



NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Feeding Body and Soul at Hope's Table

Written by: April Mulvey, Synod Authorized Outreach Ministry (SAOM) leader at Hope's Table

Hope's Table: 601 N Front St Reading, PA 19601

Every Tuesday the doors open around 4:30 in the afternoon. During those chilly winter months, our guests are greeted by Sara, who pours each a cup of hot chocolate. Anita is back in the kitchen, where the aromas of the night's dinner are wafting through the hallway. Scott is preparing his music and Judy is either mingling with our guests or helping Anita. As I am preparing the table for worship, I am talking with everyone and listening to the chatter in the room. Before dinner is served, I go around the room asking everyone for prayer requests and the guests fill me in on the happenings of the week. Welcome to Hope's Table.

My journey to serving at Hope's Table is slightly unconventional. I did not grow up in the church. In fact, the first time I attended a church service (outside weddings and funerals) I was sixteen years old because I grew up in a dysfunctional family system. My first exposure was when my grandmother took me to her church. I grew up in a home that did not show the love and compassion of the Gospel of Christ, and I carried that into my adult years. I ended up in a 12-Step recovery program, but I was still missing "something."



That "something" was the God piece in my life and it was not until I got involved in a church and with people who loved me unconditionally, and told me God loved me even more unconditionally, did my life drastically change to the path that put me where I am today being the SAOM leader at Hope's Table. My background in life allows me to relate to the guests that walk into the doors of Hope's Table in ways that are truly personal and

empathetic, and I can connect with them and their needs in times of pastoral care because I know some of the struggles they endure. I relate to the brokenness, the loneliness, the desperation, because I was once there too, but the power and love of God have done miraculous things! It put me back together.

That is part of my hope for Hope's Table. We are not *just* a food ministry. We not only feed the body, we nourish the soul as well. We come together, even if it for only one hour a week, and break bread together, and although we are not defined as a "congregation" by the ELCA, we are a community of the *ekklesia*. Church, since the pandemic, may need to be redefined and ministries like Hope's Table help pave the way for that re-define.



If someone is curious about how to get involved with Hope's Table, my best advice would be to come and check us out! Show up! Come and see us in action on Tuesday. Come and sit with our guests and get to know them. Come and volunteer to serve dinner and then we can get you scheduled for service work. Come and see just how blessed we are to be in their presence.

Hope's Table has taught me so many lessons about myself and about the world over this past year. I have learned more about the structure of the synod and church this year and how all those smaller cogs in the wheel have to be put into

position and work in unison, or the grander machine does not work. It is not just about one single church or ministry; there is a grander picture at play—like a drop in a bucket of water that sends ripples over the surface. There is much, much more to leadership than the worship at Hope's Table. The decisions we make do not just affect us. They affect the synod, and the ELCA, as a whole.

Having support from the synod has left an immense positive effect on me throughout this whole journey. In those moments when I may doubt myself, or not believe in myself, the synod staff have all uplifted me and given me support. The synod has also supported the mission of Hope's Table as vital to the community, proving once again, that God's people are seen and their needs are heard; that they are not ignored except on a Sunday morning. This continues to demonstrate that my service is properly placed.



I am excited to serve as Hope's Table's SAOM leader and the possibilities and doors that will open for us. I am also excited to be attending the Fresh Expressions National Gathering 2026 at the end of February with other colleagues from NEPA Synod in Ocala, Florida. It is proving to be an inspiring year. I have big dreams for Hope's Table! And why should I? I serve an even bigger God who has done amazing things.

Three Gatherings Across the Synod - Each event runs 8:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m. with three speakers focused on its theme.

Learning Ministry Days

Register at godslove.org/LMD26

 **Mar 7, 26** - *“How Do We Lift Every Voice: Exploring Worship, Music and Family Ministries”* (Atonement Lutheran, Wyomissing)

 **Apr 25, 26** - *“How Can We Walk Together: Mental Health and Spiritual Wholeness”* (Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, Emmaus)

 **Sept 19, 26** - *“Who Do We Trust: Truth, Scams and AI”* (Zion United Lutheran, Brodheadsville)

