



From the very beginning, some 500 years ago, the Lutheran Church has had a deep interest in and commitment to those who are suffering or struggling.



This is the home where Martin Luther spent most of his adult life.

It formerly served as the residence for the Black Cloister — the Augustinian monastery where Luther was sent when he began his ministry in Wittenberg.

When the connection between Rome and Germany became severed, Rome stopped supporting the monasteries in Germany, and they went into a fairly steep decline.

As monks left the order, the building was abandoned, and eventually given to the Luther family to use as a permanent residence.

This is part of the Reformation story that we often don't remember.



This presented a challenge for German Christians in and around Wittenberg, because in those days most of the support the church gave to the poor came from the convents and the monasteries.

The state didn't have much of a hand in it those days, so this was an important source of help and support for them.



This tradition has continued for centuries in the Roman Catholic Church.

You might think of the work performed by Mother Teresa — Saint Teresa of Calcutta, now. For years she and the sisters in her order provided comfort and care for the poor of Calcutta.

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This month we might think of Sister Margaret Ann in downtown Miami, who hauled out a chainsaw when she became aware that students and families were having trouble getting to her school.

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The problem 500 years ago was that as the convents and monasteries deteriorated in the areas where the Lutheran churches were located, much of this ministry ceased. There was no longer anyone acting on behalf of the church to care for the poor.

So Luther, in his role as an advisor to the Evangelical congregations, argued that every church ought to establish a community chest, and do what they could to continue the work that was no longer being done by nuns and monks. This has been a priority for us from the very beginning.



Today, the Lutheran Church makes a profound impact in the lives of needy people.

This sometimes goes unnoticed, because there are more than 300 separate Lutheran social service agencies in the United States.

But if you combined the time, money and energy that these organizations invest in caring for those in need, it would be one of the largest social service agencies in the world!

This has been a priority for us from the very beginning.

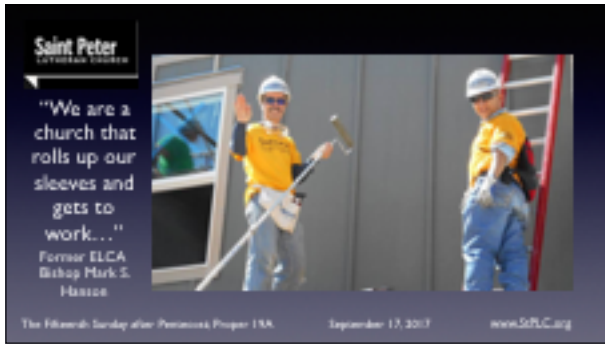
And it still is.



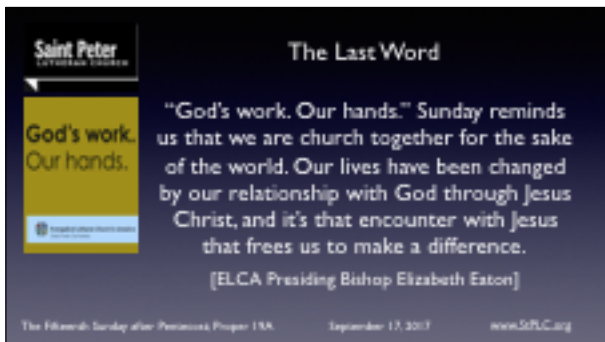
Which is why what we are doing today is such a fitting way to celebrate what it means to be the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

As Bishop Mark Hanson used to say, "We are a church that rolls up our sleeves and gets to work."

It is who we are, and I hope you will join us today.



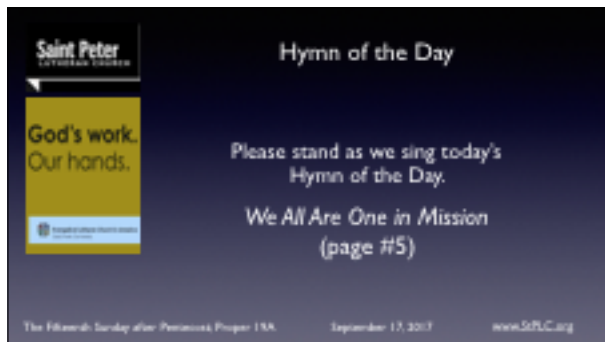
After worship today, many of us will be heading out into the community to participate in service activities. And there are also a couple of options for those of who would prefer not to leave the building. There is still room in some of these groups — you'll find sign-up sheets in the Narthex. Or if you can't join one of our serving teams, please stay with us here in the worship center after those who are volunteering leave. We'll spend some time together in prayer for those who serve, and for those who are served. It is a great way for us to live out what it means that, "We are Christ's Church." R/ "Better Together."



Our Presiding Bishop shares these words, to put today in a helpful context: "God's work. Our hands." Sunday reminds us that we are church together for the sake of the world. Our lives have been changed by our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and it's our encounter with Jesus that frees us to make a difference.

This is what it means to be a people of mercy. The kind of people described by Jesus in this morning's Gospel lesson. The kind of people we strive to be here at Saint Peter — people who are: "Sent into God's world to be a reflection of Christ." Thank you for being here today to live this out with us.

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Please stand with us as we sing today's Hymn of the Day.

We All Are One in Mission  
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