



Table Talk

"Feed
my
Lambs,



...and my
Sheep,
Feed
my Sheep."

John 21
(NRSV)

Special Edition Reflecting on
the
20th Anniversary of Women's Ordination

FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF

If you wish to express your views in Table Talk, please do so. We request that you type your articles single-space in columns 3 1/2 inches wide and 8 1/2 inches long with justified margins. Proposals for monthly columns are also welcome. Poetry and art will be considered along with letters, book reviews and feature articles. Nothing will be published without the author's name. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the staff.

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EDITOR: Viking Dietrich

STAFF: Kris Bell,
Bill Griffith
Phyllis Pelletier
Rebecca Rossow

James Gilmore
Pat Hendricks
Brian Rossow

TABLE TALK, 61 West Confederate Avenue, Gettysburg, Pa. 17325

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In this issue of Table Talk, we listen to the voices of women in leadership roles in the church of Jesus Christ, and we affirm their courage, their perseverance, their struggle, and their love. Thank you to the women and men who took the time to send in articles.

Long ago, I realized that it was not easy or comfortable to be a female in our society. I also realized that it was not easy or comfortable to be a female within the church, but in this, the end of my first year of seminary, I have come to sadly realize just how uncomfortable it is to be female within the church of Jesus Christ. It was something that I did not expect to find at a Lutheran seminary.

The devaluation of women is nothing new. It surrounds us in our day to day affairs, and it threatens us in many ways. The church throughout the ages has assisted in the devaluation of women. Some of our illustrious church "fathers" even believed that women were not "truly human". Some people say that today in slightly subtler ways. Evil has often been blamed on women, and I hear it is still blamed on women today, even in sermons given in preaching classes at our seminary. The Malleus Maleficarum was written out of misogyny of this kind, and women were burned at the stake by many "good Christian" men because of this document and this attitude. Evil has often been projected on those who had no voice to refute it. The voices of women have been cut off and silenced from much of our history, and the wounds are many and deep from this tragic happening. There is much healing still to be done within the church.

The church of Jesus Christ is not a boy's club, and if it is a boy's club, then it is not the church of Jesus Christ. How often it seems like a boy's club to me. One has only to listen to the radio stations and talk programs of our fundamentalist brothers and sisters, or read The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood, or notice the anger over something as simple as inclusive language -- consider how quickly women who speak out against sexism are labeled as "radical" and "bitter", while men who speak out sexistly are merely "cute", "just kidding around", or "just like that". The old double standard is alive and well and relaxing in a chaise lounge with a tall, cool drink. And here, at our lovely seminary on the hill in historic Gettysburg, sexism and our friend, the old double standard, are indeed relaxing; in fact, they are nurtured and cared for diligently! Perhaps even paid homage to. And we few, who dare to speak out, are quietly ignored, and our voices are silenced. Same old story. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Feminism is merely the affirming of the full humanity of women in mutuality and equality. So, why is this so threatening and so offensive to so many? I find it absolutely appalling, and very, very sad that anti-feminine attitudes are so strong within the church and within this seminary.

The church of Jesus Christ is open to all people, to proclaim the good news to all people! Let those who have ears hear!!

K.E. Bell



REFLECTION ON WOMEN AND THE CHURCH

By Rev. Evelyn J. Aurand,
Pastor, Epler's United Church of Christ

My grandmother was an active church woman in the Evangelical and Reformed Church. She taught in the Primary Department, belonged to the Women's Guild and sang in the choir. Grandma "graduated" from a one-room school known as "Mud College."

My mother was an active church woman in the Lutheran Church. At 89 she's no longer able to be active. For many years she taught young people and then joined the Huddle Class. She played the piano in Sunday School, sang in the choir and sewed "scuffles" for the hospital. She is a graduate of Hood College.

