

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**The 60th Anniversary of the Ordination of Joseph Bourret
Philippians 1.2-7, Psalm 40.1-3**

**22 June 2018
Concordia, Manchester, CT**

“Every Time We Remember You”

*“³I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for...you,
⁵because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.” [Phil 1.3-5]*

“²Grace and peace be yours from our Abba God and from Jesus Christ our Savior.” [Phil 1.2]

It must have been the strangest interview Joe’s ever conducted.

I had had a difficult internship and an even more difficult first call,

because for some reason I just could not figure out how to work with the senior pastors.

One failure I could blame on the other guy, but two in a row? Well, that might mean I had a part in it.

As I was voicing these thoughts aloud, my husband chimed in, “Well, you ARE really hard to work with.”

Flush. That was the sound of my self-image disappearing down the toilet.

Now back in those dark ages there weren’t many congregations that wanted a woman for their pastor,

so it was by no means certain that I would ever get another call.

The bishop’s assistant, Ron Fournier, however, assured me

that since I wanted to work half time and was willing to do youth ministry, I was “highly marketable”.

I had my doubts, but, true to his word, a few weeks later at synod assembly,

he said he had an interview set up for me at that very moment.

He took me up to a suite of rooms and introduced me

to a Lutheran pastor with a French name, a voice as low as mine was high, and a quiet gentle manner.

It was probably within the first three minutes that I said to Pastor Bourret,

“You know... you probably really don’t want to work with me.”

Despite his surprise, he quickly returned, “Oh, I think I want to work with you.”

“No”, I said, “I don’t think you do. I can’t get along with people, you see.”

“I think we’d get along”, returned Joe.

It didn’t seem I was going to win this argument.

I took a different tack.

“Well, I’m not going to be an ASSISTANT pastor”, I said.

“Oh?” asked Joe, “Okay. What would you like to be called?”

That caught me off guard. I thought fast. “Pastor of Youth Ministry?”

“Sounds good to me”, said Joe. “I’ll talk to the congregation but I’m sure this is going to work.”

“I’m not so sure”, I said.

But by September I was the Pastor of Youth Ministry at St. John’s in New Britain.

I had been hurt over the previous 6 years.

I had resigned my call, and resigned myself to waiting –

waiting for a call I didn’t expect to come,

waiting for a team ministry that would work,

waiting for someone to heal my hurting heart.

In the words of Psalm 40, *I waited for God and God stooped down to me; God heard my cry. [Ps 40.1]*

And sent Joe Bourret into my life.

And what I learned from Joe was that I actually could work in team ministry. In fact I was good at it. And I loved it.

I could do more than survive – I could thrive:

5 years with Joe, 18 years with Pastor Bud Myers, and 5 years with Deacon Liz Frohrip,

and none of that would have been possible without Joe Bourret.
And that's why *"I thank my God every time I remember you", Joe...
because of the way you shared the good news of grace with me from the first day until now. [Phil 1.3]*

But Joe's grace wasn't cheap. There was a little bit of law mixed in.

No sooner had I started my call then I discovered I was pregnant with our first child, Hans.

And when Hans was about a year old he had started eating table food.

One Sunday, Joe had preached and I had presided, so I was distributing the bread and Joe was following with the wine.

I got to my husband who had Hans in his arms, and all of the sudden Hans put out his hands for the bread.

Again, this was in the dark ages when the age for first communion had just been dropped from confirmation to fifth grade

and the rules said "infant communion is precluded".

What was I to do? To give or not to give? That was the question! And there was no time to debate.

Acting more as a mother than a pastor, I put the bread into my child's hands.

And then I felt awful. Joe and I had never discussed this. What did he think about the issue? How did he feel about it?

I had just made a preemptive decision without consulting my partner in ministry.

When the service was over I headed straight for Joe's office and apologized.

"I'm so sorry I gave Hans communion without talking it over with you!

I was caught off guard and had to make a decision fast. I'm really sorry if it goes against what you believe."

"Oh, I'm fine with it", he assured me. And then before I had a chance to breathe a sigh of relief, he continued,

"of course, you'll have to deal with council on the subject."

He invited me to step up to the challenge.

Over the next few weeks I thought, I talked, he listened, and eventually I came up with a plan.

Figuring the main objection would be that children didn't understand the meaning of communion, I began with a quiz.

It wasn't rocket science, but it was obviously beyond half of the council members.

There was embarrassed giggling and laughing as they proved to themselves it wasn't about understanding after all –

and finally one woman demolished the last holdout by saying,

"It's not our gift to give. It's God's gift. And God doesn't turn anyone away."

Joe Bourret's challenge trained me well for all the other challenges to come. And that's why *I thank my God every time*

I remember you, Joe...because of the way you shared not only the gospel with me, but the law as well."
[Phil 1.3]

There are so many other stories, and so many other learnings.

*There was our "50x90" Evangelism campaign to get 50 new members by 1990,

in which we delineated specific ways in which every single person in the congregation could be involved.

"I thank my God every time I remember you", Joe... [Phil 1.3]

*There was the slow, patient and sneaky way he moved the congregation from monthly to weekly communion – first adding communion to festival Sundays, then to festival seasons, and then to the "festival" half of the year,

by which time people had forgotten that communion had ever NOT been weekly!

"I thank my God every time I remember you", Joe... [Phil 1.3]

*There was the Walking the Bounds activity in which we actually left the building and walked around our neighborhood!

"I thank my God every time I remember you", Joe... [Phil 1.3]

*And there was Joe's preaching – his brilliant word-smithing that always resulted in me asking for copies of his sermons,

sermons that I've saved and read (and occasionally stolen) many times over the years.
His careful use of language was a value I adopted early on.
His brevity was a goal it took me 25 years to reach (and which I certainly haven't met tonight!)
"I thank my God every time I remember you", Joe... [Phil 1.3]

So many stories, so many learnings, so many precious memories.
You planted a ton of seeds, Joe, and so many of them took root and grew in my heart. And I'm just one person.
You've planted seeds in the hearts of everyone here.
Lots and lots and lots of good seeds that have grown into plants that have produced more seeds,
and so the sowing and the growing continue in a process that never ends. *[Mark 4.8]*

I know I haven't stuck to the texts much, and I've taken liberties in quoting them,
but this is one time when there is something more important than the words, and that's what's behind them.
So let me misquote a little from Philippians:
"⁷It is right for...[us] to think this way about ... you, because [we hold you in our hearts and] you hold...[us] in yours" and all of us are held together in God's grace. [Phil 1.7]

When I think back to my internship and first call, it's difficult to recall any positive team ministry experiences.
When I think back to my years with you, Joe, I can't recall a single negative one.
Working with you *"put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God". [Ps 40.3]*

I am so glad you didn't let me talk you out of calling me that day so long ago. Thank you.
And know that all of us – each and every one of us here – thank God every time we remember you. **Amen**