



*A four-session
small group
study for growing
disciples*

SERVE

Living Faith in Daily Life

a small group study on service and social ministry

Contents

Introduction:	About this study	page 2
Session 1:	"...just as you did to one of the least of these..."	page 4
Session 2:	"For if you keep silence at such a time as this..."	page 7
Session 3:	"...to proclaim release to the captives ...to let the oppressed go free..."	page 9
Session 4:	"Go in peace and serve the Lord"	page 12

SERVE

A small group study on service and social ministry

Living Faith in Daily Life

Service is a mark of discipleship. It is one of the seven faith practices highlighted in the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship.

When you hear the word "serve," what comes to mind? Do you think of someone bringing you food at a restaurant? Does it remind you of working at the food pantry? Or do you think about a person who wiped your brow or brought you soup when you were sick in bed? Using Christ's life as the model, this study will focus on how we can respond in loving service to our neighbors, our communities, and the world. In the ELCA, this is known as social ministry.

Christ-centered service is often transformational. It can change both the life of the one who serves as well as the person who is served. Service connects with other practices of discipleship in the ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship: prayer, study, worship, invitation, encouragement, and giving. Prayer and study of Scripture are important as we turn to God for direction and guidance in the ways in which we are called to serve. Worship is a way to deepen our commitment to serve others and celebrate our blessings. Service is a living witness to our faith that provides opportunities for us to invite others to learn more about Jesus. Through service, we encourage those who are struggling to go on and restore hope in their lives. Jesus says, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back" (Luke 6:38).

This small group study will focus on three dimensions of serving through social ministry: direct service,

advocacy, and community organizing. Direct services provide goods and services that benefit those in need. Advocacy involves congregations and communities working together on behalf of the disenfranchised. Community organizing efforts work to achieve justice in society.

As baptized believers, we are called to live our lives as servants of God. "And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). Scriptures frequently remind us that as Christians we are to serve others, work for justice and live in community with our neighbors, even those whose race, class, culture, and religion are different from our own. This is the heart of social ministry.

Why is a life of service such a challenge? Why is it sometimes so difficult to respond to the call to serve? Just as in the parable of the great feast in Luke 14, the reasons are many: lack of time, choice of priorities, the availability of seemingly limited resources to use in response to long-standing problems, hopelessness, apathy, and fatigue. But the good news is that not only has God called us to live lives of Christian service, God has provided the gifts that are needed. This study will provide insight into the gifts, talents, and resources that participants and congregations have been given; and will generate new ideas, interest, and energy to serve in the congregation, neighborhood, community, and the world. Through each of the four sessions, participants will explore the ways in which they can live out the biblical mandate to serve as Jesus served.

How to use this study

This study has been designed for a small group of 5 to 12 people who are interested in exploring the ways in which they can serve others. It can also be used by members of a congregation to generate new ideas for developing social ministry programs and activities. The focus of your time together should be on sharing insights and experiences. One person may lead the group or leadership might rotate among participants. Suggestions for the leader are found in small boxes throughout this resource. The leader's task in this course is to encourage discussion and action, not to teach content.

The goal for this study is to identify the variety of opportunities for service that can engage both individuals and congregations, as well as identify personal and congregational gifts, talents and resources that can be used to serve others. Each session of *Serve* is divided into three sections:



Advance preparation

To facilitate a successful small group experience, attend to the following needs in advance of the first session:

- Order a copy of this study, *Serve: Living Faith in Daily Life*, for each participant. (6-0001-6914-0, \$1.25 each, plus shipping.)
- Provide a small notebook for the personal reflections and journal exercises. Remember extra pencils, pens, and Bibles.
- Review this study in advance of the group's gathering to determine which resources to have on hand for each session.
- If you choose to use the written gifts assessment in Session 4, order copies for each participant (See page 13 for ordering information.)
- Plan for refreshments.

Gathering

A time to warm up through prayer and personal sharing. Questions set the stage for the theme and encourage personal sharing that builds group identity and fosters supportive relationships. Allow time for laughter and genuine community building.

Growing

A time to study the Bible, reflect through story and exercises, and journal individual group discoveries.

