

**The Ordination of Rev. Sandra L. Reimer
The Call to Sandy Reimer and to the Congregation
February 22, 2009
Andy Bachmann and Larry Reimer**

Larry: When Sandy Reimer was confirmed in St. Luke Lutheran Church at age twelve, she was given a passage from the bible, chosen especially for her, the passage you just heard read and sung, First Corinthians 13. We usually hear that passage read at weddings. But it is about much more than two people falling in love. It is about a love that transforms and transcends all other religious doctrine or values.

It doesn't matter if we believe right, hope right, know our bibles backward or forward, and even submit ourselves to pain and sacrifice. If we don't have a love for all God's children, God's creatures, and God's creation, it doesn't matter a lick. Sandy, you have lived your life according to that overarching theme of love. It is that love in your life and ministry we recognize today.

Andy: Anyone who has ever spent time in a faith community OTHER than UCG knows this significant fact. There are typical ways of doing things...and then there is the UCG way. A typical way of pursuing ordained ministry would be to first hear a call from God and from others that your gifts would serve God's church in important and significant ways. A typical path would then lead you to seminary, for studies in bible, theology, and pastoral care. A typical path would then lead you to pursue 'In Care' status, followed by a call to a congregation, and then ordination into the ministry. And a typical path would then allow you to stumble through your first few years of ministry, learning the REALITY of ministry in a church, that has very little to do with Richard Niebuhr's theory of Christ and Culture, but has everything to do with how you bring your understanding of the Christ to our culture in a way that can make a difference in our lives. That would be typical. So, of course, that is almost the exact opposite of what our beloved Sandy Reimer has done to get here today.

Sandy's call to the ministry did come at an early age. She was an active leader in her church youth group. Her pastor saw her gifts for the ministry, and encouraged her to pursue church leadership. Unfortunately that meant being a deaconess, a vocation of pastoral visitation and never making it past the first pew in worship. But God's 'YES' is louder than the 'NO' you may have heard., and God's pull is stronger than the restraints you may have felt.

When you were a senior in High school you were called to be the Chaplain of the Student Council. As Chaplain, you were asked EVERYDAY to provide an encouraging spiritual insight for the student body. One significant factor to this is that 70% of your student body was Jewish. So you were practicing interfaith understanding, and embracing the ideas of God, however known, when you were in high school. And of course, the grace of God didn't stop there; that was only the beginning.

When you attended Gettysburg College, and you met and married this lucky dog, the still small voice of God was once again calling to you through the ages and steering your path for this day.

Larry – At Yale Divinity School you were already becoming an underground partner in ministry. Even though Yale was open to receiving women and the United Church of Christ was ordaining women, it was still the case that there were only thirteen women in my graduating class of 100, of which only three were preparing for pastoral ministry. The options for ministry for women were slim back then on all fronts.

But you were part of the transformation that was going on in the whole divinity school community, engaging your faith in the issues of civil rights, social justice, and peace. You attended lectures, worshiped at Battell Chapel with William Sloane Coffin, Jr., and took your faith to picket the West Haven Connecticut Board of Education for firing a teacher because he had his own key to his classroom in the high school where you taught. Your path to ministry continued.

Andy - remember, Sandy, what inspired you to follow that call, what kept that dream alive. Larry may have been the one who was identified as the activist, out there protesting one form of injustice or another, but you've been here bringing change to us at UCG. You proposed the only change ever made to the compact of the United Church of Gainesville, amending the last line to read, "...to act in Christian concern for the welfare of all people" rather than "for the welfare of all men." You championed the youth of this church, creating our vital youth program and sustaining our children. It was you who insisted they needed their own minister, dedicated completely to them, which in turn brought Kristi Button and then me to this church.

Larry: Sandy, you shepherded this church through the Open and Affirming process. You have been vigilant for gender equality in word and deed, in all our songs and choir anthems (the choir directors here all know you will revise any exclusive or sexist anthems). You are first and foremost the spiritual guide of our ministerial team, the one who never looks for a fight. But among the three of us, Andy, Sandy, and me, I'm going to ask for a show of hands on who has had folks walk out on our sermons. It's you Sandy, raising your hand, for you are the one minister here who has had people (visitors who came looking for trouble I'm sure) walk out on two of your sermons, one on Eve and the other on Mary, because you faithfully humanized these biblical woman.

Andy: and in this we charge you Sandy – Keep the faith, and keep up the solid, prophetic ministry you have established. "You rock."

Larry: To the congregation I say, how about an "Amen."

Sandy, you have described your path to ministry to have been like the labyrinth – always winding, circling around, journeying to a center, discovering something new, then taking that discovery out into the world again. The notion that somewhere along that path you would come to this moment of ordination was something you dared not even dream of. But as is the way of miracle, a

convergence of hard work, human circumstances, and God's mysterious grace rendered the impossible possible. The United Church of Christ found the wisdom to recognize twenty-five years of pastoral experience and constant continuing education such as yours as equivalent to three years of residence in a theological seminary. This United Church of Gainesville recognized your ministry as truly a call and gift from God and petitioned the Florida Conference to do the same. And the leadership of this Conference in the person of Kent Siladi said to the Committee on Church and Ministry, "Can any person sitting at this table not agree that Sandy Reimer's ordained ministry would not be a blessing to the United Church of Christ?" No one there or here could argue with that.

Andy: To the congregation: First, remember again that we are all called to ministry. We have a variety of gifts all given of God to keep our church thriving and moving. We are all ministers. Sandy's ordination does not entitle any of us to lay the entire burden of leadership for this church on her shoulders. Second, while this ordination is the confirmation and ratification of a long and powerful ministry, it is neither the culmination nor the end of that ministry. We recognize how God has called you, Sandy, and set you a part to lead, shepherd, and serve God's people. That call will change with the turns and twists of the labyrinth of your life. But it, like the love of God, will never end.

Larry: Sandy - In a moment you will recite vows and receive the laying on of hands in a tradition as old as the church itself. Before the clergy celebrate this rite, I want to acknowledge the grace of your mother who laid the first hand upon you in blessing. I want to acknowledge the Communion of Saints who watch over you with so much pride, your father, your beloved grandparents, and my parents too. These sainted angels are tap dancing their joy for you.

Today you will receive, through prayer and the laying on of hands, a connection with minister, priest, rabbi, and monk who themselves have been consecrated by their forebears in this same manner. The hands that will rest upon your head to ordain you belong to generation upon generation of holy people in a chain of blessing that goes back thousands of years to the beginnings of our many traditions. I'm going to warn you, when those hands find you, their weight will feel heavy. But you are receiving a yoke that Jesus says is easy, a burden that is light, for the wings of God's spirit will never fail to lift you as you love God and serve your neighbor, and God loves and empowers you.

My last words are from a card that I gave you the day the Committee on Church and Ministry approved your ordination, words from St. Ignatius of Loyola, "Go forth and set the world on fire." To which I add, you're ordained baby, go for it.