**Response to Ordination**

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**NPMC – June 27th, 2021**

NPMC has been a place of healing for me. I don’t know if I’ve ever talked about it during worship before, but the two years before I began working here were really difficult. I was juggling finishing my PhD studies and parenting a toddler while Kris worked early morning hours, and searching for a job that didn’t seem to materialize. If you’ve ever been out of work, you know the feeling: pinching pennies, getting your hopes up, preparing for the pressure of interviews, feeling deeply disappointed when you don’t get the job, worrying about the future. I had begun to seriously doubt my calling to serve the church, which I had felt so strongly for the decade plus that I had spent studying theology.

So imagine my surprise when Ryan Siemens began asking if I would be willing to move to Saskatchewan, and later, at the call from Trish St. Onge, board chair at the time, when she told me that the NPMC search committee was very interested in me. And imagine my joy when my candidating weekend went so well and I was unanimously called to be your co-pastor. My gifts were (finally) needed! Here was a group of people who wanted to hear what I had to say every other week about faith and God, peace and justice, who wanted to have discussions about tough issues, who wanted to share potlucks and coffees with me, who wanted their kids to run around and learn about faith with mine, who wanted to share life – your joys and griefs, your hopes and struggles – with me. Here was also a wider Mennonite Church Saskatchewan community from which I could learn and to which I could contribute my insights about what it means to be the church together in this context. What a gift.

These past five years have been a time of healing, a reaffirmation and a reshaping of my calling as a pastor-theologian. I’ve learned so much from your faith and wisdom. I’ve learned so much about myself. There are times when I laugh to myself about how fittingly my previous life experience of studying and teaching peace theology, working in a coffee shop, art and creativity, parenting, caring for my grandparents, and volunteering in the local and wider church has served me in this role. What other work could take up all of those diverse experiences? But there have also been times of discouragement, when this work has seemed daunting, precisely because of how big an umbrella of skills it requires. Is there anything that isn’t a pastoral responsibility?! There have also been moments – some subtle, some not – in which I’ve been reminded that I’m only the second or maybe third generation of women in ministry, that in many churches, my calling to this work would be seen as illegitimate. Some of the lessons of the past five years have been hard-won! There have been growing pains. But more often than not, in such moments, someone from the congregation has checked in with me, expressed appreciation, or told me not to work *too* hard. Or someone from MC Sask has been available to lend support and an understanding of the challenges unique to pastoral ministry. It was actually my co-pastor Patrick’s idea for me to begin the ordination process, and it was very much affirmed by my Pastor Peer group of the time, and even affirmed by people I didn’t expect to be so supportive.

This congregation has been a wonderful place to be a first-time pastor, and my mistakes as I’ve learned how to do this well have so often been met graciously and with encouragement. Our family has also been embraced by this community, especially when Junia was born. Even during Covid, as we have all been stretched to our limits, there has been more than one senior couple who got into a thank-you card standoff with my kids (you know, when you end up sending thank-you cards in response to other peoples’ thank-you cards)! And regular Zoom connections with MC Sask colleagues have been so encouraging, to the point of being indispensable. I have truly been blessed by you all.

In preparing for this day, I’ve been coming back to an image from Gary Harder’s memoir about his 50 years as a Mennonite pastor in Alberta and Ontario. He talks about the relationship between a pastor and a congregation as a “duet,” as two voices singing different musical lines in harmony. He says, “The key to the health and well-being of both congregation and pastor is the integrity and harmony of their relationship – their joint music making.” It is marked by “mutuality, … respect, love, and accountability.”[[1]](#footnote-1) His metaphor brought to mind the music of Indigenous Wolastoq musician Jeremy Dutcher, who literally sings with his ancestors, in harmony with 100-year old recordings of traditional songs. There are some wonderful parallels there to the biblical narratives and Anabaptist-Mennonite faith traditions we “sing” anew in each generation. And this morning we also heard a hymn about God’s song, in which we all find our voices. All together, that’s four-part harmony, isn’t it, of pastor, congregation, spiritual ancestors, and God? I’m so grateful to you, NPMC and MC Sask, for today’s celebration. I’m looking forward to continuing to make beautiful music together.

1. Gary Harder, *The Pastor-Congregation Duet* (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2018), xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)