Going

A time to become aware of, and imagine the possibilities for service; to identify gifts, talents, and resources; and a time to pray and commit to further prayer and reflection.

Depending on the duration of group conversation, sessions can run between 50 and 90 minutes. Idea settings for this study include participant's homes, church, or any comfortable room conducive to open, honest sharing.



Session 1

"...just as you did to one of the least of these..."

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to share one of the following. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Share your name and a story about a time that you served someone who might be considered "a person in need."
2. In a sentence or two, describe the things that challenge or frustrate you when you think about participating in ministries that serve "those in need."

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

Good and gracious God, thank you for the opportunity to be together. Be with us as we share stories about serving as you would have us serve, reaching out to all of your people. Help us to always be mindful of those who are called "the least of these." We know the needs are so great and that we are sometimes blind to the many gifts you provide to meet these needs. Send your joy into our hearts during our time together today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

After prayerful discernment and meeting with church council members and the principal at the middle school across the street, Trinity Lutheran Church began an after-school program...

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

As Pastor Olson arrived at Trinity Lutheran Church late one afternoon, he noticed several kids from the neighborhood waiting for him at the door of the church. He had often seen them skateboarding on the steps of the church, hanging around the parking lot, and walking in the flowerbeds after school. "Hi, Michael. Hey, Minhau. How are ya, Julio?" pastor called. "Hey, pastor! How's it goin'?" Julio responded. "Do you have anything to eat in that church today?" Michael asked. "You know," Pastor Olson said, "I'm glad you asked. As a matter of fact, I do have some juice and cookies you could have. Come on in!" As the boys shared the after-school snack, Pastor Olson asked if they and their friends would be interested in stopping by every day. When they responded enthusiastically, he began to envision how Trinity Lutheran could make this happen. After prayerful discernment and meeting with church council members and the principal at the middle school across the street, Trinity Lutheran Church began an after-school program five days a week, where students could do their homework, have a healthy snack, and experience the love of God in a safe environment.

Discuss the following questions.

1. What were some of the joys of organizing and hosting this ministry?
2. What were some of the challenges in organizing and hosting this ministry?
3. What similar ministry do you have going in your congregation or community? What ministry is still waiting to be done?

to next page

BIBLE FOCUS *Matthew 25:31-46*

Read the text aloud. You might read it several times. Encourage all to share their reactions to the text.

This scripture is often referred to when people talk about service to others. It identifies those whom society looks down upon, those who are sometime seen as less than human—the homeless, the hungry, those who are ill or are strangers. Jesus indicates that we are to be in relationship with one another, regardless of our circumstances. In this text we are shown how we are to treat people – generously and willingly. Most importantly, the text reminds us that Jesus can be found in all of us, those who serve as well as those who are being served. When we are serving our sisters and brothers in need, we are serving God at the same time.

Although we don't like to think about the judgment of God, this passage also indicates that we will be held accountable for the way in which we live our lives. When that judgment time comes, we may be surprised when God does not ask "What did you do for me?" but instead may ask, "What did you do for your neighbor?" As baptized believers, we are confident in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. That very gift of grace, however, impels us to reach out to those in need. With Jesus as our model for Christian service, we are challenged to be "little Christs" as we use the many gifts we have been given to make a difference in the lives of those in need.

Discuss the following questions.

1. Assign each person (or form small groups) to read one of the following stories. In each case, look for the specific need being addressed. Name the group in each story that could be identified as the "least of these" referred to in Matthew 25:31-46.

- Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- Woman at the well (John 4:1-26)
- The lepers (Luke 17:11-19)
- The five thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

2. How do these biblical stories relate to the "least of these" in your community? What programs and activities in your congregation or community are inspired by these stories?

3. Make a list of the blessings and gifts God has given you to serve others. Continue the list throughout the time of your study together.

JOURNAL TIME

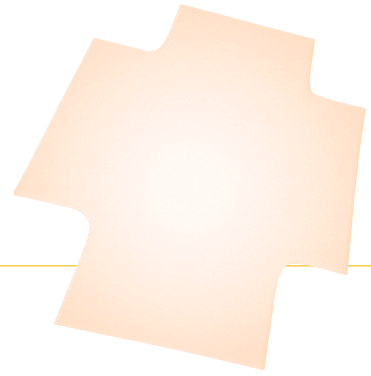
Journal time may be started during class time and completed later at home. It may be helpful to share some of your journal reflections.

