

Stories of Faith

**Celebrating 50 years of ordained
ministry in the ELCA**



**We Are Church,
We Are Called**

50•40•10



Joyfully gathered, prepared and presented by
Southwestern Minnesota Women of the ELCA

This booklet is brought to you in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the ordination of women, the 40th anniversary of women of color being ordained and the 10th anniversary of LGBTQ+ individuals serving God freely. This celebration was spearheaded by our churchwide organization in August 2019. The intention was not only to celebrate but to acknowledge that the road to equality and unity in Christ for our leaders has not been easy, nor is it finished. Read on to find stories from female clergy around Southwestern Minnesota as well as resources from the ELCA website.

Pastor Joyce Tollefson Capp First Lutheran, Pipestone

I grew up in a Lutheran home in Anoka, MN. Church since my earliest memories has been a part of my life. It is rumored that when I was 3 years old my parents came to pick me up from Sunday School and I was standing on a table singing, “Jesus Loves Me.” Such a simple song but I have been singing, proclaiming, and talking about the love of Jesus ever since in a variety of ways to a variety of people. My faith journey was shaped by my parents, home congregation, and as I served with Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship for 8 years.

I entered Seminary in 1986 and was ordained in 1991. My first call was to Hope Lutheran in Summit, SD. Here in this community of 200 I learned that Jesus always shows up and invites us to fellowship, service, and worship. Jesus’ love is made known at basketball games as I sat and visited and conversed with families. Through many in tragedies in this community my faith grew as I sat in silence with people, cried with people, and celebrated with them.

“I think we should sing
‘Jesus Loves Me’ every week
because it takes a lifetime to
know what it means...”

The organist at Hope Lutheran said to me one day, “I think we should sing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ every week because it takes a lifetime to know what it means and to live and accept that love.” I think she is right.

In January of 1998 I started my second call in Franklin, MN at St. Luke’s Lutheran Church. Together the faithful people and I learned how to celebrate our Lutheran identity. We talked together about what it means to live out our baptism in our daily life. My faith grew as together we celebrated the priesthood of all believers and invited others into ministry and mission.

In July of 2002 proclaiming the love of Jesus took me to Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in New Ulm, MN. Here I sang ‘Jesus Loves Me’ as I served with women as we studied women of the Bible and other Bible studies over breakfast and lunch. Here I was introduced to WELCA Triennial Gatherings and have been attending ever since. Relationships and discipleship was the foundation of my faith journey at Our Savior’s.

I served Scandian Grove Lutheran Church, rural St. Peter, MN from 2012-2013 where I proclaimed Jesus loves me as we had amazing monthly book studies. Together we sang and proclaimed God’s love through caring for our neighbors and building one another up.

Since the fall of 2013 I have been serving at First Lutheran in Pipestone, MN. God has reminded me that the church is not a building but the church is the people of God called together for a certain time and place to proclaim the old, old story that Jesus loves me. God continues to show me the path of life and continues to challenge me each day to proclaim that Jesus loves us and that is enough.

Wherever God leads, may we continue to sing and proclaim the love of Jesus!

Rev. Dr. Yolanda Denson-Byers
Faith Lutheran, Becker

When I was thirteen years old, and in the Missionary Baptist denomination of my birth, I discerned my call to pastoral ministry. With trepidation, I approached my pastor and shared my heart. He responded, “That is not God. Women cannot be pastors.” It was not until I was eighteen years old, and in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) denomination, that I approached my new pastor. He replied, “Of course you are; Let’s do it!” Over the next seven years, with the support of my communities of faith, I completed university at Wesleyan University, then seminary at Harvard Divinity School, before becoming a pastor, as I always dreamed.

“The ELCA’s emphasis on God’s grace captivated me. No longer was I bound by my works...”

The AMEZ Church, where I first began serving congregations, is a historically Black denomination. I was an associate pastor and then a church planter for them. When I moved to Minnesota, there were no AME Zion Churches anywhere in the state. After successfully planting one, the denomination decided that they did not want the responsibility of overseeing our congregation. This big disappointment led me to search for a new denomination where I could continue pastoral ministry with greater support. My family had some ties to the ELCA, so I explored continuing my vocation there.

The ELCA’s emphasis on God’s grace captivated me. No longer was I bound by my works and I was bursting with gratitude for God’s work, through Jesus Christ! I felt a renewed love for God, and for neighbor, as I shared the good news message that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to forgive our sin and gift us with eternal life. Later, I went to Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, where I earned a doctorate in Congregational Mission and Ministry. There, I gained the tools to help congregations interact with the neighborhood and take ministry outside of the four walls of the church.

My journey has not always been an easy one. In my family we like to joke that I have a unique triumvirate; I am female, Black, and queer. I am thankful to be in a denomination that welcomes me as a woman, affirms my calling as a queer pastor, and is undertaking new passion for dismantling racism and white supremacy within the denomination.

Currently, I am in a new call. I am the settled pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Becker, Minnesota, where I have served since October 2019. Our tagline is, “All are welcome; no exceptions!” Our congregation is a loving and joyous place where we believe, by faith, that the best is yet to come!

Praise to God, who does all things well. Amen.

Pastor LaDonna Ekern **United Lutheran, Lake Lillian**

I was raised in the LCMS. As time came to consider college and future career, my passion and love for the church pulled me toward church-related ministry. In the LCMS that meant Christian Education/Youth Ministry.

