Some reflections on ministry…

Looking back to the time when women were first ordained into the ELCA’s predecessor bodies, I am so grateful for those courageous “first” women pastors! I’m thankful, too, for the countless men and women who were willing to be open to the Spirit’s leading, have difficult conversations, and think outside the box for the sake of Christ’s church! I was a confirmation student in the early 70’s, but don’t remember hearing about this remarkable thing. At the church I attended, girls were not allowed to serve as acolytes, communion assistants, or lay readers. I never dreamed I would someday be a pastor, and yet, this coming year (2021) will mark my 20th anniversary as a rostered minister.

God truly does work in mysterious ways!

My particular path to ordained ministry is one that has been marked by conflict. In the months leading up to and following the ELCA’s adoption of the social statement on human sexuality in 2009, the congregation I served as a rostered lay leader came apart at the seams. The old congregation ultimately left the ELCA, but out of that “death” God brought something new to birth – a brand-new worshiping community – and they wanted me to be their pastor. Imagine that!

I’m thankful that leadership in the Montana Synod had already embraced non-traditional routes to ordination. The TEEM program allowed me to attend seminary while serving my congregation. I’m grateful for all the local, synod, and ecumenical colleagues (women and men!) who encouraged, guided, and journeyed with me in those difficult days. I’ve learned just how amazing, unique, and wonderful God’s people are, and I’m convinced that as members of the one body of Christ, we are truly better when we are church together!

I’ve also gained a much deeper appreciation for the voices that come to us from Scripture: Moses’ self-doubt, Jonah’s resistance, Paul’s pastoral guidance, and the example of Queen Esther – who found herself in an unexpected role “for such a time as this”. When it comes to conflict, I don’t wish it for any colleague or congregation. But what my journey as a pastor in our synod has taught me is this: lean on your colleagues when you need to and likewise be there for them; face things head-on, speaking the truth to one another in love; and trust in God’s unfailing compassion and grace. The God we serve is the Source of hope and new life.

It’s good to be a woman pastor in the Montana Synod. With two of us in the family, I should know. For my daughter Sylvia, responding to God’s call on her life has always been possible because she grew up with Jessica Crist and Sandy Van Zyl as role models. For me, it finally feels like I’m wearing the “right clothes”.

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