

# EVEN MORE BOUNDLESS

bannerblue.org  
Supplemental  
Resources for  
the 2022 ELCA  
Youth Gathering

## Service Learning Supplement Introduction

To help groups prepare for the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering, Wittenberg University and bannerblue.org have created three extra resources that show us how God's love is even more boundless than we imagined. These resources are not meant to replace the official Getting Ready materials. They add new perspectives to aid in understanding just how boundless God's love really is by engaging art and service to learn more about **love**, **creation**, **forgiveness**, **invitation**, and **promise**.

These supplements can be added on to the official 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering curriculum, or used any way that you like:

- **Coloring Pages** - one for each theme
- **Service Learning Projects** - one for each unit/theme
- **Artistic Engagements** - one for each unit/theme

## Service Learning

We have provided five potential service learning projects for you and your youth to work on: **Using Person-First Language**; **Recycling and Religion**; **Medical Debt Relief**; **Sending Cards of Support**; **Mental Health Workshop**. These projects are meant to be completed before you attend the 2022 ELCA Youth Gathering but you may use them however you like. This resource includes recommendations on how to complete the projects as well as who might lead the projects and how to talk about them with your church and its leaders. Remember that the goal of service learning is to challenge youth to gain new perspectives and to live out their faith while answering the question, "Why is this important to me, to God, to my community?" which in turn also answers the question, "Why am I important?"

# Service Learning:

- **Using Person-First Language**

Supplement for Unit 1: [Boundless Love](#)

Explore more inclusive language at your church for those experiencing illness or living with disability.

- **Recycling and Religion**

Supplement for Unit 2: [Boundless Creation](#)

Commit or re-commit to recycling and sustainability at church to help create the world that God intended.

- **Medical Debt Relief**

Supplement for Unit 3: [Boundless Forgiveness](#)

Raise funds to forgive the medical debt of your neighbors and set them free from that burden.

- **Sending Cards of Support**

Supplement for Unit 4: [Boundless Invitation](#)

Write and send cards to people in your community.

- **Mental Health Workshop**

Supplement for Unit 5: [Boundless Promise](#)

Host a mental health workshop, guided by a professional, in order to learn more and better care for others.

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## Unit 1

We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Using Person-First Language

Person-first Language strives to make clear that a person is not defined by their diagnosis or disability and not identified by a diagnosis or disability in a negative way. The ELCA Disability Ministries Advisory Team and Coordinator for Disability Ministries, Carol A. Johnson of the



Domestic Mission unit of the ELCA Churchwide Office has prepared an **excellent introduction** to Person-first Language and its use in the church. There is also a nice **blog post** to help get you started.



### What does Person-first Language have to do with Boundless Love?

When Paul proclaims in Ephesians 3 that he wants us to know all about Christ's love, we could also swap in the word "feel" for "know." People feel and know that they are loved in a lot of different ways. A church communicates to people how much they are loved in a lot of different ways. Using preferred pronouns is essential for helping people know and feel God's love, but they aren't the only words we identify people with. A church refers to and identifies people in prayers, newsletters, emails, and much more and can sometimes fall into a habit of using language that does not help people feel or know that they are loved. Person-first language is all about sharing God's boundless love.

### Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be learning about Person-first Language and how it might be used at church, and invite the leaders to join in.
- 2) Dedicate time to reading about, learning about, and practicing Person-first Language.
- 3) Empower your youth to brainstorm church language that should be Person-first Language:
  - a. Consider all the prayers used at worship services.
  - b. Consider language used for a "Prayer Chain."

- c. Consider language used for newsletters.
  - d. Consider language used in emails and text messages.
- 4) Craft new Person-first Language wherever needed (see examples below).
  - 5) Present the new Person-first Language to your worship planners, staff members, or anyone else who should see what your youth have come up with.
  - 6) In any communications to the whole congregation about an integration of Person-first Language, stress the work that the youth have done and even use testimony from the youth about what the new language and the process of writing it has meant to them.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you should consider inviting someone at your church who is representative of people who live with a disability or illness, a pastor, your worship planning committee chair, and the person who prepares your church bulletins.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to be a place where ALL people are welcome. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that the church has seen them and appreciates them. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but it will take some time and effort and we may have to convince some people so I'll need your help to get this project going, but it will all be worth it to ensure that everyone in our church is treated like they are a person first."

