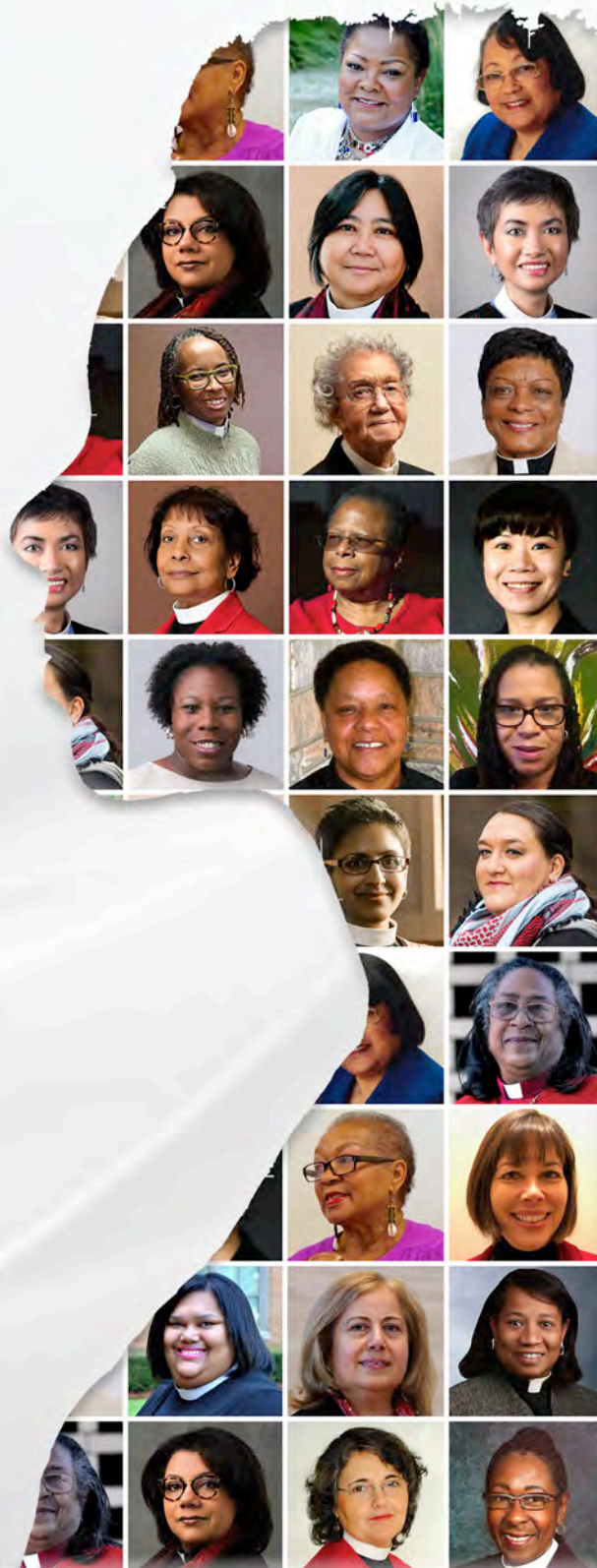


God's Faithfulness on the Journey

Reflections by

ROSTERED
WOMEN of COLOR



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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Introduction

*M. Wyvetta Bullock and Cheryl Stewart Pero
(with Rosetta E. Ross, Ph.D.)*

2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It has been a year of celebrating the beginning of Protestantism, which emerged from the 1517 publicizing of Martin Luther's 95 propositional challenges to the Christian church. 2017 is even more special for Lutherans since it marks five centuries during which the Lutheran theological tradition developed worldwide reach and influence. Commemorations of the birth of Lutheranism abound across the globe, and, interestingly, include a gathering of 120 women from 18 countries who traveled to Wittenberg, Germany, the town where Luther conceived and wrote his 95 theses. The women gathered in Wittenberg to publicize the challenge that, while Lutherans celebrate 500 years of the tradition's birth, "in many churches, women are disadvantaged." The diverse group of 17 bishops and other church leaders included women "from Suriname, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Latvia, Norway and Greenland."¹ A publicity photograph memorializing their August 2017 gathering is stunning, because it presents high-ranking women church officials in clerical dress representing Lutherans worldwide *and* because it presents the racial and ethnic diversity among Lutheran women leaders. Unfortunately, as the message they shared proclaims, diversity in Lutheranism, including the ELCA, is an issue that warrants special attention.

On July 27, 2015, the Pew Research Center released results of a poll on religious diversity in the United States. In an article titled "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups,"² Michael Lipka reports the survey examined 30 groups and looked for the presence of "Hispanics, as well as non-Hispanic whites, blacks, Asians and an umbrella category of other races and mixed-race Americans." The ELCA was found at the bottom of the list, second from last, with 96 percent white people. Although there have been steady (though small) increases toward the ELCA's 10-year anniversary goal of achieving 10 percent people of color/language other than English by 1998, increases from 2.2 percent in 1998, to 2.7 (2008), to 3.6 (2009), to 4.8 percent (2014)³ are dismal after 30-plus years of having such a goal. The reality that attrition (of white members) accounts for a substantial amount of the change makes the minor increases even more disappointing.

The Lutheran theological tradition of grace and freedom is often compelling to people of color in the United States, but the ELCA remains burdened by its Northern European culture and orientation, which, among other misconceptions, assumes that all people of color are recent members of the church, that people of color are not able to understand and promote Lutheran theology and piety, that they are in the ELCA to become assimilated, and that the gifts God gave people of color are inferior. This attitude is reflected in literature the ELCA publishes, in our standards of local expressions of this church, our recruitment strategies, our understandings (or lack thereof) of our mission, and in the way our rostered leaders of color are welcomed and treated.

¹ "A Visual Message from Wittenberg on Women's Ordination," The Lutheran World Federation, lutheranworld.org/news/here-we-stand, accessed Oct. 28, 2017.

² See Michael Lipka, "The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research Center, pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/, accessed July 30, 2017.

³ John Hessian and Kenneth W. Inskeep, "Multicultural Ministries in the ELCA: A Status Report," The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation Desk, July 2017, 4.

In seminary training and candidacy processes, there often are few places where the pastors and leaders of congregations with which students of color are placed for learning purposes also are people of color. Often, too, many well-meaning white sisters and brothers supervising students of color think that they are being inclusive, but actually they are woefully ignorant of the dynamics of what it really means to be inclusive. They have not understood that to be pro-people of color does not mean to be anti-white people. They are not alert to micro-aggressions students of color endure regularly, and they insist that those incidents be ignored or minimized. They are not prepared to challenge the colonial thinking and exclusivity of Euro-American standards of acceptability that most of our congregations inculcate. For ELCA women of color seminarians and clergy, the experience often is even more acute.

Twenty years ago, Cheryl Pero observed that she expected the 25th anniversary observation of the ordination of women to be a celebration of and for white women. Having been disappointed that there was no recognition of the first ordained Latina and Black women (the Rev. Lydia Rivera Kalb and the Rev. Earlean Miller in April and August of 1979, respectively) during the 15th-year celebration, nor recognition of the 1990 first ordained American Indian and Asian women during the 20th anniversary celebration, Pero wrote, “I no longer look to my European American sisters for either acknowledgment of or affirmation toward women of color.”⁴

Rostered women of color ministry experiences often are characterized by discouragement and lack of support. The ELCA “Work and Home Life” survey asserts that “race/ethnicity and gender influence [characteristics and ministry experiences of pastors in the ELCA] with regard to the call process and calls received, how a pastor understands and experiences being in ministry, and the level of compensation received.”⁵ While they sometimes are supported, ELCA women of color often matriculate through seminary and candidacy and enter pastoral leadership by dint of their own determination in quilting together the affirmation, assistance and opportunities they need. On average, women of color wait three to five years to enter their first (and sometimes subsequent) pastoral calls. Forty-five percent report receiving compensation below synod compensation guidelines.⁶

Still, there is good news, in spite of the, sometimes, gruesome realities. The women who contributed to this project have survived the process of rostering and are role models for other women of color. Moreover, not all candidacy and first-call challenges are so grueling. The ELCA now has more than 240 rostered women of color who serve the church and the communities to which they have been called in a variety of capacities. We have included many of their stories in this resource as another important element in celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Lutheranism. Telling the whole story, as one contributor notes, is integrally related to the church’s work of helping overcome the silencing, repression and exclusion of people of color, in general, and women of color, in particular, in the ELCA. By presenting the contributors’ stories in their own voices, this resource joins the church in its work of breaking the silence and celebrating women of color agency.

⁴ Cheryl Pero, “Women of Color and the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of Women in the Lutheran Church” in *Lutheran Women in Ordained Ministry 1970-1995*, ed. Gloria E. Bengston (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 113.

⁵ John Hessian, “Work and Home Life – Clergy” in *45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report*, Research and Evaluation, Office of the Presiding Bishop (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), 1.

⁶ *Forty-fifth Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report and Multicultural Ministries Staff Report*, Research and Evaluation Unit, Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Indian scholar, literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is well known for analyzing the significance of “in their own voices,” especially through her essay “Can the Subaltern speak?”⁷ Spivak uses the term “subaltern” to identify populations who are socially, politically and geographically outside structures of power and who often do not have access to or control over processes of writing the stories and histories of which they are a part. Subaltern speech is the unfiltered voice of people outside the ordinary structures of authority, policy-construction and decision-making. The title of Spivak’s essay is a rhetorical question pointing out that whether subalterns, particularly women, are able to speak for themselves relates not simply to their capacity to utter words but, more importantly, to their access to mechanisms and sites of communication, to their freedom from retaliation, to the content of their speech being valued. Through the intersection of racialization and gender discrimination across a wide range of institutional and cultural practices, women-of-color speech often is excluded, punished and trivialized. As a consequence, often, they are invisible, their experiences are negated, and their agency is erased in narrative accounts of what has happened at local, regional, national and international levels. For rostered women of color in the ELCA, the “subaltern” reality is not absolute, nor are the challenges encountered faced by every one of them. However, negative racialization and gender discrimination frequently exclude or minimize speech about their unique experiences and, thereby, silence women of color because what is voiced about their experiences often is not seen as important or valuable.

The Canaanite woman in Matthew’s Gospel (and the Syrophenician woman in Mark’s Gospel) presents an example of perseverance by a woman “outsider” and gives one answer to the question “Can the subaltern speak?” Matthew presents this woman as “excluded” from the House of Israel and without rights to call upon Jesus, but the woman understands herself as “included” and boldly speaks inclusion by shouting out to Jesus, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David!” Certainly, Spivak affirms that women can speak. The significance of her essay lies in its recognition and analysis of reasons for the absence of subaltern voices within the ordinary thinking and planning of so-called “insiders.” This points to the need for collaboration. So-called “subalterns” sometimes have entry points on the inside and are themselves “insiders” of communities with rich traditions and wisdom. In the case of the ELCA, collaboration may occur, on one hand, as those who have “ELCA-insider” power speak on behalf of subalterns but also, and *more importantly*, make room for full inclusion, so those viewed as “ELCA-subalterns,” rostered women of color, for example, may speak inside the ELCA for themselves. On the other hand, rostered women of color are insiders with knowledge of and access to experiences and communities that the ELCA needs. This resource is one example of rostered women of color seeking collaboration by speaking to the ELCA from their knowledge and experiences.

In preparing a resource centralizing the voices of rostered women of color, the intention is not to exclude or diminish contributions of other women within our church. As many writers indicate, numerous rostered women of color were identified, mentored, encouraged and nurtured by lay women who supported their development and service as clergy and who have been and are strongholds at the congregational, conference, synod, region and churchwide levels. Likewise, some white clergy sisters have stood with women of color and have their own stories of challenge and celebration to share. We recognize that were it not for the leadership and support of lay women and some white clergy sisters, challenges faced by rostered women of color would have been and would be even more difficult.

⁷ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Christian (New York: Columbia, 1994), 66-111.

Of the 240 rostered women of color in the ELCA, this resource has captured reflections by 38 of them. Regrettably, there are fewer voices from some rostered women of color communities. That some communities are less represented indicates the way compounded negative realities may narrow and complicate the time and space for creative thinking, reflection and writing and, thereby, also contribute to erasure and silencing. For other women who are contributors, concerns about retaliation and trivialization are palpable. There are some parts of the stories that are not written here. This is not because the stories would be invalid or because the women could not write them; portions of their stories are not written because it is too painful and too difficult to share in this format. Many believe that telling *all* of their stories at this time would put their ministries at risk.

Still, the 43 included contributions are cause for celebration. They tell of the joys and pains women of color experienced in their discernment, preparation, call and placement in this church. Their stories celebrate the families, mentors and supporters who have journeyed with them. Their stories give praise to an always faithful God who has never left or forsaken them. The women in these stories have served as pastors, chaplains, administrators, educators and leaders of various ministries with and on behalf of this church. Many have served internationally. All continue to give themselves away for God's service. All are a part of God's story as lived out in the ELCA and in the world God so loves.

For many years, women of color in the ELCA felt silenced and searched for opportunities to speak for themselves. In 1992, when there was an initial gathering of ELCA women of color, the possibility of this resource began to be realized. The vision of women of color voices being heard was caught by several people who organized a second gathering, "At the Sound of Our Name," in April 2009. The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is an excellent time to join the chorus of voices commemorating the Reformation call for liberty among God's people and to help ensure that rostered women of color never be seen as the silent "ELCA-subaltern" again.

The stories in this resource are written for generations now and to come. They are written for this church and the whole body of Christ. They are written so that the world may know God has called and continues to call women of color as leaders for God's work. We invite you to enjoy these stories and use them as an incentive to engage the fullness of God's story by sharing your own stories in small groups, Christian education settings, family gatherings, open forums and times of celebration. Thank you for your interest, your time and for hearing what the hearts of rostered women of color in the ELCA have to share with you!



REFLECTIONS



At 98 years old in 2018, Louisa Groce is the eldest of the authors contributing to God's Faithfulness on the Journey. We start with her story, and follow with contributions in alphabetical order.

God's Plan for Me

Louisa Groce

"For surely, I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

-- Jeremiah 29:11

It was the early 1920s when my parents, William and Lillian Davis, purchased the ideal home in West Philadelphia. It had three bedrooms with spacious living and dining rooms, a gas stove, instead of coal, and a full-sized icebox in the kitchen.

An elementary school was directly across the street. Mother could watch us cross the street to and from school. When we left the house, turned right, passed three other houses and crossed Haverford Avenue, there stood a big, beautiful church. However, my parents soon discovered that it was not a Baptist church, nor was it open to all Christians. To enter those sacred doors, you had to be white and Lutheran.

The DeLoach families from Louisiana were also new arrivals to this West Philadelphia community. They were Lutherans whose original language was French, not German, and whose complexion suggested they were of mixed blood. They petitioned The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod to provide them with a spiritual leader. Paul Trumpoldt, a recent graduate from seminary, was ordained as the mission developer for people of color.

The storefront property next to the school, a stone's throw from the Lutheran church on the corner, became St. Philip's Evangelical Lutheran Church for "Negroes" and the site of my first Sunday school experience at age 5. A new chapter in the lives of the Davis family also came into being.

Eventually, the storefront was replaced with a small church building open for multiple activities for children and youth. There was Wednesday confirmation class, the Friday evening teenage gathering, church picnics, a choir that became musically competent in Bach chorales, as well as the male-only church council, the Ladies Aide group and more. Eventually, the Davis family became active members, responsible for maintaining the facility, serving as members of the choir, and participating in other activities sponsored by the church. My personal journey started at age 12, as the teacher for the youngest children in Sunday school. Every Sunday during the singing of the doxology, I walked the neighborhood collecting young children for my class.

Pastor Trumpoldt served this community of faith for 19 years – all of my growing-up years. He listened to my joys, my hurts, my disappointments and my aspirations. He offered consolation when I realized that I could never become a Lutheran nun or deaconess, nor teach in a Lutheran parochial school because of my ethnicity.

In 1950, another Lutheran church for people of color was established in the Mount Airy section of Philadelphia. As well-educated professionals began to infiltrate that community, Holy Cross Lutheran Church came into being. I had also moved to the area with my five daughters and transferred my membership, becoming an active member.

In 1977, I moved to Willingboro, N.J. Although there was a Lutheran church in the community, I continued to travel to Philadelphia to Holy Cross Lutheran Church. A snow storm initiated unforeseeable changes in my life. I decided to attend the Lutheran church in Willingboro that Sunday, rather than traveling to Philadelphia. After sitting, I realized that I was the only non-white worshiper. However, the order of service was certainly familiar. When leaving, I announced to the pastor that I was Lutheran. My visits to St. Luke became more frequent. Eventually, I transferred my membership, unaware that I was forsaking my Missouri Synod roots. Dorothy Ricks, assigned by the Lutheran Church in America to encourage and facilitate community outreach at St. Luke, became a lifelong friend and mentor. When Dorothy was reassigned to a broader mission, I also acquired a new title, associate in ministry, responsible for the after-school program at St. Luke. My involvement and responsibilities increased.

However, it was the following series of events that would disclose God's plan for me, which brought about a realization of the "impossible":

A lunch-hour visitor

- The telephone call
- A request from Dorothy Ricks
- The bishop's letter
- Acceptance and enrollment in the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia
- Graduation
- ORDINATION

Waiting for me in the multi-purpose room in St. Luke one day was a gentleman I did not know and, to my knowledge, had never seen. After introducing himself as Wolfgang Herz-Lane, he stated the purpose of the visit: "Would you be interested in serving as a member of the Camden Lutheran Parish?"

I would be serving as the spiritual leader for New Life Lutheran Church, responsible for maintaining and developing a viable congregation. On the Sundays scheduled for holy communion, the Rev. Margaret Herz-Lane would arrive in time to offer communion. I accepted the challenge. As a member of the Camden Lutheran Parish, I received exceptional on-the-job training and support.

The telephone caller was unknown to me. Several days passed before I returned the call and spoke to the Rev. George E. Handley, coordinator for Region Seven, the Northeast Region of the Lutheran Church in America. There was an unfilled staff position, facilitator for multicultural ministries. I accepted the position, which was enlightening and a gift. New challenges evolved related to a deeper understanding of the concept of inclusiveness. This position was eliminated when several different expressions of being Lutheran merged to form the ELCA.

God revealed the next episode in my journey with a call from Dorothy Ricks. Her request was that I shepherd two small congregations at extreme ends of Philadelphia. The church building of the small congregation in North Philadelphia had been destroyed by fire. Worship and other

activities occurred in a small, two-story, two-room building adjacent to their former sanctuary. Violence in the community made it unsafe for this handful of senior worshipers to gather. Transferring to a safer church community was recommended.

For six years, I was “the pastor” of Emanuel Lutheran Church in South Philadelphia. In the past, Emanuel had been a thriving congregation with a parochial school, as well as involvement in numerous activities with other Lutheran congregations. When the pastor accepted another call, membership declined, the church building was not maintained, the school was discontinued, and the community with its high-rise projects was unsafe. My task was one of encouragement, revival, restoration and renewed hope. The Rev. Cornelius Eaddy, a graduate of Upsala College, a former member of and student of Emanuel Lutheran Church, is the current shepherd of Emanuel Lutheran Church.

The Saturday morning mail included a letter from the New Jersey Synod of the ELCA. My initial thought was weekend mail could wait until Monday, but curiosity changed my mind. Bishop E. Roy Riley had extended an invitation to do the impossible. I called him reminding him of my age – in my 70s and fast approaching my 80s. Would anyone my age be accepted as a student, especially by the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia?

God’s answer was yes. I completed my studies several years later at age 80 and accepted a call to Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jersey City, N.J. It was an unimaginable privilege to serve this community as an ordained minister for 10 years – one of God’s miracles. During my 98 years of life, I have seen God sweep aside barriers of ethnicity, gender and age to help me become a pastor of Christ’s beloved people. Each step of the way, this was not a calling I sought nor did it come about by my effort. It has all been God’s work from beginning to end, so that I may sing with the prophet these words given to me for a confirmation memory verse so many years ago – promises most wonderfully fulfilled:

*“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,
But my steadfast love shall not depart you,
And the covenant of peace shall not be removed,
Says the Lord, who has compassion on you.”*

-- Isaiah 54:10

A Snapshot of One Multiracial ELCA Pastor

April Almaas

“Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.”

— Rick Blaine, “Casablanca”

Apparently, I’m something of a unicorn. A year ago, the Pew Research Center published a report on “The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups.” I am multiracial. And yet, according to the Pew study, I was baptized into one of the whitest denominations in the United States (the United Methodist Church, 94 percent white), and ordained into another (the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 96 percent white). Further, of the ELCA’s non-white minority, even fewer of that number are rostered pastors. How is it that I came to be one of them?⁸

And They Asked: “What Are You?”

I was born to a “white” mother and a “black” father eight years after the Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting interracial marriage were unconstitutional. While my parents’ union was considered legal, my birth certificate’s designations of “white” and “black” fall short of describing the full diversity of my ethnic background. Following my matrilineal line back to the late 1800s in this country, my great-grandmothers were American Indian, European American, African American and Middle Eastern. If one were to add my European American and Middle Eastern heritages together (since Semitic peoples are considered “Caucasian”) my majority race is white. However, our country has a long history of practicing hypodescent – where children of mixed unions are assigned to the “subordinate” ethnic group – and, according to this practice, I am black. In total, however, I represent at least three races and eight ethnicities. I self-identify as multiracial.⁹

Why Ordained Ministry in the ELCA, and How?

During my senior year of high school, I preached on Youth Sunday. I was stunned after the service when our pastor asked me if I had ever considered becoming a pastor. This question continued to echo within me over the next five years.

At college I searched for a local worship community to plug into. I visited a number of different churches – non-denominational, Byzantine Catholic, Messianic Jewish, Mennonite and the Religious Society of Friends. While I felt God’s presence in each of these different settings, none of them was exactly the right fit for me. Before finding a new church home, I met my future husband, a Lutheran foreign exchange student from Norway. We became involved in the ELCA’s Lutheran Campus Ministry at The Ohio State University. The liturgical style and abundance of Marty Haugen’s music resonated with me, as did the theological emphasis on both/and (saint and sinner, law and gospel). At the age of 21, I joined the ELCA.

By the time I was finishing my bachelor’s degree, it was clear to me that I was experiencing a sense of call. I sought to begin the candidacy process through the Southern Ohio Synod and was granted entrance. I was then accepted into Harvard Divinity School (HDS) where I completed my

⁸ Michael Lipka, “The Most and Least Racially Diverse U.S. Religious Groups,” Pew Research Center, July 27, 2015, pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/.

⁹ For the US Census Bureau’s discussion of the concept “race” and designations of races in the 2000 U.S. Census, see census.gov/c2k0br01/race_pop.html.

Master of Divinity. Although HDS is not a Lutheran seminary, I had a very Lutheran experience there, blessed by scholars such as Krister Stendahl, Helmut Koester, Paul Hanson, Christine Helmer, and two years as a field study intern at University Lutheran Church in Harvard Square.

I graduated from HDS in 2005 (while continuing with candidacy through the Southern Ohio Synod) and then moved to Berkeley, Calif., to take my Lutheran studies year at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS). While a student at PLTS, I completed a cross-culture experience in ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa in the Limpopo Province. I fulfilled my Clinical Pastoral Education requirement at Stanford University Hospital and Clinics and was pastoral intern in a small ELCA congregation for 15 months. In 2009, I had the great joy to accept a call as associate pastor at Holy Redeemer Lutheran Church and was ordained a pastor in the ELCA by Bishop Mark Holmerud.

Uh, Oh: All Is Not as It Seemed!

I chose the ELCA because I had experienced our church at its best. In addition to our rich theology and emphasis on social justice, personally, I always have been warmly embraced and supported here. By happenstance, my ELCA experience has been very diverse – I first attended a Lutheran Campus Ministry that had an American Indian pastor, first joined a congregation that happened to be Reconciling in Christ, in a synod that had an African American bishop. It wasn't until after I had graduated with my Master of Divinity and completed the candidacy process that I discovered that this is not the norm (as the Pew Study illustrates). But it can be. Together we can stop the ecclesiology of exclusion!

The Unintended Journey

Tempie Beaman

On May 17, 2014, I was consecrated as a diaconal minister. Becoming a rostered leader in the ELCA was not part of any plan I had. Interestingly, in his sermon that day, the Rev. Albert Starr Jr. remarked that I'd been doing this work all of my life. Clearly this was part of God's plan. It was a plan, however, I resisted for a very long time. There was a period when the demands of my professional life combined with my church activities were so great that I did not seem to have any time for myself and the things I wanted to pursue. I wished that there was a way to merge the two aspects of my life. Looking back, that was probably the first inkling of the Spirit calling me to a new life. It was several years before I actually listened and obeyed.

During those ensuing years, I retired from the university and started my own consulting firm focusing on small non-profits and faith-based organizations. I became interested in one class of our synodical lay leaders training program, Equipping Leaders for Mission, and ended up completing the two-year program. I became heavily involved in the community organizing efforts in which my congregation, Ascension Lutheran in Los Angeles, was engaged and eventually accepted the congregation's request to serve as the administrator of our elementary school that we closed three years later. Unbeknownst to me, this was preparation for what God had planned. The closing of the school had a particularly negative impact on me emotionally, financially and spiritually. It was during the months following the closure that I learned how to truly trust God and find joy in the midst of a major storm. I began to explore God's purpose for my life.

One afternoon while having a talk with the Rev. Carol Scott, associate pastor at Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in Inglewood, Calif., she asked if I had ever considered seminary. I looked at her as if she were crazy. Then I said I was too old. I remember her response clearly: "You have a good 20 years." I later learned that she thought that I was 10 years younger. As I started to mention this to various people, several indicated that they had suggested I consider seminary some years before. I did not recall any of those conversations. I guess now I was ready to hear what God had been trying to say to me.

It was three years from the time the school closed until I initiated and completed the entrance requirements for the roster. I began seminary at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) program in 2007, completing my course work in 2010 and graduating in 2011.

My seminary experience was atypical at best. At the time, I was serving as the Lutheran Disaster Response coordinator for Southern California and Hawaii. Immediately following my first set of classes in October 2007, we had major fires in Southern California, as we did in each of the three years that followed. My TEEM cohort was one of the largest, if not the largest, and we were pretty cohesive and close, even though most of us only saw each other three times a year. The PLTS-Luther TEEM program was designed for ministers of word and sacrament. I was the first and as far as I know the only minister of word and service to go through the program. All of the professors' assignments were created for those serving as clergy in a congregational setting. I was neither clergy nor in a congregational setting. I was serving in a social service agency working with secular and interfaith religious organizations. Our TEEM assignments were meant to be practical and useful in our context. As the only diaconal minister candidate in the program, I recognized it was a challenge for my professors to refine their assignments for someone who was not serving in a congregational setting.

This diaconal ministry roster continues to be a challenge because it is not well understood by laity and often is seen as a threat to clergy. Diaconal ministers and other lay rosters often do not receive the same level of support in finding a call as do clergy. Many accept non-stipendiary calls, as I did, so they can do the work God called them to do. As the church moves forward, my prayer is that those called to word and service ministries, who are primarily women, will be seen as vital, valued and viable partners in the work of the church. What continues to sustain me is the fact that I am doing what God wants me to do. He promised to take care of my needs if I heeded His call. I am, and He does! The Lord is my refuge and my strength.

