

LSS Sermon Starter Story

*April 26, 2026
(Good Shepherd Sunday)*

You are welcome to use the following “sermon starter” content in your own sermon. Feel free to use content verbatim or edit as you see fit to adapt to your own voice and context. Names have been changed to respect client privacy.

Readings (Revised Common Lectionary)

- Acts 2:42-47
- Psalm 23
- 1 Peter 2:19-25
- John 10:1-10

We know Jesus as our Good Shepherd. He makes us lie down in green pastures. He leads us beside still waters. He walks with us through the dark valleys. When the wolf comes to prowl, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Do you remember what this Good Shepherd, the risen Christ, said to the disciple Simon Peter that morning by the shore after they had shared a breakfast of fish and bread?

Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.

Disciples of the Good Shepherd are called to feed and tend his sheep. We are called to love one another and to look out for the lost ones who are in danger out there all alone.

The mission of Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, one of our ministry partners, could perhaps be a shepherd’s job description. *Act compassionately, serve humbly, lead courageously.*

All across Wisconsin and upper Michigan, LSS works with families, couples, children, and individuals who are facing mental health challenges, recovering from abuse or loss of a parent, struggling with addiction, dealing with housing insecurity and financial hardship, or living with disabilities. In fact, by supporting Lutheran Social Services, you make a difference in the lives of 30,000 people every year.

I’d like to share a story from this ministry with you today...a story of hope and healing.

The number of opioid deaths annually in Wisconsin has more than doubled over the past decade, claiming the lives of thousands. Less than a quarter of Wisconsinites who

need substance use treatment are receiving that care. Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan is a recognized leader in providing addiction treatment services that change lives—helping people experience lasting recovery.

One of those people is Sam.

Sam was raised in a family that valued hard work and being independent and strong—and where alcohol was a big part of every family gathering. As a young woman, she experienced a traumatic situation, and she found herself coping with that pain by using alcohol. That quickly graduated to harder substances, and to addiction. Feeling desperate about how substance use was overtaking her life, Sam realized she needed help. She called a help line and got connected to a residential recovery program run by Lutheran Social Services. Recovery has been a long journey, and LSS has been there at every turn. She did go through some lapses. She needed more than one “second chance.” But ultimately—with the help of compassionate caregivers who didn’t give up on her, who shepherded her through—she made it.

Sam’s determination combined with a comprehensive array of services from LSS made recovery possible and also opened new doors. One important opportunity Sam pursued was to become trained as a Certified Peer Support Specialist. After completing the certification, Sam then applied for a position working with LSS recovery programs and was hired. She was thrilled: “When I got the job I couldn’t believe it, and it is one of the best moves I ever made. I now get the privilege to work in the same building I received services in...supporting others on their paths. [I’m] part of an organization that values me for who I am, where I have been and for what I can bring to the table. No human is meant to be alone; the antidote to addiction is connection.”

Sam was once a “lost sheep” struggling with addiction. But, because Lutherans like you cared enough to build and sustain this ministry we call Lutheran Social Services, Sam didn’t walk through that dark valley alone. She got the care she needed to recover, to be restored. And now she is a shepherd, too, helping others find their way to recovery. She’s joined with you and with me in this mission we share: to act compassionately, serve humbly, and lead courageously.

Your gifts to LSS provide substance use disorder treatment to hundreds of people across Wisconsin and Upper Michigan each year, and LSS is currently raising funds for additional centers to be able to help even more people. Thank you for supporting a compassionate response to this critical need.

Additional resources:

- More information about LSS Mental Health and Substance Use Recovery Services is available at <https://www.lsswis.org/services/mental-health-and-substance-use/>
- PowerPoint slides and a short video to accompany this story can be found at <http://www.lsswis.org/toolkit>