



July 2026 Mission Support Memo

STORYTELLING ENGAGEMENT

Building community from InsideOut

A story from our [Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod](#), written by Stacey Burke, NEPA Synod director of communications

As you read this story, what inspires you?

How is your congregation inviting conversations?

"God is a creative God. Don't be afraid to tap into the gifts God's given to you."

Those words from the Rev. Rashon "Woody" Santiago capture the heart of **InsideOut**, 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 the church, people gather for a shared meal, followed by an InsideOut Bible study. Rather than simply hear 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 such as 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. Thank you.



[Read](#) how InsideOut sparked a collaboration between congregations, resulting in hundreds of suitcases being collected for children entering foster care.

ENGAGE WITH US

NEW — The Generosity Project Webpage

We are delighted to have a new, comprehensive webpage for [The Generosity Project](#), available in partnership with the Stewardship of Life Institute (SOLI) at [Kindling Faith](#). The Generosity Project connects generations and equips households as centers for the faith practice of generosity. This webpage has all the curated workbooks, as well as adapted resources that include worship documents, a vacation Bible school layout, videos and stories. We are eager for this to be a place to share creative uses of the Generosity Project.

GRATEFUL

A note from Victoria Flood: "My heart is filled with gratitude for all of you — those who love our ELCA and want to share the stories of how we (across the whole church and especially through Mission Support dollars) make a difference when we respond to God's call to love and serve as a neighbor. I have served in a variety of roles within the ELCA churchwide organization for the past 25 years, and now I am moving on to a new adventure. My spouse and I are relocating from the Chicago area to California to be closer to family. *You* are the colleagues and friends who have inspired me the most over all these years. Thank you for using your voices, in the places where you are, to share stories of faith in action! God's peace be with you all."

In gratitude,

Nick Kiger, Interim Senior Director for Congregation and Synod Support

Karen Kretschmann, Coordinator for Storytelling Engagement