Write down your thoughts and feelings about serving others. This could include a story about your participation in a servant event, your feelings about reaching out to those in need, or a description of the way in which one of the Bible passages spoke to you. Perhaps you remember a time when you felt that you were one of "the least of these." Describe your feelings about this experience.

to next page



Session 1 continued



Going

Final Thoughts

Encourage all to complete the Small Group Covenant. Suggest that participants read the covenant and sign it prayerfully. The covenant is meant to be a statement of intention, seeking God's blessing.

Small Group Covenant

1. I commit to being a part of this group for each of our meetings.
2. I will pray each day for each small group member by name.
3. I will treat all that is shared in the group as confidential.
4. I will invest time each week to pray, reflect, and write on the "journal time" text.
5. I will do one "action step" this week.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Action Steps

The Gospel lesson for this session, Matthew 25:31-46, challenges us to seek opportunities for making a difference in the life of someone else. Review the scriptures used in this session. As you work and play in the week to come, be aware of the ways in which these scriptures relate to your life or to people in your neighborhood and community. Explore who "the least of these" are. If possible, check with your pastor or a leader in your congregation to learn about the ways in which your congregation serves those in need. Be prepared to share some of your findings when the group meets again.

CLOSING PRAYER

Go around the circle and ask each person to name one of the gifts or blessings named in response to question #3 (p.5). Allow each person to respond as you begin the following prayer.

Dear God, thank you for (After each person has responded, participants then read aloud together:) Help us to keep our eyes and hearts open to opportunities for Christian service to "the least of these" in our neighborhood and community in the coming week. Be with us in all that we do and say as we pray the words that you taught us....Our Father...(Lord's Prayer)...Amen.

Session 2

'For if you keep silence at such a time as this...'

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Encourage each person in turn to share one of the following.

1. Share any new insights or thoughts about Christian service that came to you during the past week.
2. Who did you identify as "the least of these" in your congregation and community? Where did you find them, how did you find them, and who are they?

Let's Pray

Loving God, thank you for watching over us and bringing us together. Send the power of your Holy Spirit to be with us and guide us in this place, at this time. Help us to better understand how we can serve by standing with those who are marginalized or who feel powerless. Challenge us to move beyond the place of self interest to the place where we work for equity and justice for all. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read the following aloud.

Meg, a member of First Lutheran Church, had been doing volunteer service at the county Senior Center for the past four years delivering meals-on-wheels. Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, she eagerly looked forward to greeting elderly folks in the community. As she arrived at the center on Wednesday afternoon, she saw John, the Center Director, standing with his arm around Kathy, one of the cooks, who was weeping. "Hi, John, is everything OK?" she asked tentatively. "Oh, hi, Meg," John sighed. "No, we got some terrible news from the State Division on Aging today. Our funding has been cut and we have to close our doors by February 1. We just don't know what to do." Meg couldn't help but think about Sarah, whose husband had just died; Oscar, the retired railroad

worker who lived with his daughter and her husband; Peggy, the retired schoolteacher who was house-bound; and all the other friends she had made delivering meals. She wondered what would happen to them. Suddenly, she had an idea. "You know, John," Meg said, "I remember when this happened in Crawford County last year. Concerned folks there came together, wrote letters to their legislator and kept their center open. I think I'll talk with my pastor at First Lutheran to see if we can get something organized. Please pray about this. I'll give you a call later this week and let you know what happens."

After prayer and discussions with the pastor, the chair of the Social Ministry Committee, and lay leaders of the church, First Lutheran decided to organize efforts to keep the Senior Center open. The congregation agreed to include this issue in their daily prayers and in the prayer of the church during Sunday worship. The Women's group, Saturday morning men's Bible study and the young adult group organized a letter writing campaign, while the director of Christian Education invited their state legislator to speak at a community forum held at the church. Members of the congregation and the Senior Center staff distributed literature in the community publicizing the meeting. The church van was used to take seniors, staff, and members of the community to talk with legislators in the capital. When the legislature reversed its decision, everyone met to celebrate the victory!

