“Seminary impressed upon me that the conversation is never done. You are always staying engaged and staying in relationships. That is the work of ministry.”
Mission and ministry mean accompaniment and listening, says Rev. Elizabeth Kanerva, not convincing and converting.

She witnessed this growing up in a PC(USA) church in St. Louis, and learned it all over again during her studies to become a pastor at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. “Seminary impressed upon me that the conversation is never done,” Liz says. “You are always staying engaged and staying in relationships. That is the work of ministry.”

It’s a crucial part of her service as pastor of a small congregation, Glendale Presbyterian Church in the St. Louis area, which is her fourth call post-seminary.

Her pastor, the late Rev. William T. Hancock, was her biggest cheerleader, and the person she sought for advice when she wanted to go to seminary. He recommended she attend McCormick, and she did, even though she felt a bit lost among the seminary insider lingo. “They would talk about homiletics and I had no idea what that was,” Liz says with a laugh. “It’s sermon writing. Ok, I can do that.”

Her congregation’s support and love as she nurtured her faith was critical to her hearing God’s call to seminary. It was a place where all questions were encouraged. “He was so intelligent,” Liz recalls of her pastor. “He would lead these talk backs after worship on Sundays and you could ask him anything. Folks who liked the sermon, sometimes folks who didn’t like the sermon would engage with him and ask questions or just tell him what they thought.” She thinks about this approach and applies it often to her own ministry. And thanks to her theological education, she’s comfortable encouraging it. “I want us to be the Church,” Liz says. “Let’s hold that tension, and not be a church where everybody thinks the same way. Sometimes it gets a little uncomfortable now and then, but we love each other anyway. It is truly what Christ calls us to do.”