I am in the last months of my call as the executive director of My Friend's House Inc., an organization that works to end hunger and promote healthy living in Los Angeles. I plan to retire in April 2017, just two weeks before celebrating the third anniversary of my consecration and a few weeks after my 70th birthday. I will continue to serve the Lord in my congregation and as pulpit supply within the Southwest California Synod. But most of my time will be spent doing those things I never quite got around to pursuing.

Jesus Walks with Me All the Time!

Thulie Beresford

I was born and raised in a Christian home in South Africa. My paternal ancestors were among the first converts of the German Lutheran missionaries, so I have always been a Lutheran. Both my parents were active church members, and my late father was a lay preacher. My mother was a registered nurse, and my father was a teacher, poet, playwright, author and musician. My name is Thulisiwe. After the birth of a second son, my mother used to cry wanting a baby girl. So when I was born, my father named me Thulisiwe, which means “I made my mother stop crying” (Condolence).

At the age of 9, I left South Africa for Swaziland to live with my maternal grandmother and after two years attended an ecumenical Christian boarding school; this was another faith-forming and enriching experience. At age 16, I graduated from high school and received a scholarship to study science at the University of Swaziland. At age 18, while a sophomore in college, I had a major life-changing experience on Christmas Eve 1980. I was stabbed almost to death in my hometown in South Africa and permanently lost sight in one eye.

I struggled with a God who would allow such harm to happen to such a good Christian. I stayed away from church for a while, but having been raised in a Christian home and having known the comfort of a God who always walked with me as South Africa still struggled with apartheid, racial injustice against the non-whites, I knew I needed God in my life more than ever. I knelt and prayed and asked God to use me as an instrument of healing in the world, using Henri Nouwen’s book *Wounded Healer*. I wanted to be a pastor, but the Lutheran Church in South Africa was not yet ordaining women. After graduating from college, I worked at a community college in South Africa teaching math and science. Two years later, I received a scholarship to do my master’s degree in biology at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where I attended Christ Lutheran and met for the first time a female Lutheran pastor, the Rev. Patricia Lull. After meeting Pastor Lull, my heart began to burn within me knowing that I could be a pastor. I shared with Pastor Lull my story of a calling into the ministry. She encouraged me to finish my studies and promised that the congregation would sponsor me to go to Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio, if I still felt the call.

After two years in South Africa, I communicated with Pastor Lull about the call to the ministry, and I enrolled at Trinity. The seminary partially sponsored me, eliminating the financial burden. I met my husband to be in seminary. My seminary experience was good and transformative. I grew in my own faith and enjoyed being a Greek student and theology graduate assistant.

As a pastor in the ELCA, I have a diverse ministry experience ranging from pastoring inner-city congregations and also serving as a chaplain in a hospital and retirement community settings.

I began my ministry at Salem Lutheran in Flint, Mich., an impoverished city where I served for 14 years. Both our children were born there. I wasn’t planning to take that call, but my husband reminded me that I was acting like Jonah. Seminary didn’t prepare me for inner-city ministry, but coming from an “ubuntu” (I am because we are) culture, I was able to serve there well. I am reminded of theologian Neal A. Maxwell who said, “God does not begin by asking us about our ability but only about our availability.” I also served at St. Barnabas Lutheran Church, another inner city congregation in Charleston, S.C. Although the inner-city place of ministry was similar, the experience in Charleston was different from Flint. These inner-city ministry experiences were

transferrable to other ministry settings as in every ministry setting I encounter the “simultaneously saints and sinners”!

We moved to South Carolina when my husband took a job with the Navy. Initially, this was a challenging time since I was without a call for three years. I felt that God had recalled me to reform and reshape me, to help me with a better identity not tied to pastoring a congregation. YES, I was transformed! During the transformation period, I served at the Medical University of South Carolina as a part-time chaplain, a position I still hold. Yes, the transformation broadened my pastoral identity. I was an instrument of compassion when I was on-call at the hospital during the Mother Emanuel AME massacre in Charleston, S.C., in June 2015.

Currently, I have a specialized call to Franke at Seaside in the Charleston area, where I serve among the wealthy and famous. God has confirmed to me the universality of the gospel that I have proclaimed in all ministry settings. Yes, there have been challenges as I serve. What has strengthened me are the words of one of my mentors: “If you feel like quitting at least three times a week, then you are being faithful to your call.”

The Worship Well

Linda Boston

The title for my Reformation-focused project paper is taken from John 4:4-42: “He had to go through Samaria.” In this text, Jesus meets a woman at Jacob’s well. The woman comes to the well with an empty pitcher needing to be filled. Jesus quenches her thirst with the “living water.” The woman in turn takes the good news to a city suffering from a spiritual drought. The communal drinking from the well results in the spiritual transformation of the entire town.

My Reformation Journey to the Well

I first heard the John 4 story as a child at my grandmother’s knee. Later in life, I would come to the well and partake of the living water, as did the woman, wearied from my life’s journey. Like the woman in John 4, that encounter transformed my life. I recall a memory from age 11 of lying on our living room floor listening to gospel music. The lyrics of one song were from Matthew 9:37, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” I remember an image forming in my mind of Jesus calling for help, “Who will go?” and no one answering. So, I responded, “Lord I’ll go. Send me. I’ll go.” Since I was just a child, I wrestled with the thought of what could a child really be called to do for Jesus. I felt safe and discarded the notion of service while still growing closer to Christ through faith.

Around age 17, the church’s place of prominence in my life changed considerably. Though my faith in God stayed strong, like a lot of young people, I left the church and didn’t return until years later. I could hear the voice of God gently calling me back into the fold through the advice, suggestions and wise counsel of many friends, family members and colleagues. They all shared, in different words, that I needed to return to the fold. Although my life seemed full, in reality, it was empty. I felt like something was missing. But I was not quite sure what that something was or how to acquire it. Whatever that something was, I wanted and needed it.

My re-entry into the institutional church came through my children. From early childhood, Jesus has always been my BFF (best friend forever). Remembering my own childhood experience, I felt my children were being deprived of one of the great joys of life: knowing and having Jesus as their BFF. Still, reluctant to make a formal commitment to the church, I enrolled my daughters in a Lutheran elementary school. The assistant pastor helped me come to an understanding of the Lutheran faith and to understand the loving and forgiving nature of God. He talked of the total forgiveness that was mine through Christ Jesus. As we went through the Scripture, I began to hear the message as I had never heard it before. I know God’s grace is a message proclaimed at every Christian service, but it was the first time that I really understood its meaning. On hearing, receiving and accepting the words of God’s grace, I felt redeemed, relieved, alive and no longer estranged from my BFF.

My Seminary Well Experience

Several years later, I yielded to God’s call, and enrolled in seminary. After the first year of studies, I found the seminary to be a bit opposed to systematic viewpoints outside their frame of reference. The seminary challenge to my accepted wisdom did not appear to come to strengthen my faith; instead, it seemed intended to dismantle my belief system and replace it with one that was more appropriate to others’ experiences of the divine. My thoughts resonated with other seminarians, who either were sitting or had sat in my academic seat. We bonded as extended family and saw each other through seminary. We have remained lifelong friends.

Questions continued to emerge throughout the seminary process. My main concern centered on whether African American theology and hermeneutical methodology could blend into the European-centered Lutheran practice without losing its effectiveness and power. In retrospect, the answer was and is yes.

The church, our church, is forever becoming the perfected body of Christ. As existed in the biblical community of Jesus' day, there exists today in the African American community a dichotomy. A dichotomy exists when within one community there is a division into two parts, groups or classes, especially when these are sharply distinguished or opposed, i.e., something that is not in agreement with itself. W.E.B DuBois, an African American scholar, philosopher and civil rights activist, refers to the dichotomy I am describing as a "double-consciousness":

The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world. This is a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.

One ever feels one's duality; an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two non-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood to merge this double self into a better and true self. In this merging the Negro wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.¹⁰

This African American Lutheran church has from its conception been a house divided from within by the historical external forces that formed it. There is a common saying that "A house divided cannot stand." Likewise, I contend that a people, a community, a church divided against its self cannot stand. An African saying I learned from a mentor, Dr. Molefi Asante, says, "One cannot be human in isolation." Dr. Asante further asserts that to be human means to be in a community. Dr. Melva Costen makes a similar statement in her book, *African American Christian Worship*:

"One of the strongest forces in traditional African life that continues among African Americans is [that] ... to be human means that one belongs to a family or community. ... Nearly all concepts connected with the inter-relatedness of God's total creation can be understood and interpreted through a hermeneutic of the "the kinship system."¹¹

Although we are individually different, we are all shaped by culture and tradition. Culture is to a society as personality is to the individual. Just as the church of the Reformation had its own authentic and legitimate way of re-linking with God, so does the African American worship community. It is not the intention or desire of the African American Lutheran worshipping community to separate the church from the church or the church from the community. Rather it is our desperate aim to make connections at the worship well between the water and those many who thirst for the water. The church, as the body of Christ, is one that is not yet fully what it should be but rather is continually in a state of becoming.

In what I consider an act of divine providence, while I was a seminarian, the ELCA entered into a contractual agreement to begin an extended studies program at the Interdenominational

¹⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994), 2-3.

¹¹ Melva Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, Second Edition, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 8-9.

Theological Center in Atlanta. I was among the first group of students to enroll in the program. Through the nurturing staff and instruction of the Lutheran and Interdenominational Theological Center professors, I gained a greater appreciation of the Lutheran ethos and theology. They helped me understand the paradoxical relationship of the Lutheran church and the African American community, alongside the historical ethnic diversity of the Lutheran church. I saw God's hand among historical workings within the church and in continuing to bring the church to perfection. It also became more apparent how God's plan included me. I came to the foreign well of Lutheran worship on the native soil of my African American community. I received the precious life-giving transforming water, and now I carry that same gift to all who come to and near the worship well.

To God be the glory, and to "Who so ever will come to the well, may they continue to come and drink." Amen.

I Was Called to Serve

Wyvetta Bullock

“No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing God will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”

— 1 Corinthians 10:13

I grew up in a small town in East Tennessee. My father was a pastor. One of the first things I remember him teaching me was how to pray. My mother was a lay theologian. She instilled in me a love for God’s word. My grandmother was the first ecumenical person I knew. She introduced me to my Presbyterian and Methodist sisters and brothers. However, there were no female pastor role models in my life. I sensed a call from God before I entered elementary school. What could it mean? I imagined myself a Sunday school teacher, perhaps a missionary, but not a pastor.

My undergraduate education is in business administration. When the Spirit began to stir my heart toward public ministry, I was not sure what to do. My father had mentored my brother to become a pastor, not me. Yes, God has a sense of humor. I was called to serve.

The Spirit began to lead me to the Lutheran Church in America. The national offices were in New York and Philadelphia. I had moved to Philadelphia after getting married. I attended the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia’s Urban Institute. Afterward, I completed my Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. It was a long journey. I was a part-time student, working for the ELCA churchwide organization. I was ordained Oct. 20, 1996.

I began serving the Lutheran Church in America in 1981. I have served the ELCA churchwide organization in various capacities since 1987. I have been blessed to be a part of many initiatives of this church such as the “Call to Discipleship,” Evangelism Strategy, “Proclaiming the Power” events; the “Use of the Means of Grace” document; the “This Far by Faith” hymnal; the Living into the Future Together Task Force; and the Called Forward Together in Christ process.

Currently, I serve as an executive assistant to the presiding bishop and executive for administration. This call holds both my passion for administration and pastoral service. I am thankful to serve as a pastoral associate at Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago. My husband and I raised our daughter there and gained a second daughter. Bethel has been a place of nurture and support for my ministry. I have the opportunity to engage with the congregation in pastoral duties, while serving the wider church in my administrative role.

One of the passions during my faith journey has been leadership development. I strongly believe in leadership “from the inside out.” In the waters of our baptism God calls us to love and serve the neighbor as our highest vocation. We are given gifts for living out our purpose and the promise that God will always be with us.

In 2012, I climbed to the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro to raise money to stop malaria. The name of the peak is Uhuru, which means freedom. Climbing to the peak was the most difficult physical thing I had ever done. On the mountain, I learned that I am stronger than I thought. I learned that it is wise to accept help when it is offered and ask for help when it is needed. I also learned that some things are accomplished by sheer will and determination.

Through my journey of discernment, preparation and placement in the ELCA, God has been my help, my strength and song. The opportunities and challenges have both been numerous. Many sisters and brothers have encouraged me along the way. I am grateful for each one. I am especially grateful for personal mentors who have now crossed over to the other side: Ms. Agalice Miller, Ms. Carolyn Green, the Rev. Dr. Wil Hertzfeld, the Rev. Albert "Pete" Pero, Ph.D. I remain thankful to God for the opportunity to serve.

*The ancestors watched with bated breath.
So much breathing they had done.
Hoping for the dream to open.
Would it be today?
Would this woman mark change?*

*Sorrow and sweetness sat together
Joy looked on and waited invitation.
How long?*

*Standing on strong shoulders.
Looking back to move forward.*

*Listen, God is calling.
The breath of life gives life.
The promise remains.
God is faithful!*

Fifteen Years in Ministry, and I Am Still Here

Perucy Nyanjula Butiku

I was born and raised in a small town called Musoma, on the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania, East Africa. My parents are the Rev. Ezekiel Kaneja Muganda and Rachel Nyaburuma Muganda. My father was a preacher known all over East Africa, and my mother was a master in hospitality. Our home was a home of prayers and love. My parents were strong believers in Jesus Christ. We were 12 children and were all brought up in the love of God. We prayed and sang together every morning and evening. During the year my mother was expecting me, there was drought in that part of our country. On the day I was born, it rained heavily, and that was the end of the drought. Hence my name is Nyanjula, which means “I came with rain.”

As an African, I am often asked: “How did you come to the United States of America?” “Did you come as a refugee or as an asylum seeker?” There is a perception that no foreigner can come to this country through any means other than seeking asylum or being a refugee. This is especially true when you are an African.

In 1985, I was sent to the United States of America by the government of the United Republic of Tanzania to serve as a counselor at the United Republic of Tanzania Mission to the United Nations in New York. I came to this country as a diplomat. While I was serving my government at the United Nations, I felt an urge to go to a Bible school. I wanted to know more about the Bible, so I joined Diakonia classes. I also started taking classes at the General Theological Seminary in Manhattan. I liked what I was learning so I continued going and taking more classes. In doing so, I met Bishop Stephen Bouman, who was one of the teachers of some of the classes I had taken. The Holy Spirit guided him to take some interest in me and what I was doing. We talked and prayed together several times, and I remember in one of our discussions, he asked me, “Are you fighting a call?” I did not know what a “call” was; he explained it to me. He encouraged me to pray about it, and I did, many times.

Discerning God’s Will for My Life

I first gave myself to the word of God, and I immersed myself in God’s assessment of me and the world in which I was living. I felt that God could not allow a person like me to serve, because I was divorced. I found it difficult to discern God’s will for my life. I had a good job. I felt I was not worthy to serve God with my divorce issue! How do I counsel those who want to get married when my own marriage did not last after 18 years? I had many questions and no answers!

This is when I received counsel and guidance. God sent me Bishop Bouman, then the bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, who counseled me and gave me guidance. As Proverbs 11:14 (NASB) says, “Where there is no guidance, the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” I realized in my discerning period I must have a personal relationship with Christ. I prayed for guidance and paid attention to the gifts and talents I have been given by God. I sought out advice from other pastors, and in so doing, I was reminded that we are all sinners and always in need of God’s merciful forgiveness and that God’s call to us is never limited by age, physical condition, education, past experiences, resources or the lack thereof. Young and vigorous or old and incapacitated, God calls us to the fullness of whatever being we have.

Seminary Experience, First Call, and Beyond

My decision to go to seminary meant leaving my job and changing my visa. It also meant reporting to my government my decision. It took some time to get a reply from my government to

allow me to take a leave of absence from my job. It meant losing my income, moving from the house provided by my employer, and finding a place for my family to live. This was a challenging time. I finally went to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia. While I was there, God sent me God's servant for help and guidance, the Rev. Gregory Villalon, who became my guide and my spiritual counselor.

My life in seminary was an eye opener. I took in all that I could and liked it. I learned a lot from the lectures, but I also learned more from my fellow students. Before I went to seminary, I had a ministry in Kiswahili language; therefore, I was traveling back to New York every Saturday for Sunday worship and going back to seminary on Sunday. After a while, the synod asked me to re-open a congregation that had been closed. This ended up becoming my first call.

I was called to serve at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, in Hollis, Queens, N.Y. I was a parish pastor for this congregation for seven years. After that, I was called to New Hope Lutheran Church in Valley Stream, N.Y. I served this congregation for five years before I was called to serve on the bishop's staff, where I am now.

Fifteen Years in Ministry, and I Am Still Here

In Romans 8:14 Paul writes that "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." In Philippians 2:13, he says that "it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for [God's] good pleasure." One of the ways God has worked in me is to give me the desire to do things that are pleasing to God. A compelling desire to move in a specific direction or a burden to minister to certain people may be coming directly from God as a means of guidance. I, therefore, believe that God can turn my anxieties into peace when I go to God in prayer, offering my problems and my needs.

I Know that My Redeemer Lives because Christ Lives in Me!

My second call was a congregation mostly of white members. I was the first pastor of color to serve there. The beginning was not easy, but after we got to know each other and to believe that we are all children of God and that Christ died for all of us, we became sisters and brothers in Christ. We learned a lot from each other and appreciated one another. I saw God working not only through me, but through the people of New Hope Lutheran Church, Valley Stream, N.Y.

I saw the foot prints in the sand and felt carried when Muslim Imam came to ask for a place to worship in our parish hall. I did not know how the congregation would feel. I struggled with it alone in prayers, and finally I was able to convince the congregation to agree. They used this space for two years, and members of the congregation and members of the Muslim community became friends. This was a good time. That experience reminded me: "I know the plans I have for you" (Jeremiah 29:11).

As I look back on my life, I believe that God has always planned my life. And I am here to say, "Here I am Lord, send me."

Women Along the Journey

Tiffany C. Chaney

I was 24 years old when I saw a woman serve as assisting minister in a Lutheran church for the first time. It was Mother's Day 2004, and the Rev. Beverly Shaw, then in seminary, was serving as assisting minister at the Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Atlanta. The only ways I had experienced a woman serving in worship before were reading the lessons, singing, playing the organ or reading the announcements. I had never seen a woman in an alb, sitting next to the pastor. I arrived at Atonement, a recent transplant to Atlanta, visiting an ELCA congregation for the first time, after having spent my life in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) congregations. When I ventured to Atonement, I did so because the church was first in alphabetical order on my list of congregations to visit, and there were easy MapQuest directions. What I know now that I did not know then is that this visit was more than just one of convenience; it was a kairos moment in my discernment journey.

When I arrived at Atonement that Sunday in 2004, I had no idea of the difference between LCMS and ELCA congregations. But when I walked in and saw a woman participating in worship in a way I had never experienced before, the very first thing I knew about the ELCA was there were ways available for me to serve unlike any that had been available to me in the past, and I found it fascinating.

Two years later, I was invited by my pastor to attend the Project Connect Multicultural Discernment Retreat, where I met for the first time a woman serving as a Lutheran pastor – a young African American, the Rev. CeCee Mills. Just three years prior, it was not in my frame of reference that being a young, black, woman pastor was even a possibility, and here she was preaching and leading, alongside her male colleagues, respected by them. Again, I was fascinated. As with any discernment retreat, there was plenty of praying, writing, reading, listening, talking and thinking happening that weekend, but I realize now, as important as all those practices were to my discernment, also important was being able to see and interact with someone who looked like me serving as pastor.

In 2012, I met Bishop Gayle Harris, suffragan bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts. Over the 3½ years I served in Boston, I got a chance to hear her speak several times. The last time, before I left Boston, she sat with a group and shared her experiences in ministry – both joys and challenges. At the time, I was preparing to transition from my first call, where I had experienced my fair share of joys and challenges. She talked about being a Black woman in leadership. As I listened, I felt affirmed. Even her stories of challenges were encouraging because I realized I was not alone in my experiences. Her words felt like a balm, soothing and healing, as I prepared for the next phase of my journey.

Integral to my formation has been the model and support of other rostered women of color, and I consider it central to my call to be a model and support for other young women of color. There is something special about being able to see someone who looks like you, relating to someone who has had similar experiences to you, being held up by someone who has already journeyed down the path you now tread. There is something holy. God is present.

A couple of years ago, I was teaching Sunday school, and the lesson included people in the community who help others – firefighters, police, pastors, doctors. The kids were asked to tell how people in these roles help in the community. A girl, about 6 years old, answered. She had

asked before if she could climb into the pulpit and has said she wants to be a pastor someday. As she began telling about how pastors help, I noticed that even though she was not talking about me specifically – rather, she was speaking about pastors in general – she only used feminine pronouns for pastor. It occurred to me that I was the only person who had ever been her pastor; she had only known a young, Black, woman Lutheran pastor. She will never question whether she, a woman, can be a pastor. Her experience will always be that she can respond to whatever God calls her. My prayer is that this will one day become the experience for all little girls to whom God is calling. I did take time that day to explain to her that little boys could also grow up and someday become pastors, too. She found this fascinating.

I'm Very Thankful to God for My Journey

Mary Ling-Hsi Chang

When I was about 6 years old, my mother took my two brothers, my little sister and me to a small storefront church. We sat on a floor without a carpet to listen to stories of Jesus by missionaries who spoke Mandarin with a Norwegian accent. I learned Martin Luther's Large and Small Catechisms in the same fashion and was baptized at the age of 11. At age 16, I was confirmed by a Danish pastor in southern Taiwan. Before I graduated from high school, I helped my mother with vacation Bible school or evangelism to villagers, because she was serving with the Finnish Missionary Society at that time. I've been deeply affected by all the Lutherans I describe above.

As a mother of three children, and as the years have gone by, I have earned life experiences through professional work to support our living. Both my childhood and adult life experiences influence my identity as a Lutheran clergy woman.

The church/synod guided me to the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia for my "Lutheran year," even though I had already had eight years of prior Lutheran theological and biblical training! Still, I think this year empowered me to become a better servant of God, to broaden my life experiences with other Lutherans and with future leaders of the church. My Book of Concord still has some stickers from a 1992 class discussion, reminding me of that precious time at the seminary. I enjoyed the quiet devotional time by playing the pipe organ. The sound echoing in the chapel was really uplifting for my soul.

I waited six years for the process of ordination, but I never stopped finding a way to improve myself and search for resources to help others to believe in Jesus. This included service and training through the University Lutheran student ministry weekly gathering outreach in Philadelphia; Prince of Peace International Outreach in Hightstown, N.J.; and, separately, two years of Advanced Clinical Pastoral Care Education training in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

The excitement of ordination for me was being recognized in a larger pool of Lutheran family leaders. Ordination enabled me to act and move in ways that reflected God's high calling upon me, an ordinary woman who could use my language skills for ministry or as a mission developer. I am thankful for all the people around me who supported the various directions of ministry I experienced, such as volunteer campus chaplaincy at a technical institute in Chicago, Jazz Night outreach at Grace Mission in Chicago's Chinatown, organizer of 50 free concerts for post-9/11 healing through music at St. Jacobi Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, Basketball Youth Outreach with youth and moms at St. Jacobi, and bilingual liturgy at St. Jacobi, along with a bilingual Bible study outreach (a half hour teaching in English, and a half hour teaching about Jesus).

I'm very thankful to God for my journey, that I've been trained as 1) an educator, continuing on my own initiative to study educational psychology, 2) a pastor, serving as a mission developer, mentor to new pastors, as well as a parish pastor and hospital chaplain for 21 years at the same time! 3) a disaster relief chaplain by the American Red Cross of Greater New York.

All of this has given me the assurance to witness for Christ in the world more effectively. It has made me dare to explore opportunities for sharing the gospel through the church to the world.

As a mother and grandmother, I am in touch with the needs of growing families. I understand 14 Chinese dialects but mostly serve in English-speaking congregations. My life experience leads me to become a counterpoint in many ways for God's ministry in the world for Christ. The hardship of life and marriage became my prayer shawl, teaching me to lean on God every day of my life.

How great is God's love from the church to me and then to the world I'm serving. Thanks be to God!

The Pew to the Pulpit: Points to Ponder

Patricia A. Davenport

I am the Rev. Patricia Ann (Curtis) Davenport, founding pastor of Spirit and Truth Worship Center, Yeadon, Pa. I currently serve as director for Evangelical Mission for the ELCA deployed staff in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, where I also serve as assistant to the bishop.

The Rev. Clay Evans penned these words: “As I look back over my life and I think things over, I can truly say that I’ve been blessed, I’ve got a testimony.” As I think about my journey from sitting in the pew to standing in the pulpit, I can only attribute each movement to the Holy Spirit. As I now see, the seeds of faith were sown along the path.

I fell in love with Jesus at an early age, sitting in the family church in Edgewater, Md., while Momma, snuff in her cheek, would read and spit in sync with Granddaddy playing the piano. The word of God was alive; we believed what Momma read and what Granddaddy preached, or vice versa. God is good – this was their witness living on the land that my formerly enslaved, great-grandmother, Margaret (Creek) Naylor, had purchased.

My faith (along with that of my eight brothers and sisters) was nurtured by my parents, Walter and Ruth Curtis, whose military orders compelled us to move to Philadelphia where we were invited to attend day camp at Holy Cross Lutheran Church. The community was in the midst of gentrification. The Germans were moving to the suburbs. English soon replaced the German service at the prime 11 a.m. hour. We were the second African American family to join and fully participate in all aspects of congregational life. My siblings and I experienced our first communion, confirmation and Luther League led by Ms. Dorothy Ricks, associate in ministry. Ricks was my mentor and role model, my first female African American Lutheran leader, who later went on to become assistant to the bishop, due in part to the influence of Dr. Grover Wright, the first African American male associate in ministry. Following the Rev. Howard Black, we had an all African American staff: the Rev. Dr. Charles Leonard; Mr. Fred Barnes, community worker; Ms. Lela Chestnut, office manager; and myself as church secretary.

Holy Cross is where my faith was nurtured. While at Holy Cross, I met and married my high school sweet heart, Joel, who couldn’t see me while we were dating until after he attended his church, so he left the Baptist Church and became a Lutheran. Yes! Joel and I served in the choir, on church council, as youth leaders, as Christian education teachers, and I eventually became a lay preacher all while working as church secretary for nine years. Our three children, Joel Jr., Shanena and Jamar, were baptized, communed and confirmed, with Shanena becoming the first female deacon in Holy Cross history.

I was asked to serve as administrative assistant to the Rev. John Cochran, assistant to Bishop Larry Hand. I served on the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod staff for 16 years. In addition, Joel and I held various leadership roles in Center City Lutheran Parish (CCLP). He coached basketball, and I led Sisters in the Hood, a young-girls group. I served as the first African American chair of CCLP while Joel served on Synod Council. We each were privileged to represent the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod as churchwide voting members.

Yielding to the Holy Spirit and the voices in my community, I entered candidacy through Theological Education for Emerging Ministry (TEEM). I made a parallel decision to enter the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia for my Master of Divinity, as I knew the stigma

of TEEM candidates. Please know, I embarked on the process with resistance, as I am a firm believer in the priesthood of all believers. I felt as if all my service to the church was living out my call. Nonetheless, I did my Clinical Pastoral Education through the Conference of International Black Lutherans under the tutelage of the Rev. Dr. Richard Wallace at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, serving at Crawford Long Hospital and in the congregation with the Rev. Arthur Lewis.