I attended Golden Valley Lutheran College and received AA in Parish Work. This led me to Devils Lake, ND as Christian Ed/Youth leader. This position made me aware of words/titles we use and if our words have any meaning. Example: as a youth leader going to games and yelling “Go Satan!” (they were the Devils Lake Satans’). After a few years there I traveled on a Lutheran Youth Encounter Summer Team; one of the churches we stayed at was in Holmen where I met my husband; who was never going to leave Holmen (seriously – never? – 7 moves later we are confident God finds word “never” a bit of humorous challenge!)

When we were first married, worked as a teacher at a Christian Day Care; then took position as Staff Associate in areas of Christian Education, youth and Family Ministry at a Methodist church; this led to a position at a different Methodist church as Minister of Outreach/Evangelism. It was at this time I returned to school to pursue BA. I attended Viterbo college in LaCrosse, WI for BA in Religious Studies. While at Viterbo I not only learned Hebrew but experienced the meaning and importance of Holy Days from a Cantor. From Viterbo I would be going to Wartburg Seminary. At this time, I had to face my first obstacle to pursuing ordained ministry – my dad! We lived 7 hours from home at that time and I made the trip by myself for a weekend with the sole purpose of telling my dad I was going to seminary. Well, I drove 7 hours back without having done that. I knew my dad, being a conservative LCMS member would never understand. My husband wasn’t happy – so next weekend we both went up and my husband stating we are not leaving until you tell him – he will find out.

I did have the conversation with dad. He wasn’t as mad as I thought he might be – but simply stated; “A pastor? Don’t you have enough control as a lay person?” My reply; “I actually have more control as a lay person than I will ever have as a Pastor, and yet, this is something I know I am being called by God to do.” “Called by God?” It sounded like I just told him I was going to have a baby and the father was GOD! Dad continued; “Called by God – you don’t hear about people being called by God anymore.” My reply; “Maybe that is one of the problems in churches today.”

At my ordination, my dad was there. He gave me a big hug and stated how proud he was of me – I still get tears when I think about that.

My first call was to a Mission Re-development Site in East Grand Forks, MN; a year after the flood. This was a grant funded position for redevelopment that turned into a flood recovery ministry instead. Definitely a learning curve discovering what it meant to be Pastor, Mission Redeveloper, Flood Recovery Pastor.

After 3 years – and having submitted my name at a couple sites that wouldn’t consider a female pastor, my second call was to a 2-point parish in rural Albert Lea/Austin area. I really believe 2+ parishes are that for a reason because they have very different expectations of ordained ministry. I was there 5 years with some really great people – but the ministry and expectations of the 2 congregations were vastly different. My fondest memories include a group who kindly welcomed us who would get together for games, bon-fires and to play practical jokes on each other! The other was the parishioner who owned a vineyard and at harvest time we would have worship in the vineyard!

My third call was to Edgar, WI (my husband being a cheese-head was thrilled to get back to WI). While there I

had the opportunity and privilege to be dean of the conference, go to South Africa on a relationship building trip and then had honor a couple years later on welcoming and being on the host team for 65 South African brothers and sisters to come and experience our lifestyle. It was also a time many in my congregation had not been exposed to people of color – and went from fearful/skeptical to embracing and loving the ones who came. Amazing how once you get to know people – preconceived judgments can change into friendships.

I am currently serving a congregation in Lake Lillian. This congregation, like most I served wasn't sure about having a woman pastor. (understatement). Even some of the women stated people being harder on me than other pastors because I was a woman. This is a relatively conservative area. We were attending one of our first gatherings – a meal by the businesses in town as a thank you to its residents. My husband wore his Packer jacket. A person in the community asked one of my parishioners who the guy in the Packer jacket was, he replied, "That's our pastor's spouse." "Oh", the response came. "You called a homosexual pastor, how cool is that!" "No" the parishioner replied, "Our pastor is a woman." "Oh" said the other with sigh of disappointment. The parishioner said to me, "Hmm, that's interesting that we would be more accepting of a homosexual pastor than female." And yet – now that could be a possibility, I don't think they would be that welcoming!!

It has been a ride and the journey continues. I have been blessed along the way as well as challenged. I have been respected and viewed as one with authority as well as one having little authority and no respect shown because I was a woman. I have been listened to and ignored. I have been received as well as been suspected for being a woman. I have heard the comments like:

"Not bad sermon – for a woman!"

"Women pastors are just far too distracting – it's hard to focus on what they are saying."

"What would it look like for a woman pastor to visit a guy's home – no I can't have our pastor come for a visit."

"You should dye your hair, or wear this type of clothes."

And yet – God is good – all the time and all the time, God is good!

50/40/10 Anniversary

Thank You to Pastors

Please click the image or type in the URL below to find a video message from Presiding Bishop Eaton thanking all our female clergy that answered God's call over the past 50 years.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=274OZzvVz6c>

Rev. Sue Grinde **Jasper ELC, Jasper**

My faith journey began the day I was born, May 23, 1964, becoming a child of God. Arriving six weeks early, not expected to survive, I was baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by a nurse. My baptism was reaffirmed when I was six months old in the Missouri Synod Lutheran Church. Or maybe it was playing communion, kneeling by the piano bench, with a piece of bread, I would smash down, and a little bit of water in a cup.

