

Pentecost, Prayer and Power



Connect the Pentecost story (Acts 2:1–13) with three areas in which we can be a blessing to one another and to our community: women’s health, violence against women, and clearing the “red tape” that keeps people from being fully empowered.

Scripture and reflection

Leader: Good [*morning/afternoon/evening*], and welcome! We will begin our program on Pentecost, prayer and power with a reading from Acts of the Apostles.

Reader 1: Acts 1:1–8

Leader: Let’s consider the latter part of the passage [*reader’s name*] just read for us. After the resurrection, the disciples had been told to stay in Jerusalem and that they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” Not understanding what this meant, they asked, “Will you restore the kingdom of Israel then? Will things go back to what they were?” To which Jesus said, “It is not for you to know.” Not exactly what the disciples wanted to hear.

Then comes a promise and an expanded call—to *global* mission: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Can you imagine packing your bags for *that* trip, all the time wondering what this “power” would amount to?

You and I are in somewhat the same place today. We live in a time of great change and fear and are not sure what to do next. We do a lot of waiting. We have conversations like the disciples had: When will things get back to *normal*—whatever normal means to us? What are we supposed to do?

The disciples' experience gives us some clues to the answers to our questions. They were told to wait in Jerusalem until the "power" came, but what is most interesting is that they were told to remain in Jerusalem *together*. Why? Because there is support in community in times of change and uncertainty. God has given us to each other for mutual support.

The disciples also modeled for us one powerful way in which this support happens: through continuous prayer. Prayer is a great gift to one's self and to the community.

Power through prayer

With this reminder of the need for prayer and its power, we can lift up three areas in which Women of the ELCA can be a blessing to one another and to the community. Those areas are women's health, violence against women, and clearing the "red tape" that keeps people from being fully empowered.

(If you have not already passed out the handout, which is the last page of this document, do so now.)

The handout you have outlines the three areas that call for our prayer commitment. Later, you will be asked to tear off one or more of the images at the bottom symbolizing an area in need of prayer, write your name on the back of it and put it in the [basket] here on the table. Please note that for now, you are being asked only to commit to prayer. The "additional ministry options" can be considered at another time and are merely suggestions should you want to go further. Let's review the three areas.

The first area, represented by a red heart, supports Women of the ELCA's health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. The initiative is grounded in the understanding that care of self creates an important foundation for carrying out the mission to which God has called us: the mission of sharing the gospel.

The second area, represented by a red thread, supports efforts to address violence against women. During the Ecumenical Decade for Churches in Solidarity with Women, the Red Thread Project

was a way to show support for efforts addressing violence against women. Church members were invited to tie a red thread around their left wrist as a reminder that some among us are not living in safety and that the global community also needs our witness in the face of violence.

How to Use This Resource

Use this program in a small group setting, in the season of Pentecost or any time.

The leader should provide copies of the handout to all participants, preferably in color. Select a few participants to read the "reader" parts, and give them copies of the entire program.

Set the seating in a circle, with a break for entering and leaving every 5 or so chairs as the circle grows. Place a small table in the center of the circle and cover it with a red cloth. Place a bowl of water, three tall, thick candles and a basket or some other appropriate container on the table. Light the candles at the start of the program. You might also want to sprinkle construction-paper red flames around the table (on top and on the floor).

If you are using this program in a retreat setting, consider inviting an expert in each of the areas—women's health, domestic violence, and social services—to give a presentation.

If you want to sing a hymn at the end of the offering, place hymnals on the chairs ahead of time.

Participants will be asked to select one or more of the three areas to pray for, write their name on an image and place it in the basket. At this time, participants are asked only to commit to prayer in the area(s) they select.

Later, leaders can invite one woman from each of the red heart, red thread and red tape groups to convene their group. The convener's goals will be to help participants (1) get to know one another, (2) discuss their experience praying for the area they selected, and (3) discuss the "additional ministry options" on their handouts and discern whether they will follow up on one or more of these options. If so, the follow-up could be done as a program option for your entire women's group.



The third area, represented by red tape, reminds us that huge numbers of people face seemingly endless “red tape” and are frustrated in their efforts to get help—including immigrants, people seeking asylum in the United States, women and children living in poverty, those dealing with foreclosure and homelessness, older adults without family members who can help them and those who are struggling to get back on their feet following a disaster, to name some. “Red tape”—our term for those things that stand in the way of getting something done—keeps people from living fully.

