



NORTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SYNOD MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Building Community from InsideOut

Submitted by Stacey Burke, NEPA Synod Director of Communications



"God is a creative God. Don't be afraid to tap into the gifts God's given to you." Those words from Pastor Rashon "Woody" Santiago capture the heart of the InsideOut ministry, a community-centered ministry based at Advent Lutheran Church in West Lawn PA, where she currently serves as transitional pastor. Rooted in relationships, creativity, and collaboration, InsideOut is reimagining what it means to gather, connect, and serve.

For Pastor Woody, ministry is about creating spaces where people can be known, heard, and valued. Whether around a game table, a shared meal, or a Bible study, InsideOut invites people into conversation, encouraging them not only to hear God's Word, but also to share their own experiences, perspectives, and faith with one another.

Every Wednesday evening at Advent Lutheran Church, people gather for a shared meal followed by an InsideOut Bible study. Rather than simply hearing a lesson, participants are invited into conversation, sharing their own experiences and perspectives while learning from one another. Pastor Woody believes these conversations create opportunities to experience God's love through

community while reminding participants that everyone has something to contribute.

That same spirit extends beyond Wednesday evenings. Through community meals, video game nights, partnerships with local nonprofits, and creative gatherings, InsideOut creates welcoming spaces where people of all ages can build relationships, learn from one another, and experience God's love in community. Pastor Woody describes it as a place where people are welcomed for who they are before anything else. Whether someone is a lifelong church member, new to faith, or simply looking for connection, everyone has a place at the table.

Community video game nights are another way InsideOut creates spaces where people feel welcome. While children and youth gather around the games, parents, caregivers, and neighbors build relationships, creating connections that extend well beyond the evening's activities.

That welcoming spirit extends beyond the walls of the church through partnerships with organizations such as Café Esperanza and other community groups. Pastor Woody believes ministry is strongest when congregations and organizations work together, sharing their gifts to meet both spiritual and physical needs. One example of that community-centered approach is a growing suitcase ministry that provides suitcases, duffel bags, and backpacks for children entering foster care. After witnessing a child packing their belongings into a trash bag, Pastor Woody felt called to respond by collecting luggage that offers dignity and hope during an already difficult transition. What began as a simple response to one child's experience has grown into a ministry that has collected more than 1,300 suitcases through partnerships with congregations from multiple mission districts.

The suitcase ministry is only one expression of InsideOut's broader vision. Looking ahead, Pastor Woody dreams of expanding InsideOut into a community gathering space where people can celebrate birthdays, learn together, play basketball, create media, partner with nonprofits, and simply spend time with one another. At the heart of every dream is the same goal: creating places where everyone belongs.

Pastor Woody sees InsideOut not simply as a program, but as a calling. "God put this on my heart to do," she said. She believes some of the most meaningful moments happen when people have the opportunity not only to hear God's Word, but also to share how God is at work in their own lives.



Ministries like InsideOut are strengthened through the shared ministry of congregations across the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Through Mission Support, congregations invest in relationships, collaboration, and creative expressions of ministry that help communities experience God's love in new and meaningful ways.

Learn more about how one conversation at Synod Assembly sparked a collaboration between congregations across multiple mission districts, resulting in hundreds of suitcases being collected for children entering foster care by reading the companion story on the synod's website.

To learn more about the ministry and future partnership opportunities, watch for upcoming stories in the synod's communications or reach out to Pastor Woody at Advent Lutheran Church.



Help Make Ministry Possible

Through Mission Support, congregations share resources, support leaders, and expand ministry. Thank you for helping strengthen congregations, support leaders, and launch new ministries. Learn more about Mission Support and how your congregation can support at godslove.org/missionsupport.