### **Here are some Person-first Language transition examples:**

**Before:** "Today we pray for the sick and homebound."

**After:** "Today we pray for people who live with an illness and people who worship from home."

**Before:** "This week we are adding Jerome who is going blind and Nancy who is going deaf to our prayer chain."

**After:** "This week our prayer chain will also include Jerome as he adjust to life with blindness and Nancy as she adjusts to life with deafness."

**Before:** "On November 22<sup>nd</sup> our church will be creating 'thinking of you' cards for all our shut-ins."

**After:** "On November 22<sup>nd</sup> our church will be creating 'thinking of you' cards for members who worship and serve God from home.

**Before:** "Christ Lutheran Church offers a handicap ramp for all the disabled."

**After:** "Christ Lutheran Church offers a ramp entrance to everyone, including those who live with a disability."

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## Unit 2

We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Recycling and Religion

One of the first ways to help the planet that we learn as kids is how to recycle. But, reduce, reuse, and recycle aren't the only important "re" words. We also have redemption, resurrection, rescue, relief, renewal, religion, etc. We want you to help your congregation see that recycling isn't just something nice that you do if it's not too much trouble—recycling is an important faith practice.

### **What does Recycling have to do with Boundless Creation?**

We hope this one is pretty obvious. When God blesses Eve and Adam with "dominion" over the earth in Genesis 1, the Hebrew word used is the same word that the psalmists use to describe God's relationship with humanity. The God that we hope for—and witness in the person of Jesus—is the model for our relationship with creation. On the flip side of that logic, however we treat the earth is how we should expect God to treat us. Do you want to be an exploiter and exploited? Do you want to be caretaker and be taken care of? Through this lens, recycling definitely isn't just something nice that you do when it's convenient. Recycling is a way that you live out your faith and your relationship with God the creator. The recycling symbol can even be a religious symbol!

### **Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:**

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be taking a serious look at recycling.
- 2) Think together with your youth about all the "re" words of faith and how they connect to the "re" words of creation care. For example, what "re"s were involved with Jesus' story?
- 3) Have the youth inventory all the things that your church consumes on a weekly basis and how many of those things are handled sustainably. For example...
  - a. Are paper bulletins recycled? Could your service(s) go paperless?
  - b. Do you use reusable, recyclable, or compostable cups and plates or single use items?
- 4) Create recommendations for how to improve your church's recycling and sustainability efforts.

- 5) Use the Recycling + Religion template below to make faith-inspired signs for your recycling bins. Encourage youth to share this template with friends of other faith traditions too.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you should consider inviting your deacon or pastor, your property board committee chair, and the person who purchases your supplies.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to live in harmony with what God created. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but you will probably have to convince people this is important to you and they'll be worried about the cost, but you can inform people about how sustainability is actually cost saving, and the way that God intended for us to live!"



You can find a full-page printout of the template and hi-res versions of the re-Spirit, re-Creator, and re-Jesus examples online at [bannerblue.org/reart](http://bannerblue.org/reart)



**Unit 3** We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Medical Debt Relief

Do you think you can raise a million dollars for something? You might be surprised at what you can do. During the past year we've all come to realize just how essential the healthcare system is to a modern society. We need nurses, doctors, technicians, and all the life-saving treatments they can provide. Sometimes those treatments are free, like a Covid-19 vaccine. Sometimes those treatments come with huge, and even surprise, price tags. Not everyone has the means to pay for healthcare, especially when huge bills come up. That's where you can help. Medical Debt Relief programs pay for other people's healthcare bills for pennies on the dollar. That means \$10,000 can pay for \$1,000,000 in medical debt—changing countless lives.

