

1 **Emma Kate Lander**

2 **Spiritual Autobiography and Reflection on Sense of Call**

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4 While my call to ministry manifested long before I recognized it, I was a freshman at
5 Susquehanna University when I named aloud that I was being called to ministry. When I named
6 it aloud, I knew in my heart that I was being called to work with children, youth, and families;
7 although these positions are not generally ordained positions, I knew that ordination was a
8 necessary part of my spiritual journey and my call to ministry.
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10 As a youth, I struggled with my faith and my relationship with God. I particularly struggled to
11 see where God was present and at work in my life in the midst of middle school hormones and
12 bullying. It was my involvement in youth group that helped heal and transform my relationship
13 with God. Being a part of a group where it was safe to ask questions about my faith shed new
14 light on what it meant to belong to the Body of Christ. In particular, my youth director, Melissa
15 (Miss) Good exemplified the kind of leader I wanted to be – she always advocated for us,
16 listened to our concerns and desires, and made sure our voices were heard and magnified. She
17 made sure we were seen. While once simply a mentor, Miss has become a friend and a colleague.
18 She's someone that I can not only share resources with, but whom I can share in the joys and
19 challenges of ministry with.
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21 From the time that I realized youth ministry was where I was being led vocationally, I knew that
22 ordination was a part of that vocation. It wasn't until my senior year of college that I began to
23 really understand why I was called to ordained ministry. I had helped serve communion with my
24 University Chaplain, Scott Kershner, during our chapel's Lutheran service each week. One
25 morning, as I was getting ready for service, my chaplain called me and told me that he was sick
26 with strep and wouldn't be at worship. Where I thought he might tell me to skip certain parts of
27 our liturgy, particularly the sacraments, he asked if I felt comfortable leading communion – the
28 liturgy was all written out and he would provide words of authorization via his wife for me to
29 preside over the table. While I was terrified inside, I told him I could do it, that I would do it.
30 There was something mystical about that experience, about presiding over the table and saying
31 the words of institution, something revelatory. It shifted something inside me, adding a parallel
32 to my call to children and youth ministry. In particular, I have come to realize how important it is
33 to me to be a pastor who communes children, who presides over the table and shares the body
34 and blood with a congregation where children are invited to share fully in the Body of Christ
35 alongside adults.
36

37 Communion isn't the only thing that I feel called to preside over; I also feel called to perform
38 baptisms and officiate weddings. I especially see this call intersecting and being crucial to my
39 call to work with children and youth. How meaningful would it be to have the youth minister, the
40 children's pastor, who will assist the congregation in nurturing the faith of this beloved child of
41 God, perform the sacrament that welcomes them into the life of the church? When a child is
42 grown, how meaningful would it be to officiate their wedding, to love and support them as they
43 enter into this new chapter of their life?
44

45 Teaching Confirmation has especially validated my sense of call to both work with children and
46 youth and to be ordained. This past year, I guided 12 7th, 8th, and 9th graders through the

47 Confirmation process. I taught them about what it means to be in covenant relationship with
48 God, about who Jesus is, about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, about the teachings of
49 the church, about prayer, about the sacrament of Communion, and about what it means to be a
50 member of the Body of Christ. As I worked with this group of youth, my own sense of call was
51 affirmed, reminding me that I feel a call to serve in a pastoral capacity. I feel called to preach and
52 to teach, to strengthen my congregation for witness and service. I feel called to serve at the font
53 and the table, to “show forth the mysteries of grace in word and action, lifting the people’s vision
54 toward the hope of God’s new creation” (G-2.0501). I feel called to be a pastor, to “support the
55 people in the disciplines of the faith amid the struggles of daily life” (G-2.0501). But above all, I
56 feel called to these responsibilities and duties in relationship with the children, youth, and
57 families of the church.