



NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

How a Desire to Grow in Faith Became a Journey into Unexpected Ministry

Written by Licensed Lay Minister (LLM) Tanya Kantner

If you had told me a few years ago that I would be serving as a Licensed Lay Minister, I'm not sure I would have believed you. For most of my life, Scripture felt beautiful but distant—something I respected but didn't always understand. Then, slowly and quietly, it began to take root in my heart. I signed up for an online Faith+Lead course through Luther Seminary—training usually taken by laypeople preparing for ministry—simply because I wanted to grow in my faith. I wasn't seeking a role or a title; at that point, there wasn't even a pathway to consider. I just felt a tug I couldn't ignore.

Then the synod announced the new Licensed Lay Minister initiative. I didn't feel ready or qualified. But I recognized that same tug—that gentle, persistent nudge of the Spirit—and I said yes. Not because I felt prepared, but because I trusted that God could take my imperfect offering and turn it into something meaningful.

Since then, my ministry has unfolded in ways that have surprised me again and again. I've learned that the heart of this role isn't about doing more—it's about being present. It's about showing up where people carry joy, grief, questions, and hope, trusting that Christ is already there ahead of us. My role in those moments is simple but sacred: to listen, to hold space, to pray with people, and to reflect back the light and love of Christ that is already moving in their lives. Sometimes that looks like sitting quietly with someone who is grieving; sometimes it's celebrating a moment of joy; sometimes it's offering a word of encouragement or a prayer when someone feels lost. In all of it, I try to be a gentle reminder that they are not alone—that God is with them in whatever they're carrying.



Serving within the Pretzel City Parish has been one of the greatest gifts of this journey. Shared ministry has allowed me to connect with people across several congregations, each with their own stories. It has also opened doors into the wider community—places where the church's presence matters deeply, even for those who may never sit in a pew.

Some of the most meaningful moments have come through simple, hands-on ministry: harvesting potatoes in the fall for local food programs, partnering with community food pantries, planning trips to places like the Museum of the Bible and the Ark Encounter, or gathering people for Bible study who have been

unchurched for years but are still hungry for connection and meaning. These ministries remind me that the Gospel is not confined to a sanctuary. It lives in fields, fellowship halls, parking lots, and conversations with people who are searching for belonging.



Looking ahead, I'm excited to continue deepening relationships within the Pretzel City Parish. I've come to cherish the everyday moments—the conversations, the intergenerational gatherings, the unexpected holy interruptions—where God quietly draws us closer to one another. My hope is that through these moments, people feel more seen, more connected, and more aware of God's love at work in their lives.

If someone were considering the Licensed Lay Minister pathway, I would tell them this: you don't need to have everything figured out. You don't need to feel certain or strong. The most surprising part of my journey has been discovering how God works through my vulnerability far more than through my confidence. Again and again, I've learned that ministry is not about our strength, but about God's.

I am deeply grateful for the synod's support and their commitment to developing lay leadership. Their encouragement, guidance, and investment in creating pathways for people like me have made this journey possible. It has reminded me that God calls people from all walks of life into meaningful ministry—and that the church is stronger when we answer those calls together.

I began this journey quietly, almost reluctantly. But each step has revealed a little more of what God is doing—not just in me, but also through me, and in the congregations and communities I'm blessed to serve. My prayer is simply to keep saying yes, one invitation at a time, trusting that the Spirit will continue to lead the way.

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