I was brought up in the Missouri Synod Lutheran faith, attended Sunday school, and Confirmation. A couple of years later, my family transferred to an LCA congregation. This is where I felt my faith take off!

"God surprises me every day!"

Faith and church have always been an important part of my life. I knew somehow, I wanted to serve the church but didn't know in what capacity. I also didn't know if I had what it took, as well as having the intellect. I didn't have a mountain top experience, it's been a growing awareness which led me to seminary. Ministry was a second career for me, I was older, and felt ready. In the fall of 2000 I started at Luther Seminary on a part time basis eventually going full time. Graduated, ordained and began my first call in 2005.

Almost fifteen years later, I am in my third call serving three congregations – Jasper ELCA in Jasper, MN; First Lutheran Church, Sherman, SD (contracted); Highland Lutheran Church, in rural Sherman, SD (contracted).

God surprises me every day!

Rev. Dawn Quame **Immanuel Lutheran, New Auburn**

I attended Luther Seminary, graduating in May 2005. I was ordained June 5, 2005 at St. John's in Lakeville, MN. My first call was at Immanuel in Akron, IA.

"I am especially grateful to the women who went before me..."

By the time I attended seminary, ordination of women was nothing new. However, in my first call I learned that there had been some resistance to calling a woman as a pastor. Nonetheless, I arrived in the summer of 2005 and stayed for over 7 years. I was blessed to have other female colleagues in that community, including one who had been there for several years before I arrived and bore the brunt of some criticisms because of her gender. In the end, I also was blessed by many other relationships, including the ones that were formed with those who initially were resistant to calling a woman.

I am especially grateful to the women who went before me, paving the way for the rest of us in those early years of ordaining women. I know it wasn't always easy but I am inspired by them and their stories. Thank You!

Pastor Dee Pederson
Director for Evangelical Mission, Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA

“O Lord, thou didst strike my heart with thy Word, and I loved thee.” —Saint Augustine

I grew up in the Lutheran Church in a small town in northern Wisconsin. Every week, my mom drove my siblings and I and our grandmother to worship. Along the way, we picked up an older woman who also lived in the country. Gina had great difficulty walking, needed a ride, and my mom was always happy to give her a ride to and from worship; on the way home, we always went inside and visited for a while. It was a wonderful lesson in the gift of visitation, and being a guest in someone’s home.

Some of my most enjoyable memories at our congregation involved being included in serving. I remember helping to wash the little glass Communion cups, and being thrilled when I was big enough to help wash pots and pans in the big sink in the kitchen. These simple actions helped me know that I belonged, was included, and that I could serve and contribute to the life of our congregation.

Confirmation for me was not such a positive experience. It involved memorization, and of course, the catechism ‘test’ in front of everyone. On confirmation day, I remember that the girl next to me fainted at the Communion rail because we were so scared to receive Communion!

High school youth activities were no better, and activities include watching sports movies – not exactly my interest area. A life-changing experience for me, though, was attending the Luther League Gathering in NYC. After that, a friend and I were welcomed by the pastor of a neighboring congregation, and a fairly large group of us formed a musical group that created liturgies, sang songs, of the day, and led worship in area congregations. It was transformational.

One of the faith challenges I was wrestling with as I headed to Luther College involved having a ‘born-again’ experience. I’m not sure where this expectation came from, but I was sure my faith was inadequate because I had not had some kind of mountain-top experience. When I got to Luther, one of the campus ministry leaders truly brought me ‘Good News’ when he reminded me that I had always been God’s child, that it seemed like I was actually asking God to work on my time-table, and that I didn’t need to have this particular experience in order to be a Christian. He reminded me that God loved me just as I was, with faith imperfect as it is. That was a burden lifted from my heart and a true message of God’s love and grace!

At Luther, I tried to major in music, gave that up, and then landed in the fields of psychology and religion for my majors. It felt like I’d found a home! Spending my junior year abroad in the Nottingham, England, program provided the opportunity to work in a church preschool and youth program, experience a culture other than my own, and began to lead me in a path toward ministry.

Was seminary in my future? I couldn’t imagine studying the Latin or Greek that was required for pre-sem back then. And in the early ‘70’s, I had never seen a female pastor – there were so few! At graduation, my home congregation called me to come back home to serve as a Parish Assistant, and this was a phenomenal experience! My home pastor then, Rev. Ron Hanson, provided mentoring and encouragement in my work, and allowed me to experience all facets of congregational ministry – from doing the bulletins to directing the choir and preaching, and being deeply involved in the resettlement of a family arriving as refugees from Vietnam. Pastor Ron’s

encouragement led me to begin thinking about seminary. My home congregation and my family gave me the support I absolutely needed to take this big next step. And because of my experience in my home congregation, I entered seminary ready, eager, and well-prepared to know why I was there.

My first call was to Faith Lutheran in Spicer, and it was a wonderful experience. In those early days, Bishop Darold Beekmann worked intentionally to place women in Interim calls so that congregations could have exposure to the leadership of female clergy. He and the (then) District Staff supported us with yearly retreats that served to strengthen our ministries and our network of relationships with each other.

My second call – to Bethlehem Lutheran, St. Cloud – spanned 31 years, and allowed me to enjoy the relationships and blessings of such a long tenure. It was an honor and a privilege to be able to walk with this wonderful congregation through many milestones, and to serve as the first female Lead Pastor there from 2006-2019.

