A Reflection on the 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women in the ELCA

The following words, “***Be assured that through the Office of Ministry, God will use you in more ways than you can know, prevent, or design****,”* penned inside a book cover on my ordination day, July 13, 2003, have come to fruition through numerous calls in the Montana Synod and beyond.

I was raised in an American Lutheran Church rural parish where male pastors were the norm. The title “future pastor” in my high school annual would have been an anomaly since I did not ***know*** a woman could fill the pulpit. In 1980, with a passion to serve, I obtained a Master’s Degree in Christian Ministries and accepted my first call to ministry. While serving a two-point parish in a licensed Word and Sacrament role, I received confirmation from the Montana Synod as the first candidate to enroll in TEEM, an alternate route to ordination at PLTS. I want to acknowledge Bishop Mark Ramseth who recognized my gifts for the Office of Ministry.

I could not ***prevent*** the following scenario: one Sunday prior to Worship, a male entering the foyer was shocked to see me and blurted out, “I can’t do this.” Even though he turned around and walked out, I faintly whispered, “God bless you.” As a clergy administrator, I could not ***prevent*** the fact that salary inequities existed, but I fought to achieve equal pay for all. To this day, my wet, frizzy hair still occasionally becomes a ‘wild hair distraction’ during humid summer wedding ceremonies, a driving snow storm graveside burial service, or while offering “Ashes to Go” on our college campus.

When the needs of all people are heard and the church responds in mission, *God’s* ***design*** for ministry abounds. God continually teaches me that people who pray together, grow together in ministry. We are called to empower, identify, encourage, and equip the saints for every day ministry. May we be inspired to guide vision and mission of all—parishioners, seniors, young adults, corporate boards, church councils, committees, campus boards—to minister to a world in need.

Following Worship one Sunday, an esteemed patriarch shared these words of wisdom with me: “Pastor, I couldn’t hear a word you said, but it was great to worship with you this week!” She puts it all in perspective—this is God’s work. Our hands. Whether you are initiating your journey or adapting to COVID-19 ministry guidelines this day, “***Be assured that through the Office of Ministry, God will use you in more ways than you can know, prevent, or design*.**” Thanks be to God!

Let us pray: Lord, open our hearts in such a way that we may hear your call to serve. May we respond as you lead in ways unknown, unheard of, or even imagined. Grant us courage, wit, and wisdom that comes from you, alone, Oh Lord.

Amen.

*I am grateful for the following calls by God’s* ***Design****:*

Montana State University. Bozeman, MT. Campus Pastor

Grace Lutheran Church & St. Paul Lutheran Church. Fairfield, MT. Interim Pastor Immanuel Lutheran Communities. Kalispell, MT. Director of Pastoral Care Immanuel Lutheran Communities. Kalispell, MT. Two tenures as Interim CEO American Lutheran Church. Winifred, MT. Pastor

Zion Lutheran Church. Lewistown, MT. Director of Lay & Youth Ministries Zion Lutheran Church. Lewistown, MT. First TEEM Ordination in MT American Lutheran Church. Winifred, MT. Licensed Word and Sacrament Call Roy Presbyterian Church. Roy, MT. Licensed Word and Sacrament Call

Our Redeemer’s Lutheran Church. Helena, MT. Director of Lay Ministries Northridge Lutheran Church. Kalispell, MT. Director of Lay Ministries Northridge Lutheran Church. Kalispell, MT. First Associate in Ministry in MT Our Savior’s Lutheran Church. Columbia Falls, MT. Parish Worker

Shetek Lutheran Bible Camp. Slayton, MN. Program Assistant Lutherans Outdoors. Sioux Falls, SD. Public Relations Coordinator

Pastor Kathleen Larson Aasheim October 2020