



MARTIN LUTHER COLLEGE

knightwatch

WEEKLY



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Knighted for Ministry in a Global City

As a first-year student at MLC, **Joshua Koelpin** attended Evangelism Day and listened as a pastor described his ministry in Vancouver. Josh remembers thinking, “I’d love to be in a global city someday.”

Eight years later, that thought became reality. On Call Day in May 2023, this is what he heard: Joshua Koelpin – Boston, Massachusetts.

It was a long way from home—in more ways than one: New Ulm, Minnesota, has 14,000 people and is 94% white. Boston, Massachusetts, has 5 million and is richly diverse.

His first feelings? “Happy. Blessed. Scared. Overwhelmed.” The morning after his ordination—held at a community center outside Fenway Park—he turned to his wife, Katelyn, and said, “What are we doing here?”

It’s been 2-1/2 years now, and what he’s doing is ministry—by being himself. He coaches youth soccer, attends university lectures, plays in a basketball league, goes to see the Red Sox, grabs coffee at the popular local shops, and plays tennis—and helps at the desk—at the Cambridge Tennis Club.



How is this ministry? He gives an example: “As I sit at the desk at the tennis club, someone will ask, ‘What do you do when you’re not here?’ and I’ll say, ‘I’m a pastor.’ And the conversation goes from there.”

Sometimes these words will be the start of a deep conversation—and then many deep conversations. Other times they’ll be met with indifference. It doesn’t matter. He’s just being his authentic self: a child of God, a Lutheran pastor.

“So much of ministry is being who you are,” he says. “Relational ministry is so important. Spend time with people, do things you enjoy, do things they enjoy, share Jesus when you can. Rejoice that your name is written in heaven and that the Holy Spirit will do his work.”

And the Spirit is working! God allowed this small-town boy to plant a church for him in Boston. Harbor Lutheran gathers in a renovated warehouse off iconic Massachusetts Avenue, between Harvard and MIT. The congregation looks different from the one he grew up in. But the gospel of Jesus and the faith and love of Jesus’ people is the same.

Pastor Josh Koelpin’s “Authenticity List” for Doing Ministry

Be yourself . . . Get off your phone . . . Be relational, not confrontational . . . Get involved in your community. “If your community offers Buttered Corn Days, then go to Buttered Corn Days” . . . Don’t see community involvement as a ruse to trick people into having conversations about Jesus. “I coach soccer because I like to coach soccer. If it looks like I’m doing this just to grow my church, people will sense that” . . . Remember: There aren’t office pastors and people pastors. There are just pastors . . . Realize that the answer to the question, “Who are my neighbors?” is often your *actual* neighbors, the people who live on your street.

Last November, Pastor Koelpin returned to MLC to encourage students with his story. “Don’t ever say, ‘I grew up in a small town so I can’t go be a pastor in a big city,’” he told them. “You can—because you know who you are in Christ. You just have to be your authentic self.”

This article is adapted from a longer MLC InFocus article titled “Knighted for Ministry: From Small Town to Global City.” Scan to read the full article.

