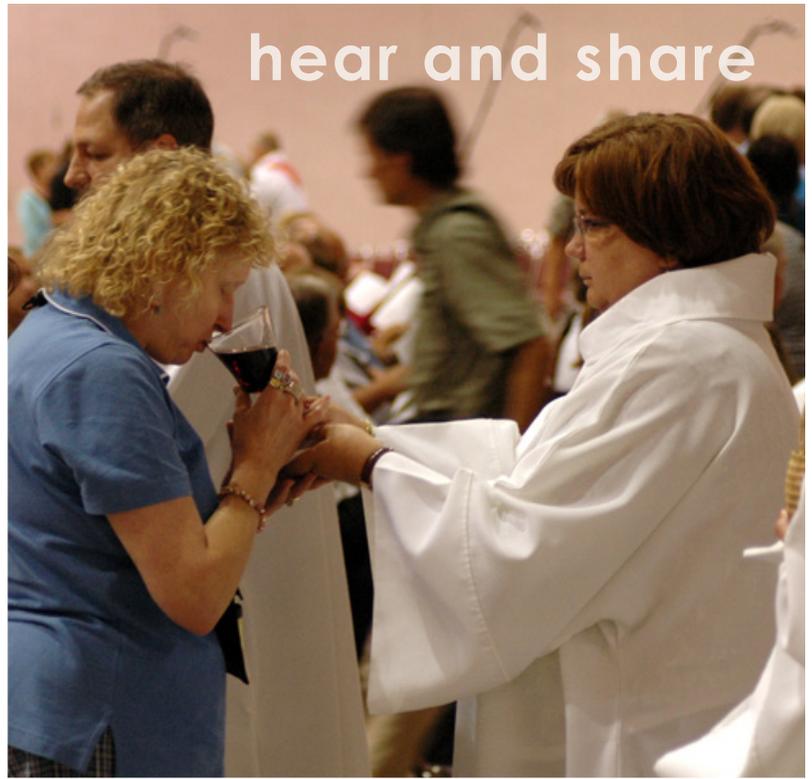




strive



hear and share

Faith Practices in the
**Evangelical Lutheran
Church in America**
Living Our Baptismal Covenant



proclaim



serve



live



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Faith Practices in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Living Our Baptismal Covenant

The Faith Practices Team of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) encourages this church to nurture a culture of mission and discipleship by embracing faith practices that stem from our baptism. The team urges ELCA members and congregations to recognize that in response to God's action in baptism, our life is one of growth in the practices of discipleship: "Baptism inaugurates a life of discipleship in the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism conforms us to the death and resurrection of Christ precisely so that we repent and receive forgiveness, love our neighbors, suffer for the sake of the Gospel, and witness to Christ." ("The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament," principle 14, page 20).

The liturgy for the Affirmation of Baptism describes the faith practices that grow out of our baptism (Evangelical Lutheran Worship, page 236). We are to:

*"... live among God's faithful people; hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper; **proclaim** the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; serve all people following the example of Jesus; and **strive** for justice and peace in all the earth."*

The Faith Practices Team encourages these practices as guides for our discipleship, expanding upon the seven faith practices identified in the year 2000 as part of the churchwide organization's "Call to Discipleship." These practices are described in the following pages. Each page provides ideas for engaging each practice as we walk on our faith journey. We recognize these ideas as suggestions that are not by any means exhaustive and we invite you to share how you and your congregation have lived into these practices.

(NOTE: All Scripture references have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible.)

Live among God's faithful people

"As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:27-28).

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (Acts 2:42, 46-47).

"... their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints – and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us ..." (2 Corinthians 8:2-5).

Living in community as God's faithful people is a gift of love, and an invitation to serve in mission. We are chosen not for position or privilege, but to live as faithful witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ. In our baptism we were made children of God and members of the body of Christ, the church. God's message of hope and reconciliation strengthens us in our faith walk. Our life in Christian community supports us as we experience the joys and struggles of life. In our walk we are encouraged to equally embrace all differences and celebrate the diversity of gifts that can strengthen us.

As we live among God's faithful people we:

- Read and study God's word
- Celebrate God's presence in our lives through regular participation in worship
- Receive gratefully God's blessings and return a portion of God's abundance through our giving
- Live a new life in Christ by caring for and encouraging others
- Pray daily for each other, our communities and all of creation as we move into God's future
- Renew daily a connection with baptism by making the sign of the cross on your forehead

Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper

"For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

"God gives the word and the sacraments to the church and by the power of the Spirit thereby creates and sustains the church among us." ("The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament," Principle 2, page 7)

We listen deeply as we hear, read and study God's word. As God's word speaks to us, it comes both as command and promise. We listen to see how the message challenges us and encourages us in our lives. We listen for God's call and God's guidance. And we listen to the words of the Lord's Supper to remind us that the body of Christ was given for us and the blood of Christ was shed for us.

