



Lori Stewart

Recently, I was asked to talk about the difference between Diaconal and Ordained ministry. When I described diaconal ministry, I found these words of Ted Dodd particularly apt, “The diaconal way of working is very community oriented, seeking to draw out the gifts of everyone, working in groups, and fostering partnerships. Diaconal ministers move with flexibility into areas where they are needed, where service is required.”

Ministry for me seems to have been characterized by working with groups and moving with flexibility. When I was commissioned, I started in a fairly typical position for diaconal ministers at that time: I was settled to Central United in St. Thomas where I was in a team ministry with an ordained minister. I participated in worship each week but I also was deeply involved in organizing the Christian Education program for children, youth, and adults, something I loved doing.

When a position for Stewardship Minister came up in the London Conference Office, a few people tapped me on the shoulder about applying. I hesitated because I didn’t know much about stewardship at the time, but was urged to try. What they really needed was someone with educational skills; the stewardship part could be learned. I ended up being offered the job and stayed for almost nine years. I particularly remember from those years the people who shared their own profoundly moving stewardship stories, my work with volunteers to create funny plays to entice churches to engage in stewardship, and how people’s giving was motivated by a deep love of God and the church.

It was during those years that I was part of the Committee on Diaconal Ministry at the General Council Office. It was a time when the church honoured diaconal ministry in an intentional way within its structures, not as a special interest group but as part of the church’s ministry that needed to be lifted up. I was privileged to meet with diaconal ministers from across the country twice a year to find ways to promote and advocate for this form of ministry.

In 2001, I went to Jamaica as a United Church Overseas Personnel. There was culture shock in those first years and a need for flexibility. I started out as the Office Administrator for the Regional Council while also working with the Institute for Training and Leadership Development, where I was the staff tutor for a group of theological students in ministry placements in the Region. I travelled around to hear their sermons and provide support

with their studies. The greatest reward was in providing training for elders in the Region, some of whom then went on to do Lay Pastor's training, and ended up in the ordained stream. With each success, they became more confident to take the next step. In Jamaica, I was called on to do all kinds of things that I didn't feel I had skill in, but my "service was required".

After six years in Jamaica, I ended up back in team ministry at Sturgeon Creek and then Fort Garry United. But now congregational ministry wasn't where I felt called to be, so when I was urged to apply for the position of Development Coordinator at the Centre for Christian Studies, I decided to give it a go. I didn't really know much about development when I started, but I was now experienced at moving with flexibility into areas where I was needed.

It seems that that's what I have been doing ever since I was commissioned in 1988.