## **What does Medical Debt Relief have to do with Boundless Forgiveness?**

Ask yourself this, if your friend had to cut back from three meals a day to two in order to save up money to pay off a surprise medical bill of \$1,000 for essential treatment, and someone gave you the chance to forgive that debt just by paying \$10, would you pay that ten dollars? You totally would! Would you strike the same bargain to forgive the debt if it wasn't your friend but rather a stranger? You totally should again! When Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son, about the parent who is willing to forgive regardless of the child's behavior, he's giving us a template for how to weigh the cost of forgiveness against its benefit. Sometimes forgiveness is easy to give and has a big impact. With that in mind, why in the world would we not forgive? Sometimes forgiveness is hard to give and takes a lot of effort but it somehow has an even bigger impact than all the effort you're putting in. With that in mind too, why in the world would you not forgive again? Put another way, if you can get more out of something than you're putting in, why in the world would you not forgive?

## Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be spearheading a Medical Debt Relief fundraiser.
- 2) Dedicate some time to learning about debt relief fundraisers by visiting a site like [ripmedicaldebt.org](https://ripmedicaldebt.org). Review the site's resources and fundraising tools.
- 3) Plan a Medical Debt Relief fundraiser...
  - a. Come up with a way to collect and distribute funds for Medical Debt Relief. RIP even does most of the work for you.
  - b. Come up with a fundraising goal. Stress to the youth that at a ratio of \$0.01 raised to \$1.00 in spending power, no amount is too small to make a difference in someone's life.
  - c. Try to secure some matching pledges. For example, Mrs. and Mr. Smith will match all the money you raise up to \$100.
  - d. Come up with an outreach plan such as a social media campaign or texting pledge drive. Be sure to use the info you've learned about the impact of Medical Debt Relief and how it connects to [Boundless Forgiveness](#).



### Who should be helping to lead this project?

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you should consider inviting your deacon or pastor, your outreach or service board committee chair, and the person who manages your church's social media.

### How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to be a place known for bringing relief to those in need. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that a church cares about their problems. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but we might have to convince some people it's worth the time when we're already trying to raise money for other things so I'll need your help to tell the story of why this project matters as we share God's [Boundless Forgiveness](#)."

**Unit 4** We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Sending Cards of Support

We all like to get mail—as long as it’s not junk mail—and yet we rarely send it to each other, even knowing how much joy it might bring. Let’s change all that. Send some cards of support through the mail and share some joy. When you sit down and think, there are loads of people for you to send cards to. But don’t let that list intimidate you; start with one card and go from there.

## **What does Sending Cards have to do with Boundless Invitation?**

It used to be that you wouldn’t get invited to something with a text message or DM. In the ancient times before smartphones people actually used their phones as phones or even used weird things called stamps to send messages through the mail. Joking aside, there is a personal touch that goes with writing out a physical card in your own hand that you just can’t replicate digitally. Some of us are old enough to remember getting birthday party invites in the mail. Maybe you’ve even experienced that joy recently. There’s lots of love in opening an envelope and discovering that inside it says that someone wants you to be a part of their special day. Even if your birthday isn’t coming up soon, you can give that experience by inviting someone into God’s love with a card of support. When Gabriel invites Mary into the incredible Gospel story in Luke 1, both this angel and the soon-to-be mother of the savior of all creation get what God is trying to say to the world. God is sending the world the ultimate “thinking of you” card in the person of Jesus.

## **Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:**

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be writing and sending cards of support.
- 2) Have the youth individually write out a list of at least five people who could receive a card of support from them. Stress that the youth won’t necessarily have to write a card to everyone on their list but at least they’ll have the names if they do want to do that. You may need to help the youth find addresses.

- 3) As a group brainstorm and write down everyone from church who could use a card of support and compare that to the lists the youth made.
- 4) Write and send cards. Your youth may want to make their own cards but you can also easily purchase blank cards for them to use. Be patient and gracious while explaining how to address an envelope because some youth may be doing it for the first time.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you should consider inviting your deacon or pastor, your outreach or service board committee chair, and the person who is best at finding people's addresses from church.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to get into the practice of sending cards of support within its midst. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that the church sees them and cares. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but we may need to convince someone to help pay for the postage, but that shouldn't be too hard because sending cards of support is a clear way to share and invite people into God's love and to make the church a place of [Boundless Invitation](#)."

