I acknowledge that I cannot state when or how I first felt a call to ministry. (As I child growing up on a farm, I felt led to baptize the baby calves, the kittens and the dog.) I do know that as I experienced life in community, first at Christikon when I was in junior high and high school and then at Holden Village when I was in my 20’s, I experienced a call to live as a disciple of Jesus. I enrolled at Luther Northwestern Seminary in 1980, as a special student and took an independent study to first ask the question if women could be pastors before I could ponder the question if I could be a pastor. I served as a secretary at a congregation in Minneapolis and again was loved into community. Eventually, I entered Luther as an MDiv. student , but my call to ministry was not solidified until I spent several months at a Lutheran Camp in New York. It was there where I finally said that I felt called to ministry. I interned at Bethlehem Lutheran in St. Cloud, MN and graduated from Luther in 1988. I completed 4 units of CPE, got married and then was finally ordained on Dec. 9, 1989 at Grace Lutheran Church in Lake Lillian, MN in the congregation where my husband Steve was serving.

My first call was to a two-point parish, First Lutheran in rural Cosmos and Beckville Lutheran in rural Litchfield, in the SW MN Synod. My congregations were 12 and 25 miles from where we lived. During the years as I served there, our oldest son Trevor was born and we moved from the parsonage in Lake Lillian to the parsonage across the road from Beckville Lutheran. We were grateful for the flexibility that all three congregations exhibited in order for that move to be made. In 1993 we accepted a call to Christ Lutheran Church in Cottonwood, MN to serve as co-pastors. We served there until 2000. We began the call with both of us working ¾ time, but during the duration of our calls, we varied the time configuration as we dealt with Steve’s cancer diagnosis, depression, and the birth of our son, Ethan. Again, the congregation was flexible and compassionate during our years with them. From 2000 – 2004, we served as a clergy couple in the Baker, Plevna and Ekalaka parish. Having grown up in Bozeman, I was delighted to be back in Montana. During that time, I first served a term on the Montana Synod Council. In 2004, we accepted the call to serve the newly formed Rivers of Faith Parish, made up of congregations of American and Redeemer, Livingston, and Shields River Lutheran in Wilsall. During our years in Livingston, because I was not in a full-time call, I had time to engage in work of the wider synod, including serving for 11 years as Synod Secretary and also serving as the chair of the Companion Relationship committee with the Cape Orange Diocese on South Africa. In 2017 September I received a call to serve as the Director for Evangelical Mission for the Montana Synod. Having served smaller and multi-point congregations, I have a compassion and experience with complex ministry situations and having interned and worked in large congregations, I have knowledge of some of the dynamics of larger ministries. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve God and God’s people in the Montana Synod.

2020 marks 20 years serving in the Montana Synod. Through the years, I have seen the changes of being one of just a handful of women to now serving in the Synod where more than half of the clergy serving congregations are women. I feel fortunate in that my role as a woman in ministry has typically not been a big issue and if someone has had an issue, I have been able to let it be theirs and not mine. I have experienced that if I just do what I do, then most of the time, people have been accepting of me and my ministry.

The other reality is that as we live in this time of a cultural paradigm shift, the church that I was ordained into and served is not and will not be the church that we experience in the next decades. But as we face challenges in the coming years, I cling to the promise that God’s faithfulness endures.

In gratitude to God,

Peggy Paugh Leuzinger