LOOKING FOR A SERMON SERIES OR SMALL GROUP STUDY THIS LENT?

Our five-week series, Sensing Hope, is designed to engage your congregation in meaningful discussion, reflection and hands-on activities to share God’s love with their neighbors around the world.

- TOUCHING HOPE: Meeting urgent needs during COVID-19
- HEARING HOPE: Spreading hope after the Beirut explosion
- SEEING HOPE: Loving communities after back-to-back hurricanes in Honduras
- SMELLING HOPE: Overcoming generational poverty in Zambia
- TASTING HOPE: Caring for refugees in Syria

Download resources at lwr.org/congregations
Dear Partner in Ministry,

I pray you are finding renewed energy at the start of the new year, despite the continuing challenges of COVID-19. The past year brought so much hardship and I know your congregation is committed to helping your neighbors in need around the world and here at home.

Thank you. Your support is so powerful. For suffering families, your congregation’s love is life-changing and lifesaving.

At Lutheran World Relief, we’ve assembled a team of pastors and lay leaders to help you lead your congregation into deeper connection with our neighbors. We want to help you tell the stories of God’s love in action around the world, and we join you in the calling to inspire deeper faith and commitment in your own congregation.

Be sure to take advantage of the opportunities presented in this edition of God’s Love in Action:

- Get your congregation’s hands busy making a real and tangible difference by making Personal Care Kits this Lent. Be sure to check out our accompanying sermon series and study guides.
- Invite your community to join you. Read the story of how one small congregation made a big impact and inspired generosity.
- Identify an LWR Ambassador for your congregation. Learn why Matt, our newest Ambassador, hears God calling him to this important work.

All of these resources — and more — can be found at lwr.org/congregations.

We are so grateful to be your partner in ministry.

In Christ,

Daniel V. Speckhard
President and CEO

Ambassador

Meet Matt Griffiths, LWR Ambassador

Matt Griffiths is always at the ready. At the age of 18, he started volunteering with the Red Cross to serve people around his community who were suffering from home fires, flooding and other crises. Immediately he knew he had found his calling, and he hasn’t looked back since.

“When you’re called to do something, God just kind of puts you where you need to be,” he says. “There are a lot of problems in the world and not enough people to help. That’s why I want to get involved.”

That “send me” spirit is what drew Matt to become the newest LWR Ambassador.

Recently, Matt was visiting Lutheran World Relief’s website and stumbled across the program, which sparked his interest immediately. He has seen LWR’s disaster relief work in action many times in the field, and he’s been longing for a way to be more directly connected.

“I’m so excited because there are lots of people who want to get involved in helping others, but don’t know where to start,” he explains. “The [LWR Ambassadors] program is a great way to introduce people to what’s happening and how they can support it, without having to go to the field themselves.”

A longtime member of Immanuel Lutheran Church in his hometown of Broken Arrow, Okla., he looks forward to sharing stories of this important, lifesaving work with his congregation and community and spurring them to put God’s love into action to make a difference.

Thanks, Matt, for so faithfully following your calling!

Is there someone in your congregation who has a passion for God’s people and an eagerness to serve – a young adult eager to make a difference? A longtime quilter who loves LWR? They might be called to be an LWR Ambassador — a special member of our team who connects local churches to LWR’s work to share God’s love with neighbors in need.

Learn more at lwr.org/congregations.

PS: One more thing – we want to hear from you!

How can we best support your ministry? Please take a minute to complete and return the enclosed survey, or go to lwr.org/churchsurveyA.
When we celebrated Easter last year, few of us could predict what the rest of 2020 would hold. We didn’t know how long our church doors would remain closed. We didn’t know just how much our technological skills (and our patience) would be stretched and tested over the coming seasons. We couldn’t know what it would be like to weather the wilderness of a global pandemic.

Meanwhile, this year of challenge, loss and uncertainty hit our poorest neighbors around the world even harder.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought more than a disease to our most vulnerable neighbors. In some communities it has meant hunger, as they’ve been cut off from food, seeds and critical farming supplies. In others, it has meant getting sick or dying from malaria, HIV or childbirth because health centers are stretched too thin — or because people are afraid to seek the help they need, fearing they will catch the coronavirus at the hospital.

The past year also brought devastating disasters, one after another. A massive explosion in Beirut killed hundreds and left 300,000 homeless. Back-to-back hurricanes in Central America decimated the crops and modest homes of people who were already living in grinding poverty. In fact, the punishing effects of war and poverty on our most forsaken neighbors did not ease up in the face of COVID-19 — they only worsened.