Discuss the following questions.

1. If something like this happened in your community, in what ways would you become involved?
2. What kinds of skills, talents, and resources did the congregation in this story use to organize and participate in this effort? What does their effort mean to you and your congregation?

to next page

Session 2 *continued*

BIBLE FOCUS *The Story of Esther*

Invite participants to read the story of Esther by dividing up the verses between the different characters as follows: Narrator, Esther, Mordecai, King Ahasuerus. Read all of Chapter 4, Chapter 5:1-8, and Chapter 7:1-4.

What does "advocacy" mean to you? An advocate speaks in support of another or stands with someone who is in need of assistance. Here are two wonderful examples of serving God by advocating for and with others. The members of First Lutheran supported and advocated with and on behalf of the senior citizens. Esther, although initially fearful, advocated for the lives of her people, after she was challenged to act by Mordicai (Esther 4:14).

Jesus supported and encouraged the sick, the needy, widows, those who were imprisoned, and all who society saw as the disenfranchised and powerless, including children. And while praying for his disciples, shortly before he was betrayed and arrested, Jesus also advocated on our behalf (John 17). In John 15:26, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come to his followers. He calls the Spirit the "advocate" (paraclete—literally "the one who comes alongside"). What does it mean to you to know that the Spirit of God is your advocate?

There are many examples of advocacy in the Bible.

Read several of these:

Abraham—Genesis 18:23-33

Boaz—Ruth 4:1-11

The Centurion—Matthew 8:5-13

Four friends—Mark 2:1-12

Paul—Ephesians 3:14

JOURNAL TIME

Reflect on a time when you were an advocate for someone else. This could have been for someone who was ill, a child who needed support at school, or someone in the community. What was easy? What was difficult? What gifts, talents and resources did you use serving as an advocate?

Take a few minutes to think about a time when

you may have needed an advocate. Did someone step forward to assist you? If so, how did you feel about this? If not, how did this make you feel?

Going

Final Thoughts

As we think about the ways God may be calling us to serve as advocates, it is important to remember that we are not alone. Through prayer, God calls and guides us. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are gifted to act and speak, and through others in our congregations and communities we are empowered to act together to lift those who sometimes feel voiceless and powerless.

Action Steps

Take a look at the people you identified as "the least of these" during last week's session. In the week ahead, pray about these people and the issues that may be affecting these members of your congregation and community. Identify ways in which you might be able to advocate for and with them. Make note of particular issues and organizations that support advocacy efforts in your community as you read the newspaper or hear news broadcasts during the week. Bring your findings to next week's gathering.

CLOSING PRAYER

Ask participants to name aloud one of the groups identified as "the least of these." Begin the following prayer.

Almighty God, we give thanks for the opportunity to be here, with this group today. We pray for [each participant names a group....] and ask that you strengthen them and surround them with your love. Give us your vision to see what is needed, courage to respond to the need, and joy in our hearts to celebrate your love as we continue to look for ways to serve you through serving others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Session 3

'...to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free...'

Gathering

Let's Get Acquainted

Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the study begins. Encourage each person in turn to share one of the following. You might start with your own sharing.

1. Take a few minutes to share your findings from last week's assignment. Name the issues that are affecting "the least of these" in your community and the names of organizations that advocate for others.
2. Name some of the *new* opportunities you see for serving in your congregation and community.

Let's Pray

Begin with prayer. Read the following aloud or speak a prayer of your choosing.

God of the ages, thank you for this day. Open our hearts and minds to the possibilities for serving that you set before us. Give us a clear understanding of ways to address those issues that have oppressed people for generations and threaten to oppress people for generations to come. We know we are blessed to be a blessing. Help us to see the ways we can share the talents, gifts and resources we have been given with all of your creation. All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

As Juan was washing his car, he glanced across the street at the new Community Ministry Center and waved at the teenagers who were waiting to be picked up. It's hard to believe that it's been three years since that building opened, he thought. I remember that day when I noticed another old chair had been left in the vacant lot in the midst of broken bottles, old tires, weeds, and litter and decided that it was time to get rid of the trash and do something useful with it. I began to pray about it, then visited with neighbors up and down the block, asking them for ideas and suggestions about ways we might be able to clean up and use the property.