Upon my completion of candidacy requirements, I was asked to consider mission development, to which I said no, as I had worked in the synod for 16 years and knew all of our congregations and most of the pastors who were leaving or needed an associate with my gifts of outreach and stewardship. I had a plan to not move from our home and to serve in the city. My adage, "In the city for good," is not a program or a button I wear; it is my life. With all that being said, when asked by Bishop Roy Almquist if I would just go take a look at the church which had been closed for a year, and her community, I obliged. Joel and I took our prayer partners, Nate and Yvonne Curtis and Kevin and Kimberly Bennett, to walk the grounds and pray with us as we sought God's will. After looking at the building's disrepair, seeing the apartment complex with tenants' cars in the church lot, and talking with some of the former child care staff and members of the community about their hopes, dreams and prayers for a Christ-centered ministry on the corner of Church Lane and MacDade Boulevard in Yeadon, Pa., I stood in the sanctuary in tears, in humble submission as Joel looked me in my eyes and said, "So this is where we will start our new ministry." As they say, the rest is history. This is a result of simply lifting up the name of Jesus and offering prayer and radical hospitality. These are entry points to Spirit and Truth Worship Center, where we are blessed to be a blessing.

May God's presence, peace and power fill your day!

I Am Not Turning Back

Sarah Geddada

I grew up in pastoral families for four generations. My paternal and maternal grandmothers and my mother graduated from Bible school/seminary. Though I felt a calling to ministry at a young age, I disliked the treatment many women leaders faced in my home country, India. However, I was still eager to serve Christ, and, therefore, I started serving as Sunday school teacher at the age of 14. There was an ongoing struggle answering God's call as I questioned the authority of Scripture when I heard sermons preached from pulpits on the subservience of women and considered the powerful gospel of Christ calling for liberation, justice and equality.

During my discernment, I had come to the conclusion that the best way for me to fulfill God's call to ministry was to marry a pastor so that I would be fully active in his work. For a while, I had fulfilled my obligations as not only as a disciple of Christ but as a pastor's wife. However, God continued to call me for ministry. A few years later, my family and I moved to Hong Kong because of my husband's job as regional secretary for the Asia-Pacific region of the World Student Christian Federation. I didn't realize that it would take a miracle for me to finally answer God's call. Similar to Martin Luther, I had made a vow to serve God in return for protection, a safety in my current dilemma. When God had fulfilled God's promise, I realized I had to fulfill mine; yet, I still had many questions about my calling to ministry. As a consequence, I spent one year praying, to be clear about God's call. Once I surrendered, I began my studies at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong and graduated in 2000. Soon after my graduation, my husband was called as a mission developer for the Metropolitan New York Synod. I followed to serve along with him in 2000.

My theological studies equipped me with gifts to serve, as I studied in one of the best international seminaries with faculty from Lutheran churches in North America, Germany and Scandinavia. My internship in Tao Fung Shan Lutheran, Shatin Anglican, and Kowloon Union congregations for almost three years gave me skills for pastoral leadership. The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia affirmed that I had excellent course work; however, I had to go through four years of a rigorous candidacy process. I realized that as an Asian woman I am not "culturally" fit to serve the ELCA, which was mostly Caucasian. Though I was approved for ordination in 2004, I had to wait another year for a call, and I was sent to serve in a synod call.

Though I labored and have skills comparable to any other pastor, I felt worthless because of the racist attitudes and secular worldview that have become a painful reality among the "body of Christ." Therefore, I felt like I am a most neglected "body part." I decided to give up, and the Lord spoke to me through Luke 9:62: "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." No matter how challenging and no matter how many obstacles I face, I surrender to the will of God, and I am not turning back.

My strong faith in Christ Jesus, my spiritual up bringing in pastoral families, and my prayerful life helped me through the difficult challenges I have faced for the past 11 years as a pastor. I often remind myself of great things my paternal grandmother, a great evangelist in India, taught me: "Never forget that you are a child of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords; serve Christ to be called 'my faithful servant,' and be joyful that 'your name is written in the book of life.'" I have reminded myself of this every day for the past 34 years of my lay and pastoral ministries. God has used me to preach as a pulpit supply pastor in around 50 congregations in the Metropolitan New York Synod.

I give thanks to God for all the great women leaders, for my grandmothers and my mother who fought for justice and fairness to create equal societies. With God's help, I continue the good fight for our daughters and all the generations to come. My prayer and hope is that our church will become more inclusive and every synod will work hard toward inclusivity and create equal opportunities for women leaders of color. For the past 16 years, I have experienced that few women leaders of color are given opportunities, which doesn't prove that we are an "inclusive church." The positive change is slow; however, I celebrate with fellow sisters and give thanks to God for our first female bishop. God has great plans for everyone, so let us work together for greater inclusion and to make a difference as the body of Christ, seeing Christ in each other.

Trusting God as Life Goes On

Victoria L. Hamilton

In the beginning was the call, and the call was from God. Why me, Lord? Why me?

I had been out of church as an active participant for many, many years when my family and I moved to Slidell, La., in the early 1980s. My husband was still in the U.S. Navy and was being stationed in New Orleans. We were the only people of color in the congregation, as was my family growing up at Faith Lutheran in Detroit. It was probably after a couple of years being there that my husband and I became involved in the life of the congregation. He served on the evangelism committee, and I was chosen to serve as chair of the education committee. I began learning about working with others, organizing Sunday school, leading vacation Bible school and teaching first-communion classes. I was also a member of the choir and the women's evening Bible study, and we attended different fellowship opportunities. During this time, as well as my skills being shaped, I was developing a renewed love for God and for the church.

At the beginning of the merger of the American Lutheran Church, the Lutheran Church in America, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, I was asked to help solicit names of people of color who may be interested in serving on committees of the "new church." My assignment was to visit and meet the people of a congregation in New Orleans! I contacted the pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran and was invited down. Much to my surprise, the congregation was (fully) African American! I was welcomed. Even after the assignment was over, I thought it important to take my children into town, at least monthly, so that they could experience worshiping with others who looked like them.

I really became drawn to the congregation, and I started attending choir rehearsal and would worship "in town" on days the choir sang. The younger folks (20+) seemed to be drawn to me. They communicated their desire for some of the activities they and others had been missing for a number of years, with the absence of their beloved pastor. Their pastor had become ill and was absent from the congregation, so everyone was trying to make sure ministry continued. I volunteered to coordinate vacation Bible school, which began that first year with 35 students from the church and community. This number grew to over 140 students within five years. Many folks from the congregation and community volunteered. Boy, did we have a great time. Because most folks worked, I would make sure I had cooked for the volunteers, so they could be fed, have an opportunity to share the best of what occurred that evening, and express concerns about any difficulties that may have occurred. I also used that time to get information about supplies and other needs for the next evening. As a result, Sunday school began and grew as well. I was doing ministry and was a part of ministry. I was also feeling validated. My love of the congregation grew, and I moved my membership from Peace Lutheran in Slidell, to Bethlehem in New Orleans.

My husband, William, aka PHam, and I felt the call into the ministry. We both were "courted" by the mission director of the Texas-Louisiana Synod to redevelop a congregation that was seeing its last days. At the same time, we were trying to figure out how to complete schooling with this responsibility of being called. We began the process of seminary questions, psychological testing, entrance paperwork and invitations to candidacy meetings, only to be told that the committee didn't know what to do with us. We were being given the run around as far as seminary possibilities were concerned. We had been told about the TEEM program, Theological Education for Emerging Ministries, by the mission director, but it didn't seem as though the synod was

willing to accept this program of the church, nor did the program seem acceptable to the pastor chairing the candidacy committee! It was only by the grace of God that Gregg Villion (Chicago), whom we had met, gave us a call and said he would intercede.

We had already been called by the ELCA to work as lay mission developers, with seminary as a part of the full plan. We were assigned to redevelop another congregation and all that goes with that! Dr. Edmond Yee, the father of the TEEM program at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, called us personally, gave us loads of encouragement and suggested we begin the next semester, which was February 1997. Two years had passed since the first conversation with the mission director before, finally, we were beginning our seminary classes! We would go to Pacific Lutheran in Berkley, Calif., while developing a congregation. I dearly loved being a part of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary and the TEEM program. I was starting to feel “accepted” within the church. Classes were in February, June and October! I (we) completed the TEEM program in October 2001; we made our way back to Berkley for graduation in May 2002, at the urging of my sister, Judith.

The congregation we were called to redevelop had backed out of their word/deal/understanding of redevelopment (possibly because people of color had started coming!), and we were asked to leave by that congregation of six people. The wilderness began and lasted two years. After finding “office space” in an Episcopal church, they asked us to leave. The priest retired soon after he said we could have space; the congregation wasn’t happy having Lutherans on the premises. “Are we supposed to be helping to build the Lutheran or Episcopal Church?” was the question asked of the rector who came in. Yes, we had to leave there. Two other large Protestant congregations didn’t like the idea of sharing space either and said the same thing. We asked and were then invited to set up at the Community Book Center in New Orleans. We were customers. There was NO hesitation when PHam asked the owner, Vera Williams, about the possibility of using a portion of their space on Sunday mornings! With each move that we made, people gathered, dropped off, and the ELCA, being big on achieving numbers within a limited time, had us close that ministry/chapter and offered us the opportunity to co-pastor St. John’s Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

PHam and I moved to Jacksonville on Jan. 20, 2000. I was not a happy camper. I felt betrayed, like a “step-child,” used and neglected; this emerged from the congregation putting us out, to wandering the city of New Orleans and being told “NO!” to HAVING to move, to the “higher ups” not seemingly doing their jobs, to folks making us feel inadequate, and just feeling sh*t upon. I still feel that occasionally, and I get PO’ed when these feelings come to the surface. I’m really tired of crying and being made to feel doubtful and inadequate.

But God’s and the Spirit’s guidance, encouragement and comfort are why I do, and continue to do, what I do. This is it in a nutshell. Life goes on. I try my best, and even at times when I’m tired as all get out, I’m grateful and thankful to God for trusting me to be God’s hands, feet and voice.

It Has Been a Wonderful Journey

Laura Ingersol

The church has been very good to me. From the day of my baptism (Bethel-Englewood, Chicago) when the pastor poured water on my curls, I knew that Jesus loved me! That began my love for the church, and I have found many reasons and ways to be part of the church's life.

After moving to Washington, D.C., following teaching school for five years, the congregation I attended (St. Matthew) hired me as their community youth worker. A year later, when the pastor was scheduled to go away for a few weeks, I was invited to preach. As I entered the pulpit, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the tremendous responsibility of speaking the word of God. As the hymn before the sermon ended, I prayed that I would not shortchange the worshipers. I felt a weight on my shoulder and a brush against my cheek and heard a voice say, "Laura, I will speak through you." I enrolled in the seminary that next week!

Throughout seminary I had the support of the congregation, the Eastern District of the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and pastors of the area congregations. My enrollment in the Lutheran House of Studies (the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg's Washington, D.C., campus) grounded me in a spiritual way in the city and in an ecumenical way with classes through the seminary consortium. Participation in the ALC's Commission on Racism gave me influential mentors who were willing to confront the church, to be the church, as we worked for the disinvestment of clergy pensions from corporations invested in South Africa that, therefore, supported the system of apartheid.

It has been a wonderful journey! It began the day of my baptism, kissed me into awareness that first time in the pulpit, and confirmed for me all along the way that I was truly called to be part of Jesus' community and the work for peace, justice and reconciliation.

I retired in 2015, and among the many experiences I remember is being invited three times to consider (and three times I declined) interviews as an assistant to a bishop in various synods. Twice I was invited to return to the seminary (at their expense) to pursue a doctorate and then teach in one of our seminaries. My call always was for parish ministry, however. I have traveled throughout the United States, to Germany, Finland and Ethiopia as part of the wider ministry of our church. I had responsibility for several seminary interns, received a Louisville Institute sabbatical grant to study growing congregations that were intentionally diverse, and served as a sabbatical interim pastor.

My greatest joy, however, is to have been called to serve five congregations. With the people of these congregations, I experienced confirmation of my call to be a parish pastor and the joy of being part of the lives of people who sought to respond to their call to be God's people. Those congregations are:

- a predominately white congregation that chose to respond to societal evolutions in a community that was changing racially and economically by calling a Black woman as an associate pastor (Bethany, Forestville, Md.);

- a predominately Black congregation that found life and growth sharing themselves while also needing the assistance of the wider church (Resurrection, Roxbury, Mass.);
- the consolidation of three congregations, one Black, one white and one racially diverse, that chose to experience a different way of living and being the church when it was clear their congregation numbers were dwindling (All Saints, Baltimore);
- a white, affluent suburban congregation that recognized its capacity to give was limited only by its imagination, as it partnered with inner-city congregations and participated in countless ways of justice work and sent multiple mission teams to work in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, as well as to Appalachia (God's Love, Newtown, Pa.); and
- two dying, predominately white congregations, that were aware there was still a mission in their community and committed their resources to begin a new ministry, a new life, unlike the traditional one they had long known (Journey of Faith, Baltimore).

The church has been good to me. In the 31 years of ministry, I met truly good, incredibly faithful, dedicated, creative and hope-filled people. There were disappointments, awkward challenges and sometimes heart-rending events. But it was the relationships with the people in the intimate moments of their everyday lives that touched me most, and these are moments that I shall long hold in my heart.

A Prayer of Thanksgiving

Lydia E. Rivera Kalb

A prayer of Thanksgiving,
for the Call
for the journey for
the people
for the places of ministry for
the rest stops
for the strength given in good and difficult times for
the water of baptism
for the wine and bread that nurtures
for the gift of the church – our treasure in an earthen vessel –
and for the Giver of these gifts.
Amen.

A Journey from Palestine: “I Kept the Promise of Our Elder Priest”

Kholoud Khoury

When you have everything, it's like there are no obstacles in front of you. Anything seems possible. But now imagine that every time you go from your town to the town next door, you have to cross a checkpoint. Imagine you can't watch movies, go on picnics or visit family members who live only a short distance away. This is what it's like to live under occupation in Palestine. As human beings, we all want freedom to enjoy life. We all want peace, whether we come from Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Europe or the United States. What makes us different is the situation we live in.

At any moment, the situation in Palestine can change. It's not safe. Israel's government controls our movement, our electricity, our water, our lives, even our ability to own and run a business.

It was never on my agenda and in my imagination to move to the United States, but I had family in the United States that I visited, first in 1990 and then again in 2001, for a family reunion. After the second intifada (uprising), I immigrated to the United States in 2002, hoping for a better life and situation. It was a tough decision to make to leave Palestine. If we'd had peace, I would have never left.

Living under occupation, Palestinians also hold different IDs and different license plate colors: West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza and Israel IDs (for Palestinians living in Israel). Because I have a West Bank ID and plate number, I was not allowed to use my car to drive through Jerusalem, Gaza or Israel, even after having permission to go. Preventing freedom of movement is seen by many as a punishment the Israeli government uses to push Palestinians to leave their homeland. Other punishments include destroying olive trees, preventing farmers from cultivating their land, and demolishing families' homes. It creates a constant feeling of insecurity, because soldiers can enter at any time and settlers can attack.

Living in Palestine, the occupied territories, is very challenging, yet people are still hopeful for a peaceful resolution. When people in the United States say we pray for you, and you are in our thoughts, when you're living in a big prison, I feel prayer is not enough. We need to take action and advocate, too.

I come from a Christian village called Zababdeh near Jenin, in the northern part of the West Bank. My mother, relatives and friends live in this village. It is one of three Christian villages in that area. I was born to Greek Orthodox parents. My last name, Khoury, means a priest in English. We had many Greek Orthodox priests in my family. However, as a child I was brought up in the Evangelical School in Ramallah, and I also attended the Episcopal church there. I then went back to my village, I studied and worked at the Catholic school and went to the Catholic church. When I finished high school, I went back to Ramallah for work and study. I used to worship at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah.

I had the opportunity to work and worship in different denominations, including working with the Red Crescent Society in Palestine. I believe this experience gave me the opportunity to embrace and welcome others of different religious traditions.

As an immigrant coming to the United States of America, it is not easy at the beginning. You have to adjust and get used to so many things. I came to Chicago and stayed with my brother. I went to school for a Bachelor of Science in finance and graduated in 2016 from the University of Illinois at Chicago. My brother introduced me to the ELCA. In 2004, I served as the secretary of the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage. In 2006, I started working at the ELCA offices.

I have been blessed to be accepted and welcomed in the ELCA. As an immigrant, I needed to stay in the United States, like all other immigrants who came before me to this country. It was the ELCA that helped me with my immigration paperwork. I became a U.S. citizen in August 2016. I give thanks to God and to all who walked with me during this journey.

Coming from a Greek Orthodox tradition, I remember our elderly priest Abound (Father) Al-Khoury (priest) Shaker Al-Khoury tried to keep the tradition of maintaining a priest within the Khoury family. He approached all males in our family to encourage them to be involved in ministry so that one of the males would be the priest in our village. No one accepted the call to ministry. All my previous jobs were with religious organizations: Evangelical Protestants and the Catholic Church. Now, I am working with developing new congregations in the ELCA. Through serving in these other denominations and the ELCA, I believe I kept the promise of our elder priest by serving in ministry.

Soaring Like Eagles

Gwendolyn S. King

Up, up she went. I watched as my rainbow delta kite danced on the wind, tugging a bit on the string I held loosely in my hand. Ah ... such freedom! In that moment, I, too, was dancing on the wind, wishing I could fly. Like an eagle soaring high, what a perspective I would have.

It was my dad who first introduced me to kite flying. Dow rods, newspaper, string, glue and a little tape was all we needed. Using my Crayola crayons I would decorate our kite, mostly with rainbows and hearts. My mom would provide the tale from her ribbon and stocking box. What fun! Such joy! I love to fly kites! To this day I keep a kite in my car at all times, just in case the conditions are right.

Maybe that's one of the reasons I chose the Air Force. While at Gettysburg College I was accepted into the Air Force ROTC program and went to summer camp at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. While there, I got to fly in the rear seat of a T-38 jet trainer. To be above the clouds, flying toward the rainbow, how awesome! "Off we go into the wild blue yonder, climbing high into the sun!" But the military wasn't ready for women pilots yet. Even though I tested well, better in fact than many of the men, no branch of the military was accepting women into their pilot programs. I was two years too soon. So, I ended up in seminary at Howard University School of Religion. But God had a plan.

Military recruiters visited the seminary. They described how their chaplain candidate programs provided an opportunity for exploring ministry in a military context while in school and getting paid in the process. It sounded like a win-win to me, and I love having options in my life. Once again, I chose the Air Force and became a chaplain candidate (2nd lieutenant).

The church, however, considers military chaplaincy a specialized ministry, and it wasn't an option for me until after I had some parish experience. After ordination on Aug. 10, 1980, I spent two years as associate pastor of Augustana Campus Church and associate chaplain at Augustana College in Rock Island, Ill.. Following some discernment on my part, I was called by the Church Council of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) to become a chaplain (1st lieutenant) in the Ready Reserves of the Air Force. Yes, God had a plan. In true Lutheran style, I was both a civilian and a military chaplain.

As an Air Force chaplain, I was to accommodate military members' First Amendment right to the "free exercise of religion" and to be a "visible reminder of the Holy" in their midst. As one of very few women chaplains in the Air Force at the time, I was a curiosity to many and a threat to some. Many of my male colleagues came from churches that felt women shouldn't proclaim the word of God, let alone be ordained. To others, I was an outright surprise. "You're a Lutheran?" they would say with a look of amazement. They expected me to be Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal, Church of God in Christ or a member of some other historically Black church. "Yep, I'm a Lutheran!" I would reply. "And I'm a cradle Lutheran at that!"¹²

Once folks got over the shock and realized that most Lutherans by nature are ecumenical, slowly but surely, I was seen as an asset. As a Lutheran I could baptize babies, kids and adults. I could

¹² The cradle that rocked me was St. Philips Evangelical Lutheran Church, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, the predominantly Black congregation in West Philadelphia, under the pastorate of the Rev. Dr. J. G. Lavalais where I was baptized, confirmed, and by the grace of God and the permission of the Eastern District of the Missouri Synod, where my ordination service took place with the blessings of the LCA. But that's a story for another time.

sprinkle, pour or dunk; it didn't matter. As a Lutheran, I could use bread and/or wafers for communion. And although my preference was common cup and wine, grape juice could be on the table and in individual cups. This discovery meant that I could preach and preside at all kinds of services: traditional, liturgical, gospel/inspirational, and contemporary praise with little theological difficulty.

Over the years, I grew in experience and rank, as I preached and presided at a variety of worship settings in chapels, tents, aircraft hangers and outdoors; I prayed at commander staff meetings, interfaith gatherings, military ceremonies and with patients, some returning from war zones. I even helped organize vacation Bible school weeks, led Bible studies and workshops, officiated at weddings and funerals, officiated at baptisms and offered pastoral counseling. Occasionally, I gave briefings on cultural and religious practices to deploying troops and checked dog tags for religious preferences. There was never a dull moment.

Offering a "ministry of presence" by visiting families, military personnel and staff was a large part of being a chaplain. Assigned as chaplain to Civil Engineering, I would often visit the fire fighters on base. They usually had some of the best food around, and someone could grab me for a bit of one-on-one pastoral care. I even accompanied them on a few runs and once served as a victim they had to find in a burning plane exercise. Other visits were to those on duty guarding flight lines, perimeters and executive branch planes. I would also visit folks at their homes, make shift hospitals in the field, or other work sites, to name a few ministry opportunities I experienced.

As for flying, I got to do a little of that, too. I was able to fly on missions as part of the crew, to refuel fighter jets and other planes, to accompany troops on C-5s and other supply transport planes and helicopters, and to travel with patients on C-130 medical transport planes.

I have been attached to or served in at least 12 ministry settings within the Air Force, including the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado, working with cadets; the Command Chaplain Office of the Readiness Center for the Air National Guard, Maryland; the Command Chaplain Office of Air Force Material Command, Wright Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, where I got the rare opportunity to serve on an inspector general team; Andrews Air Force Base, Maryland (the president's base), where, on occasion, I ministered to special visitors; and Langley Air Force Base, Virginia, where I ministered to people in intelligence work. God put me where I needed to be, offering ministry at all times of the day or night.

On Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, I was at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland completing my last duty day for the year. "Chaplain King, you need to see this!" came an urgent cry from the next room. As I entered, the chapel manager was pointing at the TV, and we watched in amazement as one of the Twin Towers in New York was in flames. Then, suddenly, a plane flew into the other tower. About 40 minutes later we got word that the Pentagon had been hit by another plane. Our defense posture on base went from Beta (low) to Delta (extremely high) in a matter of moments. As I was the ranking chaplain present, I gathered the chaplaincy staff together. We joined hands in prayer first, and then went to our various responsibilities. Since I was already there, I was given new orders on the spot. By Friday I found myself as a leader of a specialized task force of medical and chaplain personnel at the Pentagon helping both military and civilian employees deal with the trauma they had just experienced. We gave briefings and held sessions on critical incident stress management, grief and loss; prayed with people; offered information, counseling, hugs and understanding; listened to stories of survival; led worship opportunities; and visited hundreds of work areas. Later, the next month, I walked with some family members of a chief petty officer (Navy) to help them through their grief and loss, and plan services for their loved

one who was to be buried at Arlington Cemetery. It was a tough time at the Pentagon, but the Spirit of God was with us all. God had used me in that place, in so many ways, to comfort, to support others, and to help heal a nation.

This call of the church to military chaplaincy co-existed with my calls to civilian ministry in parish and college campus settings at Augustana Campus Church, Rock Island, Ill.; Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.; Emanuel Lutheran, Webster, Mass.; and Calvary Lutheran, West Chester, Pa. Mine was a dynamic, challenging and joyous ministry! God's Spirit was with me, no matter what the situation or circumstance in which I found myself. It was also one heck of a military career. By the time I retired, after 30 years of service, I had been promoted to the rank of colonel, with eagles on each shoulder. Go figure. I became the first, and to my knowledge the only, African American woman within the U.S. Air Force Chaplaincy Service to ever achieve that rank.

God definitely had a plan! I did get the chance to soar like the eagles and dance on the wind. To proclaim God's word of freedom, hope and love. Such memories! Such fun! And to think, it all started because I love to fly kites. God is good, all the time! All the time, God is good!

Your Husband Would Make a Great Pastor: Three Strikes ... You're Out!

Margrethe Kleiber

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

— Hebrews 12:1

“Your husband would make a great pastor.” The words hit me like a physical blow. I had come to Claire, an accomplished woman with a Ph.D. and a respected elder in our church, and had told her I was thinking about seminary.

So, I went to Joel. He and I worked together in youth ministry at the Lutheran Church of Honolulu. He knew my gifts.

“Joel, I’m thinking of going to seminary.”

“Really?” he said, “Your husband would make a good pastor.” Stunned, I talked to our friend Eric, also a member of the congregation.

“Eric,” I said, “You know, for a while now, I’ve been thinking about going to seminary.”

“Tony would make a great pastor.” He paused, “You’d be pretty good, too.” Three strikes, and you’re out. I gave up the idea of seminary.

It was another four or five years before I entered Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. People laugh when I tell them this story. I laugh with them. “You have such obvious gifts for ministry,” they say. But, I wonder ...

My husband is a 6-foot-2 “haole,”¹³ as we would say in Hawaii. I am a petite, 5-foot-1 “hapa.”¹⁴ Isaiah 54:10

What role did my gender, ethnic appearance, height and age play in people’s perceptions of my competence or incompetence? At the time my friends discouraged me from attending seminary, I had finished both an undergraduate degree and a master’s degree in social work. Yet questions of competence continued to haunt me, even in seminary. I heard statements like, “Well, of course the candidacy committee will pass you. They always pass people of color.” Or, “Why can’t you just be happy being a beautiful hapa?” Or, while on Clinical Pastoral Education, “You are too pretty to be a chaplain.” Three strikes, and you’re out.

The Great Cloud of Witnesses

Yet, thanks be to God! There are other voices in the church! For every voice that questioned my competence and my call, there were other voices that encouraged and inspired me. Thank God for this great cloud of witnesses!

¹³ A white person.

¹⁴ A person of mixed race, generally with Asian or Pacific Islander ancestry.

I could tell dozens of stories of people whose voices made a difference. I could go on for pages, naming the people who loved and supported me, who advised and mentored me.

For every Claire, there is an Olivia and a Cora. For every Joel, there has been a Jana and a Ken. For every Eric, there has been a Jim and an Ed and a Bill. This cloud of witnesses included people of all colors, men and women, old and young. They included pastors and professors, colleagues and friends. They urged me to disregard the voices that questioned my competence and encouraged me to run the race set before me.

The Race

Ultimately, it is the race set before us that matters.

