

# Ordination

by the Reverend Sheila Dierks



I'm sixty six. I've known a whole lot of priests. You have too. Now I am one of the tribe. Friday evening, September 18, 2009 a life-time dream got consecrated. Bishop Peter Hickman, presiding bishop of the Ecumenical Catholic Communion, witnessed the will of the community of the ECC

Rocky Mountain Region, heard the affirmations of discernment teams, listened to families standing in support, and paid attention to our pastor, Don Rickard, and our lay pastoral associate, Toni Stone.

Teri Harroun and I kneel before the bishop and promise to honor his Episcopal role. We lay prostrate while wonderful women and men place hands on us as the cloud of witnesses is chanted. Our hands anointed, our chalices presented, our stoles affixed, we turn to face the assembled. And the applause begins.

We are acknowledged in our new sacramental state. It is thrilling. But what exactly is it that delights? And what does that mean to a woman of my age? What should I know to honor best this new role? We have seen the savaging of the priesthood by members of this body. We have seen cowardice, betrayal, pride, and we have also witnessed the wounding and heartbreak of very good men. I am concerned for my own priesthood. What are the temptations? How shall I be of service?

So, prior to my ordination I wrote to a random twenty-five members of our community, Light of Christ ECC, in Longmont Co.

This is what the letter said:

It is almost exactly a month until the ordination at Light of Christ.

It is been our tradition, and one that comes from the early church, to seek the ideas and the faith of the community as we consider an important decision and move toward making it real.

As we approach September 18, I would like to invite you to share with me what you believe to be the important characteristics of a priest for you and for our community. What makes a positive difference for you?

Every voice gives me information about what we treasure in our celebrants, our homilists, those who come to visit us when we are ill, those who sit with us in times of grief.

With that small guideline, I have no specific questions, but rather, ask you to send me a few words, a paragraph, a page on your hopes and desires for my priesthood at Light of Christ.

Blessings and thanks,  
Sheila

Of course, there were those who leaped immediately to the invitation,

A woman in the parish wrote "I love a great storyteller-homilist who can draw from many teachings and traditions and has a sense of history... I appreciate someone who is genuine in their welcome of others into the congregation. A simple phone call or email to someone who has not been there for months might reveal they have a personal situation that needs a listening ear....

"A priest needs to be comfortable with people from all walks of life and at different developmental stages. We need to remember diversity does not just include including people regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation etc...It discourages clubbiness; the "in" crowd versus those outside of the circle.

"A priest needs to have a sense of balance and humor. A priest needs to listen for the language or approach that will work with each person; and an occasional laugh at how silly we all can be is a great relief. ..

"But I think it is also helpful for the priest to reach out to the other communities in the region and build bridges to other communities outside of the region..."

Another writes... "honesty, integrity, friendliness, compassion"

A member of a committee on which I also sat, said:

"Show us a kind, merciful and loving God, a God who enfolds us and yet who challenges us and pushes us on to action in our lives."

But she warns me, "...the inherent and traditional power of Priest can be overwhelming or cause people to be less forthcoming in thoughts and actions out of respect for the office when it is the person, and not the position, needing to be addressed."

A person who is a psychotherapist responded. "My hope for you is that you may experience the true "art" of your vocation ---that in your priesthood your unique talents, gifts and longings have found their true home.... in making this commitment, you are making a commitment to Joy."

Some thoughts came in closer to the ordination itself:

"The best priests that I have known are 'real' people who suffer, laugh, make mistakes, and live the messy life out loud. They don't pretend to have all the answers and 'The Church' isn't all they talk about. In fact the best priest I have known hardly talks about the Church at all. He talks about Jesus and who Jesus is personally to him."

A man who is friend and wisdom source commented,

"I love the priests who laugh, and truly value the call to 'Christian joy.' I love the priests who act like Jesus, and that to me is manifest in progressive thought, challenging the norms of society and church, and affirming those who society has not, especially women and the poor. "

And there were many more similar to these thoughts. So, what do I know?

It is interesting to note that sacraments, and how they are celebrated, are not a source of comment. In fact, except for some thoughts on homiletics no form and matter got mentioned in all the responses.

So what do people want? What do we all want? The assembled wish for a priest who tries to walk as Jesus did. Yes, "real" people who suffer, and laugh and live the messy life. Jesus did that: always in trouble, often saying the wrong thing, eating with criminals and outcasts, tax collectors, for heaven's sake.

Honest, Jesus does not seem to have been a person of subterfuge and connivance. Story teller, well, he was superb at that, knowing the story and the inversion of meaning that will draw in the listeners for the punch line. And didn't he listen, didn't he love kids? Didn't he find it okay to touch, yes touch the paralytic and the leper, the unclean woman? Didn't he pay attention?

It is fascinating to me that while Jesus did not invent ordination, and didn't seem to have much truck with priests, he certainly knew how to be priest to those around Capernaum and in Jerusalem. When I read the letters, humbled by their simplicity and honesty, I think that the writers looked to the one who has modeled it all.

May I, may we, priests, laugh out loud, may we search for the right words, may we listen abundantly, may we drink wine with our friends and companions, the clean and the not-so. May we not become prim, or righteous, or dishonest or cynical. May we find a way to enjoy the gift, the art of the calling. And when we

find that our shortcomings are evident to self and others, may we seek in our communities the forgiveness that heals and opens new life.

And may all our possibilities, all our longings, all our weaknesses, and our delights find themselves evident, humbly and happily evident, when we open our arms in sacrament and acknowledge the Jesus who lives in us all.