



"The Church of Christ in every age, beset by change but Spirit-led, must claim and test its heritage, and keep on rising from the dead"
(Fred Pratt Green, 1969).

Dear church,

Words matter. Words matter in our Scripture, in our hymns, in our governing documents, and beyond. Fifty years ago, on June 29, 1970, the Lutheran Church in America voted to change the word "man" to "person" in its bylaws and opened the door for the ordination of women. The American Lutheran Church achieved the same thing by resolution a few months later. The church was led by the Spirit to change. At the time it was scary for some. Fifty years later, it is now part of our heritage.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=274OZzvVz6c&feature=youtu.be>

Fifty years later we celebrate the anniversary as a whole church. The influence of those decisions 50 years ago is not merely the impact on women. This is a celebration for the whole church, because the whole church has been strengthened by the gifts of ordained women in its leadership. We celebrate how these pastors have shared the Word, including with words of compassion, conviction, and curiosity. We also give thanks for the moments when there are no words, but they have offered their presence.

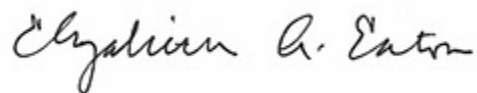
We also know that women who are pastors have struggled in ways men who are pastors have not. They deal with sexual harassment, disrespect, and often lower pay due to gender-based discrimination. The first women of color in our predecessor bodies weren't ordained until 1979. And it wasn't until 2009 that barriers to ordination were removed for LGBTQIA+ individuals in committed relationships. We know that racism and heterosexism complexify and intensify these problems. This discrimination is also part of our heritage, and something that we need to continue to work to eliminate.

In recognition of this 50th anniversary on June 29th, I invite you to express gratitude to a pastor who is a woman for how she has influenced your life. It could be by letter or email, or by other means. If you post on social media, please use the hashtag **#thankyoutopastor**. If you would like more resources for celebrating this year, go to elca.org/50yearsofordainedwomen, which has an adult forum, Bible Study, video, and worship materials.

Fifty years after 1970, we also live in a world beset by change. I am grateful for the Spirit who continues to lead us and for the women God has called to minister to us.

I thank God for all of you who minister so faithfully.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton".

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop,
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"
Galatians 3:28.