The next week, I met with my pastor and shared my concerns about the littered vacant lot which was only two blocks from the church. I also mentioned that I had talked with the neighbors about what we might do with it. Pastor Elena listened attentively, then said, "You know, Juan, I've noticed how awful that lot looks myself and I've been praying about the ways our church could get involved with doing something about it. Would you be willing to help me get some folks here at the church together to talk about what we can do?"

Well, although I wasn't sure that I could do anything more than help pick up some of the trash because I'd never been on a committee or helped with much of anything except mowing the grass at the church, I said, "Yes!" And God blessed me in ways I never dreamed possible. It was the beginning of a very busy, tiring, and exciting time. That small working group at Zion met, prayed, and dreamed about what we needed in the community. We talked with neighbors, students, city council representatives, and other church and community groups. Then we decided to

to next page

Session 3 *continued*

build a Community Ministry Center in partnership with four other churches. The working group grew from five members at Zion, to many of the congregation's members, plus people from the community. With lots of hard work, planning, organizing, bake sales, chili suppers and community grants and support, God has certainly blessed us with a wonderful building and many programs that are benefitting the whole community. People who simply walked past Zion Lutheran Church for years, have become a part of our congregation. And, I have made so many new friends while I learned that I could do things I didn't even know I could do!

Who would have believed five years ago that the dirty, littered lot would become a home for a before-and after-school tutoring and mentoring program for elementary students, a job training site for high school students, and an activity center for seniors? I heard yesterday that members of Zion would be opening a community technology center with new computers and training classes next week. Working together, with God's blessing and guidance, the members at Zion Lutheran Church are confident that this important ministry will continue to make a difference in our congregation and the community.

Discuss the following.

1. In what ways would participating in an endeavor such as this be a blessing to your congregation? In what ways would it be a challenge?
2. In what ways has Juan been blessed by his participation in this effort?

BIBLE FOCUS *Luke 4:18-19*

In today's fast paced, quick response world, it's sometimes hard to think about effective ways of dealing with societal issues that have been with us since Jesus' time – homelessness, hunger, caring for the imprisoned, and those unable to care for themselves. Those same issues as well as many others including unemployment and illiteracy adversely affect so many

people that it almost seems pointless to try to do anything about them. So why should we try? Read Luke 4:18-19 aloud.

You might read the passage several times. Encourage all to share what the text is saying to them.

This passage is a proclamation of Jesus' ministry and, as a result of our baptism, our ministry as well. Just as Jesus led by example, healing the sick (John 4:46-54; Matthew 8:14-16; Luke 5:12-16; Mark 10:46-52) and feeding the hungry (Luke 9:10-17; Matthew 15:32-39). Jesus also trained his disciples to continue this work (Matthew 4:18-25; John 1:35-51). Jesus calls us to be in community, to work together, and to encourage each other while we serve those in need.

When we invest time, energy, and resources to address systemic societal issues, we encourage others just as they encourage us. With God's help, we can serve by developing long-range programs and continually training up new leaders who will bring new energy and ideas. We, too, can work "...to proclaim release to the captives...to let the oppressed go free..." as we build the kingdom of God.

Discuss the following.

1. What does it mean to be in a community called together to serve those in need?
2. In what ways does your congregation hold one another accountable as a community called to serve?

JOURNAL TIME

Think about a time that you were involved in a long-term project. This could be a service project or another kind of long-term effort. From left to right across the page, draw a line representing the highs and lows you experienced throughout the process, starting with the time when you first began to think about the project or were invited to participate. Jot down a brief note about what happened at each of the highs and lows. Then briefly answer the following questions:

to next page

Session 3 *continued*

What were your feelings at the beginning of the project? In the middle? In the later or end stages? What kept you focused? Recall if there was a time that you were discouraged or lost hope. How were you re-energized? List the names of the people who encouraged you along the way.

Going

Final Thoughts

While direct services provide immediate responses to critical needs and advocacy efforts are often issue driven, community organizing includes efforts intended to affect long-term systemic changes. Each of these aspects of service are equally important and necessary. And, no one of us can do it all! Faith gives us the assurance that God is with us in all that we do, prayer opens the lines of communication through which we receive guidance, and the Holy Spirit nourishes and strengthens us for loving service.