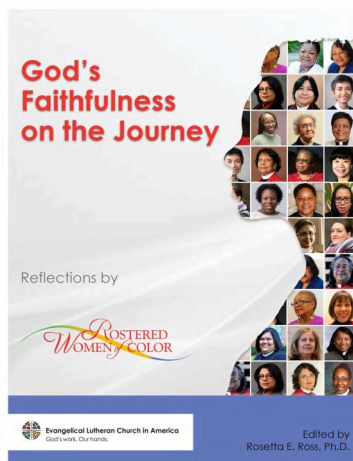
My current call as the Director for Evangelical Mission for the Southwestern Minnesota Synod leads into work with the vitality of our congregations, generosity and stewardship, serving in God’s world, anti-racism work, and walking with our new congregations, including Grace Place in Montrose and the Laotian community in St. Cloud. I believe that in Jesus Christ, local congregations are the hope of the world, and it is a joy to be able to partner with the 234 congregations of our synod as they are encouraged and strengthened in God’s mission in the communities where God has placed them.

Back in the early days of ministry, I was sustained by the words of this print, and still am. “O Lord, thou didst strike my heart with thy Word, and I loved thee.”

God’s Faithfulness on the Journey

Reflections by Rostered Women of Color

While it was 50 years ago that women were welcomed into rostered leadership in the Lutheran church, it took ten more years before the first woman of color to be ordained. The path for our women of color clergy comes with not only the barriers for all women, but racial barriers as well. In 2017, the ELCA published *God’s Faithfulness on the Journey* to honor this history and to hopefully move into a more equitable future for our women of color clergy. You can find these reflections by clicking the image or typing in the URL below.



https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Gods_Faithfulness_on_the_Journey.pdf

Pastor Sarah Larsen Tade American Lutheran, Windom

I remember as a girl in the 1970's saying to my grandmother that maybe I would like to be a pastor when I grew up. "Why would you want to do that?!" I believe she based her comment on the difficult task of conducting funeral services.

To the contrary, I have found ordained ministry life giving and funerals are one of the best opportunities to proclaim the Gospel. What a privilege to reflect on God's saving activity in a person's life and Christ's triumph over sin and death! Sadly my grandmother never had the chance to see me in this role.

Other people along the way suggested that I might make a good pastor, but my call to ministry came while I was teaching music in a Catholic elementary school for a year in Uvalde, TX. I was so moved by the school, the work of the Teresian sisters, and the activity of the parish. I saw that the best possibility to work towards positive change in the life of human communities was within the Church. I applied and was accepted to attend seminary at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago in 1988.

My journey took me to an urban internship in East Boston, MA, Clinical Pastoral Education in Yoma, AZ and finally a call to serve within the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic (CAR) through ELCA Global Mission. I worked, traveled and lived among the Central African people, especially the women from 1993 – 2003. They taught me their language, how to eat their food, sing and dance their songs, how to weep for the dead and how to welcome a new born baby into the world. They taught me what hoping in Christ looked like in their context. Together we dreamed dreams, and carried some of them out! Young women received scholarships to stay in school. I witnessed the ordination of the first woman in that church body in 1999. These were rich and formative years. God was with us. Not only that, God blessed me. While in the CAR, I married my husband, Noel, a Central African teacher, and second generation Christian. We took up life in the U.S. in 2003, a family of five!

My next call was to Shepherd of the Prairie Lutheran Parish in the Eastern North Dakota Synod serving four small congregations south of Fargo. These people taught me how to be a pastor in their context, just like the Central Africans had. I loved women's meetings, Sunday School, and time to reflect and pray while driving up and down country roads. Fall Dinners were the best! I learned who to work with multiple church councils at the same time, and how to adapt a sermon and prayers from one congregation to the next. These congregations helped Noel and I raise our children. We were well loved. I am so grateful!

I now serve at The American Lutheran Church of Windom, a large congregation here in the county seat of Cottonwood County. We also provide pastoral services for Bethany Lutheran of Bergan. I am the first woman to be called into the lead pastor role here. Again, God's people have taught me how to be a pastor in their context. Here, I have the privilege to work with other staff, to have a pastor colleague, to walk alongside motivated boards and committees. A lot of positive happens here! The sheer number of the people overwhelmed me, but year by year and one by one they have become dear to me, just like the other sisters and brothers in Christ that I have lived and served among since my ordination in 1992.

This verse has guided my ministry. **"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly"** John 10.10b. There is so much that gets in the way of abundant life. Press on in hope, and point to all the places where faith in Jesus is changing lives and moving mountains, large or small.

Rev. Rebecca Thomas **First Lutheran, Sauk Centre**

Just a little background - - I was a wife, a mom of two daughters and my vocation was in X-ray. Working as a X-ray technician was a good job, but I didn't always feel satisfied.

I cannot put an exact date for when I felt called to be a pastor. The feeling became stronger when my family joined a new mission start church in St. Joseph, MN. We met at the Kennedy Elementary School in the gymnasium. Everyone needed to help out in some way – from setting up and taking down to bringing the bread and wine for Holy Communion and more. Everyone was welcome to use the gifts/talents they were given to help with worship, learning and serving. I was a very shy person and needed lots of encouragement. Every time I tried something new I discovered that I had skills to be a leader and to share my faith I was very involved. It was a very exciting time for me. Pastor Martha Halls planted the seed, “Have you ever thought of being a pastor?”