While gender and race have certainly shaped my experiences as an individual and as a pastor, I trust that I have not allowed these to constrain me from running the race. This race is the one set out in the words of the ordination service to “pray for God’s people, nourish them with the word and sacraments, and lead them by ... example in faithful service and holy living.”¹⁵

This summer, I will celebrate 23 years of ordained ministry. Over the course of these years I’ve served as a pastor to seven congregations as well as on the churchwide staff. Many of the congregations I served have been in the largely white suburbs. Yet I’ve also had some powerful experiences in multicultural settings. My internship congregations, the Lutheran Church of Our Savior and St. Anthony’s Filipino Ministry in San Francisco, were African American and Filipino, respectively. St. Anne’s Lutheran Church in London was multicultural. Each congregation has lent its unique voices to the cloud of witnesses who have encouraged and affirmed me. I hope I have encouraged and blessed them in return.

As I run the race, I find that the God who willed me into ministry also gives me the strength and compassion to stay the course. I worry less about those who question my competence and more about whether I am running the race to the best of my ability.

Just a couple of weeks ago, a retired pastor very kindly told me that it was important for older pastors to support younger pastors. And I knew he meant that he was the older pastor, while I was the young one. I trust I received his words graciously, because after all, he meant well.

Yet, after we talked, I wondered. I’ve been ordained 23 years. I’m well into my 50s. Would he have said this to a white man of a comparable age? When will I graduate from being a “younger pastor” to being an “older pastor?”

Then I smiled. There is a cloud of witnesses cheering me on. I’m running the race.

That is all that matters.

¹⁵“Ordination,” Augsburg Fortress, copyright 2013, sundaysandseasons.com.

What's Next, Lord?

Charlene Limenih

On March 22, 2016, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary sent me their annual card thanking and blessing me for my active years of service as an ordained minister in the ELCA. It always makes me pause and give thanks to the One True and Living God, who just keeps on giving. I have 18 rich years to celebrate. Have there been and are there trials? Yes! When my faith and patience is tested, I run to the Rock that is higher than I. Jesus Christ sustains me and reminds me he wants to stretch me, and teach me more about trusting him without reservation.

As a second career pastor and the first African American female to be ordained in the Southwest California Synod, in 1998, I know something about difficult first calls, serving where there is little money, a few loving, faithful parishioners, and a great community waiting to be served. It is nothing but the love of Jesus, the desire to reach people for the kingdom of God, and a servant's heart that tells you, you can do this because Christ is with you. Thirteen diverse Lutherans at Chapel of Peace Lutheran Church in Inglewood, Calif., said yes to God and accepted my leadership. Together, we grew this small congregational ministry into a thriving place where new community members and associates learned what it means to be a Christian, serving in a Lutheran context.

After eight years of service, I achieved another first, becoming the first African American female mission developer to serve in Raleigh, N.C.; the year was 2006. Some in California questioned my judgment and my sanity. Nevertheless, I knew God's grace would not lead me where it could not keep me. I started with two prayer warriors and the support of the North Carolina strategy team. Praise God for 27 years of work with the Department of Treasury. Transference of work skills is a life-saving gift. For five long years I poured myself into the work of building a mission congregation. Today, I give thanks to the North Carolina Synod and congregations that supported and continue to support the work of Joy of Discovery Lutheran Mission.

I know God is up to something in this faithful community of believers who continue to serve. In 2012, I decided to retire from full-time ministry and rewire. I enjoy sharing my gifts of Christian drama, gospel singing, plucking out gospel songs on the piano, and, yes, teaching and preaching. I have since served as pulpit supply pastor in 17 Lutheran churches and helped African descent Lutheran women celebrate putting together their first retreat. Lastly, little did I know God would call me back to my first congregation to serve as their interim pastor. The people of Chapel of Peace Lutheran Church prayed for me to come. For one week, I heard the message Jesus spoke to Peter in John 21:15-17: "Feed my sheep. Charlene, feed my sheep." I could not rest until I said yes. Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us there is a time and a season for everything. I've served Chapel of Peace for almost a year now. I have peace that it is OK to ask, what's next Lord?

Graceless Ground

Kathryn Love

A 4-year-old child discovers her shadow on the ground. The child, now 70, makes connections and rises to the occasion by sharing her observation.

Oh, graceless grounds on thee my shadow cast
From age 4 to 70 I watched and could not escape your face.
You cling to me; I cannot run, nor skip, walk or be released from your grasp.
The shaded figure so resembles me; I watch,
as my silhouette gestures, mimics me; as if we were one!
You have grown with me; can you see my every move or know
my thoughts and joys; my anxious mood?

My path you've guessed; I cannot hide my shape, so I will tell you
of my new-found grace. Did you know that it is He who guides
my way? Since you so cling to me! I am sure you figured
who leads me on life's way.

I love your beauty, the grass, flowers trees, your creatures all;
yes, your lovely human beings. But earth sometimes I cannot see
your grace like shadows, you run and hide your face from brokenness, pain and
shame!

From 1942, you watch and cling to me. Your yield does feed and
nourish me, till now I've reached my promised 70.

From layers of concrete to grass maintained I stand. From
hop-sotch skipping, to putting tees with roaring greens, you've
remained with me. I cannot leave until others are set free;
God heal our ailing broken land; until shadows rise and meet
my now failing stance.

For when You call, my body will succumb to thee, O' graceless
one. A last I'm free from all my fears and troubled past; I take
my flight through horizon; I pass the golden gates, at home at
last. I'll need no ground or earth on which my shadow cast.

I'll know God's grace, the grace that leads the way while shades
of earth sorrow distract me from His face; I still know
Him! I also know that you, too, seek His face.

While I wait, continuing I must, like creation make my
earthly marks! The marks of courage, passion, speech and
hope. I'll leave behind these gifts for other folks who know not where
they go!

The Reign of Truth

Kathryn Love

Facing the truth, be it life or death,
is such a valuable life-time step.
'Tis the path to peace, no reason to retreat
to fantasy, and only pleasant memories,
with paths of deception and false transparency
that bind the mind, imprison the soul,
and never let the story be told.

Truth says there is no fear in me; no room
for doubt; embellishments, small lies
cannot abide. I am, truth says, like a
waterfall; I will rise for another
glorious fall where beauty walks with poise.
Where hearts are fulfilled and ready for
another day to beat in splendid fashion
waiting for the sun to rise amidst blue skies.

At last, I've found my genuine side—
The place where truth abides.

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By God's Grace

Lucille "CeCee" Mills

I could see her reddish-brown afro as she greeted people with that incredible smile – lips stretching broadly across her face revealing beautiful, white teeth against her beautiful, caramel skin. I imagined a sea of “hellos” and “glad-to-meet-yous” cascading into her ears and down her face, her shaking hands and giving sweet thankful nods as everyone milled around her in the excitement of the day.

A few months later I was seated across from her in her office listening to her confidence in my 9-year-old self. She gave me a printout with a Bible text and two books I could use for references. “Just come back and see me if you need any help, but I think you can do it all by yourself,” she said happily. I glanced down at the books and smiled back at her.

“Thank you, Pastor Earlean.” I stood up cradling my books to go prepare my first sermon. I was at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Greensboro, N.C., where she was serving as the first African American female pastor in the Lutheran Church in America. I had no idea she had made history or that our congregation had been so uniquely blessed. It removed any perceived barriers to the possibilities for me in God. I had no idea that my call to public ministry was being shaped, nurtured and nourished. I was 9 years old with an invitation to preach, and I had said, “Yes.”

I said yes because the adults in my life were convinced that I was more than capable. They were convinced that this for me was no big deal. They saw in me an ability to meet challenges and to speak clearly. Though it was not in their minds to imagine me a pastor, it was in their minds to encourage me to experiment with serving, which mirrored the faith they were teaching me in words and actions.

Prince of Peace celebrated the gifts in laity of all ages. There were numerous adults who were lay people, both male and female, who would preach regularly. It was a small, biracial congregation, which was rich in spirit and liberation of all kinds; it produced three African descent female Lutheran pastors. We had the freedom to stumble and discern. We had the invitation to use our gifts both refined and rough.

It is this faith-life paradigm that paralleled my family's beliefs that gave me the freedom to test God's holy waters in a number of ways. I was encouraged with confidence in my gifts and passively expected to struggle, yet succeed. It is the intermingling of these two realities that showed me a multiracial world with unlimited possibilities.

It was not until I entered candidacy and public ministry that the stench of racism attempted to radically impede my life. I still sometimes wonder how such a beautiful inauguration into ministry possibilities could evolve into such a stark, shocking reality that is racially tense, yet where God has called me to be.

If offered, I would do nothing else – I could do nothing else but submit to this yearning the Holy Spirit has planted and grown in me. Despite the pain of candidacy and the scarcity of opportunity for healthy calls, I stay. I stay because God has used me to show how an advanced degree is not the only way to be prepared for this work. God has used me to show that black and brown people can have a multigenerational Lutheran heritage, but that heritage is not what validates me.

It is by God's pure grace that I am ready, equipped and prepared to serve. It is by God's pure grace that I face racism and sexism in God's holy space. It is by God's pure grace that I am surrounded by supporters of all hues, who hear my hurt and long for better days. It is by God's grace that I can stomach the times where I cannot share fear, frustration and anger at having to accept not being wanted because it's just not profitable to hire a Black woman pastor. It is by God's grace that I have been invited into ministry by congregations and institutions, in ways that have broken the status quo. It is by God's grace that I – a single mom, raised by a divorcee, an African American woman with no degree – am called as a pastor in the ELCA. It is by God's grace that I see hope for diversity and witness God's people doing amazing things. It is by God's grace that I am a part of a denomination that recognizes the need to change and struggles with the how. It is by God's grace that I have been fed and nourished by every believer who has crossed my life.

Women of God

© Gladys G. Moore

G C G C G D

1. Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called to be the preach - ers of good news.
 2. Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called to make dis - cip - les eve - ry where.
 3. Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called from eve - ry na - tion, tribe and tongue.

G C G C A

Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called to move the peo - ple from their
 Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called to pro - claim hope where there's des -
 Wom-en of God, cre - a - ted cho - sen and called, called to sing un - til all songs are

D D7 G G7 C Am

pews in - to the world to wit - ness to care and lis - ten to
 pair. We're sent to lift our voic - es for those with few choic - es to
 sung. We praise the God who made us who named and claimed us as

G C D D7 G G7

share God's love with those in need. We're sent to share the treas - ure of
 advocate for just - ice for the poor. We're set to bind up the brok - en, break -
 priests and ser - vants of the Lord. We'll work as sisters to - geth - er bap -

C Am G D G C G

God's good plea - sure Am - bas - sa - dors for Christ in word and deed.
 silence with words spok - en, To preach God's reign, the king - dom's sure!
 tism's our teth - er un - til God's whole cre - a - tion is re - stored

JA, JA, JI, JI, JO, JO

Idalia Negron Caamaño

Era el título de un programa cómico de la televisión en Puerto Rico. Quise llamar mi respuesta a la petición de “Las Mujeres de Color de la ELCA” de escribir sobre nuestros retos y logros como latinas en los últimos 45 años de nuestra ordenación al ministerio de Palabra y Sacramento; porque JA,JA que bueno, que alegría, somos inclusivos y somos mujeres pastoras; JI, JI cuando las cosas están bien pero nadie las elogia y mucho menos las siguen; JO, JO cuando nos encontramos con las paredes que no se mueven por el pre-juicio y el machismo.

JA, JA, Soy nacida y criada en la Iglesia Luterana San Pablo, me confirmé a los 14 años luego de una larga espera, pues cantaba en el coro desde los 11 años y la feligresía tenía que pasar frente a mí para comulgar. Muchas veces me preguntaba: ¿Hasta cuándo tendrás que esperar? Representé a los jóvenes de la iglesia en el sínodo y estando en la Universidad de PR, a los 16 años fui a una asamblea de jóvenes en Wisconsin cuando la Iglesia Luterana en América. Recuerdo un Ji, Ji, pues los jóvenes en la Universidad nos reuníamos los miércoles y se nos ocurrió hacer un servicio de comunión con mavi (Bebida de cascara de cerveza) y casabe. Nos enviaron al Revdo. Francisco Molina a explicarnos que habíamos hecho un sacrilegio. De ese grupo salimos laicos comprometidos y cuatro pastores. El JO, JO que dijeron de nosotros, son muy liberales y hay que darles más teología y practica para que entiendan. Por lo que el pastor Evaristo Falcó me explicaba por largas horas el porqué de la comunión y el bautismo y a vez de porque no todo ser humano es digno de ellos. Cosa que me parece muy difícil de aceptar.

Fui la primera joven de 18 del consejo de la congregación, liturgista, y presidenta del consejo en dos ocasiones. Durante mis años de juventud en más de una ocasión personas de la congregación y el presidente del sínodo se acercaron a mí para que estudiara para ser pastora y siempre dije no, no puedo, es mucha responsabilidad, no tengo el dinero, muchas excusas. En dos ocasiones Dios me habló y me dijo te estoy llamando, pero como dicen a la tercera va la vencida; en el aniversario 95 de la congregación; el Obispo Rafael Malpica hizo un llamado a la vocación cristiana del sacerdocio universal y oí nuevamente a Dios diciéndome te estoy llamando a servirme. Esta vez no me resistí y comencé en la Escuela de Laicos y el próximo semestre comencé en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico. Ja,ja, ji,ji.

La entrevista inicial en el Comité de Candidatura fue muy cordial, todos los miembros eran laicos y un pastor. La entrevista con el Obispo Francisco Sosa y el presidente del Comité de Candidatura Revdo. Enrique Mercado Cruz fue un jo,jo. Primero me preguntaron: ¿Cuánto tiempo le vas a dedicar a la iglesia, ya que es 2da. Carrera? Tenía en esos momentos 45 años y dije por lo menos unos 15 a 20 años. Luego el obispo me preguntó: ¿Cuándo te llamen a las 2 o 3 de la mañana para una emergencia, tu esposo te va a dejar salir? A lo que conteste yo puedo entrar y salir todas las veces que sea necesario y más si es una emergencia. Lo pregunto tres veces más y el Revdo. Mercado le dijo; es que ella ya te contesto sí. JO, JO.

Tarde 8 años en terminar los estudios de la Maestría en Divinidad y el internado, un proceso que se alargó debido a que me traslade a Lutheran School of Theology en Chicago y allí me exigieron un año de internado con un propósito y que tenían que pagarme una mensualidad de \$1,500.00. Por razones de enfermedad de mi cuñada regresé a Puerto Rico para atenderla a ella y mis sobrinos nietos. Por lo que por los primeros seis meses no recibí llamada para internado y se seguía alargando la fecha de graduación y llamada para ordenación. Esto fue otro jo,jo, Pero Dios en su amor y misericordia me envió a los santos ángeles y se abrió una puerta para mí. La obispa

Margarita Martínez me llamó a trabajar como Especialista en Mayordomía y coordinó con el seminario y el Revdo. Mario Miranda y el que hiciera el internado en mi iglesia madre. Un ja,ja.

El 26 de abril de 2003, fui ordenada e instalada como pastora de la congregación donde crecí y donde aún soy pastora. Un gran ja,ja, ji,ji. Como todo en la vida tiene varios puntos de vista, tengo personas en la congregación que estuvieron encantadas desde el principio con la idea de que fuera sus pastora, a otros se le hizo difícil y otros no pudieron soportar tener una pastora mujer y no regresaron. Jo,jo se lo perdieron.

Desde el año 2002, he tenido dos trabajos uno con la ELCA y otro con la congregación de San Pablo. Sigo proclamando como el apóstol Pablo: “Todo lo puedo en Cristo que me fortalece. No me canso ni me frustro ante los embates de Satanás, que como nos decía Martín Lutero; ¿Qué significa esto? Que el llamado del Señor es claro y que me llamó a proclamar las buenas noticias del reino en medio de una sociedad, machista, individualista, donde todo se hace por obligación y no por amor.

Para muchos no soy la mejor pastora o Directora de Misión, pues siempre tengo mi vista fija en la gente y cómo se comporta la sociedad en donde vivo. Pero a todo eso le doy un jo,jo, pues estoy clara que el Señor me llamó, con propósito y con poder, para continuar haciendo en la tierra. Ja, ja, ji, ji.

Ja, Ja, Ji, Ji, Jo, Jo: The Lord Called Me

Idalia Negron Caamaño

“JA, JA, JI, JI, JO, JO” was the name of a comedy television program in Puerto Rico. When “The Women of Color of the ELCA” asked me to write my story in the ministry of word and sacrament, about the challenges and accomplishments as a Latina in the past 45 years of my ordination, I wanted to use a unique name that described my journey – JA, JA: It’s good; what joy; we are inclusive, and we are women pastors. JI, JI: When things are good but nobody praises and much less follows you. JO, JO: When we meet walls that do not move because of prejudice and male chauvinism.

JA, JA. I was born and raised in St. Paul Lutheran Church. I was confirmed at age 14 after a long wait, because I sang in the choir since I was 11 years old and the parishioners had to pass in front of me to receive communion. Many times, I wondered, “How long will I have to wait?” I represented the youth of the congregation at the synod level and was studying at the University of Puerto Rico. At age 16, I went to a youth assembly in Wisconsin when it was the LCA. I remember a JI, JI, as young people; we met every Wednesday and we came up with an idea to celebrate a communion service with Maví (rind of the mauby tree) and cassava bread (food of our Indian ancestors). We were sent to the Rev. Francisco Molina for him to explain to us that we had committed sacrilege. Four pastors and committed laypeople came out of that group. The JO, JO that was told about us was, “They are very liberal, and they have to be given more theology and practice for them to understand.” For this reason, Pastor Evaristo Falco explained to me for long hours the meaning of the communion and baptism, and at the same time he said that every person is not worthy of them – which seemed difficult to me, and which I still find it very difficult to accept. In my congregation, the communion is open to every person. JO, JO ...

I was the first 18-year-old youth member of the congregation’s council, liturgist and president, on two occasions, of the congregation’s council. During my younger years, on more than one occasion, some members and the president of the council approached me to study to become a pastor, and I always answered no, giving many excuses, such as, “I cannot,” “It’s a lot of responsibility” and “I have no money.” Twice God spoke to me and told me I’m calling you, but as they say, “the third time’s lucky,” and on the 95th anniversary of the San Pablo congregation Bishop Rafael Malpica was called to the Christian universal vocation of the priesthood, and once again I heard God telling me “I’m calling you to serve.” This time I did not resist and began studying in the School for Laypersons. The next semester I started at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico. JA, JA, JI, JI.

The initial interview with the candidacy committee was very cordial. All members were laypeople except one pastor. The interview with Bishop Francisco Sosa and the chair, the Rev. Enrique Cruz Mercado, was a JO, JO. First, they asked me, “How long are you going to dedicate to the church since you have a second career?” I had at that time 45 years and knew that at least 15-20 years I could give to the church. Then the bishop asked me, “When you’re called at 2 or 3 in the morning for an emergency, will your husband let you go?” To which I replied, “I can go and come as many times as necessary, if it’s an emergency,” while I filled myself with patience not to answer, “He does not have me tied down.” The bishop asked me the same question three times, and the Rev. Mercado said, “She has already answered you in affirmative.” JO, JO.

It took me eight years to complete my studies of Master in Divinity and my internship, a process that dragged on because I moved to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC), and

there I was required to complete a year of internship with the agreement that I would receive a monthly stipend of \$1,500. Because of my sister-in-law's illness, I returned to Puerto Rico to attend her and my nephews and grandchildren. For this reason, during the first six months I received no call for internship, and this kept extending the date of graduation and call for ordination. This was another JO, JO.

But God in His love and mercy sent me holy angels, and a door was opened for me. Bishop Margarita Martinez called me to work as a stewardship specialist and coordinated with the seminary and the Rev Mario Miranda to make my internship in my home church. JA, JA.

On April 26, 2003, I was ordained and installed as pastor of the congregation where I grew up, and I still am the pastor. A big JA, JA, JI, JI. As with everything in life, people have several points of view. I have people in the congregation who were enchanted from the beginning with the idea that I was their pastor; others found it difficult; others could not deal with the idea of having a female pastor and did not return. JO, JO – they missed it!

Since 2002, I have had two jobs; one with the ELCA as stewardship specialist and since 2008 as director for evangelical mission. The other is as pastor of the congregation of St. Paul. For me, it really is just one; it's the answer to God's call. I still proclaim as the apostle Paul did: "I can do everything through Jesus Christ who strengthens me." I never get tired or frustrated by the attacks of Satan. So, like Martin Luther, who said, "What does this mean?" I believe the call of the Lord is clear, and God called me to proclaim the good news of the kingdom in the midst of a society that is chauvinistic and individualistic, where everything is done by obligation, not love. I firmly believe in taking everything to the foot of the cross of Christ, and he will give me the solution.

For many, I am not the best pastor or mission director because I always have my eyes on the people and the society where I live and how they behave. But I give all that a JO, JO for I know that the Lord called me with purpose and power, in continuing to try to establish the kingdom of God here on earth. JA, JA, JI, JI, JO, JO.

Just Around the Bend

Linda Norman

My call to rostered ministry came as a slow unfolding around each bend. Before I was taught the concept of “call,” God was speaking this future into being through the embrace of the church. When my family moved to a new neighborhood, we went to our new neighborhood church, Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church in Houston. As a shy but obedient child, I followed my brother, Arthur, to confirmation classes and youth group events. When Arthur was elected to the synodical Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) board, my mom sent me along to their meetings. I didn’t actively participate – until the day Arthur and I visited Mrs. Linda McCoy, our LYO sponsor, in the hospital. Mrs. McCoy was dying, and in that conversation, she told me that I would be a leader in the church. She saw for me what I had never seen for or within myself. I started participating, learning how to work in teams, plan events and speak in front of groups. Eventually, I served as the synod LYO president and youth member on synod council.

By the time I went to college, I felt that I had lived out what Mrs. McCoy had spoken over me! It wasn’t until a non-denominational campus ministry group invited me to join a freshman Bible study that I realized that a relationship with God had been largely incidental to my leadership in the church and that my faith was largely on the surface. I found that I couldn’t give a “defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). So, I went to the Christian bookstore alongside the other students who didn’t have Bibles, and we dove into the Scriptures. I asked the questions I hadn’t cared about before. I acquired prayer partners. I sang in the choir. I worked with the youth pastor at a local congregation. And I started to speak the name of Jesus from a place of deepening relationship. After a few years, I became a Bible study leader. Although I was to be graduating with a degree in accounting, my extra-curricular instruction had become the central story of my college years. In my senior year, I was accepted into seminary but was convinced to return to Houston to begin a career in public accounting.

I began working for Arthur Andersen LLP (Andersen), one of the premiere public accounting firms at that time. In the wake of public scandal, the company folded during my fourth year there. I moved to another public accounting firm, still auditing energy companies. But the arguments that had persuaded me to put my degree to work had now lost their sway. After two months, I called the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to ask if my previous acceptance was still open. I entered candidacy. And, the next month, I moved to Chicago.

Some conjectured that God closed Andersen to get me to go to seminary. I cannot subscribe to that interpretation, but I do believe that there is a resurrection in all things. And resurrection came for me in the freedom to pursue this call. Academically, seminary felt like a wonderland. Not having had the gift of formal academic training in these areas of study, I soaked it in. There were few students of color, but we built our small network of support. I wasn’t certain that the outcome of my seminary education would be a path toward ordination. But my seminary adviser, Dr. Linda Thomas, strongly encouraged me to continue on the path.

What I didn’t know when I moved to Chicago was that I hadn’t left accounting behind. I began working part-time as an accountant for a community organization called Chicago Commons. I counted them as the blessing that would enable me to graduate without seminary debt. What I understood later was that this was how God would provide a way for me to learn non-profit accounting.

I see now how God has always been gathering up my life's experiences, layering them as road signs and tools for the journey around the next bend. It took years for me to embrace the idea that both pastoral leadership and accounting are integral to how I have been called. Within months of each other, I would begin serving with the ELCA churchwide organization as the controller for the ELCA Foundation and as an associate pastor at Bethel Lutheran Church in Chicago. Five years later, I would be elected to serve as the ELCA treasurer. I've now passed my 10-year anniversary of ordination, and I'm still integrating new layers of experiences that inform my ever-evolving sense of call. The journey has taken a circuitous route, but there has always been a clear hand of God guiding me just around the next bend. Thanks be to God!

Reflection on Thirty-Seven Years of Ordained Ministry

Cheryl Pero

Among biblical scholars and interpreters, the following saying is often quoted: Text without context is pretext. What follows is my text, my journey. I begin by sharing the context within which I was shaped and formed and honed and valued. That is followed by the context of my vocational journey in Lutheranism.

I have come to realize and affirm that we are all formed by the cultural trappings our ancestors valued and passed on. I describe my culture as Afri-Caribbean. Let me make it clear at this juncture that this does not constitute my identity; rather, this is how I identify and process who and whose I am. This is the lens through which I scrutinize others and through which others scrutinize me. This is the tapestry in which I find myself woven into my past as well as bound to an uncertain future. This means that my values and standards of acceptability were passed down to me from my Jamaican elders and ancestors, in our myths and songs, our stories and s/heroes, our food and drink, our sacred texts and our not-so-sacred idiomatic expressions. My political and religious heritage was shaped by the sin of British colonization and, its partner in crime, the Anglican Church.

My grandmother emigrated to New York City in 1930. My mother and uncle joined her later in the 1940s. I was born in Queens, N.Y., in 1951 and was baptized at three months, as were my brother and first cousins (there are five of us), at Trinity Episcopal Church in the Bronx. I am my mother's first child. My brother was born when I was 5. I was sent to boarding school in Kingston, Jamaica, at the age of 6. I had my own passport by then and was already quite the international traveler, because Grandma often took me with her when she traveled back and forth to visit her family in Jamaica. I was also her partner whenever Trinity Church went on trips and excursions. So, I was exposed to a church environment from my beginnings. I spent five years in a Christian boarding school, traveling back and forth between New York and Kingston. None of my cousins nor my brother shared that long-term cultural exposure and experience with me.

I returned to the Bronx during the summer of 1962, following Jamaica's celebration of liberation and independence from Great Britain. My parents' values came from the British, and they never questioned them – those were the only values they knew! My socialization was very different from theirs, though. They came to this country as adults after being socialized in Jamaica; I came as a pre-teen. Our parents enrolled us at Our Saviour Lutheran School (The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, LCMS); I was in the sixth grade, and my brother in the first grade. In those middle school grades, I was challenged by my peers to be an African American. I did not have a clue then, and the socialization process for me was very painful; I grew more introverted and more academically focused throughout my teenage years. I had few friends because my parents did not approve of any friends outside of the Walter League at St. Paul's Lutheran Church of Tremont (also LCMS).

I am a graduate of Wellesley College. It was my parents' choice. When I graduated in 1973, I enrolled at Andover Newton Theological School. That was my choice, contrary to my parents' wishes. The first time that I entertained the notion of a vocational call to be a pastor was through conversation with the Rev. Paul Santmire, the LCA chaplain at Wellesley. As I did a work-study job in the chaplain's office at the beginning of my junior year, Paul invited me to at least

consider the idea of pastoral ministry. And why would I ever consider it? The LCMS did not have any room for women pastors! But, nevertheless, I graduated from Andover Newton in 1977, after learning about racism from first-hand experiences as well as becoming involved in the Boston school desegregation struggle as a seminary student.