### **Here are some sample messages that could be written in a card of support:**

- Dear \_\_[insert recipient name]\_\_,  
I have been thinking of you because I am thankful for all that you have brought to our church community over the years. You are an amazing gift from God. "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus." ~1 Corinthians 1:4  
In Thanks, \_\_[insert your name]\_\_
- Dear \_\_[insert recipient name]\_\_,  
I am praying for you and thinking of you. I hope you can pray for me too. Thank you for being a part of our church family. We miss seeing you at church but know that you are truly with us in God's spirit. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." ~1 Corinthians 12:27  
Sincerely, \_\_[insert your name]\_\_
- Dear \_\_[insert recipient name]\_\_,  
Thank you for being a light for God. I want to share the light that God has given me and am thankful to have an example like you to follow. "You are the light of the world..., let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." ~Matthew 5:14-16  
Sincerely, \_\_[insert your name]\_\_

**Unit 5** We recommend that you set up additional time to take on this project rather than fitting it into the normal curriculum. Use this as a follow up, or however you like!

# Service Learning: Mental Health Workshop

We're guessing that you at least know something about mental health. You might even be trained in Mental Health First Aid, QPR, or a similar response program. Chances are, you've experienced some mental health challenges yourself. Even with all that, our churches aren't always the best places for experiencing a mental illness or for talking about mental health. It's not supposed to be that way. Churches are meant as places of sanctuary where it is safe to talk about real-life challenges or to be accepted as who we truly are—mental illnesses and all. We're challenging you to plan a mental health workshop for your church. NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and their collection of [excellent resources](#) is a great place to start for helping a church to better care for people experiencing mental illness or trauma.



## **What does a Mental Health Workshop have to do with Boundless Promise?**

When Jesus talks to Martha at the tomb of Lazarus, he is providing care for her soul and for her mental health. Martha, in this moment, is experiencing deep grief and the trauma of loss. Jesus' promise to Martha takes full account of what she is feeling. It's pretty clear that Jesus is feeling a lot of the same distress himself. Planning or participating in a Mental Health Workshop is like making an open promise to all those around that you care about how people are really feeling and are committed to learning more and caring better.

## **Here are some potential steps for this service learning project:**

- 1) Inform your church leadership that the youth will be planning and then hosting a Mental Health Workshop.

- 2) Dedicate some time to exploring the resources offered by NAMI or another organization.
- 3) Plan a Mental Health Workshop to inform people in your church about mental illness and to equip them with tools and guidance for care and support. As NAMI recommends, you should only hold a workshop led by a mental health professional. The page on NAMI's site entitled "How to Be Inclusive and Welcoming" offers an excellent list of topics to ask a mental health professional to cover in a mental health workshop. It is essential that no one goes into the planning or hosting of a workshop thinking they can fix mental health or that people experiencing mental illness are even somehow broken. Jesus—our Lord and savior and the most brilliant person who has ever lived—did not try to fix Martha or treat her like she was broken. He loved and accepted all of who she was in that moment and offered affirming and uplifting words that he backed up with action. None of us can care for someone experiencing a mental illness or trauma by resurrecting their loved one, but we can plan or take part in a workshop to keep ourselves informed and equipped.

### **Who should be helping to lead this project?**

Your youth are your best leaders! Apart from youth, you must invite a mental health professional and consider inviting your deacon or pastor, your outreach or service board committee chair, and your faith formation or Christian Education committee chair. Mental health education is faith formation.

### **How to get church leaders to say "Yes!" to the youth and to this project?**

Ask your leadership if it is worthwhile for your church to be a place where people can go to talk about and receive care for mental health challenges. Talk about whether the time spent on this project is worth even just one person feeling that the church understands them and cares about their struggles. Ask the leadership if it is worthwhile for the youth to feel like they have been seen, heard, and can make a difference. It might be helpful to imagine how you would say yes to this project; something like, "Yes, but this is not an easy subject to talk about and we'll need to do this carefully and respectfully so I'll need your help and maturity, but it will all be worth it because we are leading our church to be a place of God's **Boundless Promise**."