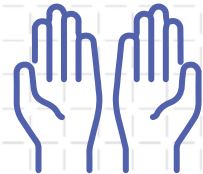
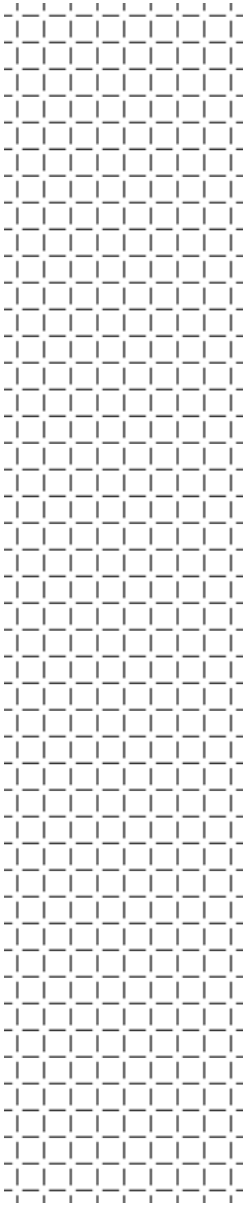


Future Church:
**God's Love
Made Real**
PRAYER GUIDE





The Church has been “on the move” through the people of the Lord and the power of the Holy Spirit since Its inception in the book of Acts. The Church is a movement of God’s people, so, by definition, it continues to move, change, develop and expand.

As the ELCA, we desire to move with God in the world so that God’s love will be made real for all people and all of creation. We have embarked on a journey with Barna and with Fuller (and with you) toward this end, but we begin here, now:

In prayer.

We begin with listening, looking and paying attention, together, to God.

We begin with attentive prayer.

We begin with discernment together of the movement of God in our time to move with God, toward a vibrant and welcoming Future Church that is courageous in strategy and clear in vision.

We begin together, trusting that the redemptive work of Christ in all things meets us here: willing a way forward for the ELCA to grow in faithfulness to the calling of the gospel.

We begin by praying together.

So, this is our ask of you: wherever you are located, whether you are doing this on your own or endeavor to do it with a group, in whatever context best suits you...

Partner with us in prayer.

It will take all of us to move together toward what is next for the Church.

Isaiah 51:1-6 says,

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the Lord.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn
and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Abraham your father

and to Sarah, who bore you,

for he was but one when I called him,

but I blessed him and made him many.

For the Lord will comfort Zion;

he will comfort all her waste places

and will make her wilderness like Eden,

her desert like the garden of the Lord;

joy and gladness will be found in her,

thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Listen to me, my people,

and give heed to me, my nation,

for a teaching will go out from me

and my justice for a light to the peoples.

I will bring near my deliverance swiftly;

my salvation has gone out,

and my arms will rule the peoples;

