My experience of ministry in the Montana Synod is mostly positive. Sure there have been moments of pain. Once in a while people are disappointed to see me. They hope to see one of my male colleagues and are crestfallen when I show up, “Oh, it’s you.” I serve in an ecumenical context so there are certainly a few that wish they could save my heathen soul.

I have walked with 100s of folks at the end of their lives and it has been hard, beautiful, awful, and holy. I will never forget waddling around St. John’s during my pregnancies. One elder’s son could only see my belly. He was flustered and panicky when I came around. His mom liked me though so I did come around. Yet, I could see the distress on his face, “You’ve had sex!?!” Well I never claimed Immaculate Conception, so yeah buddy it’s happened. But then there was the family saying goodbye just down the hall who saw something sacred in the baby visibly and violently kicking within me as mom’s life ended.

To that Catholic family they found God in that moment and literally within that chaplain. It was a sacredness that no priest could offer them. The circle of life was present as we prayed over their mother’s body. I do believe it was a sacred feminine power.

Mostly though, I’ve spent the last seven or so years in the Montana Synod learning what it means to be a publicly identified religious leader, Lutheran, woman, wife, mother, citizen, occasional prophet, colleague, and friend. Typically, I know just enough about all those identities to get me in trouble. Somedays I do them all well. Other days my work is passable. Occasionally, I leave work early because my son is in trouble at school. In the rush, I forget to send out the weekly devotion. Then I pick up my daughter from our CFG daycare on campus. She is dirty, She has on spare pants (because of a certain 2 year-old issue). In the car, she gets mad and kicks off her shoes. As I pull her out of the car seat, dirty, with miss matched clothes on, and shoes mysteriously gone… she wipes her nose on my shirt.

As I carry my strong and independent little girl to the school, I do so with my work incomplete and my life a mess. I wonder, “God how am I proclaiming your Word today?” In those moments, I honestly don’t know, but then I preach or lead a devotion about not having it all together and I see the elders, my ladies (that I love with all my heart), nodding along. I recognize their knowing and their wisdom as nonjudgmental. I listen to their stories. I hear of their highs and lows. I hear about the more than two children that they were able to bring to adulthood and I think that maybe being a hot mess chaplain mom really is the Imago Dei.