In the fall of 1991 I registered to take classes at St. Benedicts College to finish my BA. During this time, I started to work with the SWMN Synod to look at the possibility of going to seminary. Resurrection Lutheran in St. Joe was very supportive and encouraging. I was a daughter of the congregation. Many nights I found myself at the kitchen table with my daughters. All doing our homework together. In May of 1998 I graduated from Lutheran Seminary and was assigned to the SWMN Synod.

My first call was to First Lutheran Church in Sauk Centre. I was the topic of interest in a small town with a strong Catholic presence. I was interviewed by the local newspaper for being the first female pastor to serve in the area. Sometimes when I wore my collar to events people didn't know how to react – a few times I was even called Father. I must also say that the local ministerial group welcomed me warmly.

**“I love what I do.
Thank you Jesus!”**

First Lutheran is blessed to have a male and female pastor. It is the best of both worlds. Our gifts complement each other. When people have needs they can come to either of us – some feel more comfortable with me – some with Pastor Mike – and some it doesn't matter. My colleague is very supportive and fair in our relationship and duties. Over all, I have had an amazing story of being welcomed as an ordained minister of Jesus Christ. That is why my first call is my only call. I have had the honor of serving at First Lutheran for 21 years and I look forward to a few more before retiring.

I am grateful for all the people who have supported me through the years. I am so glad I went back to school. It was the hardest (and best) thing I have ever done. I am so blessed to serve as a pastor. I love what I do. Thank you Jesus!

Pastor Kathleen Ulland-Klinkner Our Savior's Lutheran, New Ulm

"Through the years, my mom's voice was constant in encouraging me to go to seminary."

I like to tell people that I "fell" into youth ministry in 1986. I had seen some postings for youth director positions and as my faith was important to me and I liked working with teenagers, I thought it might be fun to be youth director while I waited for a teaching job. Little did I know I was beginning my journey to ordination! My mom had told me in college I would make a good pastor, but I dismissed it. I had that first job at First Lutheran in Marshall for one year and then moved to New Ulm, after marrying my husband Gregg. I thought that was it for youth ministry. However, shortly after joining Our Savior's, they had a job opening for Director of Youth and Education Ministries. At my

interview I told them I would stay for three years to establish the position. I was hired and after several years I realized God had called me to serve in the church as a career. I stayed for 23 years!

Through the years, my mom's voice was constant in encouraging me to go to seminary. I finally told her to stop telling me I should go to seminary because I lived two hours from Luther Seminary and I was married to a farmer, so seminary was impossible. Her reply was, "Kathleen, I don't care what you say, I know you are going to be a pastor." Even though I disagreed with her, I knew that my mom knew me like no one else knew me and so I wondered. As more people began to encourage me, and as I began to listen to God, I realized it was true, God was calling me to be a pastor. I finally began a long journey through seminary. I worked full-time and went to seminary part-time while living on a farm and raising a family near New Ulm.

I was ordained in 2011. My mom died before I graduated from seminary and was ordained. I shed tears on those days, knowing how we would have cherished those milestones. I know though, that her faith in God and her confidence in my gifts continue to impact me.

I served at Augustana/East Sveadahl Ministries in St. James for eight years. In the fall of 2019 I was called back to Our Savior's to be their senior pastor. I could never have imagined the journey I was beginning in 1986, and I couldn't have done it without faith, hope, and encouragement from others. It has been a blessing, a privilege and an adventure!

Pastor Ann Zastrow **Grace Lutheran, Luverne**

I am a second (or third?) career pastor, ordained in 2014. The first Lutheran women were ordained in my lifetime, but it didn't make any impression on me at the time. The congregation I belonged to at that time likely would not have considered calling a female pastor. When I was in college, the Lutheran campus ministry/congregation I participated in had a female intern, so that was the first time I encountered the possibility of a woman being a pastor. That is where I also first had the experience of leading worship. After college, I encountered a couple more female interns. At that time, it didn't seem unusual or out of the ordinary to have women as interns, or pastors, but I didn't see myself as serving in that role.

I have always attended church weekly, growing up, through college, and since then, even when I taught overseas, so looking back, it doesn't seem completely unusual that I would find myself called to be a pastor. I remember one sermon (as an adult) where the pastor talked about being a pastor, sort of a recruitment sermon, but I remember thinking that he wasn't talking to me, perhaps because I was female, not male, and because I was an adult, not college-aged.

My first career was education. I substitute-taught for 7 years after graduating from college, because at the time districts were not hiring. Then I attended an international job fair, and landed a job at an all girl's school in Tokyo, run by Spanish nuns. I worked there 4 years, and the second two years my "other teaching duty" was teaching the 5th grade protestant religion class once a week. It was a wonderful experience! I was also a worship leader at the English language Lutheran church I was attending, and received a lot of support from parishioners and pastors there. By the time I left Japan, I knew I would go to seminary, but I wasn't sure where, when, or for what. Being a pastor wasn't really on my radar at the time, but I knew I was being called to do church work of some sort, eventually. I returned to the States, and taught one more year. When I left classroom teaching, I knew I wanted to continue working with children and youth. My church was always looking for confirmation small group leaders, and I figured I could do that!