I am an active church woman. After volunteering for many years, I graduated from Gettysburg Seminary with the MAR degree. I served on the LCW (Now ELCW) staff. Ordained in the United Church of Christ, I have been a pastor since 1974. I am a graduate of Hood College, the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg and Lancaster Theological Seminary.

My daughter is an active church woman in the Methodist Church. She has directed choirs, sings in a choir, plays with handbell, recorder and instrumental ensembles. She ministers to children in the public school. She has degrees from Hood College, Butler University and Tennessee State University.

My granddaughters are also active in the church. Their ministry as healers and joy-bringers is important in both church and home. They think it a little unusual to have a grandmother who is pastor of a congregation.

I want them to grow up knowing that you don't have to be a pastor to minister. I envision the church of their future as a community where women and men, both ordained and lay will be equal partners in shared ministry. Amen!

"There is no longer Jew
or Greek, there is no
longer slave or free, there
is no longer male & female;
for all of you are One
in Christ Jesus

- Galatians 3:28 (NRSV)

I remember, as a child, wanting to grow up to be a pastor. I never told anyone because I knew that they would tell me that women can't be pastors.

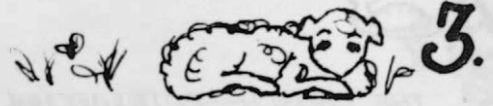
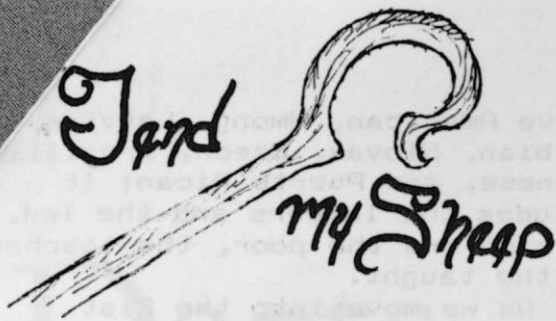
I remember, when I read about Elizabeth Platz's ordination, telling my family and friends that I wanted to be a pastor. They didn't approve.

I remember, as a seminarian, the first Sunday that I went out to Supply Preach. When the pastor of the congregation learned that the supply pastor was to be a woman he cancelled his vacation. He met me at the church and told me that he would lead the service and I would preach. During the announcements he apologized to the congregation for having a woman in the pulpit, and promised them that it would never happen again.

I remember, last year. The Sunday School books for the little ones in my congregation had a picture of a male pastor. They were supposed to talk about what that person does in the church. They couldn't figure it out. They thought that only women could be pastors.

I remember, last Sunday. After church one of the little girls in the congregation was trying out the pulpit and the pastor's chair. And she said, "Maybe I'll be a pastor when I grow up". And I rejoice. No one told her that she can't be a pastor.

The Rev. Karen E. Tews, Pastor



Dear Paula,

I can share with you my present ministry as a Chaplain in a Lutheran Nursing Home in Montana. This is a very exciting ministry, for I serve people who are faithful in their calling as God's ministers. They take their baptismal call very seriously. Many of the people in this Home are charter members of their home churches. They helped to bring Christianity to this state.

For this type of ministry you need to love God's older children, and be willing to relate to their needs, and walk with them through the Valley of the Shadow of death. It is also a ministry of Word and Sacrament, as we celebrate Communion two times each week, in regular services, and once a week at the Alzheimers Special Service. I get to minister with the residents, their families, and the staff. It is wonderful to see these people who have blossomed as flowers in God's garden where once seeds were sown. They love their Lord and they show it. They love one another and they are always willing to help one another from place to place. Many who can walk, push those who are in wheelchairs from place to place.

This is a ministry that was usually done by men, and now women in Long Term Care ministry is increasing. It used to be a ministry for retiring ministers, and now it is seen as a very needed ministry and a reconized one. With people living longer we are going to need more homes, and hopefully more Christians ones, with a Chaplain doing fulltime ministry there. Its exciting, look to it as a possibility for yourself.

