster and richer than a mere transaction. To reclaim evangelism toward transformation is to embrace God’s justice, rooted in compassion and empathy. Reclaiming evangelism is a bold theological affirmation of our call and commission to bring good news to all, across any borders.

Why We Evangelize

We evangelize, first and foremost, because Jesus calls us to. We see it in how he called his followers to be “fishers of people” (Mark 1:17). We see it in how he sent them out to others to proclaim the good news and to bring healing (Matthew 10:1–15). And we see it in how the risen Jesus told an expanded group of his followers: “You will be my witnesses … to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In these words of Scripture, we hear Jesus calling us today to join in sharing the good news, bearing witness, and bringing healing to the world.

We also evangelize because doing so is one of the promises made at Christian baptism. At baptism, we who are baptized — or our parents or guardians on our behalf — promise to “proclaim Christ through word and deed” and “care for others and the world God made” (*ELW* liturgy of Holy Baptism).³ Evangelizing isn’t confined to religious professionals — it is the calling of all the people of God.

Finally, we evangelize as an act of love — not only love for the gospel of Christ that has changed our lives but also love for our neighbors whom God so loves. In this sense, we do not evangelize because we “have to” but because we are freely “invited to” as a joyful response to the transformative love we have received. We do not evangelize because we think that only we can save others; we evangelize because it is all up to God, who, in Christ, loves and saves the world. We evangelize because this message about the love of God in Christ has changed everything for us eternally and we cannot rightly keep it to ourselves. The gospel leads us to respond by sharing it with others as an act of love.

³ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), pp. 227–31.

Whom We Evangelize

In love for our neighbors, we are called to get to know those with whom we wish to share this good news. Who are they? What are their existential concerns and spiritual questions/yearnings? (Forming real relationships with people is an important first step.) Listening is our first act of bearing witness to the living Word of God. Similarly, showing up in solidarity with a struggling community is a way to embody the love of Christ that we wish to convey.

What resources can help us get to know the community in depth? Are there murals that tell the story of the community? Are there books or documentaries about the community? Which older adults are the memory-keepers of the community? Who has their finger on the pulse of the community and can explain its yearnings, concerns and joys?

Spend some prayer time pondering the question “How does the gospel speak to the reality of this community, its questions, its concerns, its yearnings, etc.?

How We Evangelize

Keep it simple so that others might feel that they can do this too. Evangelizing is not just for experts or professionals. Inventory the gifts God has already given to your faith community: talents, material resources, relationships, access, etc.

In articulating your message, use language that is germane to the community to which you have been called to bear witness. How can you convey the gospel in language that the people will understand and in ways that will connect it with their questions, concerns and yearnings?

The Ethics of Evangelism

Sharing witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ must be done with respect and humility. We renounce religious bigotry and we are not interested in manipulative strategies of taking people away from other faith traditions (see the ELCA commitments on Interreligious and ecumenical engagement at www.elca.org/faith/ecumenical-and-inter-religious-relations). Instead, we are interested in bearing witness to the love of God in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. We must also recognize the different ways in which people have been hurt by the church and the gospel and be sensitive to people’s and communities’ particular circumstances.

Testimony, Q-and-A, Debates, Art

Develop a strategy, based on the resources available to you, for the particularities of the community, and let it inform the message you wish to convey to reach that population. Build into your strategy easy ways for people to know who you are (i.e., who the message is from), how to connect with you if they want to and how to learn more about the message or get involved.

Prepare by sharing your testimony. Anticipate natural questions about your faith. Do Q-and-As and debate sessions with trusted friends, speaking to challenges and significant questions about your Christian faith. Think about artistic media that speak to such questions alongside more traditional, verbal forms of communication.

Prayer

Pray for the people/community/population that you have been called to engage. If possible, pray for them by name and be as specific as possible. Pray that they will be receptive to the word and that you will be able to communicate it adequately.

Evaluation

How will you know what impact your evangelizing is having on the community? How will you ensure that your act of bearing witness is life-giving and not harmful? By what means can you get feedback from the community about how the community perceives and receives your evangelism? How is your evangelism transforming you and your own faith community? What gifts does this community have that it might share with your faith community?

