MMU – November 2, 2026

Note from Lisa – Who I am

November, for me, is a month of remembering. Yesterday, we remembered all the saints in our worship. On November 11, we will remember those who have fought in wars, many of whom did not return from the fields where battles raged. A few days after that, I will remember my father on his birthday. He joined the church triumphant over four years ago. At the end of the month, we will remember the compassion of the indigenous people who helped immigrants from Europe as we gather around communal tables to break bread together on Thanksgiving Day.

When I was growing up, we did not focus that much on Thanksgiving. It was a gathering of my father's family, split between our home and his sisters from year to year. This continued a few years after my father's mother moved with his sister's family to Huntington Beach and we moved to Huntsville, Alabama. During that time, my mother decided to forgo turkey and all the fixings for dinner out or lasagna. When we returned to Woodland Hills, she kept up the tradition of non-traditional Thanksgiving, which was fine with me as I preferred her lasagna to turkey.

When I joined the military as a chaplain, I had no idea how much turkey I would be subjected to in November. I was invited to all of my assigned unit Thanksgiving potlucks to pray. It was then that I realized that no one made stuffing like my mother. But I also discovered other traditional dishes from various regions in the United States – oysters from the northern coasts, corn casserole from the southwest, jambalaya from Louisiana, collard greens from the deep south, smoked ham from the Atlantic southern coast, and Jello salad from the Midwest. By the time Thanksgiving rolled around, I would have prayed at and feasted at no less than 10 Thanksgiving Potlucks. On Thanksgiving Day, I was grateful to join the commanders to serve the airmen at the dining facility. I would return home late, grateful to not be cooking, and happy to eat pizza.

When I was deployed to the Middle East for two Thanksgivings, I missed traditional food and was happy to serve the troops and eat turkey and all the fixings.

I started working in the military after feeling called when I was at Seminary. I joined the Chaplain Candidate program, which allowed me to serve and to try out the military to see if it was a good fit. Upon graduation, I tried to be ordained to serve as a chaplain, but the PC(USA) and the military required at least 2 years of experience in a church. After a year of searching, I was called to serve as a Presbyterian minister in a Reformed Church in America church in Grand Rapids, MI. I worked there for three years, served in the reserves,

and then was called to active duty. In Michigan, first in Ann Arbor, and then in Grand Rapids, I started the tradition of serving Thanksgiving meals at homeless shelters. It kept me from having to cook a full meal for just two people, and it gave me an excuse to eat pizza on Thanksgiving.

In the Air Force, I traveled the world. I served at bases in Washington State, Texas, North Dakota, Alabama, New Mexico, Maryland, Washington, DC, and England. I was sent on short deployments to the South Pole for the mid-winter resupply, Egypt to help train the Egyptian Army, Rwanda following the worst of the genocide, and Mozambique. I also deployed to Kuwait and Oman before and following Operation Enduring Freedom. Everywhere I went, I led worship, officiated at weddings, baptized infants and adults, served communion, visited people in the hospital, and provided spiritual and emotional support. It was rewarding work.

On Veterans Day, I will wear my Women Veterans pin and think of all the people who have served and who currently serve. But, more than that, like on Memorial Day, I will remember those who died in service to their country, not just Americans, but everyone. Serving in the military is a hard life that wounds you physically, emotionally, spiritually, and morally. So, we need to remember those who have served and those who are serving as well as their families. In all your remembering this month, pray for those who have lost loved ones this past year, pray for those who serve in the military, and pray for those who open their hearts and set a table for the hungry and homeless.