the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens

and look at the earth beneath,

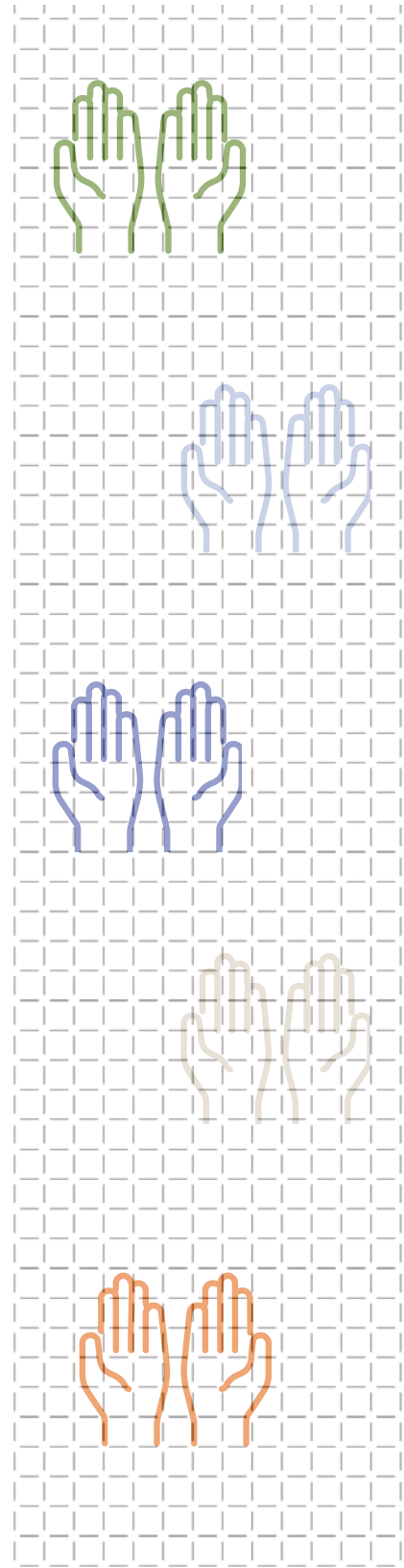
for the heavens will vanish like smoke,

the earth will wear out like a garment,

and those who live on it will die like gnats,

but my salvation will be forever,

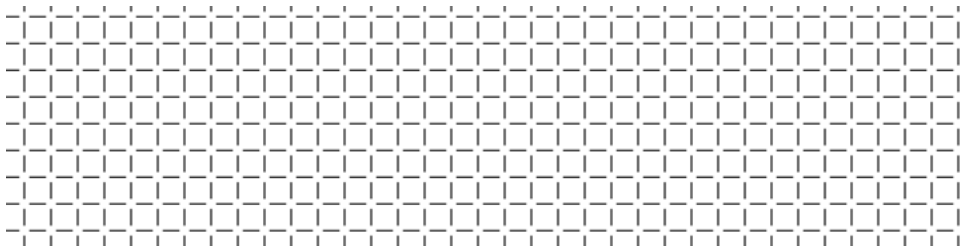
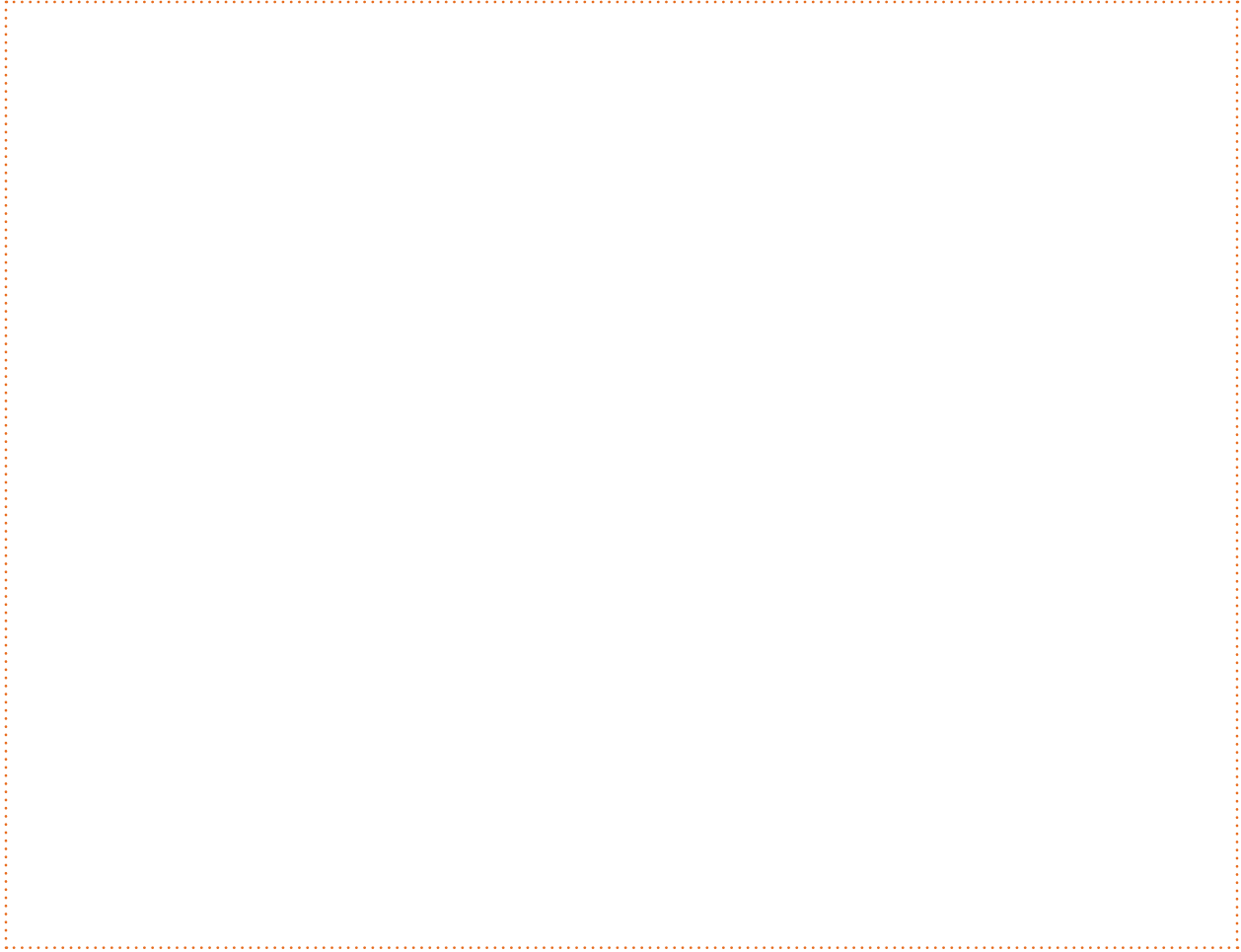
and my deliverance will never be ended.”