I became a member of the LCA on Mother's Day in 1977 in Chicago, where I was fulfilling my "Lutheran year" requirements at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). The Division for Mission in North America of the LCA had heard about me, a Black woman seminary graduate, and I was invited to serve on the staff in New York. I accepted and wondered if I was going backward instead of moving forward with God's vocational goals for me. But this was a way for me to learn about the LCA, hands-on, at the same time that I was going through the candidacy process in the Illinois Synod. I did my internship in 1979-80 and was called to serve as an associate pastor on the north side of Chicago. I was ordained on May 18, 1980.

I did not expect to be so misunderstood by that Swedish congregation and its senior pastor! I had been groomed to stand tall and proud, to believe that my character and credentials would speak for themselves. Was I ever in for a rude awakening! As long as I identified and functioned as Jamaican (after all, there's not too much difference between salted codfish and lutefisk, except lye!), I was well received. But when I identified with the African American community, I lost my "exotic" otherness, and I was judged and pigeonholed as not really belonging and valued even less! And that was the white community! The African American collegium was just as ambivalent and judgmental: they perhaps saw me as using my Jamaican culture to set myself apart. I also discovered that those who opposed my ministry were more likely to be middle-aged women than any other demographic group.

Ministry has been a roller coaster ride for me. I served two parishes over a five-year period (with a six-month "on leave" status in between when I worked as the receptionist for the Chicago Baptist Association offices of the American Baptist Churches USA. Following that, I worked in Crossings Campus Ministry (a partnership between Lutheran Campus Ministry of Metropolitan Chicago, the City Colleges of Chicago, and Lutheran Social Services of Illinois) for 12 years. I learned an awful lot about the Black church in that context, but that call came to a screeching halt when I called out a colleague for directing Black students to a Black church down the street instead of welcoming them to our Lutheran campus ministry site. I returned to part-time parish ministry in 1999, where I served for six tumultuous years.

I have always been interested in advanced graduate study. I earned a Master of Theology degree (Th.M.) in church and society from LSTC in 1981. I took time off from the academy for a number of years and found myself returning to school to begin work on a Ph.D., one course per term, during my campus ministry years. I married my best friend, Pete Pero, in 1988, and I switched disciplines from ethics to biblical studies, one factor being that Pete taught in the ethics division. I began by auditing Greek and Hebrew courses in order to get my unused languages back up to scratch. In 2003, I received a Th.M. in biblical studies, and on May 16, 2010, I was granted the Ph.D. in New Testament. I am at the stage in life where I am more tickled than anything else by white denial of the accomplishments of people of color. I was the first woman to earn a Th.M. in 1981, but was told that simply was not true by a white faculty member. I am the first African American Lutheran to earn a Ph.D. in Bible, but even that is denied to me by inserting the noun "woman" on the part of the academy. Hasn't some male African American Lutheran, like Dr. Peter Nash, done that earlier? In spite of Peter's assertion that I am the first in this field, white people refuse to grant me that credential.

Conflict is unavoidable when one's cultural values are judged inferior and overridden by others' cultural values, which are considered ethnocentrically superior. God's heart breaks over and over again when God's people create and function in this hierarchical manner. Lutheranism functions in this way when the members do not value all the people of God. We, as African descent rostered women, may have wonderful one-on-one relationships with white peers and colleagues, but the church has told us in regular, routine messages wrapped in cloaks of micro-aggressions that we are not valued.

My last and final call has been as the director of the Rev. Dr. Albert "Pete" Pero Jr. Multicultural Center (née the Multicultural Center, renamed by the board of directors in 2011) at LSTC. I am called by the ELCA Church Council to this ministry, appointed by the president of LSTC and approved by the Metropolitan Chicago Synod. I have served in this capacity since 2010. As one who has an earned Ph.D. in Bible, I have been overlooked, ignored, insulted and marginalized by some members of the faculty, mostly white women. I have wondered if this was because of my marriage to the sole African American systematician (until recently) in American Lutheranism. Did they not realize that I thought independently from Pete? That I was able to express my own agency?

There are lots of incidents to which I could point as illustrations of my text. But I think this will suffice. I plan to retire from my current call on June 30, 2017. I must admit that my 37-year experience as an ordained Black woman pastor within Lutheranism has been bittersweet. Why have I stayed? Because I love the Lord, and God called me to serve in this church.

Walking into My Purpose

Rhonda Pruitt

“Pastors are older, wise, mature, calm.”

“You can see God all over someone who is called. I don’t see it on you.”

“Pastors are men. Women don’t usurp power if they love God.”

“Pastors are above reproach. Somebody needs to show you your sin.”

“Girl get you a job that will pay the bills. Nobody’s going to call you!”

“Black women should expect to wait three to five years for their first call.”

“She certainly exhibits more extroverted tendencies than most pastors in this denomination.”

“You are the trifecta of what church people don’t want in a pastor – Black, woman, young.”

“Maybe you should focus on those two precious babies and let this church thing go.”

“Clearly I’m not called. I wouldn’t make this many mistakes if I were.”

I guess I should have asked forgiveness for even thinking about a call to rostered leadership. It’s almost its own litany; I can hear myself after each petition – “Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord have mercy!” My gifts did not seem suitable for ministry, and there was no lack of voices who reminded me of it, including my own. From patriarchal-oriented, well-meaning loved ones, to residential assistants in college, to good friends who wanted me to “have a life,” I heard it. Even the inanimate, non-living preparatory experiences – “preparing-for-post-seminary-life-as-pastor” classes and the required psychological assessments and evaluations – testified that I didn’t have what God or the church needed. Yet there I was, the young black girl drawn not only to Scripture but to church process as well. I guess if I was a misfit for church, I was just as much a misfit in my social circle. Nobody knew what to do with the friend who prayed before we took forbidden rides in parents’ *borrowed* cars. Friends also asked: “Who dresses up as a pastor for Halloween?!” “You are skipping _____ concert to sing in a choir concert?!” I didn’t belong anywhere. I lived in my own personal limbo. Still ...

“But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?”
(Romans 10:14)

Somebody or something had to get through all the negative clutter, because I needed to walk into my purpose. God enlisted willing vessels and put them in my way to stop the rebellious defiant, angry trajectory I found myself on. It started with my mother Betty “You are as smart as any man. God put you on this earth, and you weren’t made as an inferior model!” Then she set about the task of making sure I was connected to people who refused to let me forget it: My principal, Hazel, who made me memorize, and eventually internalize “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4); Pastor David who told me that I could do all things through Christ who would be my strength (Philippians 4:13); Aunt Mary who told me “No weapon formed against me would prosper” (Isaiah 54:17). It was my bonus mom, Wyvetta, who spoke the word of grace I so desperately needed to hear: “For I am convinced ... neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Right over my head that flew, so she simplified it for me: “There is nothing you can do, past, present or future, that Christ hasn’t already taken to the cross. You can’t make God stop loving you. It’s impossible. You already belong to God.”

It didn't happen instantly, and I still struggle some days to live into this truth, but I started to feel like I belonged in the vastness of God's community.

The seal that *set* my face toward this call came in a dream. After one big, painful assertion –“You trying to be a pastor is evil and sinful and demonic!” – I sat on the floor, knees drawn to my chest, in tears waiting for God to get revenge on the person who had wounded me. I woke up with a severely stiff neck but in full remembrance of the dream. There I was standing in one spot with a line of faceless individuals. One by one they approached me and left. The last person in the line was in tears – I remember her. She had nowhere to go and no one to turn to. She asked “Do you have one more? Can I have what you gave them?” Confused, I looked at her and said, “I didn't give them anything. I have nothing!” Refusing to be denied, she asked me for a word. I gave her the only words I had: “You aren't a misfit. You have a place, and no one can take it away from you. God says so!” Her face became clear. *She was me*. And then I KNEW. With the word of on my lips, and a bag full of experiences that could testify with integrity, I was to preach the all-inclusive love of God to people who don't know they need God, and to people who can't live without God. I AM CALLED to make every misfit who crosses my path fit, to let every unsuitable-mismatched-immature-trifecta-of-deficiencies person know the same message that God has used others to preach to me: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. YOU BELONG!”

Reflexión en el Día Internacional de la Mujer

Carmen Ana Rameriz Marrero

“Cuán insondables son tus caminos, Señor.” Rom. 11:33 Dando un recorrido por mi memoria puedo afirmar como Pablo. Los caminos del Señor no solo son insondables, sino también inescrutables.

¡Cómo pasa el tiempo! Hace tres décadas no podía imaginar el giro que daría mi vida. Siendo madre y maestra sentía que algo faltaba en mi vida. Hasta encontrar un oasis, la idea de dedicar mis años, luego de la crianza de mis hijas, y jubilarme de mi posición como educadora, se hacía más visible mi deseo o llamado a la pastoral.

Acepté el llamado del Señor. “Oí una voz que decía a quién he de enviar, respondí heme aquí, Señor, envíame a mí.” Isaías 6:8 Sentí una alegría inexplicable, sin embargo, no pudo ser. Al reunirme con el Director del Comité, un pastor, me indicó que en ese momento, “no había lugar para mí en la pastoral” porque había muchos candidatos estudiando en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico y no había tantas iglesias vacantes. ¡Qué ironía! Hoy tenemos seis iglesias sin pastor o pastora atendidas por seminaristas y pastores retirados. Yo no podía entrar por la “vía alterna” pues ya no estaba disponible. Esto frustró mi deseo y alegría. Vi mi deseo tronchado. Los caminos de Dios son inescrutables y mis aspiraciones dieron un nuevo giro. Aunque esa fue la respuesta que recibí del Director del Comité, no me quedé de brazos cruzados, continué estudiando en el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico para completar una Maestría en Artes de la Religión.

Con la ayuda del Pastor Wilfredo Aponte, me di a la tarea de buscar otro camino de servicio al Señor. En ese tiempo no sabía que existía un ministerio de Palabra y Servicio, diaconisas de la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana en América con sede en Filadelfia.

Pastor Aponte buscó información, nos orientamos e hice la solicitud para entrevista. ¡Qué gran diferencia! Fui recibida con alegría y mucho amor. Sister Nora Frost, Directora las diaconisas y Sister Phylis Enck, Directora de Educación, me acogieron como su “hermana.” Parecía que me conocían de toda la vida. Fui aceptada para entrar al proceso en una organización con otro idioma y cultura. Era la única candidata latina. Tuve otras reuniones, visitas a la “Comunidad, un lugar hermoso y acogedor.

Durante tres meses estuve internada en la Comunidad viviendo, estudiando y compartiendo con las hermanas. No fue fácil pues era la primera vez que me separaba por tanto tiempo de mi familia. La experiencia fue gratificante. Visité iglesias, fui al Seminario en Gettysburg, asistí a retiros. Verdaderamente un giro a lo que yo creía era mi llamado. Continué estudiando. Esta vez con una mirada clara al futuro.

Fui investida en un Servicio muy emotivo donde asistieron y participaron el Obispo Francisco Sosa, quien ofició, El Revdo. Wilfredo Aponte, cantó el salmo 121 en español, que aunque las hermanas no sabían el idioma, lo disfrutaron. Me acompañó mi hija Edna y mis amigas Edith Nieves y Noelia Marrero. Ese día recibí la grata sorpresa de los seminaristas Nelson Rabel y José Luis Escalera quienes estudiaban en Filadelfia.

Mientras mi vida concurría entre el Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico, y la Comunidad de Diaconisas, ordenaron dos compañeros a la pastoral, esto sin tener una Maestría en Divinidad. “Cosas veredes” le dijo Don Quijote a Sancho.

Completé un Maestría en Artes de la Religión. Hice mi internado en la Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Divino Nazareno y ahora a esperar, porque, al igual que en la pastoral hay que recibir un llamado para ser ordenado y/o consagrado. No había un lugar para una diaconisa. Algunas personas no estaban claras cuál era ese Ministerio.

Fui consagrada el 27 de octubre de 2002 en un hermoso y emotivo Servicio. Asistieron Sister Nora Frost, directora, quien trajo el mensaje, Sister Phylis Enck y algunas de las diaconisas. El llamado tuvo una duración de un año pues se terminaron los fondos.

Como diaconisa he sido asignada a algunas Iglesias cuando no ha habido pastor/a. Estas han sido experiencias gratificantes en las cuales he podido llevar el Evangelio, la Buena Nueva a otro/as. Sé que Dios todavía tiene planes para mí como dice Jeremías 29:11. Hoy puedo decir como el Profeta: “Hasta aquí me trajo el Señor.” El continuará caminando conmigo en medio de las dificultades y obstáculos que encuentre en el camino. A Él sea todo honor y toda gloria.

Reflection on the International Woman's Day, March 8, 2016

Carmen Ana Ramirez Marrero

“How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33) As I take a trip down memory lane, I can speak as Paul – the Lord’s ways are not only unsearchable but also inscrutable.

Time flies! Three decades ago I could not have pictured the turn my life would take. I was a mother and a teacher, but I felt that something was missing in my life. This was the case until I found an oasis. After having finished raising my daughters and retiring as a teacher, I began to feel an increasingly strong desire or call to a pastoral life, and I decided to devote myself to pursuing this goal.

I accepted the Lord’s call. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me’” (Isaiah 6:8). I felt unexplainable joy. However, it would not happen. When I met with the chairman of the candidacy committee, he said to me, “At this time, there is no place for you as an ordained minister because there are too many candidates studying at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and very few vacancies.” How ironic! Today we have seven congregations without a pastor that are cared for by seminarians and retired pastors. I could not get in through the “alternate route,” since that option was not available anymore.

This thwarted my desire and joy. I saw my hopes shattered. God’s ways are inscrutable, and my aspirations took a new turn. Even though that had been the answer I received from the chairman of the candidacy committee, I did not stand still. I kept studying at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico with the intention of obtaining a Master of Arts in religion.

With the help of Pastor Wilfredo Aponte, I began looking for another way to serve the Lord. In those days, I was not aware of the word and service ministry, the Deaconess Community of the ELCA, headquartered in Philadelphia.

Pastor Aponte looked up the information, we received some guidance, and I made the request for an interview. What a big difference! I was welcomed with joy and much love. Sister Nora Frost, director of the Deaconess Community, and Sister Phyllis Enck, director of education, welcomed me as their “sister.” It was as if they had known me forever. I was accepted into the process in an organization of a different language and culture. I was the only Latino candidate. I attended other meetings and visited the “Community,” a lovely and hospitable place.

I spent three months interning in the Deaconess Community, studying and sharing with the sisters. This was not easy, since it was the first time I had spent so much time away from my family. It was a rewarding experience. I visited churches, went to the seminary in Gettysburg, Pa., and attended retreats. It was a complete turn of events from what I thought my call was. I kept studying and, this time, with a clear glance at the future.

I was invested during a very moving service with the presence and participation of Bishop Francisco Sosa, who officiated, and the Rev. Wilfredo Aponte, who sang Psalm 121 in Spanish, which the sisters enjoyed, even though they didn't know the language. I was accompanied by my daughter Edna and my friends Edith Nieves and Noelia Marrero. That day, I received the pleasant surprise visit of seminarians Nelson Rabell and Jose Luis Escalera, who were attending seminary in Philadelphia at the time.

While my life revolved around the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico and the Deaconess Community, two male friends were ordained to the pastoral life without an Master of Divinity. Don Quixote said to Sancho, "The things you will see."

I completed a Master of Arts in religion degree. I did my internship at the Evangelical Lutheran Church Divino Nazareno, and then I had to wait, because as it is the case with applicants to word and sacrament, we have to be endorsed in order to become ordained and/or consecrated.

There were no positions available for a deaconess. Some people were not sure what this ministry was.

I was consecrated on Oct. 27, 2002, during a beautiful and moving service. It was attended by Sister Nora Frost, who delivered the sermon, Sister Phylis Enck and several deaconesses.

I was called to work as director of the Lutheran Center of Theological Formation. This call only lasted one year because we ran out of funds.

As a deaconess, I have been assigned to several congregations as a lay pastor. These have been rewarding experiences during which I have taken the gospel – the good news – to others. I know that God still has plans for me, as stated in Jeremiah 29:11. Today, I can say as the prophet said, "The Lord has taken me up to this place." God will continue walking by my side among the obstacles and difficulties that come across my way. To God all honor and glory!

“Who Do You Say that I Am?”

Tuhina Verma Rasche

When I was in seminary in 2010, I had the good fortune to be a recipient of a fellowship from the Fund for Theological Education (now known as the Forum for Theological Exploration). This fellowship gave me one of the biggest gifts I could ever imagine now as an ordained minister of word and sacrament in the ELCA: a vocabulary to describe the breadth and depth of my experiences within our denomination and a community that continues to support me in this strange and wondrous calling to this day.

My fellowship project was exploring Asian and Asian American identity within the ELCA. This led me to a classroom at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia where Dr. Frank Yamada, president of McCormick Seminary, was presenting at the Asian Theological Summer Institute. Dr. Yamada's presentation explored how our cultures influence the way we read biblical texts. In this presentation, he mentioned the question Jesus posed to his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” and what happens when that very question is reflected back upon our own incarnational identities? As a seminarian mesmerized and uplifted by this experience in Philadelphia, I asked this question of some friends when I returned from the Asian Theological Summer Institute. Many of my friends knew that I was on a pilgrimage to find words and a community. Some friends mentioned the personal relationship I had with them, while others mentioned my ethnic identity as a South Asian.

I have wrestled with being a woman of color within the ELCA. I am immensely proud of my South Asian heritage. My parents came to the United States, immediately after their marriage, for my father's graduate education and decided to remain in this country. I am the child of two worlds, being raised in the United States by Indian parents. I am entirely and neither Indian “and/nor” American. With the intersections of the many identities that form the person that I am, I feel that I have had to straddle many worlds but never feeling a true sense of wholeness or home. But there is a strange home with a crucified and resurrected Christ, who also, strangely, made his home with us as God incarnate dwelling in our space and time. There is a strange home in the sacraments. I have felt something stir within me and my passion for the church of Christ, with the realization that God incarnate in Christ lived a very human experience as well. I still marvel that the Word made flesh straddled between the worlds of full humanity and full divinity.

I wonder about the words that make my flesh and the question of “Who do you say that I am?” reflected back at me in this present time. What would happen if I asked this question of the communities that I hold dear? What would my community have to say about the person that I have become? I was amazed with the responses. The words that I saw on a computer screen when asking my community, “Who do you say that I am?” were humbling. These words acknowledged the body and the skin that I inhabit. They honored my womanhood, my ancestry, and my ministry. The words that came from my communities are words that I hold dear; these are some of the words that make my flesh, inscribed on my bones, tattooed onto beautiful brown skin. The formation of becoming a pastor cannot happen in isolation; I truly believe that Christians in the world today are fed by the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist to then be the hands, feet, heart and voice of the risen Christ in the world today. We are created in the image of God, and we are called to be Christ to one another. Receiving the answers from the many communities where I have dwelled is a reminder that we all belong to one another.

That question Jesus posed to his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” can profoundly impact us as well. When that question is asked of us as Christ’s disciples today, what are the words? What are the experiences? How do the answers to such a profound question interact with the intersectionality of our identities? Yes, I am a rostered woman of color. I am also a daughter. A wife. A sister. A friend. All of these identities come together to form the person and the pastor that I am today. But the ultimate identity that I dearly and desperately hold on to is the one identified in the words spoken at my baptism, “Tuhina, you are a child of God; you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”

Responses to the question "Who do you say that I am?" are included in the following image.

"Who do you say that I am?"

A kind-hearted, inspirational, colorful Woman of God who will transform more lives by the time you leave this earth than one can even imagine

A witness who is always ready with a prophetic word and an outrageously fun smile

An awesome human being
Beautiful, kind, gentle, exceptional, a treasure
Brown sugar with red chili flakes
A friend beyond measure

My pastor
A badass woman
A dear friend of my late husband's. He loved you, and therefore, so do I. Keeping up with you is one of my ways of keeping up with him.

A lover of religion. truthful, loving, and risk-taking
A lover of freedom. woman pastor of color who is kind and won't let you get away
A lover of rights.
A lover of kindness. with s***

Unique. Brilliant. A state of change who is beautiful inside and out
An honest soul. A fierce lover of God and His people

You are joy and sorrow unbounded, a perfect embodiment of the Holy Spirit. You are clay.
A really nice person I met along the way and I am really happy to know you are out there in the world.

Sassy, compassionate, determined. And possessing a gift for music that is effectively used in any situation. Fierce. A loving friend. When I hear or think of the Holy Spirit hearing our prayers with sighs too deep for words, your sigh always comes to mind. So deep carrying a variety of emotions needed.

You are a baptized child of God, loved beyond comprehension
Loved and loving; grace-filled and graceful; spirit-filled and inspirational; beautiful, inside and out.

One of the smartest and most thoughtful (thought-provoking, too) women I know. My life is richer knowing you.

Someone who looks like me, has made a huge impact on her community, and inspires me in more ways than one

You are one of the kindest people that I know. You are a gentle guide with a sense of humor and you have a warm smile.

All of the above in kick ass shoes

I'm still trying to figure it out, Jesus

Light

You and your husband are the example my wife and I aim for.

A beloved child of God and a sister in the faith

Not to mention, a hula hooping fool!

A piece of the infinite.

An aspect of the holy.

A reflection of the Ultimate.

A lover of justice and a beacon of peace.

Also, my elementary school girlfriend.

Amazing and inspirational

Deep, funny, serious, silly

A dear friend

Someone who can preach about zombies and the eucharist at the same time

CALLLED My Sister

A woman of inner strength

smiles and fire

A child of God. A teacher.

A friend. The first person to hold me in my tears of uncertainty and tell me that everything was going to be okay.

A stranger with a beautiful name and heartfelt commitments

A student who came up with incurvatus in se off the cuff

Thy cup o'rflows with the pains & joys of this world, wilt reminding us all to ponder deeply on our faith & our place therein.

Our best friend

A Journey and an Adventure!

Graciela R. Rivera

Upon reflection on the journey of becoming and being part of the ordained ministry, the words of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* always come to mind (paraphrased): If you step out of the front door, you do not know where your feet will take you, but it will be a journey and an adventure. So, it has been. Even though the call had been felt very early in life, it was not received at that time in history. I remember asking my pastor, why can a girl not be an acolyte? – and his plain response: “That is a boy’s job!”

Church always was very a much part of my life. I became a member of the congregational council, part of the youth staffer program at the synod level in then 1970s, and I always was an active member of the congregation. My leadership formation was, in part, due to the awesome women of the church, and the example of both my mother and godmother who were parish workers in a time when we could not be ordained. Another part of my leadership formation was due to the strong women in my family like my great-grandmother, Monserrate Oquendo, an exceptional storyteller in her own right.

Marriage took me out of the secure area of my home to live in other countries as a military wife. Three daughters later and a very multicultural experience in life brought me back home after a broken marriage. During this time, my spiritual life had been what sustained me. Coming back found me asking God, “How will I be able to begin this journey to become what You wanted and intended me to be?” Encouraged and helped to begin by the women pastors in our synod, including the Rev. Tersa Palma and the late Bishop Margarita Martinez, and with the help of the bishop at that time, the Rev. Rafel Malpica, I began in the Seminario Evanglico de Puerto Rico.

Money was the main obstacle, but, as always, God provided every time. So here I was a mother raising three daughters as a teacher by day and a student by night. It was a time of great changes, a time of rebuilding. At times, I felt like a piece of pottery that had been shattered into many pieces and was being put together with a lot of love by the Creator – a work is still in progress. The song in my heart was and still is, “He who began a good work in me will see it to completion.”

The first call shaped my ministry. I was called to serve a small urban congregation that was so hurt by circumstances. The pastor had been removed on suspicion of child molestation. On the Saturday prior to my first service, I was served with the papers in a lawsuit against the congregation. It was a hard time; there were continuous meetings because of the lawsuit against the congregation, the synod and the ELCA. It was grueling both to my mind and spirit. I would have to say that the Lutheran understanding of what a church is was key to my ability to go through this time.

Having resolved this obstacle after three years, I moved on to become the first women pastor to a congregation that had only two previous pastors, one being a legend in our faith community. Centered in an area of San Juan where members of the Dominican Republic community were becoming a large part of the church, the ministry challenge was to help the congregation to be more hospitable. I moved to the parish house on the second floor of the church, becoming the pastor of the community as well having three girls in college and an opportunity to serve elsewhere.

I moved to Las Vegas, Nevada, with the intention of beginning a Spanish ministry in the heart of the city. I not only worked with the Hispanic community but also with the Native American community. I made use of public transportation where I would meet most of the people of Spanish descent. Then my doctor called saying there was the possibility of cancer. I was not afraid; after all, God has always been directing my life. But the real reason came through, and two surgeries later all was well. But circumstances, again, required me to move for ministry. Having to go on leave from my call due to my health, I returned home and I was sent to help the Frederick Lutheran Church in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Yes, God Calls Palestinian Woman to be a Minister

Niveen Sarras

I was born in Bethlehem, Palestine, to an ecumenical family. My father belongs to the Eastern Orthodox Church, and my mother is Catholic. My siblings and I were baptized in the Eastern Orthodox Church, but we grew up Lutherans by attending a Lutheran school and going to Sunday school. Going to church and reading the Bible have been my favorite things since my childhood. I attended Bethlehem Bible College. While I was studying there, I visited a Catholic church. At the moment the priest concentrated the elements, I felt a warmth in my chest, and I felt God was calling me to do the same (to concentrate the elements).

I shared my experience with a relative of mine who encouraged me to pursue my call. I prayed about my calling, and I realized that God did not only call me to the ministry of word and sacrament but also to the ministry of teaching on a professional level. God affirmed my calling through opening the door for me to go to the United States to study and through my family's support.

I went to the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) to do my Ph.D. in Hebrew Bible. I received a scholarship from LSTC for five years. LSTC assigned a spiritual director for me. I talked to her about my calling. We spent lots of time talking about God's call. We prayed and read the Bible together. My spiritual director assured me that I was called to the ministry of word and sacrament and to be an Old Testament scholar. I also met lots of women who were called to the ministry, and God spoke to me through them.

I enjoyed studying at LSTC because the seminary has an excellent Ph.D. program, and I met lots of international students. I also had an opportunity to take classes at the University of Chicago. LSTC taught me to be critical and to love biblical languages.

After I finished my Ph.D. program, I went to Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (PLTS) to do my Master of Divinity and to become a pastor. I enjoyed PLTS, and I have very good memories of my time there. This seminary is social justice oriented and the faculty and staff were very supportive of Palestinians. I felt very comfortable there. PLTS prepared me to be a Lutheran pastor and to use my academic background in the parish context.

Studying Lutheran theology and feminist theology along with my internship helped prepare me for my parish ministry. Besides serving at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Wausau, I had an opportunity to teach at the University of Wisconsin-Marathon County through its continuing education program. Teaching at the university has enriched my soul and expanded my ministry. My graduate degrees have helped me prepare good sermons, lead adult forums and publish articles.

I also receive lots of support from my congregation. Immanuel Lutheran in Wausau is a mid-sized congregation. This size suits me because I can get to know all the members. Many of them are highly educated and intellectual. They encourage me to publish and to teach at the university. They enjoy my adult forums and my sermons. Serving in a small town like Wausau is very comfortable for me. It is not crowded, and I am near many ELCA parishes. I have a chance to meet my colleagues and discuss life and ministry.

