

Reformation Anniversary Communications Guide: A resource for working with your local media

**The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America observes the 500th anniversary of the Reformation
Freed and renewed in Christ: 500 years of God's grace in action.**

Notes for Congregational Media Relations

October 31, 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, which is an opportunity for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to bear witness to the hope and joy we have through Jesus Christ. Many people will be asking about the significance of what happened 500 years ago when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses.

Luther's action started a dialogue that changed the way we receive and share the gospel, which continues today. This anniversary is an opportunity to communicate the Reformation's significance for faith and life in the 21st century and the freedom we have in Christ that liberates us to joyfully serve our neighbors.

By now, you may be already planning for or participating in activities that honor this milestone anniversary. These activities allow you to give thanks for the word's power to free and renew all creation in Christ and provide an opportunity to emphasize the continuing work of reconciliation in the Christian church with our ecumenical partners.

Connecting with the media in your community creates an opportunity to model Luther's dialogue and increase awareness of your congregation's plans to observe this significant milestone. It's also an opportunity to share with your community how your congregation serves its neighbors as Lutherans in today's world. This powerful and impactful opportunity means your congregation.

This guide is intended to support your communications outreach with your local media. It is broken into three parts for easy use:

Planning Your Outreach

Making Media Contacts

Staying Connected

Should you have questions at any time, you are welcome to contact Reformation Anniversary Communications Manager, Rob Campbell, to brainstorm, bounce around ideas or simply ask for support. He is your resource for a successful anniversary commemoration. He can be reached at rob.campbell@elca.org.

Good luck!

Planning Your Outreach:

In planning your anniversary activities, you may find there are many opportunities to highlight in the media. Examples which might reflect your congregation's activities to highlight. Among them are:

- Ecumenical activities with our brothers and sisters in Christ, particularly as it relates to our growing relationships with the Roman Catholic, Jews and Muslims. (Candice, I thought about listing some examples that are news worthy to keep from inundating the wires and assignment editors. Thoughts?)
- Service to your neighbors, particularly with on "God's Work. Our Hands" day of service Sunday, September 10, 2017.
- Reformation-related Mission trips within the United States and overseas that not only demonstrate your congregation's commitment to bearing witness to the hope and joy of Jesus Christ.
- Educational travel to Germany to visit and learn about the historical points of interest specifically related to Martin Luther.

Examples of recently published news articles are below. This list serves as only an example. (Check back frequently for updated links). If you believe your story is of interest to your community, you are welcomed and encouraged to contact the media.

[Minneapolis Star Tribune](#): Minnesota Lutherans at forefront of new Martin Luther revolution

Before engaging the media, you may want to consider these steps:

Build

Build upon current relations with your local media as we approach the 500th anniversary. Ultimately, the media will decide what is news-worthy, but it will be helpful to be prepared to engage with your community about who we are as Lutherans, how we are observing this significant milestone and what it means for us today.

If you have not developed a relationship with your local print and broadcast media, the 500th anniversary is a great opportunity to do so. Your introduction should not necessarily focus on a single event. It should be about communicating your congregation's evangelical mission and witness in the community. How are your members making a difference in the world?

Designate

Identify a congregational media contact. This person will communicate specifics of the observance with the local media, send updated news-releases and make follow-up calls to media. This person will also help prepare two to three members or congregation staff for interviews.

The goal is to generate media interest about the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and your congregation's observance as part of a larger churchwide anniversary observed by millions of Lutherans around the world.

Prepare

Make use of the resources available to you to gather and share the information needed for your media contact.

ELCA500.org

This website hosts Reformation anniversary resources, news and event highlights from local, national and inter-national ELCA partners in mission (including, but not limited to, synods, the churchwide organization, The Lutheran World Federation and Augsburg Fortress.)

