Having never had a female pastor growing up in Montana (though I know I saw Jean Larson in my congregation from time to time,) it never occurred to me that I might ever get to be, or even have an opportunity to be a pastor.  It was never on my radar.  For 20 or more years, I would tell my friends that I really wanted to be in fulltime ministry someday, that I WOULD “do” ministry fulltime at some point in my life.  But I was the musician—vocalist, choir director, teacher—and I never thought much beyond that, except I loved social ministry as much or more.  And putting groups of people together to get things done.  And serving.  When it became clear to me in my late 40’s that I had to go to seminary, I did. It was hard.  Internship gave me some great mentors. A few interim ministries were complicated. It surprised me how opposed to women preachers some people still were…and when it came to actually being ordained, being older and female brought even more challenges. Sad to say, it seemed that other women were more difficult about this than most men.  One member refused to call me Pastor…she always called me Mrs. Mitzman. Some didn’t hesitate to tell me that they didn’t want a woman pastor (telling those stories is not something one can really get across well in such a short space); it also takes time to tell the stories of other pastors unwilling to take on mentoring a new (female) pastor, or who feel they have to talk over you rather than listen to you. Or talk about you.  But that isn’t the stuff that matters.  Some of it hurts, but there are so many things that have kept me doing what I do.

I was called as an interim in 2011 to serve the very congregation I grew up in and remained a member of throughout my lifetime.  I was their “oldest” member in terms of membership years. (No, I was never the matriarch.) I knew the people, the politics, the foibles and failures.  And they knew mine.  I knew their reputation throughout the synod.  I especially knew what a cool bunch of humanity gathered in that building.  Bishop Jessica warned me that as there would be “no way” I could receive a call to be their next pastor though.  I was fine with that. But that is not the way things turned out.  I *did*receive a call to be their next pastor...I have served longer than any previous pastor did in that congregation.  I was privileged to be ordained and serve in the same church I had spent some 53 years in.  It took longer for the people who had known me all my life to take me seriously as their pastor. That was okay. I performed a wedding for a former kid’s choir member, for a former kindergartner, and for the husband of one of my dearest friends who had died from cancer. I buried my mom’s best friend and her husband who had been one of my high school teachers.  I baptized 5 kids from the same family.  We fed the less fortunate with our “Blessing Boxes” and pantry.  Bread was broken.  Everyday was and is different.  It remains so now throughout this pandemic.  Nothing is the same. Except God.  God is with us. Always and forever.  God remains with us throughout the challenges, the joys, and always uncertain futures and questions of how ministry (and pastoring) will look.  I am called then too.

Rev. Kris Mitzman