When I became a pastor, I was worried about my spiritual life. I thought I would not have a chance to grow spiritually because I would be busy helping the members of the congregation grow in their relationship with Jesus. I prayed about it, and Jesus answered me by making me hungry to spend time with him and hungry to read his word. My prayer life is getting stronger every day. Jesus talks to me and leads me. I see Jesus present in my congregation through the ministry that we have. I see the presence of Jesus when the members of my congregation come together to serve not only in our congregation but also in our community. I am always in conversation with my congregation council and the committees that I have in my congregation. We work together, and God is blessing us every day. I also work with the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, which provides directions when I need them and offers workshops to help me and my parishioners be a more vital congregation. So, God speaks and leads me through my daily prayer and meditation, my congregation and my synod. Jesus is present among us and he shall ever be.

Tell the Story

Prairie Rose Seminole

There are mornings when I wake with a heavy heart. The blankets provide comfort, and I can see the rays of the sun peeking through the cracks of my window blinds. In the fading dark, I stare at the sky and give thanks to the stars for being able to breathe another breath. As the sun makes the journey across the sky, I too get up. I put out water, tobacco, or some food for my relatives who have passed on. I offer my gratitude for being alive and being able to witness that which moves all things – that power, God, Great Mystery, Chief who sits above, Mother, Creator, the blood in my veins, the hurricanes crashing to shore, earth moving – that power of which we are all a part.

My people are nearly gone – the Sahnish, or Arikara people, Rees for short. We were once many in our great nation, spanning trade regions from the Gulf of Mexico nearly to the Canadian border.

We died.

War, small pox, influenza, the sicknesses to which we mostly were not immune. The blankets the cavalry gave our people, knowing we would get sick. We did.

We died.

Along with these sicknesses came the word and idea of what the white people called God. In our language, we don't have a word specifically for God, and when we say God now we are referring to the Christian God. Now we have many ways of saying this idea: Father, God, Creator, God – all names referring to one single male God who created all things.

Today, there are over 500 tribes that are recognized by the federal government. Hundreds more that fight for visibility. All of these tribes have their own story of being and creation. My people were not created by one single god. We can talk sometime about the theology of my people and the Christian God, but those who came and colonized, stole our land and murdered us, didn't care to ask us about our own experience with who God is to our people. Our creation story is different from what is in the Bible. Is it our place to say that is wrong? No. It is our place to acknowledge that our creation, our migration, our history, is different than yours. No more, no less. Different. We view the world through a lens, a culture, a perspective that is not taught in mainstream history books.

I was taught some about God through the church. In a way, I was taught that there was a belief hierarchy – beliefs or non-beliefs that were stronger, better, more rational, those beliefs prevailed, and those that weren't "more rational" were shut down. Those beliefs were shamed if the Christian God was not accepted and respected as truth. By contrast, in my indigenous perspective, the Christian world view, the lens through which Christians view God, although different from mine, Christian truth was accepted and respected as your truth. Historically, tribes have gotten along with this understanding – although your truth is different from mine, your truth was accepted and respected as your truth – and if we didn't get along, we stayed away from each other.

White settlers, colonizers brought the holy war here to these lands and destroyed people and cultures in the name of a Christian God. How the church came to be in this land is a great narrative of claiming and prosperity. However, this great narrative has omitted some great truths, and as we move forward, we need to tell those stories we've left out. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. noted one of these omissions when he wrote that:

Our nation was born in genocide when it embraced the doctrine that the original American, the Indian, was an inferior race. Even before there were large numbers of Negroes on our shore, the scar of racial hatred had already disfigured colonial society. From the sixteenth century forward, blood flowed in battles over racial supremacy. We are perhaps the only nation which tried as a matter of national policy to wipe out its indigenous population. Moreover, we elevated that tragic experience into a noble crusade. Indeed, even today we have not permitted ourselves to reject or feel remorse for this shameful episode. Our literature, our films, our drama, our folklore all exalt it.

Our children are still taught to respect the violence which reduced a red-skinned people of an earlier culture into a few fragmented groups herded into impoverished reservations.¹

Two thousand years of Christianity, 500 years of the Lutheran church, and over 500 years of genocide and policies to wipe out the first people of our country is an intermingled story that needs to be told. In the years to come, reflection, reconciliation, holy experiments and holy experiences will drive the transformation of our church. In my lifetime, I have seen 10,000 sun rises in a land that knew my people for millennia upon millennia upon millennia upon millennia. As a church, it is time to tell the story, to give gratitude that we are here. The omissions are breaking our foundation. It is time to move forward to heal our past and tell the shared stories of how our church came to be.

¹ Martin Luther King Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon, reprint, 2011), 141.

For Mary of Magdala

Angela Shannon

Hope dwells at the tomb.

Oh, how I have kept vigil in what seems like endless darkness.

More than the watchman waits for the morning,

Stalking twilight amongst the shadows.

Where, O God, are you to be found?

I can't see for looking ...

So desperately.

Can scarcely hear above the wails and lamentations of my own voice. Blinded by tears I ask,

“Sir, how long have you stood there?

From where did you come?”

The Word before all sounds,

The Logos before all languages calls my name.

And suddenly, I am no longer entombed

But resurrected.

Triduum

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It Was Surprising, and It Is a Privilege

Beverly Brown Shaw

It was never my intention to be a rostered leader in the ELCA. It was never my intention to be in ministry at all. For me, ministry did not begin with a discernment. It merely began. Actually, it kind of slipped up on me. On a Sunday morning in 2001, I was invited to attend a class at the local seminary. My pastor at the time convinced me that I, even at the ripe old age of 51 years, could survive a seminary class. He had me read *Another Day's Journey* by Robert Franklin and write a commentary on the work. For my effort, I received a big, fat red "A" stamped across my paper. I was later to learn that Dr. Art Lewis had never read the paper. But not knowing that, I was encouraged to take the course offered, Lutheran Confessions, and my life has never been the same. Course followed course as I became enthralled with the love of God in Christ. Not just interested, but enthralled. I began to see the Scriptures in a different light, to interpret them with the grace in which they were offered. Still, leadership had not occurred to me. I had not made a decision not to engage in ministry. It just never had occurred to me, period. I was simply enjoying classes.

When this same pastor, Dr. Lewis, suggested candidacy, I was amused. Why would anyone want me as a rostered leader? But I did not see what harm would be done. And as I was entranced, then endorsed and approved, my interest grew. It was at my internship that I found my pastor's heart. It seemed that everything that had occurred in my life was simply preparation for what God was calling me to. I was in love with the ministry of word and sacrament. I was ready to serve!

As I look back on my journey, I marvel at how well I do not see what there is to be seen. It was not long before I saw what for me were some very difficult times. There seemed to be no official place for me. I did not have a voice anywhere. I served as an interim synodically authorized minister even before ordination. Yet, I received no call. Reality set in. I was a middle-aged African American female. In my previous vocation, this would not have been a problem, as I am an experienced registered nurse with years as a business professional and public speaker. But at that point, I was an "old" newbie. And that, my friends, is very demoralizing. As my third year without a call approached, I was prepared to return to the pew. That was not God's plan. I was called to St. John's Lutheran Church in Atlanta, where I presently serve.

It is surprising to someone of my age to learn that a total plan has been set for your life. It is surprising that you had nothing to do with that plan. It is like Sarah, who thought her time had come and gone. It was like Saul of Tarsus, who thought he had all the answers. It was surprising to me that God had a voice for me. A voice that God would give me for God's purpose. And small though it may be, it is what God needs to get out the message of love and grace to my patch of the world. I feel sometimes overwhelmed by the knowledge, strength and power of those women in ministry that I know. I am in awe of them. They stand like the finest oaks, towering above all I see around me. Yet, though I stand small, I have a strength of call that sometimes overwhelms me. From the pew, without my knowledge or approval, God brought me to this place in ministry! A small, still voice in me often wonders why and always prays that I do not "mess it up." But I have learned on this journey that it is not me but the Holy Spirit that speaks through me. It is a serious charge. Humankind does not determine the holiness of God's word or the holy sacraments. It is God's own Spirit. And to enter sacred spaces with the people of God is a privilege – to hold a hand, to sit with a survivor, to pray for a blessing. It is a privilege to celebrate the Eucharist, to pour across the head of an infant the waters of baptism, to unite in matrimony, to commend to the Lord, to proclaim the good news of Christ and Him crucified and

our hope of the resurrection. It has been a great privilege. And if I sometimes feel inadequate, I remember this prayer given to me by a friend. It is not about me but the one I serve:

*Lord God,
You have placed me in your church.
Were it not for your guidance,
I would long since
have brought everything to destruction.
I wish to give my heart and mouth to your service.
I desire to teach your people
and long to be taught your work. Use me as your work
[person], dear Lord.
Do not forsake me;
For if I am alone, I shall bring it all to naught.
Amen.*

– Martin Luther

God Provided for Me

Maria Gracia Sijera-Grant

I grew up Roman Catholic in the Philippines. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I could be a Lutheran pastor! But God has such a sense of humor. It all began when the Rev. Fred Rajan, who was the ELCA director for multicultural ministries, posed a question to me: “How would you like to be a pastor?” I laughed. “Are you kidding me? I am not even Lutheran!”

At that time, I was attending a Filipino Strategy Consultation meeting in Redwood, Calif. The ELCA wanted to start a Filipino ministry in California and had invited Filipino Americans for input. My name came up after participating in an intensive ELCA multicultural writers workshop, an event that my husband discovered by accident in a newsletter a pastor shared with him.

But the question stuck. Could God really be calling me to be a Lutheran pastor? My husband, Bruce, a lifelong Lutheran, thought so. He said that it was a perfect way to bring together all my gifts – my background in mass communications, my passion for healing, my genuine interest in connecting and caring for people, and my spiritual leanings. Still, I resisted the idea. I grew up believing that being Filipino and being Catholic were synonymous. I did not mind going to a Lutheran church with Bruce and our two boys. It had an excellent Sunday school program, which I thought was more kid-friendly than its Catholic counterpart. And because I was used to being actively involved in church life, I volunteered to help in their music program.

But if I became Lutheran, would I be betraying who I am as a Filipino? I grew up believing that Catholicism was the one true faith. What did it mean for God to call me as a Lutheran pastor? I struggled and wrestled with God for a whole year. Thankfully, God won! The first step was to become Lutheran. The next steps were to figure out which seminary to attend and how to pay for the tuition. I had been a stay-at-home mom for our two sons, Brian (10) and Jason (7).

The Rev. Rajan introduced me to Dr. Edmond Yee, director of the Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) at the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif. I will always be grateful for Dr. Yee’s wisdom. When I told him that I had a lot of questions, he encouraged me to keep asking questions and to keep expanding my knowledge by including resources that are non-Lutheran. Dr. Yee taught Confucianism at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. What a breath of fresh air he was! It was a contrast to what I learned as a Catholic, making sure that each book I read had the “Nihil Obstat” and “Imprimatur” stamp on it. By God’s grace, I received a scholarship from both the seminary and my home congregation, Christ Church Inner Harbor in Baltimore. I went out on a limb and God provided for me! I became the 17th person and (as far as I know) the only daughter of Christ Church to become a pastor.

For over three years, I commuted back and forth from Maryland to California to attend seminary. Dr. Yee interviewed several pastors from the Delaware-Maryland Synod and chose the Rev. Joseph Lettrich to be my mentor. Pastor Lettrich taught me a lot about being Lutheran. I had a steep learning curve. Those years were growth-producing. I learned to listen to and trust the Spirit as I unlearned the old and opened my mind to new knowledge.

I now serve as one of two pastors at First Evangelical Lutheran Church, a large, predominantly white congregation in suburban Ellicott City, Md. When I came on board 14 years ago, my first impression was that it was a sleeping giant – a congregation that was capable of so much more but was not aware of its potential. Over the years, I spearheaded many new ministries, survived

two senior pastors, one associate pastor, two interim pastors, and served as interim senior pastor during a time of crisis and transition. The congregation and I have grown together. This giant is waking up. God is making things new! First Lutheran is one of several congregations participating in our synod's LEAD (Living Everyday as Disciples) ministry. This allows us to have honest conversations about what God is calling us to do as a congregation in relation to the community we serve. After all these years, I sense that we are ready to make a big step forward. I am excited with new possibilities.

To this day, the Spirit continues to guide me into uncharted territories. As a member of our synod's Racial Justice Ministry Team, I have gained a deeper understanding of how racism permeates structures and institutions, including our church. I am beginning to find my voice. Since February, I also began serving as president of the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders of the ELCA, one of six ethnic associations in the ELCA. I recognize that there is a lot of work to be done. I am humbled and grateful that God has called me to be part of God's work in the church and the world.

Domestic Missionary for Christ: One Sister's Journey

Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld

This is my church – the ELCA – only a short change in initials from the LCA (Lutheran Church in America) in which I was raised. I'm an East Coast Lutheran – smells, bells and all that jazz, literally. New York Lutheran – St. John's, St. Peter's in the city, then The Lutheran Association (now St. Luke's) in Ithaca. Yet, in many ways, the ELCA is so different, at least in the Midwest. Our daughter, former president of the Lutheran Youth Organization, says "Lutheran dense" – I'll let you ponder the double entendre. I was called to ordained ministry in a church that knew its whiteness and had been intentional about building up leaders of color. Dorothy Ricks, Massie Kannard, Grover Wright and Eugene Crawford saw to that. They knew us and wrapped us tight, always there to encourage and call us to account. And they celebrated with us as we were called to serve. I was one of the first seven women of color ordained in the Lutheran church – they called us the Magnificent Seven.

For me the road was one I hesitated to tread upon. A woman of color – black, brown and red with a little white (from my Irish grandfather who joined the white designation late in the 1800s), raised to be proud of it all and live true to it all. I embarked on the path slowly after much urging of a bishop who didn't know how to graciously accept a "No, I'll stay in the laity." Bishop Edward Perry, a rebel, tell-it-like-it-is bishop, not afraid to be large and in charge, even for a Black woman. He was a bishop who hopped on a plane coming out to the Chicago seminary to call a housing director to account for telling me, when my husband and I complained about critters in our apartment, that I should be used to roaches. Yes, I entered reluctantly as God's call would not be denied.

What has it been like these past 30-plus years as a domestic missionary? My professional ministry started with my internship in the only Swedish Lutheran Church in southeastern Wisconsin. I was called the intern pastor, for my intern supervisor chose me to be the person who would pastor the church when he took the call he was then seeking in Florida. He protected my internship by arranging for the neighboring pastor to become my "supervisor on paper." This man became my treasured colleague in ministry and co-pastor in my second call. The internship (in my fourth year of seminary because my seminarian husband did not accept his assigned internship in Cicero when the pastor told him the parsonage would be burned down if we moved in) colored my view of my first call. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

As the internship year was coming to a close, Bishop Perry presented our names as a clergy couple to a yoked congregation in Buffalo, but the larger of the two didn't want a Black pastor. The bishop, furious with their racism, would not give them another name for over 18 months as he worked with them to move them toward being an accepting church. Thus began our sojourn of calls in the Midwest. The first was as an associate with a white, male senior in a congregation in central city Milwaukee, where positions of power remained in the hands of our paler brothers and sisters who lived outside of the church neighborhood, of which a majority was people of color and in poverty. It was a strange reversal having essentially been the pastor in internship, and now I was moving into a first call that was feeling like an internship. Still, I grew in my love for the ministry in this community in poverty. It was there, though, where I first experienced my own people showing a preference for a white male over a sister, even at God's table of grace. That was painful as I came to understand how internalized racial oppression worked to keep people of color apart.

Two years and a second baby later, I left that call and entered a Clinical Pastoral Education residency at St. Luke's Hospital, cutting my teeth on ministry in a cardiovascular transplant unit and ER while serving part-time at the parish where my former "supervisor on paper" served. Upon completion of my residency I was called as the second pastor there. Soon we became co-pastors who were so instinctual that we would complete each other's sentences. It was a ministry that sought to be vibrant in the community where we were planted – a second ring neighborhood in Milwaukee, the most segregated city of its size in the nation. As is typical of city congregations, some white members had moved out of the neighborhood but continued to worship at the parish. However, in this congregation, there was shared power among a diverse group of those living within and outside the neighborhood, people of color and white. Committees rotated their meetings in the homes of those on the committee. Yes, that meant suburban people would come to the homes of central city people and vice versa. They broke bread together; they belonged to one another, and it made them stronger. The widows' pew said it all as old German, Danish and Swedish women sat with their "grandchildren," mostly children of color, for worship and regularly attended their school programs. These children stopped at their church grandparents' homes to make sure the grandparent was doing well and to share their school day. They had truly adopted one another and were neighbor to one another.

Though I longed to return to the East Coast, it seemed God had other plans. This adventure with God was about to get even more challenging. Bishop Peter Rogness asked me to interview at an all-white congregation in the burbs. All went well, with unanimous recommendations by both the call committee and the council. The meet-and-greet appeared to go well also, leading up to the vote the following Sunday. Yet the call was not extended. The call committee and council members were shocked. The synod staffer present was savvy enough to not let people just leave without some explanation of the vote. After a few minutes of silence one person spoke truth into the room – "We are not going to call a Black woman as our pastor." There it was – race and gender trump God's call. Two days later this became an Associated Press story as an older woman in the congregation refused to be silent. That Sunday afternoon, she called the number for the religion editor of the local paper leaving a message that told the story. This is what happens in our church, burdened by racism – which Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton calls one of the greatest sins. My congregation rallied around me, held me close and protected me, even denying access when media came calling the following Sunday morning. It is something to see a 70-year-old white guy, who at one time had said "I'll never call her pastor," hold media at bay at the front door of the church. He invited them to put down the cameras and come worship. The cameraman did and later joined the congregation.

Bishop Rogness again asked me to be one of three pastors presented to another congregation. This time the call was issued, and I became a domestic missionary in an outer ring suburb. Having gained experience in what it means to be a person of color in the most segregated city, my first task was to introduce myself to the police department as the new pastor in town. Still, I was regularly followed by the police. Even more challenging was being denied home visits because some people didn't want their neighbors "to know my pastor is Negro," and there were other trials. Yet with God's support, I walked with the congregation in redevelopment as the retired founding pastor remained in place.

Yes, this adventure with God remained challenging, but in the midst of the challenges were the children who brought hope of a new day. I gained new understanding of "let the children come," and we walked into a new understanding of discipleship that rubbed off on their parents. This discipleship was key to the redevelopment journey, which reached out to form a ministry with ex-offenders, a ministry with Burmese refugees, an international ministry as we formed a companion relationship with a congregation in our sister synod in Tanzania, and a ministry that over the

course of three to five years built a core group of 22 disciples who had undergone a 2½-day anti-racism workshop through Crossroads. I was there for 18 years before the opportunity came to be presented for another call.

During this time, Bishop Rogness asked me to be part of a team he was forming to address racism in the synod. He put money into preparing this team of 30 people who participated in a few anti-racism training models to evaluate their suitability to be the means through which rostered leaders, synod staff and synod council members would enter into the anti-racism journey. We chose Crossroads as the vehicle to assist us. Bishop Rogness was instrumental in systematizing this as a best practice – and he put money behind the effort – for all rostered leaders in the synod. Though it has been challenging to enforce this best practice over the last 20 years, recently, I have seen more acceptance of participating in the 2½-day training.

For the past five years, I have served as an intentional interim pastor for the synod, helping congregations build health and wellness during the transitional time between settled pastors. Serving as an intentional interim is a rewarding wrinkle in the journey with God that uses my ability to preach the gospel with power, my strong counseling skills, my commitment to engaging visitation ministry, and my speaking the truth in love in difficult situations. This has been a rewarding sojourn in my ministry, drawing well on my skills and passion. And my interims have grown under my care. So continues the adventure with God. I remain passionately anti-racist, wondering what is next in this ongoing adventure. Certainly, this church is not what it should be, but I maintain hope that, led by God's Spirit, it can become more intentional in walking toward being a church for the world that values all people as beloved children of God. I remain a missionary for Christ, bringing that message in word and deed, to the people I serve.

Meeting Jesus in Our Everyday Experiences

Rebecca Thomas-Templeton

As a child, I thought of God as being far away from us. As an adult, I have come to understand that God is near us also – meaning God is immanent. God is Emmanuel who dwells among us. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, people witnessed God's presence in their lives. And after they witnessed God's presence, there was always a response to what they had experienced. For example, in Psalm 40 when God delivered him from the miry clay, David wrote a song. The woman at the well also responded by returning to her community to tell others about Jesus.

The attached writing researches the woman at the well's social context and moves into what may have been in her mind to write her thoughts about her encounter with Jesus. So, the writing of "Meeting Jesus in Our Everyday Experiences" captures her response in poetry. I was serving at Mission of Christ Lutheran Church at the time of writing the poem.

To write "Meeting Jesus in Our Everyday Experiences," I studied the text John 4:1-30, 39-42 about the woman at the well. In selecting this text, I wanted to portray that on many occasions in our lives we encounter the Savior. Due to many daily distractions, we are not in tune until something sparks our minds. In our moments of reflection, we realize that something extraordinary has occurred, just as did the woman at the well.

Jesus the Christ took the high road that led him to encounter the woman at the well. In this experience, he moved through cultural boundaries to establish a new community. It was time for God to intervene into human traditions that opposed God's will. To God be the glory!

The background of the page is a photograph of a stone well. The well is constructed from large, flat, greyish-brown stones stacked in a circular pattern. A wooden bucket is suspended from the side of the well. The well is surrounded by dense green foliage, including ferns and ivy. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

Meeting Jesus in Our Everyday Experiences

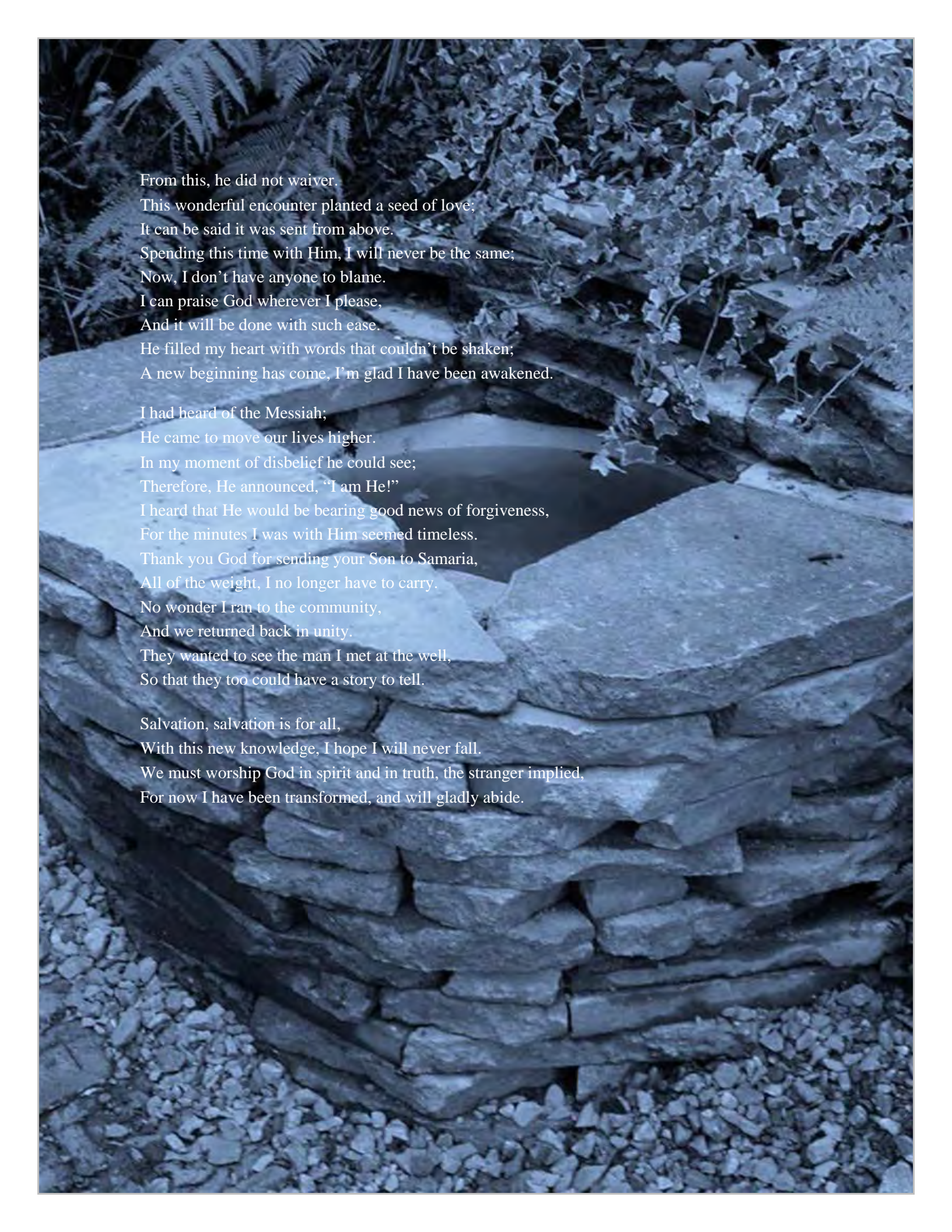
Rebecca Thomas-Templeton

John 4:1-30; 39-42

It was a day of serendipity,
Not a day of sadness and pity
On this ordinary day,
The Christ came my way.
He never looked at me with condemning eyes;
He used his heart, which I was surprised.
From his mouth came things no one else knew;
Just as he did it for me, he'll do it for you.
With his insightfulness, he told my story;
From now on, God gets the glory.
Now in the community, the women and I could develop a sisterhood;
You know if we tried hard, we really could.

I learned about God from the Law;
I now know that there is other information on which I can draw,
For the secrets from my heart I would never give;
I vowed to keep them as long as I live.
But then on an ordinary day, the truth was revealed; you see,
I needed it for me.
To live a life in the abundance of the Word,
For me, this was unheard.
He talked about things like living water for my life;
He also asked if I was a wife.
The water He was offering could nourish my soul;
It would help me also to feel whole.

The men were excited to hear;
So excited, they wanted to be near
The one who was seated at the well.
This experience I will always tell.
I met a man who knew I needed a Savior.

A photograph of a stone well, likely the one mentioned in the text. The well is constructed from large, flat stones and has a wooden bucket hanging from a pulley. The well is surrounded by lush green foliage, including ferns and ivy. The scene is captured in a monochromatic blue tone.

From this, he did not waiver.
This wonderful encounter planted a seed of love;
It can be said it was sent from above.
Spending this time with Him, I will never be the same;
Now, I don't have anyone to blame.
I can praise God wherever I please,
And it will be done with such ease.
He filled my heart with words that couldn't be shaken;
A new beginning has come, I'm glad I have been awakened.

I had heard of the Messiah;
He came to move our lives higher.
In my moment of disbelief he could see;
Therefore, He announced, "I am He!"
I heard that He would be bearing good news of forgiveness,
For the minutes I was with Him seemed timeless.
Thank you God for sending your Son to Samaria,
All of the weight, I no longer have to carry.
No wonder I ran to the community,
And we returned back in unity.
They wanted to see the man I met at the well,
So that they too could have a story to tell.

Salvation, salvation is for all,
With this new knowledge, I hope I will never fall.
We must worship God in spirit and in truth, the stranger implied,
For now I have been transformed, and will gladly abide.

