

# THIRTY YEARS *BEFORE*

The following was originally written in 1990, twenty years after women's ordination, and revised in 2000, including the title change. Further revisions and added material are included here to provide the essay for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Campus Ministry in 2007. March 14, 2007. Alice Otterness (Thoresen) Hoaglund.

Thirty years after the ordination of women was a great cause for celebration throughout the ELCA. Likewise, thirty years *before* the ordination of women is worth remembering and celebrating, especially role of women in campus ministry. These years gave to the church the unique richness women brought to this developing ministry. At the same time these women found that campus ministry gave to them an opening for service to the church when the doors to ordination were closed to them.

Many fields were reaping the harvest of women's gifts. Parish workers were instrumental in the beginnings of home mission churches across the nation. Women with degrees in Christian Education were serving in established congregations. Ms. Clara Paulson was a valued faculty member of Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary in Pennsylvania. Women were continuing to serve as missionaries abroad. Women's auxiliaries were providing leadership opportunities for laywomen in local, regional and national positions.

In the church's ministry at state colleges and universities, women worked alongside men in ministry with an openness and freedom, taken for granted by those involved, but remarkable for the church at large. Current consciousness had not reached the point where large numbers of women were pressing for ordination. Many, however, thrived in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for their intellectual and theological abilities, as well as their special gifts for enhancing the church's ministry. Such openness was not prevalent throughout the church.

Proceeding these years and fostering this interest in campus ministry was a cadre of women from the different church bodies who were serving in various capacities in the church's ministry in higher education. Mary Markley, one of the first women executives of any denomination, served from 1921 to 1946 in a dual role in the ULCA, both with women's missionary activity and higher education. Mildred Winston was appointed to the ULCA Board of Education in 1928 and worked actively promoting campus ministry until her retirement in the 1950's.

In the American Lutheran Conference several women were brought on board in the 1940's by the Student Service Commission to strengthen work on state college campuses, among them were Hortense Hage Storvick, Betty Garton Ulrich, June Sederstrom Cavert, Arlene Olmstead Silness.

When the Division of Student Service of the National Lutheran Council was formed in the 1940's, Ruth Wick was elected assistant executive secretary. Wilma Westburg, Helene Rasmussen and Ruth Lerud were some of the earliest campus ministry women in California. Norma Arneson Knutson traveled doing regional work in the 1950's. These and other women from this period are named in

the book titled The Planting Years, published by National Lutheran Campus Ministry on the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of campus ministry in 1987. By 1950, the number of full-time women counselors is recorded as 18. They can be identified by name on the campuses where they served and in a picture of the first Staff Conference in 1946 in Duluth, Minnesota, on page 54.

International and ecumenical connections fostered by campus ministry leadership also gave women of that day role models of theologically astute women who were not ordained. Margaret Neovius Deschner from Finland launched a significant Bible study program among students in the United States. Marie-Jeanne de Haller of the United Church of Canada, a staff member of the World Student Christian Federation, is an example of a theologically trained woman sharing her gifts with the wider church through the ecumenical student movement. Madeline Borot of France, and other women who preceded her, gave leadership in the World Council of Churches at the Geneva headquarters desk called “Cooperation of Men and Women in the Church.” Connie Parvey, an ELCA pastor from University Lutheran Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, later served in this capacity.

In the vocabulary of the day, women in campus ministry were called “counselors.” They directed ministries in cooperation with contact pastors in local parishes or worked with full-time campus pastors. In this role they served as advisers to the campus Lutheran Student Association of America (LSAA). Their responsibilities were to lead Bible studies and discussions, encourage students to worship in local congregations, and talk with students about personal problems, faith issues, and intellectual/theological questions prompted by the academic environment. Underlying this activity was fostering of the community life, which so richly characterized campus ministry. Their style of partnered leadership helped bring forth unusually responsible students who served in local, regional, and national LSAA positions and eventually in the church at large.