Rev. Betty K. Mawbey
Spiritual Life CoOrdinator
Good Shepherd Lutheran Home
Havre, Mt 59501

AFTER 20 YEARS, OR EVEN 5

Even after 20 years, or the 5 that I have known...


the polite grimaces
the kindly ignorance
the forced inclusion
the gentle patronizing
and the trips to the women's bathroom (if there is one) by myself still hurt, O Lord...
the subtle divisions
the unshared stories
the blank stares
the lack of options in clergy-wear catalogues penetrate the sting and wound.
But I pray that I will only love you more, O Lord, and model
your grace
your mercy
your compassion
For those who would limit your call to faithfulness
to the eloquent un-Moses-like stars
to the powerful Pharaohs
or to the unusual, the expected, the slightly boring among us,
need to know that your kingdom will never be closeted
in majestic boardrooms
in men's bathrooms
or church supply catalogues.
For your kingdom reigns in and beyond

all our illusions
all our brokenness
And your kingdom comes
to make sacred even our most unloving thoughts
to make whole even our most wounded souls.

So, even after 20 years, or the 5 that I have known...

I pray that I will only love you more, O Lord, and be
your vessel
your servant
your most blessed child.

Pastor Anne R. Roser
Class of 1985

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*THE CHURCH--PATRIARCHAL? FEMINIST?
BODY OF CHRIST?*

It has always interested me that the Church is described as patriarchal, when the reality seems to indicate just the reverse. While the public leadership of the Church has been historically and continues to be dominated by men, the majority of the faithful appear to be women. Throughout the ages, while the Papa had the job of interrogating his children in the catechism and Scriptures, it was the Mama who actually did the teaching, the motivating, and the supporting. Today, it may be still predominantly men who preach, but it is mostly women who hear and do; it is mostly women who comprise the Church in action.

Perhaps this is true for the same reasons that it was Peter, James and John who were asked to watch with Jesus while he prayed, but James' mother Mary, Mary Magdalene and Salome who were the ones to discover the empty tomb and inform the apostles. Perhaps it is true simply because women have more time to give. Whatever the reasons and however disturbing the imbalance of leadership, the Church is, after all, not a human creation, but a divine one. What is important, therefore, is recognizing Jesus as Lord of the Church and getting beyond the labels. For if we perceive the Church (angrily or delightedly) as "patriarchal" or as "feminist", then it will have a negative effect on our participation in the community of saints. When we worship at the altar of quotas crying "Justice!", we become deaf to the call of the Lord, which does not regard gender or race, but seeks faith and the willingness to take up one's cross and lay down one's life to follow Jesus. Indeed, the community created in the image of God, the body of Christ, is not all women or all men, nor is it one group dominating over another, but it is male and female; comprising persons whose skin is red, yellow, black, and white and whose culture is German,

Native American, Hmong, Latvian, Namibian, Slovak, Czech, Brazilian, Japanese, and Puerto Rican; it includes the leaders and the led, the rich and the poor, the teachers and the taught.

As we move into the 21st century, it is time to stop creating the Church in our image, time to stop turning the tables of history in futile attempts to create what we perceive as justice and time to recommit ourselves--men and women, children and youth--to him who was pierced for our sin and yet stands calling us to new life as the whole people of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

*The Rev. Beth A. Stoverschlegel,
Pastor, St. Petri Ev. Lutheran
Church, Philadelphia, PA*

I wish I could remember who told me this story, but, like all great stories, the better they get the fuzzier their origins become. I heard this at Gettysburg Seminary, around 1981:

A female Lutheran Pastor was on a panel with several Roman Catholic priests and other clergy at Catholic University in Washington, DC discussing the ordination of women.

A Roman priest made the point that it was essential that those persons that stand in the place of Christ at the Eucharist must be male because, simply, Our Lord was a man.

When at that point, after a long and frustrating discussion on this matter, the female Lutheran pastor responded, "Well then, it seems to me that in your ordination rite your Bishops are really laying their hands on the wrong part of the body."

