



Caryn Douglas

In September, I will start collecting my pension. Only because of protocol am I using the word “retiring”. When I was Commissioned into Diaconal Ministry, my commitment was for life: for me, that is what it means to be in the Order of Ministry.

I first felt the “call” at age 12. The appeal was two-fold: I knew, even then, there were way better ways to do the job than I was witnessing, and the idea of a captive audience to hear my opinions was tantalizing. Those who know me won’t be surprised. I have endeavoured to be creative and responsive to the changing context for the church in the world in the work I have done. I still have an opinion about almost everything. I hope that now, 55 years later, those opinions hold more wisdom and are offered with a greater depth of respect.

Like any relationship, the one between the United Church and myself has required work. There are times we have let each other down. Times we needed to distance ourselves, to re-group, re-evaluate, re-commit. There have also been times of joy and satisfaction. I am very grateful for the opportunities and invitations into leadership: working in a team as Principal of The Centre for Christian Studies; ministry among Indigenous people in reserve and inner city settings; facilitating intensive learning programs for adults, at the Prairie Christian Training Centre and with the Designated Lay Ministry Program, for example; leading worship, in small circles, and to my surprise with a large congregation, ignited my creative spirit and deepened my biblical literacy, and brought out my silly side.

Through the church, I travelled a lot. The kind of “pack your bags” travel took me to Australia, the Philippines, USA, Egypt, and to pretty much every corner of Canada. The kind of “unpack your bags” travel took me on journeys of discovery: from a family where neither parent went to high school to a doctorate, sharpening my theological and social critique as I struggle to recognize my privilege and figure out true companionship with the marginalized and vulnerable creatures of Earth.

My relationship with the church wouldn't have lasted if it weren't for singing. These days, I want to sing songs about following the teachings of Jesus, teachings formed in response to the brutalizing power of an oppressive patriarchal regime, teachings needed in our time. Songs that are uplifting, unifying, fun; songs that are serious, moving, and pluck my heart strings. I'm not afraid to change the lyrics so they steer us from centuries of wrong-directed idolizing worship of the leader of the Way and challenge us to consider if, like him, we have drawn the circle as wide as it can be.

When I first felt the call, the idea of service wasn't foremost. Dating diaconal ministry is when my vocation was made clear. I have served and look to continue to serve in the tradition of diakonos, in companionship with others. We are not alone, thanks be to God.