

Kay Ward

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to *Expectations To Insure Readiness for Ordination*. The entire article deserves attention but I will respond to only one of the sections, primarily because it addresses many of the issues and concerns that I experience as I travel around the country speaking to folks who are wrestling with a call to ministry.

The “Spiritual Expectations” paragraphs make explicit what has often been unspoken, or at best carried along in the oral tradition of our denomination. Most folks speak easily of a relationship with Jesus Christ and many will use serving language to describe their call, but that service is often understood in a very narrow pastoral or geographic sense; i.e. “a teaching ministry in our congregation” or “becoming a chaplain in a nearby hospital.”

The pilgrim language of these paragraphs does not play well in our culture. Being willing to consider any call to ordained service throughout the Moravian Unity is service on a very grand scale. In a culture that appears to be more mobile than ever, we may have become less willing to see ourselves serving outside of a small regional area. Communication and transportation connects us globally but geographically, we are becoming less willing to move out of our familiar regions.

When I am sitting in someone’s living room, the conversation often goes like this:

“I have always felt called. I didn’t respond to the call before. I fell in love - moved into another kind of vocation - had children. But now I am feeling that call more urgently and I think God wants me to be an ordained minister

in the Moravian Church. I am very active in my congregation - I am there every time the door opens.”

Have you tested out that call in the congregation?

“People say they always thought I should be a minister. The pastor has been very encouraging. But I don’t really see myself leaving this community. My husband/wife has a business here - my children wouldn’t want to move - my parents are elderly - we own a house. So I have looked into getting my seminary degree on-line - by extension - in a nearby city.

Have you considered Moravian Seminary?

“Not really - it’s too far away. And I would hate to burn my bridges here at home because I see myself serving the church here in this community. I don’t really feel called to serve anywhere else. I trust that God will work this out - if I am meant to be in ministry, the district board (PEC) will find a way for me to serve here. God wouldn’t ask me to jeopardize my family.”

Two things are apparent to me from these conversations:

1. as a denomination, we have failed to be clear about the call to ministry - how it works and how we believe that God works. Every person that I talk to eagerly points to Clergy X who has done what they intend to do. They earned an M.Div., were ordained and have continued to serve in Moravian congregations without ever leaving their home. Pilgrim language is not persuasive because it is so out of context. We seldom speak of it. It may be

a generational thing. I think there was a time when everyone understood that responding to God's call to serve the church could mean that your children would not be with their grandparents on Christmas morning. Aunts and uncles would not be there to attend junior's baseball games. Cousins would not endure their cousin's piano recitals. It was understood. Folks knew that sometimes, in fact, you might be called to a church that was near the family home ground, but those occasions would be rare.

2. as a denomination, we have failed to be imaginative and consistent in our encouragement and blessing of lay ministry so that many folks who express being called to the ordained ministry are really being called to lay ministry but don't feel any acceptance

of such a ministry. About half the people I speak with, I think, are being called to a new kind of leadership within their congregation and are desperate for training and affirmation from their church.

This document will be a helpful resource as the church continues to encourage and assess those who are feeling called to the ordained ministry. If this is a work still in progress, I would encourage the writers to include some call to peace and justice issues, to more explicit evangelism and to the prophetic nature of the ordained ministry.

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Reply

Betsy Reed Bombick

I first want to say "thank you" to each of the respondents for their review and comments on the "Expectations of the Provincial Elders' Conferences, North and South to Insure Readiness for Ordination" (RFO) document. While reading your thoughts I was reminded of the old parable about the 6 blind mice each trying to describe an elephant. We each have our perspectives that arise from our individual experiences, and the whole is much greater than the mere sum of the parts

(sounds like confessional 'government!'). Your perspective and contributions are most helpful.

First let me be clear: I am not "officially" responding on behalf of the PECs; I am responding as an individual who is serving on the PEC (Southern Province). These are my personal reactions to your responses. I won't be able to address every point or issue raised here, although I will cover as