*Rev. Walt Cleckley
Salisbury, North Carolina
Gettysburg-Class of 1983*



Darts in the Vestments

Donna
Schaper

I learned right away that I had to act normal even if I wasn't. We women clergy, even in the fairly liberal United Church of Christ, dare not call more attention to ourselves than already exists. The more others stare, the more we must resist the staring. The temptation is to act like we're the only ones, to take the credit personally for sexually integrated pulpits. This temptation passes as soon as we remember the full-scale social movement it took to open these pulpits to our preaching. Like the bathrooms of the old South, admittance was hard-won. Now we have the left-over stares, the astonishments of the many who said it couldn't be done, who said nobody could do it.

The astonishment wears off as people see that women are a lot like men in the ministry. There is the same chance that he or she can preach or pastor. Each can talk relatively equal percentages of people into teaching Sunday School. They commit similar numbers of embarrassing sins, like adultery with the choir director or leaving the ministry to sell insurance or forgetting the time of your daughter's wedding rehearsal. They have relatively equal rates of success too, picking just the right words for Aunt Susie's funeral and leaving out the fact that no one really liked her. Or showing up to hold the hand of the daughter with AIDS and her bewildered parents. Or bailing the drunken husband out of jail but not taking him home again. Or being the only one who could get through to the kid on drugs. You know the litany. The kind of success clergy have is limited if lovely. Gender has little to do with it.

Now that we're more than a decade into this

so-called revolution, at least we no longer have to appear on as many panels consisting of a woman lawyer, doctor, cop, and minister. My participation on these panels ended when one cop told the story of her male partner fainting when she was hit in the belly with a rifle while six months pregnant. She had to apprehend the criminal and revive her partner. Thus ended the panel.

Such things may not fully disappear until our daughters and sons grow old enough to have memories that women have always been clergy. For now I don't really blame the older women in my church for regretting that they will have to be buried by one of us rather than by one of them. Nothing in their lives prepared them for women in such roles. If anything, their latter years have been too manless already.

Seminaries were the first to accept us, but there is good reason to believe that they wanted our tuition money. Now most larger congregations will take one of us as associate minister; after all, women make great assistants in almost every endeavor. Normality may come when we have our own pulpits, as well as peccadillos, in the same numbers as men. Or perhaps it will arrive when men consent to be the associates of female pastors, a day no one has quite glimpsed yet.

It is interesting to chart the differences in denominations; the "higher" the church, the fewer the women. The stronger the sense of mystery around the bread and wine, the more reluctant the church to relinquish that power to women. The Catholics lead this pack, with Episcopalians following soon behind. Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists all have an easier time of it, probably because the mysteries are smaller, the powers of clergy fewer.

The rate of acceptance of women into the



clergy is actually astonishing. The religious supply stores all carry vestments with darts in them. The religious insurance companies feature women clergy on most of their covers with their spouses getting extraordinary attention. Male spouses actually have a pretty good time of it.

I'll never forget the senior pastor of my first congregation inviting me and my husband to dinner. My husband asked what the congregation would expect of him. My boss said, "Oh, nothing much, I'm sure." At which point his wife, Mrs. Senior Pastor, knocked all the pots out of the cabinets in the kitchen. I thought it an absolutely appropriate response on her part. Perhaps the real difference in male and female clergy will turn out to be that we don't have wives. Congregations will only get one employee when they hire us.

People keep trying to convince me that I am abnormal or extraordinary. Maybe it's because I was divorced young or married a Jew the second time or had twins. All of these things bother people, because they think there's enough strangeness in my ordination. I always tell them about the weirdness in my women clergy friends. Some are councilwomen and clergy, others moonlight by singing in night-clubs. Some are expert chess players, others are superb softball pitchers. We are not all heterosexuals. Male clergy are no more and no less normal. I always continue in this conversation by asking a few questions designed to reveal how abnormal their own lives really are. After

all, you pilot a small private plane, don't you? And what about that rare disease your daughter's lesbian lover has? Catsup on your scrambled eggs? Gin in your ginger ale? Haven't voted since 1964? Normal is just not a religious category. When it stares at you, it is very important to stare it down.