Engaging in Evangelism

Strategy 1:

1. Pray for the last four people whom you have called or texted on your smartphone that are in a close relationship with you and may not go to church or know about Jesus.
2. Read a Bible story about Jesus that speaks to you and learn how the story strengthens your faith.
3. Invite each of your four people to coffee, tea, a meal or any other form of affinity connection and share how Jesus' story has aided your faith journey.
4. Provide space for each person to offer their thoughts, ask questions or express doubts.
5. Invite each person to Sunday worship so they can hear more stories about Jesus.
6. If they agree to attend, notify your pastor that you are bringing a friend to worship.

Strategy 2:

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead you to three people in your congregation, current members who are, preferably, diverse in age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, passion, economics, sexuality, stage of life, etc., and who might video-record their story of why they follow Jesus and attend worship at your church.
2. Once God leads you to those individuals, invite them to write their story, keeping it to three minutes (about 750 words).
3. Ask these individuals to video-record themselves sharing their story (stressing the importance of good lighting, clear audio and slow, clear delivery) or schedule a time for you to record them.
4. Upload this video onto your social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) or other mass communication platforms (YouTube/mass email).

Strategy 3:

1. Pray for your neighbors and communities.
2. Set a specific date and time for a free community event (i.e., drive-through prayer, blessing or communion; an on-the-go breakfast bag giveaway; a water bottle giveaway, etc.).
3. Boldly invite members of your larger community; publicize the event with a big banner outside your church; post the news on your website, social media platforms and mass media outlets; add it to your newsletters and bulletins; and communicate it to your local community partners.
4. Distribute a simple flyer with the church's name, address, phone number, email address, service times, website URL and pastor contact info.

Strategy 4:

1. Pray for a specific group that is under-represented in your congregation but highly visible in your community, putting a face to your love of God and neighbor. Examples include the Latiné community, the Asian/Pacific Islander community, the queer/trans community, families with children under 10 years old, etc.).
2. Research their community events, celebrations and holidays. Where do they gather? Where do they do life?
3. Explore ways to bring your church members outside the church walls and into the gathering spaces of your neighbors (walk in their parades, support their protests and demonstrations, rent a booth at their cultural and community events, offer your parking facilities for such events, and give away prizes for kids — water bottles, balloons, stickers, etc.). Be a presence of love and solidarity with those specific groups and let them know that you want to welcome and support them because Christ has called us to love our neighbor.
4. After many months of building rapport and relationship, pray again and distribute a simple flyer with the church's name, address, phone number, email, service times, website URL, pastor contact info, inviting people to experience your church service.

Receiving People and Their Gifts Into Community and Discipleship***Invite***

Among the people touched by your community's evangelism, some will become interested in learning more about your faith community. Be ready to extend them a warm invitation. Don't be discouraged if at first, they don't accept. People might be intimidated to walk into a new space with a group of strangers, not knowing what to expect. Give them a sense of what your faith community is like and be honest. Don't say that all are welcome if you know that is not entirely true. People are not looking for the perfect community; what they crave is a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose. Luther's comment about how the church is a clinic for sinners (and not a museum of saints) might be a helpful reminder that they will encounter all kinds of people there. Share with them your Facebook page, your website (make sure it's up to date), a booklet or anything else that can give them a sense of who you are and what a visit might be like.

Prepare the Congregation

Cultivate an attitude of joy toward receiving new people and appreciating their unique ways of being human, which might be different from what your community expects. Some Christian traditions view guests as angels, sent by God as a blessing to the community. How can your faith community joyfully welcome strangers?