Action Steps

Covenant to pray daily, by name, for each of the members of the group. Add to your list of talents and gifts that you can share when you serve in your congregation and community.

Preparation for Next Week

Bring a copy of the daily newspaper with you to next week's gathering.

CLOSING PRAYER

Ask participants to look over their journal entry for today and choose one name from those who offered encouragement to include in the following prayer.

Lord, thank you for showing us how to love and serve our neighbors. Thank you for the cloud of witnesses you have sent to encourage us along the way, especially *[each participant names a person]*.....*[All continue to pray together]* Be with us this week, filling our hearts and lives with peace, joy, and a willingness to love and serve you in all that we say and do. We ask this as we pray...*[The Lord's Prayer...Our Father...]*.



Session 4

'Go in peace and serve the Lord'

Gathering

Be sure you have on hand, one section of the newspaper for each participant. (The papers can be from different days.) Make sure all feel welcome and are comfortable as the session begins. Encourage each person in turn to share one of the following.

Let's Get Acquainted

1. As a group, make a list of all the opportunities to provide direct services that you identified in your congregation and community. Include those ideas and programs which are already happening as well as new ideas. Make a second list of the opportunities and issues relating to advocacy. Make a third list of issues that are best addressed through long-term programs and planning as well as community organizations working on these issues. For additional ideas, see "Many Ways to Serve" on page 15.
2. Share any new insights relating to service and social ministry that you have had as a result of participating in this small group.

Let's Pray

Today's prayer will focus on topics from the newspaper you brought with you. Each person should have one section of the paper. Encourage each to take a few moments to look for the topics, issues or organizations relating to service or social ministry. When the group is ready, each person will share their discovery with the group and offer a brief prayer related to the item. End each segment of the prayer by saying, "Lord, in your mercy," and the group responds, "Hear our prayer."

Exercise adapted from Walking in Jesus' Path of Peace: Living Faithfully in a Violent World © 2001, Augsburg Fortress, p.9.

Growing

Read, or ask a volunteer to read, the following aloud.

While members of the youth group were planning their service projects, Pastor Tom noticed that Marcus, who was usually a bundle of energy, sat slumped quietly in his chair. "Hey Marcus," Pastor asked, "what kind of service project do you want to do?" "Oh, I don't know," Marcus said sullenly. "Everyone here is talking about doing all kinds of stuff and about the gifts they have. I don't think I have any gifts. I can't sing; I can't draw; I don't like to write; I hate to do yard work. I'm just not sure there's anything I can do."

"Are you kidding?" asked Sherisa. "You're the best with little kids! They loved you when we helped out with child care at the last Parents' Support Group meeting. Don't you remember?"

"Well, yes, but . . .," said Marcus hesitantly. "But, nothin'," said Sherisa. "I know lots of guys who wouldn't be caught dead playing with toddlers and holding babies! You should really think about volunteering some time at the preschool." "Marcus, I'd have to agree with Sherisa," said Pastor Tom. "I think your ability to work with younger children is a gift!"

"I guess I never thought much about it," Marcus said. "I do have a good time with those kids. Pastor, sign me up to help with child care during the monthly Parents' Support Group meeting and at the preschool on Wednesdays after school." "Will do, Marcus," replied Pastor Tom, "and thanks for your willingness to share your gifts!"

to next page

Session 4 *continued*

Discuss as a group.

1. Why is the "I can't do anything" response to a call to service so common? When have you heard (said) it?
2. How can you encourage others (and yourself) to be more willing to use gifts in service to others?

BIBLE FOCUS | *Corinthians 12:4-11*

Read the text aloud and perhaps more than once. Ask all to share what the text means to them as they consider God's call to serve others.

In the past three weeks, we've talked about the many options for service and began to list the gifts and talents we've been given to use in serving others. What are the ways in which each of the gifts listed in this text can be used to serve others?

This passage is another reminder that there are many ways to serve and many gifts to use. In our society, which thrives on competition, we are constantly told who is the "best," who has the "most," who is the "greatest." But in this text, Paul reminds us that Christian living is not a competition. All of the gifts and talents we have are gifts from God through the Holy Spirit that we can use for the common good.

