MEMORIES OF SERVING IN THE MONTANA SYNOD

PASTOR CHERYL HOOPS

It was early in the second year of my seminary training through the TEEM Program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary that I received a call from then Associate to the Bishop Jessica Crist asking if I would be interested in serving as a SAM for the American Lutheran Parish of Harlem, Hogeland and Turner. I said yes, then consulted the Montana map to see where that was. I met with the call committee of the parish in January 2006 and on March 1, 2006 began serving those wonderful people. In January of 2008 I was called to serve as their newly ordained pastor.

As they had for many other first-call pastors, they taught me much about how to be a pastor and were supportive and patient with me in the early years as I negotiated serving while completing seminary. In the five and a half years I served there, I presided at three services most Sundays, baptized 27 adults and children, confirmed 21 young people in the faith, presided at two weddings and 26 funerals for their loved ones. It was a joy and a blessing to serve among them and I will always treasure the memories of my time among the people of Harlem, Hogeland and Turner.

I learned during my time there that pastoring a congregation is very much a mutual relationship – albeit with good boundaries. I rejoiced with them in celebrating weddings, baptisms and confirmations; grieved with them in their loss of loved ones. I shared meals and holidays with them and came to love them. In turn, they loved me back, nurturing my growth as their pastor, encouraging me through my diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer and helping me cope with the death of both of my parents.

I still miss those good people and I miss my Montana Synod colleagues – especially the wonderful post-Easter gatherings with them at Chico Hot Springs.

When I remember my time in the Montana Synod the words of St. Paul in Philippians 1:3-6 come to mind: I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day util now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Blessings today and always,

Pastor Cheryl Hoops