

Freed and Renewed in Christ: 500 Years of God's Grace in Action

Ideas for observing the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in your congregation

In 2017, ELCA congregations have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to lift up the 500th anniversary of the Reformation as an occasion to grow in faith, strengthen relationships with other Christians, renew service in the community, and make a fresh witness of Jesus Christ in the world.

Especially in the fall of 2017, ELCA members and other people will be interested in learning more about this historic development in the Christian church and engaging their faith and service with renewed commitment and energy.

The following menu of activities is offered as a place where leaders and planners in your congregations can jump-start brainstorming. It is not an exhaustive list, but can help you choose or create new ideas on your own, depending on your resources and what makes sense for you. Most of the activities can be adapted to a variety of situations and scaled to nearly any size of congregation.

Use your creativity and passion! Additionally, please consider reviewing the [Reformation 500 Sourcebook](#) for other suggestions and a wealth of resources for your congregational planning.

Worship, preaching and music

- Use the [Common Prayer liturgy](#) in a joint worship service with other ELCA congregations, Roman Catholic neighbors or other ecumenical partners.
- Organize a hymn, music and/or art festival with other congregations or organizations in your community (for example, community or college choir). Consider using "The Church's Journey in Art and Song" — a resource designed to be adaptable to a variety of contexts and that includes art that can be projected. ([Reformation 500 Sourcebook](#), pp. 83-86)
- Adapt the Lenten worship series based on Luther's Small Catechism for use on successive Sundays at another time in the year. ([Reformation 500 Sourcebook](#), pp. 77-82)
- Read together a section of Luther's Small Catechism each Sunday (readily available in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pp. 1160-1167).
- Create a dialogue sermon interspersing quotations from Martin Luther read by several readers and including commentary by the preacher.
- Contact narrative lectionary writers at [Working Preacher](#) about ways to utilize the Small Catechism in preaching.
- During Lent, collaborate with other congregations in your community in a stations of the cross service.
- Plan a sermon or message series on the Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer and sacraments. (Luther's Large Catechism was adapted from his sermons on these topics.)
- Encourage your congregation to download to their smartphone the free [Small Catechism app](#) for use when a worship series or study group uses the catechism.

Education

- Explore new perspectives on the Small Catechism in a four-to-six-session adult study group that listens to new or different voices, such as the [African Descent Catechism](#) or resources from [Lutherans Restoring Creation](#). Invite confirmation students to join and share their insights about the catechism.
- Host a reading group to discuss "[The Freedom of a Christian](#)," one of Luther's other writings, or a biography of Luther.
- Plan a four-week study of "[Papa Luther](#)" with elementary age kids using the [downloadable study guide](#). Or create a "Hans and Magda" mini-play, adapting a script from "Papa Luther."
- Use the five-week study of Luther's five catechetical hymns and then sing one of the hymns during worship each week. ([Reformation 500 Sourcebook](#), pp. 83-86)
- In an adult forum or study group explore and discuss "[From Conflict to Communion](#)," "[Declaration on the Way](#)," or one of the [ELCA's full communion partnership agreements](#) and the significance of these relationships for Lutheran identity. Contact the nearest Roman Catholic parish to arrange a shared discussion or other education exchange based on these resources.
- Take a group to attend one of the many Reformation anniversary lectures or other [events sponsored by ELCA synods, colleges or seminaries](#). Or collaborate with ELCA neighbors in hosting a speaker in your community.

Ecumenical and inter-religious

- Contact the nearest Roman Catholic parish to explore the opportunities for exchanges or jointly sponsored events in worship, education or service.
- Collaborate in a series of conversations with local Roman Catholic leaders or friends about "[From Conflict to Communion](#)," "[Declaration on the Way](#)" or the "[Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification](#)."
- Coordinate a joint worship service with an ecumenical partner or inter-religious group. Consider using the [Common Prayer liturgy](#).
- Start an ongoing study group to learn more about Lutheran history and current relations with other religious groups using the case-study approach in "[Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World](#)" developed by ELCA consultative panels on Lutheran-Jewish and Lutheran-Muslim relations.
- Use the resource [Luther and Contemporary Inter-Religious Relations](#) to prepare for questions about Luther's writings about Jews and Muslims. Or use this and [other resources from the ELCA website](#) to prepare and plan for conversations with local Jewish or Muslim communities.
- Plan a Taize prayer service or use "[Holden Prayer Around the Cross](#)" for the healing of creation with one or more neighboring ELCA or ecumenical congregations.
- Host a conversation or study of the user-friendly book "[One Hope: Re-Membering the Body of Christ](#)."

Service and vocation

- Develop and perform the [95 Acts of Service](#). Invite your local ELCA college, university, campus ministry or other congregations to participate.
- Start an ongoing study group to learn more about Luther's economic teachings and concern for people living in poverty. Consider using as resources "[The Forgotten Luther](#)," "[Luther and the Hungry Poor](#)" or "[Beyond Charity](#)" to explore and assess your serving ministries.
- Coordinate a service project for the [ELCA day of service](#) on Sept. 10 ("God's work. Our hands." Sunday). Invite a neighbor or inter-religious partner(s) to participate. Use the [Baptized Servants](#) resource to explore vocation from a Lutheran perspective.
- Plant a 500th Reformation anniversary tree or garden in a common space near your congregation; mark the occasion with a short, standing congregational acoustic public worship service at that location, inviting all who pass by to join. Resources can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
- Write a letter to your legislator or local paper discussing [the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and why it's significant today](#).
- Read and discuss what Luther wrote in the Large Catechism (Eighth Commandment) about protecting the rights of others. Sign up for e-advocacy alerts; then lead or participate in a march for human rights.
- Read and discuss what Luther wrote in the Large Catechism (Fifth Commandment) about feeding the hungry. Host a congregation (or ecumenical or inter-religious) day at the food bank.
- Sponsor or host a study of Luther's "[Whether Soldiers, Too, Can Be Saved](#)" with former or active military members. Invite a military chaplain to lead in the planning and discussion.