One of our greatest challenges, however, is to recognize our own gifts. Because society does not label us as the best, the brightest, the most talented, or the most successful, we sometimes have difficulty naming and claiming the gifts with which we have been blessed. And, sometimes, these gifts are so much a part of who we are as individuals, we can't even see them as gifts.

We can continue to identify the many gifts and talents we have by completing written tools or surveys designed to help us assess our gifts and talents (see *Opening Your Spiritual Gifts* reference on this page). We can also think about the activities we enjoy, the things that give us satisfaction and pleasure. Our friends, families, and even strangers can help us identify

our gifts, too. Do you remember the last time someone thanked you for something you did, or told you that you had done a good job? The response was probably a result of the way in which you shared a particular gift, talent, or skill.

Do you like to spend time meeting and greeting others? Do you have the gift of hospitality? Do you like to organize parties? Do you like to talk on the telephone? Do you prefer to spend time alone, meditating and praying? Do you like to write letters? Talk about how these gifts and others like them can be used to serve God through serving others. How do you plan to use your gifts in service?

JOURNAL TIME

If the group purchased copies of *Opening Your Spiritual Gifts*, (see below) take time to complete these now. Jot down some words or phrases that describe the way you feel about your experience as part of this study group. In pairs, read the list that you have been compiling of personal gifts and talents used to serve others. Can you add any others? Make a list of the ways you can use these gifts to serve in your congregation and community, including Lutheran social service agencies and other community organizations.

Consider using a self-scoring gifts inventory such as *Opening Your Spiritual Gifts*, Neil Boese, Patricia Haller (Chicago, IL: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for Congregational Ministries, 2001). Available from Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648. (6-0000-2932-2) 12/\$12.00 plus shipping. The inventory is also on-line at www.elca.org/eteam/assessment/OpenSpiritGifts.htm

Session 4 *continued*

Going

Final thoughts

As baptized believers, we are called to serve in the world. God has given us the gifts, talents and resources to care for both members of our families and congregations and those in the world who are seen as "the least of these."

In pairs, encourage participants to share brief responses to the following questions:

1. If you are not actively involved in social ministry through service in your congregation and community, do you see a place or an activity where you could become involved? Do you know of someone who will pray about this with you? Are you willing to make a commitment to serve?
2. If you are actively involved in social ministry through service in your congregation and community, do you see opportunities to invite others to join you? Do you know of someone who will pray about this with you? Are there ways in which you can strengthen your commitment?

Many who were awaiting the Messiah expected a powerful king who would serve as ruler over all. Imagine how surprised they must have been to see instead, a carpenter whose life was dedicated to serving others. This is our challenge as baptized believers: to serve all of God's people humbly, willingly, and lovingly.

Several years ago, the young people attending a retreat at Briarwood Lutheran Ministries in Texas added three words to the response at the conclusion of worship. When the worship leader dismissed the group with "Go in Peace. Serve the Lord" their response was an enthusiastic "Thanks be to God -- and we will!" How will you choose to respond to the challenge to "go in peace and serve the Lord"?

CLOSING PRAYER

In preparation for the closing prayer, have each participant share how they plan to use the insights they have gained during this small group study. You might conclude with this prayer or another of your choosing:

We give you thanks, O God, for all the blessings of this day and for the time we have shared together in the past four weeks. We thank you for the gift of friendship and for the abundance of talents and resources you have given us that we might serve others. We ask that you continue to be with us, guiding us in all we say and do. Help us not only to see the needs of others, but to faithfully and joyfully use what we have been given in service to others. All this we ask, as we pray the Lord's Prayer: Our Father... Amen.

Leader: Go in peace and serve the Lord.

Participants: Thanks be to God—and we will!



Many Ways to Serve

Here is a starter list of ways to serve in your congregation and community.