I was a small group leader for grades 7 and 8, and grade 6 when that was added into the program, for approximately 8 years. The church had a requirement of going to camp for a week in the summer. Our program was so large that we rented out the whole camp, and staffed most of it ourselves. I went to camp as an adult leader for probably 6 or 7 years. Part of the "summer staff" was college aged interns from the congregation, so I got to know them, eventually effectively working with youth grades 6 through College, and beyond. It was these youth who saw that I could/should go to seminary and encouraged me along the way.

I entered seminary in an MA program in Children, Youth and Family ministry, to become a youth director. I was working full time in a non-church setting, so was taking classes in the evenings, part-time. In my third semester I realized I had to switch my program from MA to MDiv, and become a pastor.

My journey through seminary was not always smooth, and did not always go in the way I hoped it would. It took me a long time to finish, for a variety of reasons, but I always tried to make lemonade when life gave me lemons! I finally did graduate, and was assigned to a synod. I worked with them for a year to find a call, interviewing several places, but nothing was a good fit. I was reassigned to Southwestern Minnesota, interviewed several places, and received my first call, to a 3-point parish. I was there for 5 years, and have been in my second call a bit less than a year.

As a woman in ordained ministry, working as an associate pastor with male lead pastors for both of my calls, I think that my gender has definite assets. It is good for women and girls to see women in pastoral leadership roles in the church. Sometimes women feel more comfortable talking to another woman. I do not feel that I have been pigeon-holed into working with women, children or youth, but have been able to use other gifts and talents which I do possess. Both of the men I have worked with are good pastors, and we complement each other well. That being said, it is not always easy to be a woman in ordained ministry. Some Christian traditions do not accept women in ordained ministry, or in any leadership position, and it is a challenge to be in ministerial conversations with these male colleagues in the community. “The Old Boys’ Network” is alive and well. Parishioners are not always open to women clergy, but many are. In both of my calls, I am the first or second called female pastor they have had, though there were female interim pastors in congregations’ past.

Women in Ordained Ministry still face lots of challenges in doing our jobs, following our callings, and being accepted for who we are and what we do. We have both supporters and detractors. We are strong, but need support. It is both humbling and an honor to be called to do this work. I hope that I am able to support and encourage women and girls to follow this path in their futures as they live out their calls.

Pastor Mary Leigh Boyd Hovland **Co-Chaplain at Bethesda Care Center, Willmar**

I was blessed to grow up in a family where church and school were the center of our life. Both my parents were active in both church and community. They were a prayerful, living model of serving together in community.

As a child I thought of being a nurse missionary. I particularly remember listening to a missionary speak at our church and there began thinking of serving in the church. At the time, a woman called to ordained ministry was unheard of.

I believe everyone is called by God. We receive our calling and commissioning for service as we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From the smiles of a baby to the love shared of our oldest members of the church, we are called daily to give glory to God for the sake of a world in need. Thanks be to God!

As an adult, I was called to be a nurse, called to be an Associate in Ministry in the ELCA, and now called as an ordained pastor in the ELCA. I have been blessed to have the following calls:

1. Associate in Ministry at Bethel Lutheran, Willmar MN 1980’s
2. Luther Seminary 1988 – 1995 with Internship at Paynesville Lutheran 1994-95
3. Maynard-Wang Lutheran Parish, Maynard MN 1996-2010
4. Vinje Lutheran, Willmar MN, Pastor of Parish Care 2010-2018
5. Co-Chaplain at Bethesda Care Center, Willmar MN with Pastor Bill Miller 2018 – present

In addition, I have been called as a daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother. All these calls are ministry in daily life. We lovingly serve because God first loved us. Our callings are not a program or job, but a way of life.

During these calls, my confirmation verse has served me well. **“Trust in the living God who gives you richly all things to enjoy.”** ^{1 Timothy}

Pastor Marlaine Doidge **Retired – living at Wagner, SD**

My call to ordained ministry in the ELCA developed slowly, over many years. In 1971, I enrolled at Augustana College, Sioux Falls, SD, and became the first female to major in religion at that institution. Before I graduated in 1975, my advisor, Rev. Dr. James Limburg, made sure I knew that women were being ordained in the ALC and encouraged me to become a pastor. At 22, I could not picture myself in public ministry. I therefore became Augustana's first religion major who did not go on to seminary immediately after graduation.

Between 1975 – 1984, I got married, had children, taught Sunday School, Confirmation and led adult bible studies. From 1985 – 2000, I served Christ Lutheran Church in Glencoe, MN as their first Christian Education Coordinator. I was commissioned to be an Associate in Ministry in 1990. Throughout those years, I heard a call to ordained ministry many times from many different people, but like so many who have gone before me, I made excuses and set up all kinds of barriers to prevent me from doing what God wanted me to do. But God persisted, so finally, with the full support of family, congregation, Synod staff and candidacy committee, I succumbed to the Spirit's will. I enrolled in the Masters of Divinity program at Luther Seminary in 2001 when I was 48 years old; I was ordained at 52 and called to serve St. John and Trinity of rural Hector and Peace of Cosmos.

