Mt Synod Women Ministry October 2020

My experience of ministry in Montana was late in coming. I didn’t attend college until my forties. Then my entry into seminary was a call ushered in by a whirlwind. The Graduate Theological Union and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary came with culture shock, but so was the year I spent at Wartburg in Des Moines, Iowa. The latter prepared me for more of the same regarding ministry, the former prepared me for the future. Both cultures are present in Montana and bridging that gulf can be a challenge. As a woman pastor I found that being a Montana native was helpful. I was welcomed as “one of us”, rather than an outsider. As a mature woman, I found an easy entre for relationships especially with women. I think that by the time you’ve reached middle age you innately have all the authority, wisdom and experience you need to take a leadership position. All that has gone before has trained you to interact with varieties of people and issues. You have learned to listen to your own internal authority. But the external authority granted by the call of the church gives you the opportunity to prove yourself to the congregations or institutions to which you are called. One thing seminary does not seem to prepare you for is administration, and the constant demands of forming relationships with your peers and congregants. This is where a mature person has an edge of experience. This has served me well in my ministry to both city and rural parishes.

I took part in Intentional Ministry through the Methodist Church and found it extremely helpful in filling in the gaps of administration and organization. One thing stressed is to examine all the systems of the church and draw the congregation in to updating and adapting where needed. It also gives a great opportunity to encourage people to look at their church from a different perspective and pick up new insights in how to run the church, and to revamp their ministry into a current format instead of business as usual. I highly recommend interim training whether or not you may choose to be an interim.

 I have learned that teamwork is vital to the success of the spread of the gospel. The pastor cannot be the only one preaching and teaching and serving – it is a group effort. I have learned the great wisdom congregations have to offer their pastor, not only about their own church, but about their communities and areas. One thing that has been my theme in ministry is love – loving your congregation with God’s love, being willing to be vulnerable with them, and caring about their lives and concerns. This is an important foundation to being able to incite and invite others into deeper spiritual growth and relationship with God. Just as each person is an individual, called to work in their own fashion with their own gifts, each congregation has a history and a personality that guides them in ways no one can quite fathom. Respect for them and their way of being in the world is so important to a seamless blending of ministry. My deepest regret is my slowness in learning to hear and recognize God’s Holy Spirit as the voice of inspiration. More than once I failed to listen and missed making a hospital visit before it was too late or overlooked the message behind the words someone was speaking. I learned how important my own spiritual study, prayer and meditation was to fit me for the duties and challenges that would come along. Now as a retired pastor I find a sadness that it’s all over so soon, but great satisfaction at the opportunity I had to learn, grow and share in the work of ministry. Montana is full of people and parishes that want only to learn more each day how to make their faith grow deeper and reach wider, while being encouraged that God is with them, at work spreading Good News.