Montana Synod

As a 6-year-old child I started to attend a Lutheran Sunday School close to our house as my parents didn’t drive. At 7 I was baptized and at 16 confirmed. During the summer between High School and college I worked as a Counselor in Training for the local Lutheran Bible Camp. While going through college at Pacific Lutheran University, I spent the summers as a camp counselor for the 3 Lutheran Bible Camps in Washington State. I thought that perhaps by attending PLU I might meet a future pastor and become “the pastor’s wife.” That didn’t work. It was during my senior year in college that it became possible for a woman to become an ordained pastor. As a first generation, goal-oriented college student I felt that it was too late for me to become a pastor.

Over the years my service as a lay person widely varied. With a change of pastors, I served as a lay worship leader, worked with a woman interim and served as Sunday school teacher, confirmation assistant, choir member and director and handbell director, VBS lead teacher, youth group leader, Secretary of the congregation, deacon and call committee member. I didn’t serve on property and management but I was married to the treasurer.

From my experiences, the next thing I knew I was taking Greek II without completing Greek I (thank goodness for my Latin classes) in St. Paul. I continued to take one class at a time independent study and then summer classes offered by Seattle University. My goal was to retire from teaching and be ready for internship but with a family of 3 adopted girls and their issues it actually took 14 years before graduation.

Now the Northwest Washington Synod Bishop was a family friend and when it was time for graduates to be placed in a synod, he let me know that I had been “dealt away” to the Montana Synod. So, while my husband and I were driving through the Carolinas, the last states on our bucket list, Bishop Jessica called and welcomed me to Montana. She mentioned sending my paperwork to Circle and Opheim. Circle decided to wait until after the harvest to get around to calling me but Opheim called and made arrangements for my interview immediately. Soon I was riding the train to Glasgow and going by car to forever in my mind, 50 miles to Opheim. Once they decided to call me, I returned home to grab a few things as school was about to start and I was also going to serve as the music teacher at the school as well.

As a pastor and congregation in Opheim we faced challenges. There were issues resulting from previous pastors, for some I was another woman, births and deaths, really good crops and not so good, the larger churches vote of homosexual pastors being called, 22 days of no school, early dismissal and late arrival do to blizzards and the reality that the church really couldn’t fund a full time pastor anymore.

There were times of blessings for us as well. We offered the community a Sunday School and a youth group. The church celebrated their 100th anniversary. The few Methodists that were in town decided to join our congregation. We had a wonderful traveling and welcoming service complete with a visit by Bishop Jessica. Ecumenical services were held for Baccalaureate, Week of Prayer and Thanksgiving. Sometimes I ended up helping with funeral arrangements for people in the area including the local Catholic community when the priest couldn’t be there. One very special event was the presence of the Pastor Presidente from Bolivia having a chance to come to visit the church and the school as well as have his picture taken at the Canadian border. When I dropped him off in Glasgow, I thought I would be saying good-by to a new friend for good. Little did I know that while I continued to serve in Montana, I would have the wonderful chance to go to Bolivia as part of a group of women from the Montana Synod. Not only did I get to see my friend again but we had a chance to worship with and greet Lutheran Christians in Bolivia. As a retired teacher I was to happy to be with the children and even had a chance to share the good news of God’s love with them during a children’s sermon.

After a conversation with the Valley County Sheriff an ecumenical jail ministry was started and still continues on today. Lutherans, a Methodist and a Catholic shared their faith and listened to the inmate’s stories. The baptism of an inmate of the jail was a highlight of that experience for me. It’s the only time I baptized someone in handcuffs and surrounded by deputies.

While in Opheim, I gained so much respect for the wheat farmers there. They live through all kinds of weather, not knowing if the crop will sprout, if there will be enough moisture in the ground, and if they will be able to harvest the crop before hailstorms or other disasters will devastate the crop. I continue to pray for all the people living there.

It was agreed that while I was a pastor my husband would become the “house husband.” It wasn’t long before he was a substitute teacher, a substitute bus driver, he taught drivers ed, became a city council member and the water system operator as well as a member of the county refuse committee.

Soon it was time to move on and I was called to a two-point parish, to Froid and Ebenezer Lutheran. It was while I was there that I wrote to Bishop Jessica that I was not just doing rural ministry but rather “frontier” ministry. Ebenezer Lutheran stood alone on the plain. Years before there had been a large community. It was new to me to have a church with no water for cooking, washing and a restroom. It was amazing what kind of a potluck and a meal they could create as well as a wonderful bazaar. This church is composed of mostly a large extended family. While small, this church is active in creating and collecting all kinds of things for Lutheran World Relief. They have also been offering a church service at the local hospital/ nursing home once a month. Froid Lutheran was in the town of Froid itself. Froid means cold in all kinds of languages. While the weather was cold the people were warm and friendly. They too provided a community Sunday School. Good cooks abounded and the church reached out not only to the community but to hunters that came with a wonderful home cooked meal including pie. The women weren’t the only cooks however. It was the men who ran the Lutefisk dinner from ordering to cooking and clean up. People came from Canada as well as from far and wide if they were travelling through. One older member and I spent many evening hours visiting and making prayer shawls for people in the community. We believe we finished 70-80.

It was while I was there that the whole cluster gathered together for a reformation service and a meal. The service had all of the pastors involved and people from the whole cluster in a choir. The service was held in Plentywood and was broadcast on the local radio station. People from the cluster were also involved in not one but two Thrivent concerts with the proceeds going to the Freedom in Christ Ministry.

While we were there, we both were involved in the fire department and my “house husband” was certified as a National EMT. He drove the activity bus to the speech and drama for a neighboring school district. I spent some of two years serving as a music teacher in 2 districts. We both were involved in the Prairie Symphonette for all 10 years we served in Montana.

What’s amazing for me is that little 6-year-old Sunday School student would end up becoming a pastor and leading worship, sharing God’s love with so many, doing pastoral care and all the other things pastors do. I feel blessed to have walked with God’s people.