The best advice I received on my ordination journey came not from a pastor or a professor, but from my wise and worldly father, Marcus Goldhammer. When I shared my plans to begin seminary studies, Dad, a lifelong Missouri Synod Lutheran, told me. "I have two things to say about this: First, if you believe this is God's call to you, then you most certainly should listen. Second, don't ever forget that you are a wife and a mother. Those callings come from God, too, and they are every bit as holy as the call to be a pastor." (I guess he was better acquainted with Martin Luther than I knew!) I assured him that I would not, could not forget my family; that they would not be left behind or lost in the midst of congregational demands or pastoral duties. I won't say it's been easy, (this is a challenge for every pastor), but I have been mostly successful in honoring my Dad's words and have shared them with numerous women entering ministry.

The second-best advice I received was from a wise lay woman who once told me, "Remember that every time you do something yourself, you deny someone else an opportunity to become involved." Let that be a lesson to every female pastor! The temptation to show congregations and colleagues that we women can 'do it all' is every present; I succumbed to it more times than I can count, but recalling that God calls all of the baptized into ministry helped me imagine, invite, and include others in the work that God calls us to do.

I am thankful for the great crowd of witnesses who have surrounded me on the road to ordination and throughout my ministry:

- Gifted male pastors and professors from whom I learned a great deal, especially Pastor Chet Hoversten, my long-time colleague and friend who recognized my gifts for ministry and helped me develop and use them in a congregational setting.
- All the women who paved a path to ordination, but especially the female pastors in the SWMN Synod who welcomed me with open arms, prayed for and with me, shared their collective wisdom, good humor, resources, encouragement and advice. They were honest about the challenges they had encountered and helped me avoid mistakes and pitfalls.
- My husband, John – he was ministry gifts in me long before I saw them myself; was and still is a strong support and sounding board.

It's been a joy to walk with younger women entering ministry, including my own daughter, now a Deacon in the ELCA, but my favorite moment in ministry happened in worship one Sunday. A young boy publicly expressed disappointment that he could not become a pastor, because, in his words, "only girls can do that." That was the first time I realized that I, a female, was the only pastoral role model this young man had ever known. It had never occurred to me to explain to children, youth or adults that ministry in the ELCA is open to females AND males, those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or of other orientations, race or color. What a joy it is to be a part of a church that recognizes, accepts and utilizes the gifts of all God's people in ministry! For that, and the blessings I have known as a pastor, I can only say, "Thanks be to God!"

Pastor Carol L. Olson **Retired – residing at St. Cloud**

I was blessed to be baptized and nurtured in faith by a loving Christian family, surrounded by an extended family of devoted Lutherans. I attended Concordia College, Moorhead with the intention of becoming a missionary but experience in being a "parish worker" quickly made me change my major to elementary education. I taught for three years in Juneau, AK, then moved to Dubuque with hopes I might pick up some courses in theology at Wartburg Seminary, even as I continued teaching.

Upon marriage and a year with a seminary student I was passionate to study with him. I was allowed to enroll and was the long female in my classes. I often heard "Gentlemen...and Carol" at the beginning of class. My husband and I did a two-year internship in Papua New Guinea – a wonderful experience but not much training for a woman in pastoral ministry. When we returned the ALC passed the right for women to be ordained, we had two children, more women had joined the ranks at Wartburg, and my husband took a call to a small two-point parish close enough that I could finish up my studies. I struggled to discern if I was being called to parish ministry because I had never really longed to be a pastor. Upon graduation we spoke with "district presidents" about the possibility of sharing a call since we did not want to turn our children over to daycare (now numbering three).

Alas, one gentleman, Bruno Schlactenhoffen, Iowa district, said he thought something might be worked out and we became the first clergy couple in the ALC. My husband resigned his call and the congregations called us back as a team. We worked together for 17 years before taking separate calls for financial reasons.

I retired the first time in 2015 but flunked retirement and was called to serve another three years, completing 48 years of ministry. My faith has grown and been transformed in many ways and the training of pastors and role of clergy is quite different from my beginning journey. Thanks be to God!

Pastor Linda M. Pedersen **Retired – residing at Brownton**

Perfect attendance for 12 years in my Lutheran Church Sunday School was a great building block to learning and living a faithful Christian life. However, born in 1951, the thought of ever being a Pastor never crossed my mind. The year after I graduated from high school in 1970, our Lutheran Church ordained the first women. But the thought of being a Pastor was still far from my sense of identity.

It was when I was selected to participate in a one-year program to build up youth ministry in Synods across the Church that my sense of how God might be calling me to serve changed. The program was funded with a grant from the Women's Organization of our Lutheran Church. After two years of college I left the only home I had ever known in St. Paul and went off to Southeastern PA to become a "youth staffer." What followed was another year of service in Illinois. When I came home a call to congregational ministry was my focus, but still not to be a Pastor.

My passion for youth ministry would continue to drive me, while the voices of others in places I worked would continue to ask the question, "Don't you want to be a Pastor?" I worked with Christian education and youth ministry in St. Paul, Edina, Shoreview and Olivia, MN.

In 1980 I started seminary, pregnant with our second child and I was ordained in 1986. A pregnant seminary student was something new for most of my seminary professors, even 16 years after the ordination of our first women Pastors.

Both of my first two calls to congregations brought joys and sorrows. Joys in the many opportunities I was given to lead in our Church and ecumenically as a woman. Sorrow as both my first two call votes had a few people who voted against my call based totally the fact I was female. There was even both joy and sorrow when in 1991 I was the first woman in the Saint Paul Synod to be called as a solo Pastor, now 21 years after our Church began to ordain women.

