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NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Nurtured by Community, Sent to Serve: A Candidacy Story

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Hi! My name is Heidi Shilanskas, and I am a Deacon Candidate at United Lutheran Seminary, serving at Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Pa. I am in my final year of Seminary, preparing to start my internship this fall. I am looking forward to graduating in May of 2026 from ULS and starting my call as a Deacon in Northeast Penn Synod.

I have always been involved in Youth and Family Ministry since my own days as a youth, going to Lutheran Youth Fellowship (LYF) Assemblies and participating in Mission District progressive dinners. As a paid youth worker at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Easton, I took classes out of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg (now ULS) on youth ministry and learned from professors and leaders in the field how to look beyond the church walls for service projects for youth. After I got married and had my own children, I started to look for new ways we could participate in church in a culture that doesn't center congregational ministry the same way it did when I was growing up. As a member of St. Mark's in Bethlehem, I started dreaming of new ways to involve children, teens and their parents in ministry beyond the church, making service in our communities a core element of church life.

My candidacy journey started when Pastor Brandon Heavner suggested I'd be a good candidate for ministry. At first, I scoffed at his certainty, but he was tenacious and after many, many discerning conversations about call and passion, I decided to move forward with candidacy. The next step was meeting with Pastor Rachael Dietz, then Executive Associate to the Bishop and Director of Candidacy. Her warmth and encouragement helped me feel secure in the decision to go to Seminary. Without Pastor Brandon and Pastor Rachael, I would never have dreamed God's call on my life would have included Candidacy and Seminary. I am forever grateful for their faith in me.

For my internship, I plan on implementing some of those dreams. I am looking forward to creating "family style" worship services that are intergenerational and interactive so all members can participate in the liturgy. I am planning Bible studies with a focus on service and using our gifts to serve our neighbors.

I will use social media and online tools to create more opportunities to connect with people. Finally, I am hoping to work more closely with the Bethlehem Interfaith Group on creating ecumenical services projects with our neighbors who aren't just Lutheran, but Presbyterian, Moravian, Jewish or Muslim, etc. I am excited to find ways to be a part of a wider community of neighbors.

My ministry is centered around Jesus' command to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Diaconal work looks outside of our church buildings to find the needs in the community and make connections to the resources of time, talent and treasure stored within our walls. As I meet and talk to Deacons across the ELCA, I am inspired by the courage, creativity and experimentation that fosters new and exciting way of reaching God's people outside of the church buildings. I am hopeful that my own work will continue in this tradition, planting seeds of love in communities desperately in need of joy.

If you are interested in or discerning Candidacy, please contact Pastor Jennifer Heavner at pastor@starofbethlehemlutheran.com

DID YOU KNOW that your Mission Support helps fund areas of the synod like this one and many other important initiatives? Your contributions are making a significant impact and helping others grow in faith, supporting the synod's lanes of Growing Young, Gaining Strength, and Going Beyond Death to Life, along with the directions of loving like Jesus, healing like Jesus, and engaging like Jesus. To learn more, visit godslove.org/missionsupport.

God's work.
Our hands.

September 7, 2025

This day is an opportunity to celebrate who we are as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America — one church, freed in Christ to serve and love our neighbor. Use the QR code above or visit elca.org to learn more

How will you be observing GWOH Sunday?

ONE WEEK AFTER

September 14, 2025

The Lutheran Center: 2354 Grove Road, Allentown PA 18109

This year marks the 50th Anniversary of Lutheran Congregational Services! Help make it meaningful by assembling over 100 Flood Clean-Up Buckets and Women's Hygiene Kits for neighbors in need. **You don't have to attend in person to take part.** Congregations and individuals can help by signing up to donate kit items using the QR code or URL, then drop them off on September 14 or contact Heidi Shilanskas (hshilanskas@gmail.com) to arrange a drop-off.

Learn more

godslove.org/events