Train a Community of Greeters and Welcomers

Teach your congregation to offer a warm, enthusiastic (but not overwhelming) welcome to newcomers — to listen and not judge. Train volunteers to meet them at the door with a gentle smile and a welcoming presence, asking them if this is their first visit and how they found out about the church. Orient them to the space, the community and the flow of the worship service. If they have small children, assure the parents that the congregation loves having children at worship (if this is true), explain that a nursery is available if they need it, and point out any other resources available to children or to parents with small children. After the service, make sure that someone from the congregation follows up with an email, letter, phone call, etc., to thank them for their visit and maybe even request their feedback on how you can be a more welcoming congregation. Also make sure that new people understand the faith traditions that "everyone knows" — like wearing black on Good Friday or red on Pentecost Sunday and Reformation Day — so no one feels excluded.

On Not Scaring People Away

Greeters and other volunteers should be attentive to members cluelessly saying things to newcomers that are insensitive or even hurtful such as “You are sitting in my pew,” “Aren’t your people Catholic?” or “Are you here for the food distribution?” There should be people in the congregation ready to interrupt such encounters.

Prepare the Space

Do the art and messages displayed around the building proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that is intelligible to outsiders, so that, the moment they walk in, they immediately know what you believe? Do such art and messages say “You are truly welcome here” or “You are not one of us”? So they say, “You are welcome here so long as you are like us”? Do they fairly represent a rich diversity of races, gender identities, socioeconomic classes, ages, marital statuses, etc.? Are the languages prevalent in the surrounding community present or at least acknowledged in the space and the service? Are the service and the furniture arrangement friendly to people with disabilities, mobility issues, hearing impairment, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc.? In other words, does the physical space where you gather embody the message you are trying to proclaim? How can you make your space, inside and out, convey that you would love for this stranger to come inside and visit with you, that you have been waiting for them, that there is a place for them, that here they will find love, compassion and a community dedicated to Jesus’ sense of justice and wholesomeness? How can the walls, windows and grounds communicate all that?

Help People Connect

Make sure that newcomers can easily learn how to get involved in the life of the faith community and find more information about connecting. Invite them directly; you might think, “Of course, anyone can join,” but to newcomers, yours might look like a very closed group.

Invite People into Discipleship

People are called to the church not to be spectators or admirers of Jesus but to be disciples. How can your faith community teach people to follow in the way of Jesus rather than just sit through a worship service once a week? This is especially important with youth and young adults. How can we respect their intelligence, honor their questions and curiosity, and nurture their hunger to make a difference in the world as followers of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit? How can we initiate them into the rich traditions of our prophetic, Christian, Lutheran and ecumenical church? How can we connect them with meaningful ways to grow in faith and put that faith into practice? When someone works in the service industry or in politics or in science, how can we instill in them the sense that theirs is a holy vocation, just like being a pastor or a deacon or a bishop, when they do their work to please God and serve the well-being of the neighbor and creation?

Learn From Others

Visit congregations that are good at inviting and welcoming people and observe how they do it. What can be applied to your own setting?

Appendix 1: On the Relationship Between Justice, Evangelism and Evangelicalism

The gospel has been visible through the work of evangelists for centuries. Consider liberation theology in Latin America (namely Brazil, El Salvador and Peru), caste liberation in India, anti-apartheid in South Africa, minjung theology in South Korea and the civil rights movement in the U.S. All are examples of the *euangelion* and its profound integration with justice.

Evangelism and justice cannot be separated. Evangelism is more than personal salvation; it should be good news for the oppressed, for God's diversity of humanity and for all creation. However, today's political and sociological landscape has separated the two. Evangelism is perceived to be what "conservative" and "pietist" Christians do, and justice is what "woke Christian liberals" and "DEI people" do. The truth is that the church has and will always need to do both. Evangelism and justice will always be connected.

Perhaps this is a natural response to our current America-first ideology, which centers on the personal rather than the communal. Our Western society places more value on self-preservation than on world preservation; thus, for many, personal salvation outweighs salvation for many and justice for all.

Soong-Chan Rah defines two forms of evangelicalism. First there is lower-case evangelicalism, which prizes Scripture/Word and the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ and believes that the Scriptures call the people of God to seek justice and abide by God's grace and love. Certainly for Lutherans, the sacrament of Baptism and, as Martin Luther would say, the Sacrament of the Altar fit within this lower-case evangelicalism. This is the kind of evangelicalism that the ELCA should want to reclaim.