The Lord's Supper stands at the center of our lives as Christians. In that meal, we receive Jesus' presence into our very bodies. We receive God's gifts of forgiveness of sin, new life and salvation. At the same time, as a community God makes us into the body of Christ, one with all in every time and place who share this holy meal. We become the body of Christ for the sake of the world. That is, we participate in God's mission. Having been showered with God's gifts, God sends us forth to take that love and compassion out into the world to the lonely, the oppressed, the poor, the hungry, the imprisoned, the angry, and those suffering in mind, body and spirit.

There are many ways we hear God's word:

- The public reading of Scripture
- Preaching
- Bible study, devotional reading and retreats
- Sacraments
- Experiencing the Arts
- Forgiveness of sin
- All aspects of a congregation's educational ministry
- Continue the fellowship of the Lord's Supper through meal time prayer at the dinner table

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

“And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah” (Acts 5:43).

Think about proclaiming the good news. It’s easy to envision a pastor in the pulpit on Sunday morning bringing the word of God to the gathered people. But through our baptismal covenant, we all are called to proclaim the good news of God in Christ. Not just the pastor, but every one of us. And not just once, or once in a while. We are called to proclaim the good news day after day, never ceasing, just as the disciples did in the passage above.

What does it mean to proclaim the good news of God in Christ? As the church, acting together and as individuals, we have a story to tell. We have the story of God’s movement in our lives through the saving actions of Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is not simply a story in the Bible. Rather it’s the story of our lives and the story of what brings us life. We simply share with others how God is working in our lives. We share the story that shapes our story.

We are living out the story of Christ in us. We are proclaiming the story of God’s saving grace in our lives when we:

- Invite others to the church where Christ is proclaimed
- Confess our faith through song and word in worship
- Offer encouragement to a friend and others who are ill or in need
- Show Christ through our daily lives and work, which express thanks to God and care for the common good
- Talk about our faith in our homes and with others
- Live prepared to give a reason for the hope within us

Serve all people following the example of Jesus

“For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Serving is at the heart of Jesus’ ministry. Making the connection between Jesus feeding the five thousand and setting up a food pantry is easy. God serves others through us. Jesus calls us to be more than good waitstaff. The ministry of feeding is commendable, but there is more to serving.

To follow the example of Jesus and serve all people requires us to get involved in the lives of others. Jesus valued relationships. Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, making time for children or comforting his friends Martha and Mary serves as a blueprint for moving us beyond projects and anonymous charitable activities to relationships.

Following the life of Jesus leads us into the mess of life where lives are transformed and Christ is made known. Serving as Jesus serves brings us closer to Jesus, the one who did not come to be served but to serve.

As we serve following the example of Jesus Christ, we can:

- Visit the sick and the imprisoned
- Feed the hungry
- Respond to disasters
- Walk alongside others
- Give of our resources

Strive for justice and peace in all the earth

“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8b).

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

“Along with all citizens, Christians and others have the responsibility to defend human rights and to work for freedom, justice, peace, environmental well being and good order.” (ELCA Social Statement, “The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective,” 1991, page 5)

We celebrate the abundant blessings that are a part of this world. But we also walk in the struggle of human existence where we face our own sin, our self-centeredness, and the collective sin of human institutions, for example, the church, governments, the nations. In this struggle however, we meet the suffering God who bears the sins of the world and sends us out, as ones who are joined in the crucified Christ and in his solidarity with the pain of the world. As believers in Christ we are called to be about the work of justice in our personal and public life. We recognize that God’s justice is something deeper and purer than our own best understanding of justice. And yet, we are called to love our neighbor as we would love ourselves.

We speak the truth in love as we participate in God’s mission of abundant life for all. With a deep awareness of our sinfulness and the sin of our society, with humility we speak with respect and promote change. And God calls us to speak out. An enemy of justice is silence. A justice mindset is one key way we practice our faith. A mindset and a heart filled with peace is faith in practice. Practicing our faith is something that we may never master. We always have more to learn. The focus of our practice is our gracious God, not the practices in themselves. Our faith practices are always an offering of response to our gracious God. May God work on you as you practice your faith in the midst of life in God’s church and God’s world.

As we seek justice and peace in all the earth we:

- Pray for peace among nations and peoples
- Host an after-school, summer or weekend feeding program for children and families
- Begin a “Go Green” Initiative in our congregation and community
www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org
- Forgive as we have been forgiven by God
- Organize a community march against family violence
- Challenge the systems that perpetuate poverty
- Contact the ELCA Advocacy Office about joining with other Lutherans to speak to public officials about the difference your congregational ministries make in your community
- Sign up for the ELCA Advocacy Network to receive information and other alerts
- Love all of humanity, respecting everyone, and seeing differences as a gift from God