My Life as a Rostered Woman of Color in the ELCA

Jacqueline Utley

It was in 2005 when I began attending the Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (LTSS) in Columbia, S.C. At that time, I was a Pentecostal in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) who had been reared at home by my Apostolic Holiness mother and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) father. These were the very reasons that I never imagined I would become a Lutheran pastor. As a member of the COGIC faith tradition, which did not practice the ordination of women, I served contently as a licensed evangelist missionary. I say contently intentionally, because I was of the opinion that God did not call women to be pastors, and I had no desire to become one. God later made a believer out of me.

I enrolled in the Master of Divinity program at LTSS; both Greek and Hebrew were requirements. I was the only fulltime African American student living on campus. The other African Americans on campus were pastors of the Baptist and Methodist faith traditions taking classes part-time. I became aware that I was the only non-Lutheran African American who attended the daily chapel services on campus; in addition, I attended the weekly evening Eucharist service.

Whereas Holy Communion was only administered quarterly in most COGIC churches, I had embraced being communed weekly at the seminary, and it had become more meaningful for me. It was in this Lutheran setting that I became aware of grace in a way that I had never known. I was of the persuasion that one sort of earned salvation, working one's way into heaven. This was not so among the Lutherans, who understood that grace is free, a gift from God. I soon embraced this liberating truth and without realizing it, I was becoming what I call "Lutheranized." After this point, the rest is history.

In 2007, while taking an elective course, I met a Lutheran pastor in class named Herman Yoos, who would become bishop of the South Carolina Synod of the ELCA the following year. He took an interest in me and remarked that it was not by accident that I, a Pentecostal, was a full-time student at a Lutheran seminary. He shared that he was pretty sure God had plans for me in the Lutheran church. Well, regardless of God's plans, I had no plans of leaving the COGIC to become a Lutheran.

Upon graduating from LTSS in 2009, under Bishop Yoos' direction, Dr. James Thomas, one of the first African American professors at LTSS, approached me about becoming Lutheran. I would assist Pastor Ronald Brown at Ascension Lutheran Church, which was adjacent to the seminary, a stone's throw away. Ascension was an all-white congregation of predominantly senior members, located in a predominantly African American community as a result of "white flight." Bishop Yoos had joined Ascension as an effort to encourage outreach into the community to welcome the residents to worship. Somehow, he had an unction from God that having an African American pastor at that church would be essential to making the necessary connections with the community, and I was that person.

In July 2011, I answered God's call by joining Ascension and began assisting Pastor Ron Brown in ministry. Pastor Ron and I worked well together as he was a great mentor. After 1½ years of my assisting in preaching, teaching, pastoral visits and bonding with members of the congregation, Pastor Ron announced his plan to retire in 2013. Upon his retirement in May 2013, I was called as part-time mission developer/part-time pastor of Ascension. On June 2, 2013, I was ordained at the South Carolina Synod Assembly, held in Charleston. As I was the first African

American to be ordained in the ELCA in South Carolina, it was a historic event. In addition, attending bishops from Tanzania, Japan, and Colombia assisted Bishop Yoos in the ordination. On June 9, 2013, I was installed as the first female and African American pastor of Ascension.

Having served as pastor of Ascension since 2013, I have made connections with other leaders in the community, including other pastors, city officials, business owners and local school officials. By encouraging a loving and inviting atmosphere at Ascension, we receive frequent visitors of diverse races. All visitors are made to feel welcome as the congregants of Ascension are warm and hospitable. Ascension is no longer an all-white community. I am blessed that serving as a rostered woman of color in the ELCA, during this particular time in history, I have not suffered pains as others who were called long before me. Thus, the joys I have experienced, I attribute to God and to the women who have served as trailblazers in the ELCA.

Justice Journey as a Filipina-American Lutheran

Terisita Valeriano

I composed “Song of Mary” during my time at the Asian Institute for Liturgy and Music in the Philippines. It was included in a liturgy about violence against women in church and society, which I wrote for my recital in composition in March 1994. The composition highlighted liturgical songs based on traditional music from various parts of the Philippines and a few choral compositions highlighting the plight of women and mothers, especially those who worked abroad and left their families and children. The liturgy also included liturgical dances based on traditional Filipino dances and artwork based on the text of the bent woman in Luke 13, which was drawn by a young woman during the liturgy. During this recital, for the first time in the history of Immanuel Lutheran Church, my home church, where there is no ordination of women, the gospel was read by a woman. The liturgist was a woman, and the reflection was shared by a woman. Even though the Holy Communion was still presided over by a male pastor, women led the whole liturgy. It became the closing worship for the National Council Church in the Philippines women’s month, attended by various women of member churches. It was a bittersweet event for me because I was no longer there to witness it. I left a few weeks earlier for the United States. I was not present because it had taken me a long time to convince our church leaders to hold the closing worship in my home church due to the theme, which was branded as controversial. My friends, mentors and women of the church all prepared and led the liturgy with pride.

I became an ordained pastor of the ELCA in 1998. I have served mostly in special ministry calls, including with The Lutheran World Federation as youth secretary and regional officer for North America, as well as in campus ministry and mission development. I would love to serve a congregation, but it has been a difficult journey to receive a call. I continue to lament patriarchy, exclusion of women from ordination, and violence against women in various forms in our church and society. Another challenge that I was introduced to here in the United States, beginning in seminary, is racial injustice both inside and outside the church. I have faced many challenges, being a woman of color and an immigrant, and I am also a proud member of Proclaim, the professional community for Lutheran pastors, rostered lay leaders, and those preparing for rostered leadership, who publicly identify as LGBTQ. I am blessed with a loving spouse, Jennifer, and Taal, our beautiful 3-year-old son. The intersectionality of oppressions is real in our church and society, and I hope to continue to challenge it along with the voices of other women, some of whom have been my mentors and models in life and ministry. The most important among them is my mother, Remedios, who proudly put my stole on my shoulders at my ordination, a testimony of her own faith and spirituality, that women are called and chosen, too. She passed away two years ago, and I miss her dearly, but she gives me strength every day in life and ministry. Today, I particularly hope and pray for the ordination of women that is still not permissible in my home church in the Philippines and in almost a quarter of member churches of The Lutheran World Federation. We have come this far, and the “Song of Mary” gives me hope and courage to continue this journey toward justice.

Score

Song of Mary

Do

1. My soul doth mag - ni - fy the Lord And my spi - rit
2. For God has looked with fa - vor On the low - li -
3. The migh - ty one has done great things. Cho - sen - me and
4. The mer - cy of our God is great. It's from ge - ne -
5. The hum - ble are ex - al - ted. And brought down the
6. The Lord our God is great in - deed. Let us praise God

Dong dong ay sa - li - dum - ay In - si - na - li

doth re - joice in God. Sa - li - dum - ay.
ness of God's bles - sed ser - vant. Sa - li - dum - ay.
tru - ly God's name is Ho - ly. Sa - li - dum - ay.
ra - tion to ge - ne - ra - tion. Sa - li - dum - ay.
po - wer - ful from their thro - nes. Sa - li - dum - ay.
now and e - ter - na - ly. Sa - li - dum - ay.

dum - ay - Sa - li - dum - ay Sa - li - dum - ay.

* These text are non-lexical ancient words believe to be used by the northern tribes in the Philippines in most of their songs.
The melody is based on the five-tone scale of these tribes.

A Reflection on “Song of Mary”

Teresita Valeriano

“Song of Mary” is based on Luke 2. The word “Salidummay” is a non-lexical word used in the northern mountainous part of the Philippines in the people’s songs. The contextualization of liturgy and music in the country included it in many songs as an expression of praise. The melody in this song is drawn from a pentatonic melody from the same area.

The music is the original handwriting I used in the Philippines in 1994. Since 1994, I developed these new lyrics, which vary slightly from the original:

1. My soul does magnify our God, and my spirit does rejoice in God. Salidummay
2. For God has looked with fa-vor, on the lowliness of God’s blessed servant. Salidummay
3. The mighty One has done great things, chosen me and truly God’s name is Holy. Salidummay
4. The mercy of our God is great, It’s from generation to generation. Salidummay
5. The humble are exal-ted, God brought down the powerful from their thro-nes. Saliddumay
6. Our God is just and great indeed, let us praise God now and eternally. Salidummay

A Journey of Hope

Alicia Vargas

I was born in Havana, Cuba, and was baptized in a Roman Catholic parish. I spent some time being formed and educated by Catholic nuns. I am thankful for that blessing.

In the United States, I married and had a child, but that marriage ended in divorce after a while. I was married again in a Lutheran church where my child had been attending nursery school. I remember researching carefully what those “Lutherans” would be teaching my child before I enrolled him in that pre-school. My mind conjured a pretty suspicious, nebulous vision of a guy named Martin Luther who was no friend of the church in which I had grown up. However, I had been reassured enough to register my 2-year-old in that nursery school when I saw the same prayers and the same pictures on the wall that I had said and seen all my life.

My new husband and I started attending that church for occasions other than when the nursery school kids sang a song in church on special holidays. The pastor had welcomed us and showed me God’s grace in marrying us with no strings attached. I felt at home in the liturgical service, and little by little I learned of the subtle differences in polity and theology between the church I had been raised in and the church that was becoming my own. I fell in love with the emphasis on grace and the theology of the cross. My husband, who is a white American did, too, and soon after he was applying for seminary. I was happy that he did, but I was not thinking for a minute that I would want to follow the same path ... until 1988. When I heard that the new church that was forming wanted to become a multicultural and multiracial church, I quit a tenure-track job at a prestigious university and signed up for seminary. I wanted to share with all people, including my Latino people, the message of the freedom of the Christian and the empowering message of God’s grace.

Upon graduation from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, I waited and waited with my heart broken as I saw all my white classmates go excitedly to their calls while I waited even for an interview. An assistant to the bishop, wanting to console me said that they were not sending me to interview with any congregation because they didn’t want me to be hurt. They knew they did not want a woman of color. Thus, the synod, wanting to be helpful, sent me to do the word and sacrament and close a congregation that on some Sundays was completely empty.

When that congregation was officially closed, I learned about an opening for a chaplain in the local county jail. I took the job, which I could not call a “call” because that was not a “congregation.” For two years the synod, literally, did not know what to do as I was providing a word and sacrament ministry, and I had not been ordained. Somehow two Lutheran congregations heard of the problem and jumped in to solve it. They called me as their associate pastor with no salary or benefits to do word and sacrament ministry in the massive jail system in that county. So I was ordained at the jail, apparently a first, which made the newspaper and TV news. Even *The Lutheran* came and ran a half page photo and blurb on the day. It was a good day, but one that I arrived at with pain.

As God works in mysterious ways, I learned in my ministry in the jail more than I had learned in all my degrees combined. When the seminary called me to teach from the perspective of a person of color, I was able to take to that pedagogical task the perspective as a person of color augmented by the perspective of the masses of economically and politically disenfranchised and ignored people. I had been able to witness the tears of people and share Christ in word and in

sacrament with those who had been funneled into jail, most beginning that journey at childhood.

For eight years, I maintained both ministries, chaplaincy and teaching half-time, until I accepted a full-time position that the seminary offered me. The journey continued there. Much was in need of change, from curriculum and personnel to worship. Little by little and with loads of patience, I've seen it change. The process continues toward fuller inclusivity of different perspectives, racial, cultural and economic.

In my whole journey in the church with its pains and its hopes, I have been sustained by the emphasis on the theology of grace that brought me into the Lutheran church in the first place. I'm still hoping that many more people will be able to hear it and be free and empowered in it.

Passports

Kimberly A. Vaughn

If I had a nickel for every time I felt like an outsider in Lutheranism, for every time I was made to feel like a trespasser in this tradition, for every time I considered finding another tradition which might welcome my “Black girl magic ...”

Being a female leader has enough challenges. Add to that brown skin in an American denomination deeply rooted in German and Scandinavian culture. I was naïve about the notion that my skin was the wrong color for Lutherans because I grew up in a Black Lutheran church.

The minute I stepped out of the safety of Advent Lutheran Church (Cleveland) and into adulthood, my “passport” was demanded of me. I didn’t understand this. Why must I show my papers when white Lutherans didn’t have to?

My “passports” were the ways I responded to those moments, that still make me cringe, when meeting new people. Always with a smile I’m asked, “When/how did you become a Lutheran?” Innocent-sounding questions that fished for my Lutheran credentials. The *real* question politeness forbade them from asking was, “How did you get here? You’re not supposed to be here; so, who let you in?”

This passport checking wore at my soul, and I had one foot out of the Lutheran door more times than I can count. Yet something deep inside fought back. I thought of the people of Advent who taught me Lutheranism from early childhood to young adulthood. I thought of these Black Lutherans – historically Black college and university graduates, teachers, politicians, business owners, musicians, retail workers – Black and proud and Lutherans. They never let on that we weren’t supposed to be here. They taught me the Bible, the liturgy, and Martin Luther’s Small Catechism. They taught me about God’s justice, gospel music and the cost of Christian discipleship. They taught me that I am somebody – a child of God.

I thought of Jesus of Nazareth and his rag-tag band of misfits-turned-disciples – men, women, old, young, fishermen, tax collectors, from Galilee, Jerusalem, Bethany, Tyre, Sidon. Everyone was a potential proclaimer of the good news of God. Jesus Christ invited me on this discipleship walk. I have a place.

I decided to fight for my place. What good would it do if I walked away, giving up on the declaration that we, too, sing “A Mighty Fortress”? Besides, I knew that I knew my catechism as well as – or better than – those who needed to see my papers and who boasted about their own bona fides. I knew that salvation by grace through faith apart from works of the law is why I am a Lutheran Christian.

Knowing this didn’t stop the passport checks. It did help me learn better ways to respond and to demand to see others’ passports as well. “How did you become a Lutheran?” “First, tell me what about Lutheran doctrine draws you.” “I was born Lutheran!” “Really? Well, I was born a Vaughn and a girl, then baptized Christian and later confirmed Lutheran. But you were *born Lutheran?* Wow!”

One of the things that called me into ministry is the desire to get “ethnic” Lutherans to move beyond heritage to discover what holds them in this tradition and to help others to find their place in this rich tradition. I want this church to be welcoming for everyone.

Lutheranism had a candidacy process that welcomed my voice and experiences. Seminary had problems, mostly borne out of a “culture clash” of passports. It was like walking a gauntlet between those from Scandinavian or German Lutheran cultural experiences and those from other Lutheran cultural experiences. Passport checkpoints appeared everywhere, from students, staff and even faculty. A professor even doubted my ability to handle academics due to my race (I was an all-A student!). They didn’t stop me though; there were more who encouraged my sense of call.

Ordained ministry also put me in some places where my passport was demanded, collar or not. There were places where I felt unsafe because of my skin color. There were places that tried to silence my blackness and my femaleness. There were places where people assumed I was the church custodian. There were places where people were astonished at my ability to follow the liturgy.

There *have* been more moments of grace, moments when I know God is present and active. Serving in Black, white, Latino congregations and building trust relationships across racial lines has been an incredible gift. We have learned, grown and loved each other well. Being called to the New Jersey Synod staff has been an incredible gift of grace; I never sought it, and, sometimes, think I don’t deserve it. The opportunities it provides for me to get back to that sense of call to help everyone find their place in Lutheranism are an incredible place of grace in which I find myself.

So, I guess I’ll stay around. But I am putting my passport in storage.

An Unfolding Journey of Surprises

Andrea L. Walker

I had no idea what a Lutheran was and never thought in my wildest dreams of being a pastor, until God found me and drew me to a small Lutheran congregation. This changed the direction of my life.

This congregation was St. Mark in East Point, Ga. The Rev. Eugene Powell was pastor. St. Mark is where my ears heard and my heart felt God's unmerited favor, grace and unconditional love. Being raised in both the Baptist and Pentecostal traditions, I thought that being religious meant there were certain requirements to be considered worthy. The word of God proclaimed and what I learned at St. Mark taught me, strengthened and nourished me.

Because of the love of God, I became involved with the work of the congregation. I taught Sunday school, served on the church council and began traveling to represent the church at events in the synod and around the ELCA. I began learning what it meant to be a Lutheran and grew in my faith. On one trip, I met Dr. Rudolph Featherstone and dared to ask a question in a conversation he was convening. He challenged me to consider ordained ministry. I had not gone to college, but with encouragement from my friends at St. Mark, I completed a Bachelor of Arts at Georgia State University and then started seminary.

Most of my seminary education was done through the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta (LTCA), where I would eventually work. Dr. Carl Ficken and Dr. Richard Wallace were my mentors. I stayed in Atlanta for seminary because I was a single parent raising a child and needed to work full-time. I went to seminary part-time until it was time to do my Lutheran year. Then the debating began. Where should I go? I was connected to Southern Seminary through LTCA, yet I had been warned by sisters who had attended that this might not be the best place for an African American female. I considered Trinity because of Dr. Featherstone. I decided on the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) because of Stacy Kitahata, who I had come to know through being part of the ELCA Youth Ministry speaker's bureau, Lift Every Voice. Stacy was dean of students; she thought I might flourish in Chicago. After my Lutheran year, I did a terminal internship in the Bronx with the Rev. Heidi Neumark, who became a mentor and friend.

My first call was challenging. It was at St. John's, a small African American congregation in the South Bronx. The people did not appreciate a first-call pastor who was African American and who happened to be a woman. The call was short-lived; it became a very toxic environment, so, as the three-year mark approached, I filled out my paperwork.

Although multiple synods were listed as choices, I was called not very far from New York City as the associate pastor of another St. John's. This St. John's was an affluent German congregation in Summit, N.J. This congregation helped me heal from the wounds inflicted by my first call. Not being the one in charge was a relief. I could preach, teach and do ministry without ultimate responsibility. Yet, God had something else in mind. Sixth months into the call, the senior pastor had a stroke, and I became the pastor in charge until they called me to be the senior pastor in 2006.

By my 10th year in ministry, I was flourishing in a call that used my best gifts. The congregation supported me financially through my pursuit of a doctorate of ministry in preaching from LSTC in 2007. This congregation also understood that pastors are called to the whole church and

expected me to use my gifts when called upon. Through their encouragement, I worked with the ELCA Youth Gathering in 2009 and 2012.

After nine years, as plans were being made to celebrate my 10th anniversary with the congregation, God again interrupted. The executive director of the ELCA Global Mission unit called to ask me to consider the call of area director of Madagascar, West and Central Africa. This was a call that I did not seek. The thought of this call both frightened and excited me for many reasons. For one, the action had always been at the congregational level. In considering a call to the churchwide organization, I realized that our three expressions help us to do as a church what individual congregations or synods cannot do. Being part of the ELCA churchwide staff allows me to interact with churches in the wider Lutheran communion.

This journey has been both a blessing and a tremendous challenge. Through it all, I am learning to be open to the surprises of God.

Sometimes

Beverly R. Wallace

A womanist scholar
A daughter of Grant and McCrary, Snorton and Costen
Forming me to be the leader that I am.
Tapped by God and affirmed by my sistahs.
Lutheran sistahs walking with:
Shannon and Walker, Newberry and Pruitt.
You see you can't be a sistah without sisters to be with –
Sometimes.

Called to be a scholar, a teacher of the craft,
Carer of the souls, healer and liberator,
An Intellectual Maroon yet sorely misunderstood – sometimes.

Sankofa brings me back to remembrance
Helping to recognize who I am, who I have always been; who I was destined to be.
One from the hood, still working in the hood, educating people in the hood like Miller before
me in this church. Miller first woman to be ordained, following in her steps like Copeland too,
North Carolina sojourners from Prince of Peace.
And over-looked – sometimes.

Challenging powers and the miseducation of our folk, causing folk to question:
Is she Lutheran still?
Questioning myself, my purpose in this church, “Why here?” I asked.
Because they will be in our community, with our folk, not fully understanding our culture,
misunderstanding how to care for our souls and so, I choose you.
Is it scary?
Sometimes.

In a two-hour call, affirmed by a sistah you see, to Atlanta I would go, and my contextual
theological education would be,
the foundation of my work, the food for my soul, where Bailey would teach me about the
midwives overlooked. Where Grant would remind me that some women are more servants than
others, where McCrary and Wimberly would school me on interdependency, where Lomax
would enlighten me on art the art of preaching, where Ficken would teach me the history and
legacy of Lutheranism and where Costen would constantly ask me when she taught me worship,
would I be the first Black female Lutheran Bishop? Not me.
And this radical education would be questioned – sometimes.

This “uppity woman” straight from the “ville,” her ethnicity questioned even from within the
community you see, and her faith shaken and abuse taken (even with a Ph.D.). Former A2B and
creative director of LTC, yet placed out, you see by the powers that be.
Feeling forgotten by God – sometimes.

Yet the spirit reminded me, yes in that Sankofa move

To forge ahead anyhow

To write anyhow, to teach anyhow, to lift as I climb, to shelter and mentor anyhow, to remind God's people of Abundant Life no matter what; to engage in prophetic work; to engage in healing work; to involve myself in powerful work – like addressing violence against women and girls in Africa and her diaspora; to research a Lutheran womanist ethic; to gather with Lutheran women theologians; to hang out with Dr. Katie Cannon and Dr. Cheryl Kirk-Duggan; to go to Ghana and get to know Dr. “Auntie” Mercy Oduyoye, mother of African Women's Theology; to write on grief and loss (what I know so well); and to teach these things 'fore our people are hurting. Yet teach them to not just Lutherans but to the sistahs and brothers who will hear you.

Seemingly thrown into the briar patch, but like Brer Rabbit, I love the briar patch. Do I miss trying to be with my Lutheran brothers and sistahs?

Sometimes.

“You Just Don’t LOOK Like a Lutheran Pastor”

Maxine Washington

When the doctrine of “the priesthood of all believers” was discussed in my new members class at Holy Family Lutheran Church, Chicago, in the early ‘60s, I was blown away. Somehow, I believed that only male pastors were given the privilege of being priests. Wow! Also, during worship, the pastor sat on the front pew and not on a level above everybody else. Wow! These and other biblical images are what led me to embrace the theology and mission of the Lutheran church.

I am extremely grateful for God’s guidance during my journey. As a daughter of a single mom who moved to Chicago during the Great Migration, I can truly say that I have been “freed and renewed in Christ.”

My journey, which has led me to a deep and committed life for the cause of Christian mission and evangelism, began when I moved to the South Side of Chicago. There, one of my new neighbors, Dr. Betty Guice, invited our family to the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit, a nearby mission congregation. It was at the Lutheran Church of the Holy Spirit that my gifts of creativity and energy matched the needs of this new mission. This is where my love for Jesus and my spiritual journey toward being an ordained minister began. My spirituality blossomed as I had the opportunity to lead the youth group with morality skits during worship. I even had the opportunity to take my production of “Jesus Christ Superstar” on the road to other Lutheran congregations. During the production of “Jesus Christ Superstar,” Mr. Anthony Fiorentino, a Lutheran elementary school teacher at Martin Luther Educational Center, volunteered to play the drums in our musical quartet. That relationship led to our marriage several years later. As I continued in leadership at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, I felt the call to enter into the rostered leadership of the ELCA. I entered seminary at age 36. My girlfriend said, “You will be 40 when you graduate.” I told her, “I would be 40 anyway, right?”

I was divorced at that time and had five offspring, four in high school and one in grammar school. Was I crazy? Yes, crazy for Christ. I often wonder about how my offspring felt about my decision. I sometimes wonder how many important conversations I missed with my daughters and sons because of my decision to enter seminary.

Seminary was an exciting experience for me. I graduated in 1986, and in 1987 I was called as associate pastor to Holy Family Lutheran Church, an ALC church with Pastor Charles Infelt. This is the same church I had joined many years earlier. Again, the needs of Holy Family Lutheran Church and my gifts for ministry matched. Along with pastoral duties, I was to initiate a program at Dwight Women’s Correctional Center. Hallelujah. The Dwight Program sponsored by the Lutheran Social Services of Illinois is still active.

When the opportunity opened to explore a call to the national office of the recently merged ELCA, I eagerly accepted as I felt my God-given gifts would allow me to participate in helping with the mission of our new and exciting ELCA. I was called to the Commission for Multicultural Ministries as associate director of Education for Ministry.

My call involved the recruitment of African Americans who were considering ordination and the support of African American students who were enrolled in the nine Lutheran seminaries across the country. During my call at the commission, I entered the doctoral program at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and earned a doctorate degree. My dissertation, "Paradigm Shifting for Mission, Ministry and Renewal," gave credence to the biblical mandate that our church should shift in attitude and mission to become more multicultural. Subsequent calls presented more opportunities to use my gifts. It was also an honor to have my name appear on ballots for bishop in two synods.

The doctrine of "the priesthood of all believers" means that all God's children are called for a purpose. I rejoice that God has given me the opportunity to answer my call in the Lutheran church. I recall after preaching my first sermon as a student at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a fellow student quipped, "Your sermon was fine, but you just don't look like a Lutheran pastor." I have been ordained in the ELCA for almost 30 years. I wonder if I now look like a Lutheran pastor.

Jesus Be My Friend

Maxine Washington

Jesus be my friend,
My guide along life's way.
I love to share my thoughts with him
Each day, I pray, I pray.

Jesus lead me now.
To follow your call away.
Let this be my fervent vow,
Each day, I pray, I pray.

Mold my life with joy.
Fill my heart with love.
Help me aid someone to live.
Help me aid someone to live.
Help me aid someone to live.
Each day, I pray, I pray.

This song was written during my time at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. I wrote the lyrics and King Fleming (deceased) wrote the music. It is sung currently at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church.

For Maxine

© Keith Haan

In appreciation of her work at Grace Lutheran Church as Intern Pastor and Friend.

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line in 4/4 time, with lyrics: "May our love _____ be held with - in your heart, and God's love _____ shine bright-ly as your". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, starting with a *mf* dynamic. The bottom staff shows the chord progression: F, B \flat , F, C, F, G \flat . The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

Sustain with chords throughout

The second system of the musical score continues from the first. It also consists of three staves. The vocal line has lyrics: "guide. re - mem - ber all we've shared when we're a - part _____ and then one". The piano accompaniment continues with a *cresc.* dynamic. The chord progression for the bottom staff is: C, A \flat m, D \flat m, B \flat , C. The piano part maintains the eighth-note accompaniment, with the left hand providing harmonic support through chords and bass notes.

For Maxine

11

day we'll join with each o - ther by his side. His

B \flat F Gm F

Pno. *dim.*

15

light _____ will grow with - in us _____ and make us one, and we'll

B \flat A m Gm7 C

Pno. *mf* *cresc.*

19

smile _____ when we re - mem - ber _____ all the work _____ that we've be - gun. His gun.

Gm F Gm/B \flat 1. F 2. F

Pno. *dim.* *rit.*

Reflection on “For Maxine”

Maxine Washington

I rejoice when I think about my 30-year journey in the ELCA. However, some of my memories make me want to sing “How I Got Over” – my soul looks back and wonders, how I got over.”

It was during those hard times that I thought back and remembered my wonderful internship at Grace Lutheran Church where there were around 2,000 Swedish Lutherans and me. As I left Grace Lutheran Church to return to the seminary, the youth surprised me with a concert. They sang about my time at Grace Lutheran Church—riding on horses, camping, swimming and canoeing.

They ended the concert with the song written by Mr. Keith Haan, “For Maxine.” As they sang the song, I wept. I didn’t realize how supportive these words would be on my journey. Words to this song gave me fortitude as I attempted to use my God-given gifts in the midst of what I felt was racist and sexist treatment for four years in a synodical position. I was released from this position and felt great anguish. Words to this song propelled me to seek mediation at a Federal Equal Opportunity Organization and helped me to continue my spiritual journey in the ELCA.