Isaiah 51 beckons us to be attentive to God's renewal.

Consider reading the passage again. As you do, what do you notice? Are there any phrases or word pictures that stand out?

Take a few minutes to draw or make a note below.





Isaiah 51 invites us to see and hear renewal afoot; promising that life is often emerging from what seem like wrong circumstances.

The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37) does the same: it invites us to see life in what looks like devastation. John 12:24-25 reminds us, “*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.*” K.J. Ramsey says it like this, “The kingdom of God is like a seed that has to be broken open.”

Impossible, wrong, even dying circumstances are where God is often inviting new life to emerge. *What do you see that is impossible, wrong, or dying in your own local ministry context?* Naming it, discussing it, or writing it down might actually give you the freedom to see what it could become.

Acts 27 is another one of those ironic, life-from-death narratives in scripture. Paul is on his way to Rome as a prisoner, when he senses that the sea-journey is fraught with danger. The passage (below) describes in great detail the peril. Paul, although a mere prisoner, speaks a word of prophetic hope to all on board that the ship will be lost, but the people will make it safely to shore. Even though that seems impossible with the perils ahead, Paul steadies the courage of the sailors and soldiers and gives them detailed strategy. It is, in the end, as he saw it and heard it from the Lord: by the final verse of the chapter, the ship is wrecked, but the people are whole.

Consider the passage:

“When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for. Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. After we had sailed across the sea that is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind was against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Sailing past it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

Since much time had been lost and sailing was now dangerous, because even the Fast had already gone by, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. Since the harbor was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favor of putting to sea from there on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, where they could spend the winter. It was a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest.

When a moderate south wind began to blow, they thought they could achieve their purpose; so they weighed anchor and began to sail past Crete, close to the shore. But soon a violent wind, called the northeaster, rushed down from Crete. Since the ship was caught and could not be turned head-on into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. By running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were scarcely able to get to the ship’s boat under control. After hoisting it up they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they would run on the Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and so were driven. We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard, and on the third day with their own hands they threw the ship’s tackle overboard. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.



Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, “Men you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss. I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before the emperor, and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.”

When the fourteenth night had come, as we were drifting across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took soundings and found twenty fathoms; a little farther on they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. But when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and had lowered the boat into the sea on the pretext of putting out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat and set it adrift.

Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive, for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.” After he had said this, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. (We were in all two hundred seventy-six persons in the ship.) After they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

In the morning they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.” (Acts 27)



As you pray through Acts 27:

- What sticks out to you?
- Do you notice any through-lines to your current context?
- What strikes you about Paul's role?
- How does the story resolution nestle in your emotions?
What does it make you feel?
- Is there applicability for Future Church in your ministry context?

If you're in a group, share with one another your responses to this text. If you're praying through this guide on your own, we invite you to share your thoughts with us at the [ELCA](mailto:Jackie.Baumhover@elca.org) (Jackie.Baumhover@elca.org).

Of all that you have prayed through today, are there two themes that stand out to you about the movement of the Spirit in the formation and reach of the Future Church?

We invite you to write those two words to represent these themes on the bottoms of your shoes. You can use washable black marker for this. Write one word or concept on each shoe and then commit to "walking" those prayers out — by praying each time you get movement (exercise, your walk to work, play with your children, housework, etc.) until the words are worn out on your soles.

Pray it over your local context;

pray it over our global context;

pray it over the Church and the world at-large.

What we know is this: The next season of movement that we endeavor to join God in begins here — in prayer, together.

Thank you for partnering with us in this formational way.