Reformation Anniversary FAQ

Preparing to speak with a reporter includes anticipating the types of issues and concerns the reporter's audience may be interested in. Questions will vary according to the publication's or broadcast's audience and local or regional factors. The sample list of questions and responses [found here](#) illustrate an approach that uses ordinary language as much as possible to focus on the central issue of God's grace in Christ and the relationships that emerge from a confidence in that grace.

News releases

Prepare a news release to share your congregation's observance plan with your local media. You may want to share a general 500th anniversary news release and then a specific observance news release about two weeks before your congregation's observance or activity. You may use the news release template in the [Sourcebook](#) digital files to get started.

Common themes for media interest may be an event you're planning with another congregation in the community, a project you're working on to observe the anniversary or engagement with your local ecumenical and inter-religious sisters and brothers.

The ELCA's churchwide organization public relations team will also continue to write news releases on the anniversary, specifically in the fall of 2017, that congregations are able to share, which will include statements and quotes from leaders, such as Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. To see all current press releases, visit: ELCA.org/News-and-Events.

Interviews

- Choose two or three people from your congregation who feel comfortable speaking to the media and who are able to communicate your congregation's plans for the 500th anniversary observance. They should also have the ability to communicate your congregation's mission and witness as Lutherans.
- Familiarize these people with the Reformation anniversary FAQ to assist with broad topics.
- Be able to answer the basic questions about your observance of the anniversary. The person being interviewed should be prepared to identify:
 - o Who: Who is participating in the observance? Who is invited?
 - o What: What will you do to observe this milestone?
 - o When: When is the anniversary and when is your observance activity?
 - o Where: Where will you host the observance?
 - o Why: Why is this milestone significant? Why is your congregation observing the way that you are?

Engage

Media outreach includes both traditional outlets – newspaper, radio and television – and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest, and other media tools your congregation uses.

Making information readily available creates a path for members and friends to learn about the 500th anniversary and your observance.

- Prepare your congregation's print and digital resources to reflect your upcoming plans and resources for the 500th. This will increase awareness and provide clarity.
- Create bulletin inserts and prepare temple talks to engage your congregation. By increasing awareness, you will make it easier for the media (and members) to engage with your plans.
- Consider how you will update your congregation's website, social media presence and bulletin board to reflect plans and opportunities for involvement.

Remember that providing digital and print resources is helpful for not only current members but also the media and potential new members to learn about the ways our church is observing this significant milestone.

Once you're ready to engage the public, pitch your congregation's story to your local media. You may use the news release template in the Sourcebook digital files to get started.

STAY CONNECTED

This website, ELCA500.org, is the digital information clearing house for ELCA Reformation anniversary information. You will find resources, events, connections to partners and networks and more for you and your congregation to make use of as you prepare for your observance.

Social media:

If your congregation has a Facebook page, Twitter handle or other social media and you haven't yet started sharing information on the 500th anniversary on a local, national or inter-national level, you can begin sharing posts, news and resources for your members surrounding the Reformation to spark interest.

Facebook

If you do not currently have a social media presence (and even if you do), you may direct media and your members to the ELCA's [500 Facebook](#) page designed to be an informational hub specific to Reformation anniversary news, resources and events across the ELCA. ELCA Reformation 500 is a public page open to all for information and shareable posts on resources, news and events. Please feel free to use or "share" anything posted to support your social media strategy.

There is also an [ELCA Reformation 500 closed Facebook group](#) for conversation among other observance planners. Please join the conversation as we move forward into the 500th anniversary together.

You may also want to connect with your synod Facebook page to learn about what is going on at the synod level.

On Facebook, Instagram and [Twitter](#), use hashtag #ELCA500 to cluster your Reformation anniversary posts with other ELCA congregations!

Many synods also have 500th anniversary planning teams that may be able to assist your congregation. We encourage you to reach out to your synod office to learn more!

- Reach out to your synod for continued support and future Reformation anniversary opportunities.
 - Continue to be in conversation with media through October of 2017.
 - Support and empower members to learn more about Reformation anniversary related projects.
- Prepare paths for engagement and provide connections to current paths for members to learn more about the global scope of this milestone.