I much prefer the velveteen rabbit's notion of real. You get there when you've been loved so much that all your hair rubs off. If that is our destination, most of us are already there.

I stared with dismay at the church of my happy youth as it told me that it didn't want me."

Now that almost half the people in Protestant seminaries are women, I suppose I should feel glad. It represents a victory, a harvest, maybe even a redemption of what I did when I was twenty. At that time, along with many other women, I fought to get the

Lutheran Church in America to ordain women. Then I stared with dismay at the church of my happy youth as it told me that it didn't want me. That dismay stayed with me all the way out the door, when after a series of embarrassments designed to get me ordained in the church of my baptism, I finally had to realize that they didn't want me. That they weren't going to ordain me and that the reason was that I was a woman. Luckily, I didn't learn that the Lutherans didn't ordain women then (they do now) until after I had completed two years in seminary. They themselves couldn't bear to say it out loud—we do not ordain women—and so they allowed us to prepare for the ministry as a form

Donna Schaper lives and ministers in New York state. She is the author of *Narratives Against the Current: A Book of Common Power*.

of enrichment of whatever it was they thought would be our lives after graduation.

I'll never forget the day my one honest professor sat down with me after class. The class was Systematic Theology. He said, Donna, what are you doing here? Perplexed, I told him I was preparing to be a parish pastor. Why? he asked. Because I had so many good pastors when I was a child, because my family moved quite frequently, and each time I needed the home of the church and the youth group to garner the courage to enter a new school. People were good to me in the church. When bad things happened in my family, I found the pastors reliable, loving, kind. I just wanted to pass on what I have been given.

The professor kindly paused before he said you can't be a pastor. Females can't be ordained. The sky fell. It took me years to realize that what he said about the church I loved so much was true. It really didn't ordain women. Maybe I can't yet be glad about all the progress of women in ministry; I haven't yet recovered from the surprise and sadness that we were excluded for so long.

Then again, my lack of gratitude may be rooted in the many embarrassments of knocking on and then down the door. Today I wouldn't consider begging the way I did then. The question of whether this was the club I wanted to join is simply too present. After I graduated from seminary, and completed an extra year and an internship, both of which were suggested by the denomination as a way to stall the justice in my claim for ordination, I couldn't get a job. Some bishops just said no, no women allowed. Others played games and said maybe.

Thus I embarked on an employment plan. I would knock on the door of every church in Tucson, Arizona, where I then lived. I would present my credentials, my faith, my interest in serving God and humanity. I visited every church in Tucson—Brethren, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, first, second, and third of everybody. Everybody kindly said no. I was on the verge of taking a job at Garibaldi's employment agency as a job counselor because it is hard to eat tuna fish for longer than a month at a time when I had a totally female inspiration. It must be my clothes.

I had a credit card and went straight to the local department store and used it, fully intending to return everything if the trick didn't work. I bought a new blue suit, earrings, necklace, and shoes. I then went back to the First Congregational Church in Tucson, where I had seen a

glimmer of interest in the pastor's eye. I had decided to tell him that I would work for half of what he ought to pay an associate. While waiting in his outer office to see him a second time, a woman who happened to be chair of one of the key committees in the church was also waiting. I told her the whole story, including the half-price deal. As soon as the minister opened the door to his office, she informed him that I was hired and that she was paying the first year's tab herself. I really don't know if the chance meeting of my now dear friend was my last chance at ministry, but that day it certainly felt that way. Accidents lessen the embarrassment of facing closed doors, tightly shut, but they are not quite enough to allow complete forgetting.