EDUCATION

- Establish a tutoring program
- Provide English as a Second Language classes
- Provide adult literacy tutoring
- Advocate and work for proper financing of schools
- Offer parenting classes or support groups
- Provide a certified preschool
- Organize a community technology center

ENVIRONMENT

- Plant trees
- Recycle office paper and bulletins
- Limit or eliminate polystyrene products
- Use ceramic mugs at congregational events
- Advocate for clean air or water legislation
- Investigate low-maintenance landscaping alternatives
- Hold recycling drives

FOOD

- Contribute to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal
- Donate to a local food pantry
- Provide food baskets for families in need
- Open a soup kitchen
- Deliver Meals on Wheels
- Take meals to families dealing with illness or to new mothers
- Collect a Bread for the World offering of letters
- Study the complexities of world food distribution

HEALTH CARE

- Offer AIDS awareness and prevention programs
- Provide teen pregnancy education and/or support
- Provide drug awareness education
- Begin twelve-step support groups
- Start a parish nurse program
- Study stress and offer programs on dealing with it
- Organize a health fair for the community
- Hold a blood drive
- Encourage people to register as organ donors
- Advocate for adequate health care for all people
- Provide used medical equipment for short-term needs
- Organize an exercise program

HOMELESSNESS

- Build homes with Habitat for Humanity
- Make sleeping bags for people who are homeless
- Establish a homeless ministry at your church
- Collect clothing, especially warm outerwear
- Put together kits of toiletries for homeless people
- Advocate for low-income housing

MEN

- Start support groups for men
- Support batterer recovery programs for men
- Advocate men's health care issues

PARENTING

- Provide parenting support groups
- Provide child care for parents at job interviews
- Establish a Parents-Day-Out group

PEACE AND JUSTICE

- Advocate reducing gun-related crimes
- Study the effects of militarism on global living
- Drive children to visit incarcerated parents
- Support after-prison care programs
- Provide transportation to prisons for family visits.
- Participate in, support, or start a prison or jail ministry
- Write letters to legislators advocating for peace

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Study the accessibility of congregational facilities
- Provide hearing enhancement equipment in worship
- Support the Americans with Disabilities Acts
- Provide large-print or Braille materials

POVERTY

- Hold a rummage sale for maternity and infant's clothing
- Make quilts or kits for Lutheran World Relief
- Help settle a refugee family
- Study local and global root causes of poverty
- Begin vocational training or job placement programs
- Support or start a transitional housing program

SENIORS

- Provide senior care in the congregation's facility
- Research the special needs of older adults
- Establish an adopt-a-grandparent program
- Provide secretarial (bill-paying, correspondence) services
- Advocate for better transportation, housing, etc.

WOMEN

- Support a shelter for battered women
- Advocate anti-stalking laws
- Establish a rape or crisis hot line
- Offer self-defense or personal safety classes
- Poll women for their heart-felt concerns
- Provide transportation for women to prenatal classes
- Provide child care for women enrolled in classes

YOUTH

- Open a coffee house/youth drop-in center
- Sponsor a community sports program for youth
- Begin before- and after-school programs
- Organize activities for school vacation days
- Provide certified day care
- Establish a youth hot line or drop-in counseling center
- Promote Big Brother and Big Sister programs
- Support those seeking to be adoptive or foster parents

OTHER IDEAS *(Add your own ideas here.)*

Participate in a servant event

Adapted from "Fifty-some Ideas" in *To Serve as Jesus Served: A Guide to Social Ministry for Congregations*, ©1994 Augsburg Fortress, p. 56-57.

For a suggested resource listing to accompany this study, go to www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources



SERVE *Living Faith in Daily Life*

a small group study on service and social ministry

LIVING FAITH • ELCA-wide Call to Discipleship



Writers: Loretta Horton, Jean Morehouse

Editors: Diane Monroe, Ted Schroeder

Designer: Sharon Schuster

Copyright © 2003, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631. 800/638-3522. Permission is granted to photocopy this resource provided copies are for local use only and each copy carries all copyright acknowledgements found in the publication.

Manufactured in USA.

Unless noted otherwise, all scripture quotations are from *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright ©1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and used by permission.

Produced by the Christian Education team of the Division for Congregational Ministries. Multiple copies of this resource can be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress, 800/328-4648 and asking for item code 6-0001-6914-0 \$1.25 each, plus shipping.

This resource and other materials are also available at www.elca.org/dcm/christian_education/resources