Oh, the stories I can tell, from visiting a woman after she had just miscarried a baby and being able to share with her that I too had experienced miscarriage and could relate. Or the day one little girl in my congregation wondered out loud, why is there a "man" (intern Pastor) leading worship, since she had only seen a woman in the role of Pastor. Or wondering in my solo call how the world had changed when I realized half of our church council members had been raised in the Roman Catholic Church. Or having people after a funeral or wedding say, "I have never seen or heard a woman Pastor before." Or someone not knowing what to say, maybe trying not to be sexist, commenting, "It is hard to get used to my voice as a Pastor." But then there were others who said they could hear me or welcomed "my voice."

"All totaled my life has been richly blessed to serve as a Pastor."

All totaled my life has been richly blessed to serve as a Pastor. I have a sense of being a pioneer in this vocation as a Pastor. I am also so grateful for this opportunity and the fact I am no longer a novelty. Women entering seminary today are not alone in their gender. And I am especially thankful for both men and women who lead the way for our church to welcome the gifts of women to serve as Pastors.

Pastor Doris Weber **Retired – residing at Sartell**

*“I lift up my eyes to the hills...from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”* Psalm 121:1-2

My ‘faith story’ is the story of how God’s love/mercy has the power to transform hearts and change lives forever. I know this to be true because God changed my heart and my life. I know something else: no one person is excluded from God’s love. When you surrender your life to God, there is no limit to where God may take you/ use you. We just need to open our hearts, God will lead the way.

I am a retired ELCA pastor – but I wasn’t raised in the church. Even though I wasn’t in God’s church, God was always in my world (Hebrews 13:5) “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”

I was raised on a small Iowa farm, located a couple miles east of the Missouri River, between Sioux City and Omaha.

When I was about 6 years old – my father was diagnosed with tuberculosis. He was sent to the VA Hospital in Omaha. He was gone for a long, long time.

It was a difficult time for the Carter family.

Eventually my father came home – but my mother wasn’t able to cope with all the pressure: a sick husband (with an unknown future), no close extended family, a farm to work and 7 children to care for. My parents divorced. Along with some of my brothers, I stayed with my father.

By the time I was sixteen, I was living alone. I met Bill (future husband), after he returned from the war in Vietnam. When I was 17, I was married with a child, living in California.

Eventually Bill and I returned to Iowa. We bought a home in a small town, just south of LeMars.

Shortly after moving to Merrill, a pastor from the Lutheran church, stopped in to visit. He invited us to worship. We thought we would give it a try – the people were welcoming – so, we continued to attend worship. Pastor Norheim suggested we join his Bible study. We did. Each week we were given a Bible passage to read. At the study we would discuss the readings, Weekly Pastor Norheim would ask, “What do you think about this Jesus?” At first, I thought Jesus was ‘good guy’ – then I thought he was some kind of ‘teacher.’ Eventually Pastor Norheim assigned John 10: 22-30. The Father and I are one. It didn’t make much sense. When I asked Rev. Norheim about it – he explained how God loved the world so very much, God decided to pay us a visit. Rev. Norheim said, “The Bible is God’s love letter to the world.”

When you read scripture, the Spirit of God is working to transform your heart. You find yourself wanting to follow Jesus in word and deed. Not because God will love you – you already have God’s love. Eph. 1 8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing; it is a gift of God – not the results of works, so that no one may boast.

I asked to be baptized. At the time I didn’t know how unusual it was for an adult to be baptized in the Lutheran Church. My baptism took place on a cold December morning. Two of my daughters were also baptized. They were grade school age. The pastor asked if I would give a short testimony. I remember telling the congregation “I could lose my friends, family, everything I owned, but God promised to love me forever.”

When we moved to MN we became foster parents. We felt God was calling us to reach out to young people

struggling with life. God has a way of using our own struggles to help the ‘neighbor in need’.

I received my GED in Iowa (I have 11 brothers and sisters and we all dropped out of school to work with only one sister graduating from high school).

I was attending St. Cloud State when I saw an article in the local newspaper about an older woman who had attended seminary and was ordained. When I showed the article to Bill, he said, “Why don’t you do that?” I said, “Do you think I could do that?” He replied, “I know you could.”

Pastor Scott Larson (Foley, MN) drove me to Luther Seminary in St. Paul. I was given a tour. I said to the person leading the tour, “I’ll soon be 42 years old.” She replied, “you can be 42 years old sitting at home or sitting here.”

I applied to Luther and received a letter of acceptance. I carried the letter in my purse throughout my seminary years. (God seems to have a sense of humor). As a senior, my purse was stolen. I didn’t worry so much about my license and credit cards (they could be replaced) – my letter of acceptance was gone. But I didn’t need the letter because I was graduating.

Pastor Norheim didn’t approve of the ordination of women, but on June 25, 1995 (my ordination day) I looked out the door of Gustavus Adolphus Church in Foley – and saw Rev. Norheim walking up the sidewalk. (I will forever be thankful for the witness of Rev. Norheim).

I have served congregations in rural Princeton, Tyler, Montevideo and Milan, MN. I have met so many wonderful people along the way. My heart overflows with love for them.

My faith story is the story of God transforming my heart and my life. God is still working on me! After 70 years of good times/difficult times, I have learned: God will never leave me nor forsake me. God’s love/mercy/salvation doesn’t depend upon my effort/faithfulness. God in Christ took care of that.

God be with you on your journey of faith!

