
Festschrift for Norma Cook Everist

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I first heard of Norma Everist when I was a student at Valparaiso University in about 1982. I had been hanging out at Deaconess Hall while trying to heal from the negative reaction of my family to my announcement that I was feeling called to pastoral ministry. There was Norma's picture up on the bulletin board, in a clerical collar, for some award or new committee assignment. The article said she was a deaconess and an ordained pastor. So, I learned that the two were not mutually exclusive, one could indeed be both: one could train to be a deaconess, join this supportive community and at a later time go to seminary and become ordained, but one didn't have to leave the sisterhood. This was a welcome word of grace for my young mind.

Subsequently, I met Norma in the deaconess community and I was told that she had been a true trailblazer in helping move our community forward in acceptance first of married women with children coming to Annual Meeting, and then of ordained women celebrating the Eucharist among us. Neither of these changes came without awkwardness and pain. Because our community has its roots in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), the latter change was especially difficult, and I'm told that there was one Annual Meeting at which Norma had been invited to celebrate and then had to be un-invited because some sisters were not ready to receive that gift from her. A less grounded, loving, forgiving person may have left the community then, never to be seen again. But Norma stuck it out with us, for which I am eternally grateful, because she paved the way for so many other deaconess pastors who came after her.

Later on, I know that she was an articulate and tenacious champion for the diaconate in her participation in the Committee for a New Lutheran Church, which was tasked with working out the structure and details for the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) from three structurally diverse church bodies. She brought her experience in our community, of "both/and" rather than "either/or" thinking to another level while, as both a deaconess and ordained pastor, ELCA she advocated for the importance of the diaconate in the life of the church.

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I never had the opportunity to take a class from Norma, but I am sure that she brought to the classroom the same creativity, love, and keen interest in her students that she always showed to me whenever I had interactions with her. And it has been an example to me in my own teaching. What helps to build up students for bold and compassionate ministry is precisely this: examples from our own ministries, enthusiasm for hearing students' own stories, and a great deal of love and compassion. I am so thankful to God for all the gifts that Norma Everist has brought to our diaconal community and to the wider church. She has had a very far-reaching impact on so many generations of people engaged in ministry. Well done, good and faithful *diakona*.