Scripture and reflection

That’s a lot of need, you might be thinking. Indeed it is. Like the first disciples whose witness territory was expanded from Jerusalem to “the ends of the earth,” ours too is a *global* mission. We know we are part of a global community, connected through technology, commerce and more. Like the first disciples, we need to hear again *how* we are to carry out this global ministry. Listen as [*person’s name*] reads from Acts 2.

Reader 2: Acts 2:1–4

Leader: In the midst of all our questions, God continues to give us the answer: The Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out what we are called to do, here and throughout the world. Maybe the “new tongue” we have to learn is relying on the Spirit to teach us to pray. Perhaps we need to be reminded that through our baptism, God has given us the power to witness. And maybe we need to be more attuned to the issues we are praying about so that our prayer can be better focused.

As you take on this request to remain steadfast in prayer while awaiting God’s direction for the future, you are equipped with the power of the Holy

Spirit. You are able to boldly bring yourself and the community, whatever the need, to God in prayer with the assurance that the prayers of the righteous, those whom God has redeemed, are heard.

I invite you now to take a moment in silent prayer to consider which of the three areas of prayer you will remain steadfast in this year. Then tear off the image representing one or more areas and write your name on the back. When you are ready, place them in the [*basket*]. Then dip your fingers into the water and make the sign of the cross on your forehead as a reminder of your baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that empowers you for this ministry of prayer.

(Play a Pentecost hymn in the background during the offering. Give enough time for all to return to their seats, and then continue.)

Closing prayer

Leader: Let us pray. Most gracious God, we praise you for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives so that we may give witness to the life-giving work of Jesus, our Redeemer. You have blessed our lives with the gospel and you give us to one another in community for mutual support. Receive our offerings as gifts of grateful hearts. Bless us with the power of your presence and the presence of your power as we commit to intentional prayer. Where we are fearful, give us peace; where we are complacent, show us the realities; when we are unsure how to pray, teach us; and when we have answered, let us rejoice in your mercy, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Thank you for your commitment to prayer. God bless you with God’s power in all you need to be faithful in your commitment.

(If desired, sing a closing hymn.)

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Pentecost, Prayer and Power Handout

The story of Pentecost is the story of God giving the disciples the power to be witnesses. God gave them what they needed to carry out their mission.

You too are equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit. In the light of Pentecost, you are asked to commit to praying for those who need empowerment in the areas of health, violence and working through systems that limit empowerment.

As you engage in prayer you may experience growth in your prayer life, new awareness of needs and how to meet them and perhaps even a call to a new area in which God wants you to use your gifts. Go with it. Rejoice in God's gifts. Listen for God's direction.

If you find that you want to do more than pray, consider one or more of the additional ministry options.

On this page are three areas that need your prayers. Choose one or more, and then tear off the image at the bottom that depicts the prayer need and write your name on the back. Place it in the basket at the appropriate time.

Yes! I will pray for the health of women and girls so that we are able to carry out God's call to mission in the world.

Additional ministry options:

- Promote the Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls initiative in your congregation. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org.
- Host a Healthy Heart Fair in your congregation. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org.
- Start one or more health activity groups for women and girls in your congregation: biking, bowling, walking and so forth. Invite young women and girls to be part of the planning for these intergenerational groups.

Yes! I will pray for victims and perpetrators of violence against women.



Additional ministry options:

- Hold a forum on domestic violence. October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Distribute red threads with information on the reason for wearing it on one's wrist.
- Check with local women's shelters to see what their needs are, and if you can help meet them, organize to do so. Meet the women, too.
- Provide education on handling conflict and where to call for help if being domestically abused. Place phone numbers in your church rest rooms, on bulletin boards and in articles for your congregation's newsletter.

Yes! I will pray for those who, facing endless "red tape," are frustrated in their efforts to get help: immigrants, people seeking asylum in the United States, women and children living in poverty, those dealing with foreclosure and homelessness, older adults without family members who can help them and those who are struggling to get back on their feet following a disaster, to name some.



Additional ministry options:

- Talk with social service agencies and your community's health and human services department to determine the needs of people in your area working through forms and processes. See what you can do to help alleviate the frustration by volunteering to be available to anyone who needs your help.
- Where you see a pattern of frustration, write your legislators or agency leadership, sharing what you've seen and requesting changes in the system to benefit the person in need of help.