**Put God’s love in action this Lent**

Because of these realities, many of us are approaching Lent this year with heavy hearts. Our congregations are restless; we want justice. We want to be the hands and feet of Christ for our brothers and sisters. After a year of feeling stifled, we want to DO SOMETHING to make a real and tangible difference in a world groaning for hope and relief.
At Lutheran World Relief, we want to help your congregation do just that. Between COVID-19 and the many challenges of 2020, the need for LWR Personal Care Kits around the world has grown and intensified. Meanwhile, our warehouse shelves are almost empty.

To support your ministry during Lent, we’ve prepared a series of congregational and small group resources to help you lead your congregation to love their neighbors around the world during this sacred time. As they engage in powerful stories of God’s love in action, people of every age can share that love by making LWR Personal Care Kits — whether in individual families or in groups. (Visit our website for tips on making group collection and assembly events safe and socially distant.)

Please visit lwr.org/congregations to access our Season of Hope: Lent tools and resources.

In addition to making Personal Care Kits, your congregation’s love can go even further with a financial gift to help us reach the families who need these critical items. Please join us to make Lent 2021 a Season of Hope for our neighbors around the world.

Until your love reaches every neighbor.
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A Special Gift for LWR Quilters and Kit Makers

For three generations, dedicated Lutherans have extended God’s love around the world by providing more than 27 million quilts and kits to their neighbors in need.

To show our gratitude, we’ve created the Quilt & Kit Affinity Pin as a special gift for our faithful LWR quilters and kit makers.

Please encourage those in your congregation to pre-order their FREE PIN to let their love shine!

Visit lwr.org/congregations for details.
When Pastor Dwight Anderson heard the initial news that thousands of LWR quilts and kits were believed to have been destroyed in the blast that shook the port and surrounding area of Beirut, Lebanon, he knew he had to let his quilters know. As he arrived at their work room in the basement of Nelsonville Lutheran Church in rural Wisconsin, he announced, “Elders, we have a problem.”

The faithful quilters took the news hard. They had prayed over every one of the quilts they had sent. This was personal to them, and their hearts hurt for the people who wouldn’t be receiving their love and comfort. But like thousands of other quilters around the country, they promptly got to work to replace what was believed to have been lost.

But they didn’t stop there. “There was no question in their minds. They were also going to send money to Beirut,” Pastor Dwight shared. The congregation council promptly gathered and voted to send $10,000 immediately to LWR. What’s so amazing about this? Pre-pandemic, Nelsonville Lutheran worshipped with an average of just 56 people each week.

Pastor Gretchen Anderson, Dwight’s wife and co-pastor of the Three Rivers Parish which includes Nelsonville Lutheran and Peace Lutheran Churches, believes it is the foci of the congregations over the years that continually leads them to moments of generosity like this. “It takes courageous leadership to rivet a congregation’s focus beyond the immediate, self-focused needs,” says Pastor Gretchen. “But that courage comes from the faith of the congregation and from points of inspiration among those who have heard the call and are responding.”

Not only did the people of The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish hear the call, but they also shared the need with the wider community. They encouraged additional financial gifts and urged people to get behind the kit making enterprises they were undertaking. Soon community members not affiliated with either congregation were dropping off components for School Kits and Personal Care Kits. Nelsonville’s generosity was contagious.

By the end of the year, these two small congregations and their community joined efforts to send 467 quilts, 663 kits and over $15,000! Their pastors believe it is all about cementing a community identity as a faithful identity. “We are not alone in this world. We are not in competition with the megachurch fifteen miles away. We are called to be faithful in this place, and it is impossible to see our little corner of the world as all there is to think about and concern ourselves with.”

We’re so grateful for The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish, for Pastors Dwight and Gretchen Anderson, and for you — the countless leaders of congregations of every size across the country — called to be faithful in the places to which God has called you. Thank you for the courageous ways you lead your congregation to share their love with our neighbors around the world.

By the way, there’s one more thing Pastor Gretchen insisted on sharing. “Don’t forget — Nelsonville will be incredibly uncomfortable with being lifted up — but if you tell them ‘it’s for the good of others,’ they will look down at their feet and stop their protestations.”

We assure you, Nelsonville Lutheran and all the other humble Lutherans who stand by their side, it is all for the good of others. Until your love reaches every neighbor.