

**TODAY I AM CELEBRATING 25 YEARS OF ORDINATION INTO THE OFFICE OF  
WORD AND SACRAMENT IN THE ELCIC.**

When I was in seminary, Dr. David Jacobsen, my homiletics or preaching professor, taught us that there is no “I in sermon”. The argument of course is that as a preacher our goal is to make sure that people stay focussed on the gospel and not on us as preacher. We are conduits to the gospel. Sure, there are stories that can be used to help in our proclamation, but we need to use them very carefully. Today, I have to admit I am going to break that rule as I share a little bit of reflection of how the gospel has affected my life and led me to the anniversary of twenty-five years of ordained ministry.

It is quite a common occurrence in my life to have someone ask me “When and how were you called to ministry?” Well, first let me start by saying that we have all been called to the ministry- the ministry of the priesthood of all believers. Through our baptism God has freely claimed us as daughters and sons making us his children so that we might know his love shown to us in the Trinity. Our role in response is to live the call to share the gospel daily.

I was baptized in Kitchener at St. Peter's Lutheran Church – the big one on TV, on October 11, 1971. We moved to a neighbourhood around a mission congregation St. Philips where I attended Sunday School and Confirmation. I have to admit it sure wasn't confirmation that set the stage for ministry. It planted seeds. Our pastor was kind of scary. I remember as a child, we were not allowed to commune until we were confirmed. I dreaded going up to

communion before confirmation because Pastor Stewart would be place a wet purificator on our cheek and say a blessing. It was so uncomfortable. He was an academic and just someone whom I could not relate too. Having said this St. Philips was always my home congregation until it closed a few years ago. Interestingly the building has been repurposed into an aboriginal outreach centre that offers programs of cultural learning and such.

When I started dating my ex-wife, we both attended church together. That is when I became very involved in youth ministry. I became a youth leader. Like the young people of Zion I took kids across the country to youth gatherings. I was involved in a planning committee for one of the national gatherings and one of the synod gatherings. I sat on the Eastern Synod Youth Committee and ran retreats at Camp Edgewood occasionally. The church was kind of my life. The more I got to know a couple of pastors the more I felt called to ordained ministry. I struggled with the call. There is never one reason or direct way that people are called. I had finished college was working in a distribution centre doing sales. When I was laid off permanently that was it. The last sign to go to seminary.

After completing a Master of Divinity after four years of study, I was ordained as a Lutheran pastor in a Roman Catholic Church in London on July 7 2000 at the Eastern Synod Convention. I served my first call in Normanby Township at St. Paul's and St. James. Then I served St. James Renfrew, All Saints Newcombville Nova Scotia, a Call to Specialized Ministry as a chaplain in Kitchener, Christ Peterborough, and now at Zion. I have enjoyed every parish I have served, for different reasons. I love the fact that each parish is unique. Regardless of whether they are rural, urban or rural urban, small town, farming,

fishing or forestry communities, they are all different. Yet they are one in the same. Baptism connects them all because we all have many gifts and we all play a part as the body of Christ in different ways.

I have been asked many times “Why would you ever want to be a pastor?” Well, simply put I love God, and I love people. There are very few professions where one is given the privilege to enter into people’s lives during celebrations and sadness; or is able to visit and commune with a senior member in their home; or care for a family as they keep vigil over someone they love in a hospital room; or preside at weddings and funerals. I get to lead worship weekly and preach the gospel, teach both children and adults (even if confirmation drives me nuts sometimes-don’t get me wrong it is actually one of my favorite parts of the week). I get to watch the people I shepherd carry out all kinds of ministry, reaching out to the community, reaching into our community. I love ministry because of people. Don’t get me wrong, there are difficult times in every parish. The good times though have far outweighed the bad. I also love ministry because I know I am cared for. My family has grown during this time. My second child, Grace was born in Normanby and they threw a congregational shower for us. I went through a divorce. I went on stress leave to deal with my epilepsy. I married the most wonderful, beautiful, loving and caring woman in Pastor Sue. Both of our congregations celebrated with us. I continue to struggle with my health a bit. The people of Zion have been so supportive. No matter good or bad, personally, my congregations have been there to care for me.

After twenty-five years of ministry I can honestly say my two favorite experiences during worship are not Christmas or Easter. It is not at a wedding or funeral (by the way I much prefer funerals-they are much quieter than noisy brides).

The first is when two tiny hands reach out for the body of Christ. Once while serving wine from the pouring chalice, I had a conversation with a little boy leaning on the altar rail. Jack said to me, "What's in there?" So, I stopped bent over and showed him, and we had a little conversation during the Holy meal. That moment was sacred.

The second experience that is my favorite is when I get to baptize a baby like Everett today. I love holding a little child in my hands, and as she/he looks into my eyes, I get to splash them with water in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. These precious children receive God's unconditional free love, by way of the Holy Spirit. They become one of us, children of God. It is my joy to baptize you today Everett and it is Zion's joy to celebrate with you.

May God's grace always be sufficient for Everett and all of you this day. And I want to say that includes those who are not baptized. Remember ultimately there are no conditions to being a child of God. God's grace and love is for all people. Thanks be to God. Amen.