In the summer of 1948, the Division of Student Service of the National Lutheran Council provided scholarships for eight counselors to attend the Lutheran Theological Seminary, which at that time was in Maywood, Illinois<sup>1</sup>. The women lived on campus for the summer session. Such a step was a bold adventure for students and faculty alike. Among the professors that first summer were Joseph Sittler, H. Grady Davis, Granger Westberg, Theodore Bachmann and C. Umhau Wolf. Armin Weng was president of the seminary at the time. The curriculum of theology and pastoral care in the setting of a global and ecumenical outlook made the experience invaluable for this group of women. The initiative of summer study continued and resulted in theological courses as a prerequisite for women in campus ministry. Other Lutheran seminaries invited women students as well, often in the field of Christian Education. Lutheran women were also earning degrees at seminaries like Union in New York City. The hunger among women for theological education was growing, whether or not there were opportunities for employment.

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<sup>1</sup> Women at Maywood Seminary 1948 included Katy Markhus, Millie Schalkhauser, Cleone Olson, Blanche Rockne Jensen, Virginia Schwenke, Alice Otterness (Thoresen) Hoaglund, Trudy Rogness Jensen (deceased).

A global and ecumenical outlook was fostered by an additional experience for several campus ministry women in the summer of 1952<sup>2</sup>. Some of these same women mentioned above, plus others, were offered discounted fares to travel by a converted troop ship of the Holland America Line to attend the second Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Hanover, Germany. The Youth Study Conference preceding the Assembly in Sachsenheim was also included in the plan. The young people (under age 30) were mainly German, but came from other churches throughout the world. A few campus pastors and students from the United States were also there. The vision of the church and the sense of being involved in the larger world stayed with the participants and enriched their ministries. Carl Lund-Quist, former national LSAA president and a former campus pastor at the University of Minnesota, was the LWF executive at the time and welcomed these campus ministry visitors enthusiastically.

The issue for campus ministry in the years around the 1950's was not whether women could be ordained, but whether student congregations could be legitimate points for preaching and administering the sacraments apart from existing parishes. When this latter question was resolved in favor of allowing student assemblies with a distinct worship life, the necessity for women in campus ministry to seek ordination became clear. The first woman to be ordained in the Lutheran ministry in 1970 was Elizabeth Platz. She was serving at the University of Maryland at the time and was subsequently called to be the full-time campus pastor.

Credit for the acceptance of women who were theologically competent and suitable for ordained ministry goes to men and women in leadership in the church in these critical years, notably professors in theological seminaries, pastors and laypeople in parishes, and leaders in campus ministry. Among those who fostered this interest and ability among women, who were looking for ways to fulfill their Christian vocation, were mentors and role models such as Gould Wickey, Fredrik Schiotz, Morris Wee, Donald Heiges, Henry Hetland, Al Dillemath, Burnice Fjellman, and Henry Horn.

The era of thirty years prior to the ordination of women in our church was richly fulfilling for many women in campus ministry. The frustrations were also there, such as a pension plan, which is still a painful reality for some. The acceptance many women experienced in this ministry may underlie why a few were slow about becoming part of the feminist movement in the church. Curiously, had some not been as satisfied with opportunities in campus ministry, the ordination timetable might have been moved up a few years. However, most found advocacy for women clergy a natural consequence of their own experience. The thirty years *before* ordination, plus unnumbered years before that, were a prelude to the bright new day which opened up in 1970, when women were finally recognized as the scholars, care-givers, and community builders they have always been, and became part of the ordained leadership of the Lutheran Church. Thanks be to God.

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<sup>2</sup> Women at the LWF Assembly 1952 included Clarice Leite, Blanche Rockne Jensen, Bonnie Sorem Anderson, Katy Markhus, Mertice (Pat) (Schmidt), Virginia Yeager (Wilke), Alice Otterness (Thoresen) Hoaglund, and Evie Schaefer Diers (deceased).