His Light will grow within us
And make us one,
And we’ll smile when we remember
All the work that we’ve begun.

Spiraling Path of “Here I Am, Lord”

Jade Yi

Introduction

易千玉 (Yi, Chien-yu) is my Chinese name; my first name means “thousands of jade.” People know me as Jade in the States. I was born in Taiwan and raised in a polytheistic social context. Before my conversion to Christianity, my way of seeing religions was heavily influenced by Buddhism and Taoism, and my understanding of life was guided by Confucius’ teaching and philosophy.

I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in May 2010, was ordained in July 2010 and served as a solo pastor in a small white congregation. After that, I served as an interim associate pastor at different congregations. Currently, I am working on a second master’s degree, TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) and intercultural studies at Wheaton College Graduate School. I am planning to complete it in the fall of 2016.

My Spiraling Path

Serving God seemed to be a linear journey, at first, for I naively thought that God’s generous forgiveness and mercy for all should be easily translated and conveyed to those who had been trapped by the unbearable pain, shame and guilt that the society has inflicted on them. The fact is that the path of following Jesus and serving God’s people in a hierarchical structure is more like a spiraling one for me. I constantly have to ask myself, “Am I strong and patient enough to navigate an existing power structure? Will I be able to ignore negative immature critiques that don’t build me up but strike me down?” I have had to say, “Yes,” to God’s calling over and over again in the past six years each time I am asked to serve.

It is unquestionable that the gospel that Jesus gives has been filtered through all sorts of secular lenses and influenced by human-made traditions, philosophy, and institutions. Isn’t that what the apostle Paul was dealing with in Colossians 2:8? We not only have made Jesus more like us, but we also made God’s kingdom into many small kingdoms of ours. The more I contemplate the way that Jesus led people and the gospel that he proclaimed in the New Testament, the less I can correlate what we have been doing with what Jesus did. We keep preaching about the priesthood of all believers, while at the same time maintaining the idolized professional trained clergy, which, unfortunately, have made our believers into “worshippers.” Somehow, we have gotten away from disciplining apostles, evangelists and prophets and become mainly invested in equipping lay leaders to be teachers and shepherds. How could we have missed how Jesus led in the four Gospels and the five gifts that Apostle Paul pointed out in Ephesians 4:11? How do the current structures and systems fit the way of life that Jesus taught us, and where do I fit in, in the midst of the chaos?

Being one of many immigrants who have come to this nation since 1600, being an Asian like many who could thrive and mingle well at school and at work, being a woman like many who have played important roles in our society, being a non-native English speaker, and feeling like a gentile among seekers who yearn for the sense of belonging and tangible gospel, I had to learn to appreciate the complexity of my identity as an ordained female Asian pastor in a white male dominated denomination, the ELCA. If one agrees that congregations are the reflection of their pastors, then it should not be surprising at all to grasp the current struggle of why the majority of congregations don’t reflect their neighborhoods and why the ELCA

does not have competency to reach our multiethnic communities that currently make up this nation. That's another place where I find myself feeling disconnected.

“Here I Am, Lord”

It's important for me not to forget my conversion story and the precious gift God has given to me, living a new life fully in Christ. My response to God, “Here I am, Lord,” is not an astonishing one worthy to be lifted up but a common one to which the minority of minorities can relate. My “yes” to God in each layer of my life has led me on a spiraling voyage, which has been filled with countless transformational stories, some of mine, and some of others who have cleared the path for me to serve, who have walked beside me and encouraged me, who have prayed for me and given me support, who have taught me and mentored me. They have been the ones who have seen me as what God had made me to be, and treated me as an equal ministry partner. I give thanks to God for putting them in my faith journey.

Before offering my life to God, I was an adventurer, a fighter, an opportunist, and full of confidence. After becoming a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ in the States, I cannot be anything without God's help and companionship. God has been teaching me, molding me, and leading me in each step that I take on this spiraling path in the midst of challenges. It is my prayer that we all can be more like Jesus and see each other through the lenses of the cross, remembering that Jesus has died for everyone and conquered everything. A book titled *Untamed*¹ emphasizes the power of “Shema spirituality”² as Jesus' creed through which we are called to reorient our lives toward God as a *Communitas*.³ In *Untamed*, the authors say if we understand and practice Shema spirituality, if 30 percent of the world's people simply took the Sermon on the Mount seriously, or if everyone makes authentically loving relationships with just two or three people in a lifetime and choose to become like their neighbors (as in the good Samaritan story) in a “pay-it-forward” style movement,⁴ we would actually accomplish the Great Commission in one generation. Is that what the fulfillment of God's kingdom looks like? I believe it is. We all have been entrusted by God with a great responsibility.

¹ Alan Hirsch and Debra Hirsch, *Untamed: Reactivating a Missional Form of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2010).

² In the book *Untamed*, the authors identify “shema spirituality” as loving God with the whole self and loving the neighbor as the self.

³ Edith L. B. Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy*, First Edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). “Communitas” is a community in which members take pleasure in sharing things in common.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

REMEMBRANCES

We Remember...

Cynthia Shuler, died Dec. 2, 1989
African American/Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered May 21, 1980

Ruby Nollez, died July 11, 1992
African American/Black, associate in ministry, rostered Jan. 5, 1969

Diane Sadravi, died Oct. 24, 1995
African American/Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered April 5, 1987

Michele Robinson, died July 24, 2001
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Aug. 28, 1994

Carole Burns, died Dec. 27, 2001
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Dec. 19, 1992

Margarita Martinez, died March 11, 2007
Latina, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Aug. 13, 1989

Barbara Kearse, died Aug. 22, 2007
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Dec. 17, 2000

Carol Scott, died Sept. 25, 2007
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered May 5, 2002

Ivis Mestre, died May 26, 2009
Latina, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Jan. 13, 1985

Irene Lewis, died June 23, 2009
African American/Black, associate in ministry, rostered Sept. 23, 1993

Brenda Echols, died March 27, 2010
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Feb. 12, 1994

Barbara Davis, died March 29, 2010
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered June 6, 1987

Dorothy Ricks, died March 12, 2011
African American/Black, associate in ministry, rostered Jan. 9, 1985

Vivian Martin, died May 25, 2013
African American/Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Dec. 1, 2002

Earlean Miller, died Nov. 10, 2014
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Aug. 26, 1979

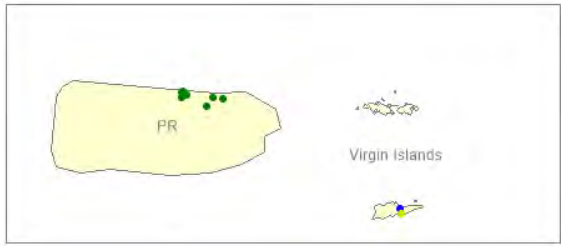
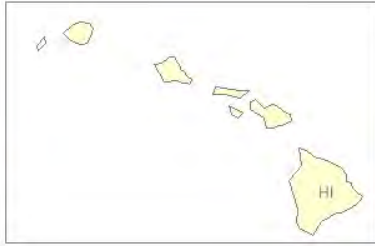
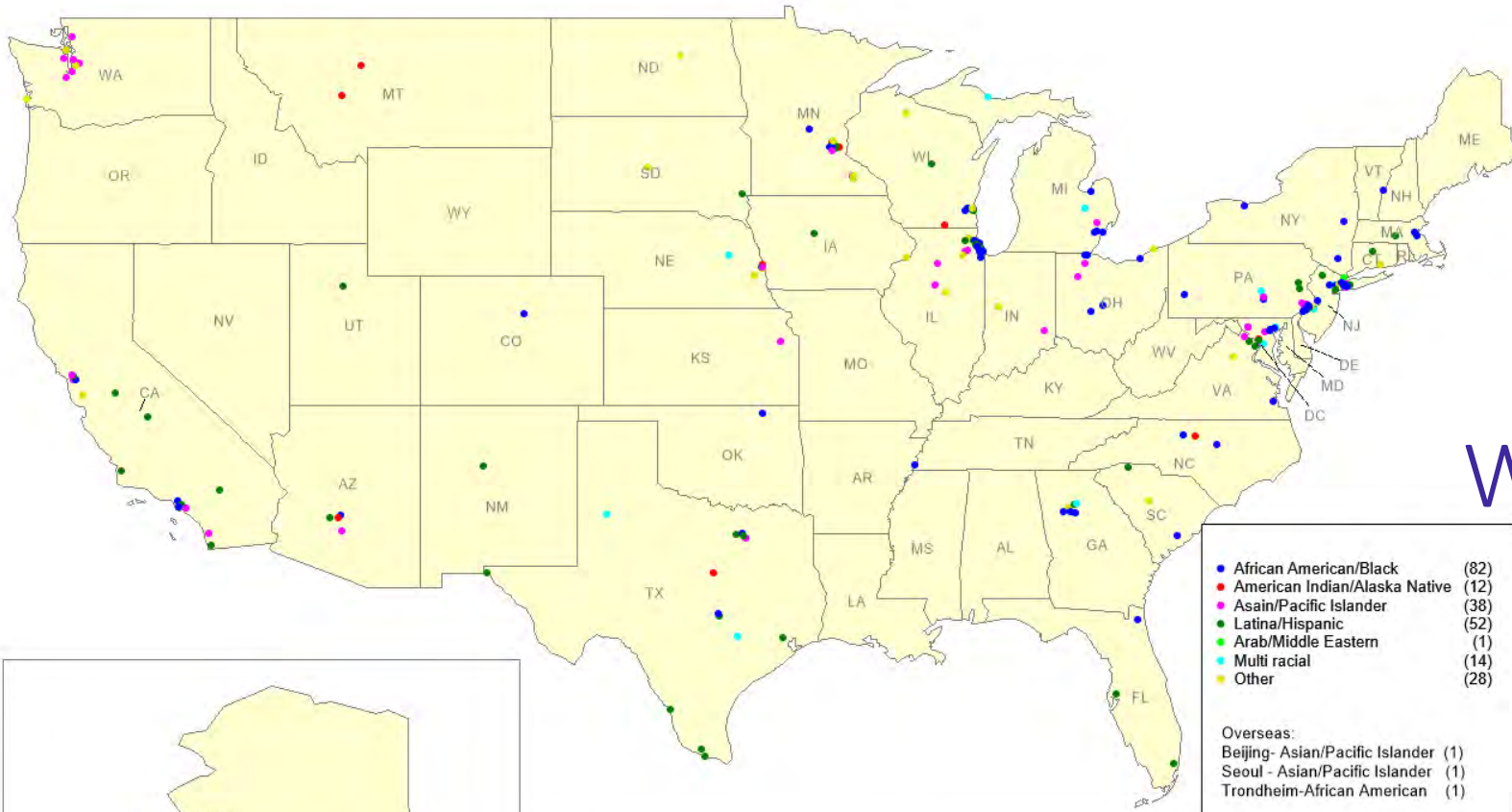
Beverly Conway, died April 8, 2015
African American/ Black, minister of word and sacrament, rostered Dec. 17, 1995

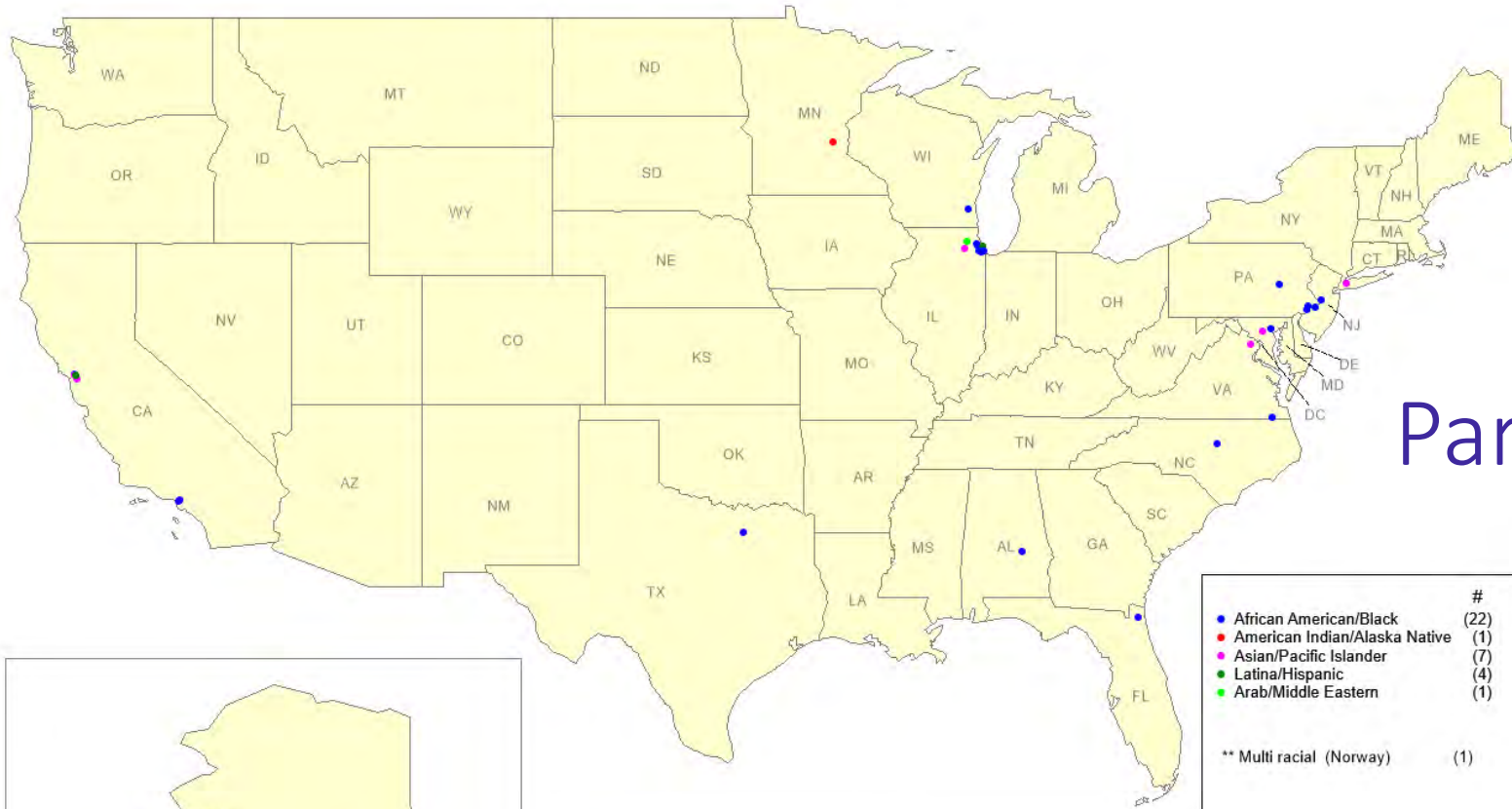
Lillian Smoot, died May 28, 2016
African American/Black, associate in ministry, rostered May 15, 1987

APPENDIX

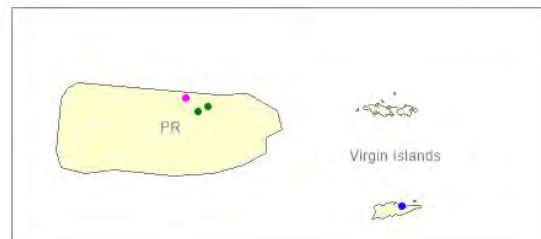
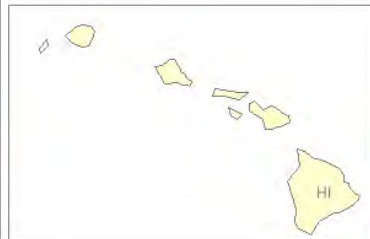


All ELCA Rostered Women of Color





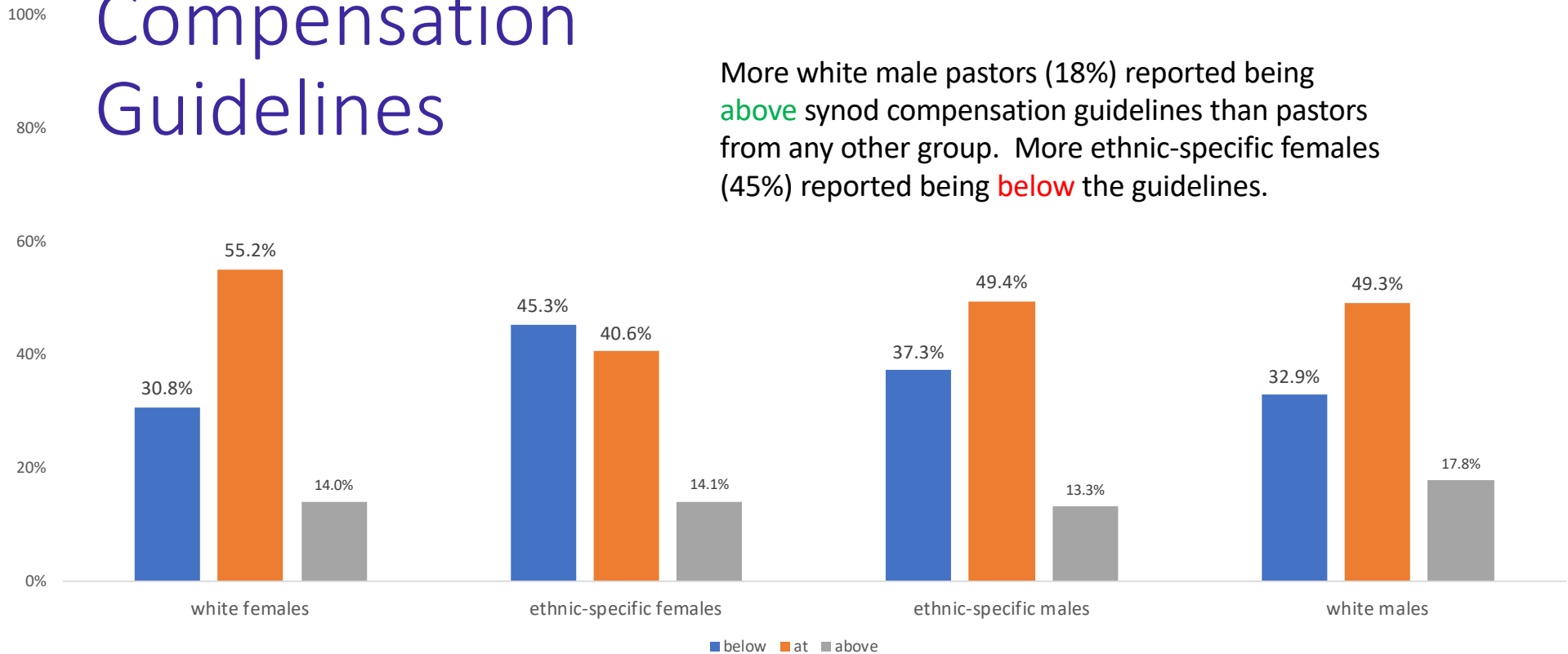
Project Participants





Compensation Guidelines

More white male pastors (18%) reported being **above** synod compensation guidelines than pastors from any other group. More ethnic-specific females (45%) reported being **below** the guidelines.



Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.



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Experience & Compensation

All congregational pastors start with nearly the same level of compensation. But white male clergy, as a group, **receive systematic pay increases** over time. While ethnic-specific female pastors **cannot count on increases** over time.

Time Ordained	Ethnic-specific		White	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
5 years or less	\$54,885	\$55,277	\$54,604	\$54,847
6 to 10	\$57,977	\$57,940	\$57,764	\$60,630
11 to 20	\$52,857	\$52,839	\$60,932	\$65,265
21 to 30	\$53,737	\$56,319	\$65,995	\$68,537
30 or more	\$51,642	\$63,082	\$66,561	\$70,652
overall	\$54,652	\$56,321	\$60,169	\$66,147

Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.



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Clergy Debt



Since ethnic-specific female clergy as a group are paid less than their white female counterparts, and the cost of a seminary education is the same regardless of race/ethnicity, it would follow that they would maintain a higher level of debt. As can be seen, a significantly higher percentage of female ethnic-specific clergy currently **owe more than \$15,000 in educational debt.**

	No debt to \$15,000	\$15,001 or more
White Females (N=492)	71.7%	28.3%
Ethnic-specific Females (N=81)	58.0%	42.0%
White Males (N=478)	85.3%	14.7%
Ethnic-Specific Males (N=127)	78.6%	21.4%

Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.



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Seminary Preparation



Respondents were asked if their experiences in seminary prepared them well for their first call. White females (76%) and white males (76%) were the most likely to agree or strongly agree, but the percentage dropped to just over a majority (56%) for the ethnic-specific females.

	Strongly disagree to disagree	Agree to strongly agree
White Females (N=536)	23.9%	76.1%
Ethnic-specific Females (N=93)	43.8%	56.2%
White Males (N=465)	24.5%	75.5%
Ethnic-Specific Males (N=122)	31.1%	68.9%

Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.

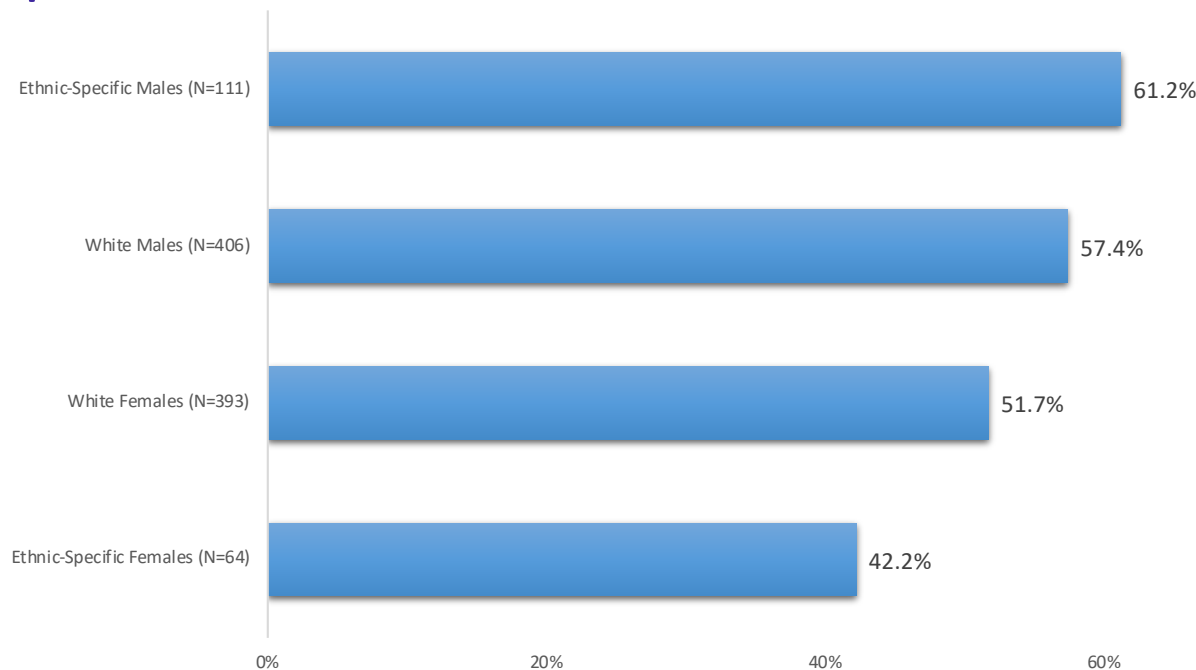


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Work more than 50 hours per week

Ethnic-specific females are **least likely** to work more than 50 hours per week.



Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.

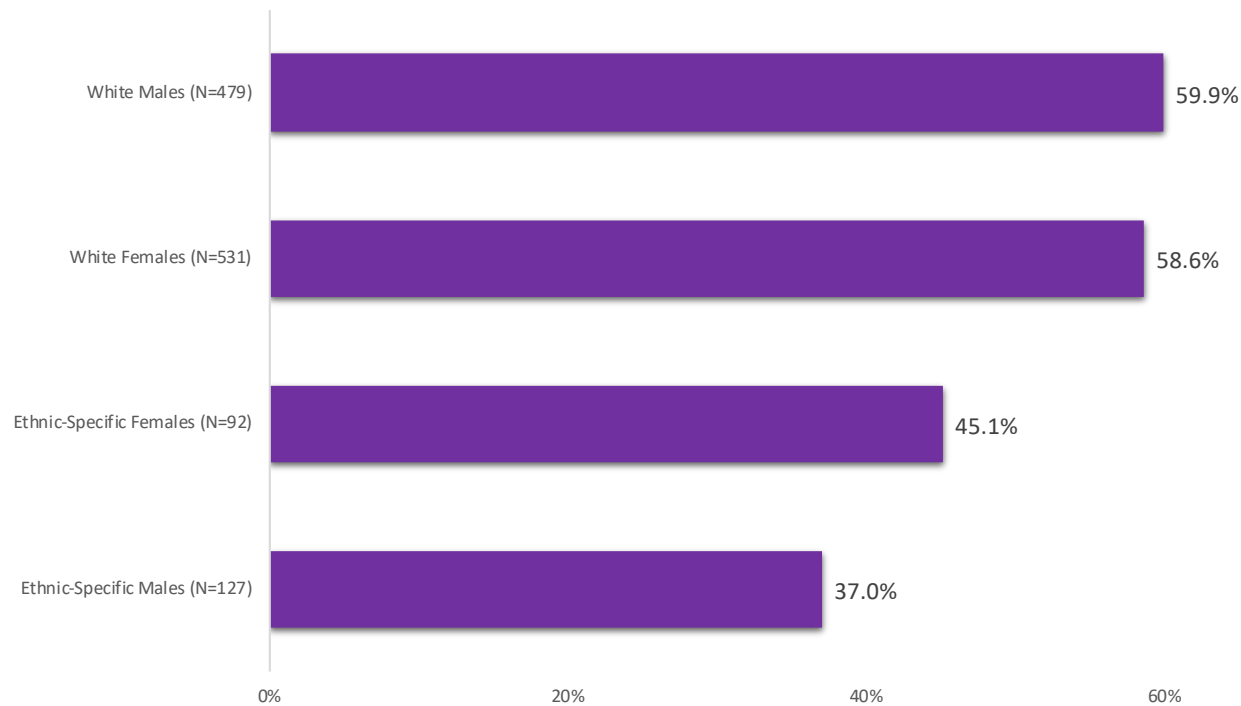


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Vacation Time

Ethnic-specific clergy take **significantly less vacation time** than their white counterparts.



Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.





Discrimination

The level of discrimination reported by ethnic-specific females and males in the various settings of the ELCA is significant.

	In the Congregation or Ministry Setting	With ELCA Rostered Leaders	By Synod and/or Churchwide Staff
Ethnic-Specific Females (N= 93)	37.6%	29.0%	24.7%
White Females (N=536)	5.8%	1.3%	1.9%
Difference	31.8%	27.7%	22.8%
Ethnic-Specific Males (N=132)	28.8%	31.8%	31.8%
White Males (N=482)	6.0%	3.5%	5.2%
Difference	22.8%	28.3%	26.6%

Data is from *The 45th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women Report* and *The Multicultural Ministries Status Report*, provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Research and Evaluation.



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