Second, there is upper-case Evangelicalism, which is bound by the system of whiteness, is nationalistic in nature and sympathizes with the Republican Party in the U.S. It may encompass some of the beliefs embraced in lower-case evangelicalism, but it pledges its allegiance to the evangelical church and movement.

Here is where the shift occurs. "Evangelical," once a theological and ecclesiological term, has become a sociological and political term. Evangelism was primarily defined as the act of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people (theology) and as the function of the church in their discipleship (ecclesiology); now it is defined in terms of one's class, power, privilege and race (sociology) and one's political affiliations. This distortion of the term does not align with the values and commitments of the ELCA. When the gospel no longer sounds like good news, the time has come to reclaim it.

Appendix 2: What We Believe (A Refresher Course)

Grace. Grace is the heart of the Lutheran understanding of the gospel. We believe that grace fundamentally reflects the nature of God, who is not angry and vengeful but merciful, faithful, and gracious whose love for all people is inexhaustible. To believe in God's grace is to believe that God loves us even when we act unloving and feel unlovable.

Faith. Faith is trust in God, whose love has been made known to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and is attested to by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Martin Luther wrote, "Faith is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God" and is "a living, daring confidence in God's grace" ("Preface to Romans").⁴

Love. We love as we have been loved by God, not because we want anything in return but because, through the Holy Spirit, the love of Christ has been made known to us. Love is not a feeling but a desire for and commitment to the well-being of the beloved. Faith and love belong together. True faith yields fruits of love. As Martin Luther noted, faith "is a living, busy, active, mighty thing. ... It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them" ("Preface to Romans").⁵

Creation. The whole cosmos and all creation are the result of God's ongoing creative activity, and both are deeply loved by God.

Justice. Seeking justice is essential to a life of faith. To seek justice means to seek healing and wholeness for all. (Refer to ELCA social teaching and to resources from the ELCA's Service and Justice home area for specifics on how we as a church engage in the work of justice.)

Forgiveness. God is a loving and forgiving God. Lutherans believe that sin is real and pervasive (no one is without sin). Sin is personal and communal, immediate and transgenerational, individual and structural. Sin has real consequences: injustice, exploitation, suffering, death, the devastation of God's good creation, and much more. But we do not have to be defined by our sin. On the cross, Jesus took upon himself the sin (and suffering) of the entire world, and in dying, he vanquished sin's power over us so that we can be liberated from the compulsions of sin and free to live lives that are rich and meaningful, driven by the genuine desire to glorify God and to serve the well-being of our neighbors and of God's good creation.

Sin. As Paul makes known in Romans, all of humanity and creation are broken. More specifically, humanity and creation are subject to sin, death and evil, powers that defy God and discourage human life and flourishing. Sin, as mentioned above, is personal and communal, immediate and transgenerational, individual and structural. Sin has real consequences: injustice, exploitation, suffering, death, the devastation of God's good creation, and much more. These things separate us from God and from one another. Martin Luther speaks of unbelief as the source of sin — and faith as that which sets us free.

Salvation. We believe that salvation is more than going to heaven. Salvation is wholeness, captured by the Hebrew word *shalom*. Salvation is liberation from sin, death, the devil, and everything that keeps us from reaching the fullness of who our loving God wants us to be. Salvation is not something that can be earned. We are saved by God's grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Whatever needed to be done for our salvation was accomplished by Christ on the cross.

⁴ Martin Luther, "Preface to the Romans," *Luther's Works*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960), vol. 35, p. 370.

⁵ Ibid.

The Bible. God speaks to us through the Bible, and we believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the authoritative source and norm of our proclamation, faith and life. But that doesn't mean the Bible is a word-for-word, literal dictation of God's word. The Bible is the Word of God in the sense that it bears witness to God's acts and revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the primary source for God's saving activity in Christ, the Bible is the Word of God for us.