Now sixteen years into the ministry, when people don't even modify the word minister with "woman" in front of me anymore, when many understand that women clergy and men clergy have about the same percentage of gifts and graces, flaws and flamboyances, that you can go as right or wrong with a woman as with a man in the pulpit, now that so much change has happened in so short a time, I really should feel glad.

But I haven't quite gotten there. Satisfied, yes, even deeply so. But glad gets me too close to grateful, and I can't quite take the step. There is far too much about the ordained ministry itself that is troubling, the way it interferes with people taking responsibility for their own spiritual lives, as though the minister were the doctor responsible for their health, or their lawyer responsible for their quarrels, or their congressman responsible for stopping pollution. Often we get in the way, we get caught between the people and their gods. If we're stupid or sinful, or don't preach well, then people seem to assume that God must be like that. It's a useful cop-out for many. We become the personal property of our parishes rather than the raisers of the ancient ruins or those who restore streets to dwell in. Our parishes really don't want us involved in politics or economics or any of a million preventive prophesies which are so desperately needed. Too many of them are satisfied if we live with them in their own back yards and close the curtains around our communities.

When I was excluded from the ministry, it looked less tarnished to me than it does now that I am included. I suppose this is why I am so grateful that Roman Catholic women are taking a longer look around as they consider priesthood for women. Protestants rushed right in to status quo ministry; Catholics are suggesting that maybe ministry needs to be changed before women want to join the club. Next time I am bruised from the insult of exclusion, I am going to think twice before demanding insider status. Normal may no longer be a suitable destination.

“Normal is not just a religious category. When it stares at you, it is very important to stare it down.”

Women, the Church, and the Present
by Myron Schevey class of '72"

It is always dangerous to generalize especially when one is a man writing on a topic as nebulous as, "Women, the Church, and the Present." Obviously women have been part of the church since its beginning, when they were among the followers of Jesus and witnesses to the empty tomb. What is new, is the presence of women within the ordained ministry among Lutherans in North America.

Where I see the impact of ordained women in the church is within clergy support groups. My perception is that some female colleagues are more inclined to share their own personal spiritual experiences than most male colleagues, and they are more responsive to the personal spiritual experiences of others in the group. Thus through the openness of some women clergy God appears to be infusing warmth into His church.

Mistaken Identity

I completed a quarter of clinical pastoral education in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Although only one of our group was ordained, all of us chaplains were advised to wear clerical garb when we were on call for emergencies. On my first on call day I arrived late for lunch at the cafeteria. After scanning the room for a familiar face, I made my way to the table of a student nurse I'd met on my rounds. "Oh my God!" he exclaimed as he looked up at me. "No," I replied, "just a pastor."

submitted by the Rev. Beth B. Folkemer

Women, the Church, and the Future

In 1990 it is still a novelty to most Americans for a pastor to be female! If present seminary enrollments are any indication, however, that situation will be changing soon.

The "feminization" of the church will be seen by some as a weakening of the church's power--not only by those who really believe that women are the weaker sex, but also by those who do not understand the gospel truth that Christ's power lies not in the kind of power that the world values. It is even hard for me, a woman pastor, to put aside these worldly values.

It is also hard for me to discern and put aside the world's values on heterosexuality, homosexuality, and celibacy, especially when many church people have also adopted a post-Victorian prudishness, an unbiblical and unrealistic overvaluation of chastity, and a homophobia that denies God's gifts to people who are unlike "us." The theologically trained women of the church are the ones who must challenge these attitudes.

As a former editor of Table Talk, I congratulate you on your 25th anniversary and on your invitation to the alumni to contribute.

Judith B. Helm, '85
Macungie, PA

Since my graduation from LISC in 1979, my Christian Spirituality has been enriched by women in the Church. Most notably through my wife who is ordained. I have come to appreciate and nurture my right side of my brain - which has resulted in a more balanced and whole understanding of myself; a deeper and more awesome sense of God; and a freedom to rejoice in the gift of life. Women in the Church - Thanks be to God!

-Rev. Peter Kuritz
Class of 1979