The Church. The church is the community of those who have been brought to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit. It is made of imperfect people, sinners who have learned to rely on God's grace rather than their own merits or righteousness. The church is defined by the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It can be recognized by its members' bearing the cross — that is, by their willingness to suffer in loving solidarity with those among us who are most vulnerable.

Science. Science, as an expression of reason, is a gift from God that we use to carry out our human vocation of tending to life and stewarding this beautiful garden that is God's creation. Through the faithful use of science and technology, we can be instruments of God's healing and creativity in the world.

Diversity. We believe that diversity is not a problem to be solved but a blessing to be claimed. Diversity expresses God's extravagant and bountiful creativity. No one expression of humanity is superior to others in God's sight. We all have been created in the image and likeness of God, which gives us all inalienable dignity and human rights. We celebrate our diversity, we are committed to equity, and we hold each other accountable for how we live out our faith from within our particular social location and our intersectionalities and how we treat each other and the rest of God's creation.

Controversial Issues. One way in which the ELCA engages controversial issues is through a years-long, prayerful process of discernment, inviting experts from relevant fields to work with rostered leaders, theologians and other church leaders in studying the issues and developing social teaching that is voted on by the churchwide assembly. See ELCA.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements.

Appendix 3: Sharing Stories of Faith

Pick a beginning that inspires you! Tell us about:

1. Someone who inspires you to have faith today.
2. Someone who taught you to have faith when you were younger.
3. What you have been taught about Jesus that you love to remember.
4. A favorite Bible verse, story or song. Sing the part if that's fun for you!
5. A time in your life when you feel God is close to you.
6. A time when you couldn't have made it without God bringing you through.
7. Who or what brought you into the church community.
8. What keeps you coming back to the church community.
9. A time when the Holy Spirit empowered you to do or create something.
10. What you feel Jesus calling you to do or be.
11. A moment when you felt God had put you in the right place at the right time.
12. A prayer experience, a miracle or God's healing and guiding of you.
13. Your faith experiences. What part of this treasure do you want to share with the world?
14. How you see God at work in places of suffering around the world, and how we might be called to join God's work in those places.
15. How we can pray for you. We love sharing Jesus' stories of faith together!

Contact Anna-Kari Johnson at ELCA Evangelism Initiatives (Anna-Kari.Johnson@elca.org) to join the ELCA Evangelism Network.

Appendix 4: Some Convictions on Evangelism

From the Symposium on Evangelizing and Lutheran Theology, Aug. 18–20, 2025

1. Evangelism is sharing the story of Jesus, which takes shape best in the context of relationships.
2. Evangelism is following Jesus' caring ways by paying attention to where God is already at work, asking good questions, inviting people to share their stories, and affirming faith in the ways we see Jesus present.
3. Evangelism is rooted in relationship, flowing from the Triune God, who is the source of all life.
4. Evangelism is sharing Jesus' good news in word and in discipleship, embodied through the baptismal promises of peace and justice.
5. Evangelism is urgent — good news that invites sharing right now.
6. Evangelism involves practicing integrity; the way we share the gospel must align with the gospel itself, avoiding harmful methods.
7. Evangelism is making Christ known.
8. Evangelism is spiritual — a sacred overflow, rooted in prayer, spiritual practices and the Holy Spirit.
9. Evangelism entails justice, which is inseparable from evangelism. Justice is good news for the oppressed, for God's diverse humanity and for all creation.
10. Evangelism is clear communication — about the good news, who we are and whom we welcome.

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New Ministry Development and Evangelism team, Christian Community and Leadership home area, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

ELCA Symposium for Evangelizing and Lutheran Theology 2025

Participating:

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- Bishop Phil Hirsch, ELCA Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod
- Rev. Carmelo Santos, Director for Theological Diversity and Ecumenical and Interreligious Engagement
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- Rev. Hayley Paulson-Moe, Pastor, Advent Lutheran Church, New York, N.Y.
- Deacon Kayla Zopfi, Coordinator, Young Adult Network
- Rev. Anna-Kari Johnson, Program Manager, Evangelism Initiatives

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Find more free resources at ELCA.org/evangelism.