

## **Surprises in Ministry: Women's Responses**

### **A) Surprised by the invigoration**

How much joy it has brought! The pleasure of witnessing the Spirit already at work in people's lives before I ever show up.

That after 26+ years, I still love this work. That in four different congregations I have been loved and deeply cared for. That my three children did not grow up in a fish bowl and love the church, too (for the most part).

The generosity of the church members.

When we moved, I left a very fulfilling ministry with a hospice. I took a job with the public school while I waited for a ministry opportunity. It surprised me how "drained" I came home each day. There were a few months where I worked at school until 3:00 p.m. then went to the chaplaincy position at the nursing home. I would leave school very tired. I worked at the nursing home three hours and came home refreshed. That the physical experience solidified for me even more God's call; God gives us all that we need to do God's work. Work should energize us as we follow God's leading.

The joy! The total engagement of my whole being – hence fulfillment.

I love leadership issues, visioning and working on strategic planning. I'm also a very good fund-raiser.

How much I enjoy it and how well it has been!

How much I love it. How quickly people have let me into their lives and accepted me as their pastor. How challenging it is.

That God would choose to give me this privilege and bless others through me.

The beauty and art of ministry. The persistence of God to keep calling all to life in our time.

How much I've loved it – and how deeply I love my congregation and feel their love in return. I expected it to be far harder emotionally. .

How content I am – deep down contentment. .

How much I enjoy it. How much the congregation affirms me.

How often it doesn't feel like "work" but a natural thing to be doing.

## Surprises in Ministry

The camaraderie I experienced with older youth in my ministry and those who have “graduated” from the youth program.

Getting paid so much for doing what I love to do.

I have been surprised at how right this calling has felt, how rewarding it has been to pastor.

That I enjoy it so much!

The gratitude I feel in being able to serve in this way. The delight in the variety of tasks. The permission to enter into people’s inner lives.

I find myself loving to read scripture and lead worship. I thought I would enjoy pastoral care and find it difficult to visit people who only want maintenance and not growth.

How happy and fulfilled I am in my work. To receive the respect I do, to given authority (the last word) because I’m pastor “with executive privilege”. ☺ I’ve had to learn to claim my own authority.

The power of ritual and the sense of awe and reinforcement of call in administering rituals

The entrée that this role gives you into peoples’ lives.

That I like it so much. That it suits my gifts and passions.

How joyful, meaningful and energizing it is to get to be part of God’s holy work in a congregation and get paid for it.

How I continue to love my work and find new insights and challenges. How people open up their lives to me.

Fun, flexible schedule and diversity of ministry tasks.

That I actually have some strengths and gifts which enhance pastoral ministry.

The response from people outside the congregation when I tell them what I do. The Catholics ask two or three times, not sure what pastor is and how I could be one. Others are very affirming. As a preacher’s kid, I used to try and hide my father’s job. Now I have to try and be proud of this calling for myself.

How fun it is.

That I actually ended up becoming a pastor! After 18 years I continue to thoroughly enjoy my work.

What a good fit it is; how much fun it is most of the time and how God seems to keep using me, finding things for me to do/roles for me to play.

The love from the congregation that was so immediate. The deeper more rich presence of the Holy Spirit.

Just how easy and conflict-free it has been. I have a great fit with my congregation and I believe that’s part of why this has been so graceful.

How well it fits me and my vocational passion.

How much I love doing what I do (most of the time!)

How much I enjoy it- why didn't I do it sooner. I really like and enjoy the congregation.

It has surprised me how much I love what I am doing! I also continue to be amazed at how people open up to me because I am their pastor- these are holy moments.

To witness miracles that have happened and God's interference in the ministry.

The commitment and goodness of people in the congregation.

I have discovered a lot of my administrative leadership gifts that I have not been able to use previously. I have been able to use my creative gifts in leading retreats of spiritual formation in many different countries.

That it is actually happening.

How stimulating on all levels (spiritually, intellectually, emotionally) ministry has been and how much joy I've experienced as well as genuine support from the church.

It seems odd to say it, but the most ongoing, surprising thing is the continued in-breaking of God into the lives and experiences of First Mennonite people (and beyond). That truly keeps me going!

I was surprised by how much satisfaction I experienced in pastoral ministry!

The extremes of joy and devastation.

I guess it is that I have enjoyed pastoral ministry and have been affirmed. I entered this with anxiety and found I was able to do it well (especially preaching, even though I realized it is not one of my stronger gifts).

The tremendous opportunities that keep coming our way.

That I could do it!

The way the Lord leads in marvelous ways to wide-open opportunities that are available everywhere and the joy and satisfaction that comes in accepting these opportunities as they appear day by day. With the Psalmist I can say: "Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup; You have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord who counsels me." Psalm 16:5-7. My experiences in the ministry have been wonderful, satisfying, and if I had to choose again, I would definitely again choose pastoral ministry.

God! God's grace, God's movement in people's lives, in my life. That I enjoy it so much! I can't imagine doing anything else!

How much fun it is!

The way years fly by.

The continued joy of serving God where I'm called

The lack of non-Christian encounters...

That I enjoy it most of the time.

The degree to which I enjoy it and how it nourishes my own spiritual life and appreciation for how God is at work in the lives of congregational members, myself, the church and the world.

How much I can enjoy preaching.

That my family is thriving even though I'm not at home as much as I used to be.

**B) Surprised by depletion**

That the most difficult times were with women...both as described above and in moves to have me less free.

That I am very tired and find it hard to find places, people and time to nourish my own soul and faith.

That people expect you to be present and available at all times. The emotional drain it can take on me.

The lack of time to be alone. At times I feel as if I have sold my soul to the congregation.

How draining it can be!

The extent to which my life is open to public view. I sometimes feel as if everyone wants a piece of me. This is sometimes an affirming feeling, but it can be overwhelming. A bit of personal time is very important.

**C) Surprised by disappointments**

Nothing was very surprising. I did see how human pastors are.

The first year I would have said – “The junk mail and telemarketing that finds its way into church offices.” But now, after a very difficult several years, I would say I am surprised and very disappointed over how mean and petty wonderful people can be to each other.

The spiritual challenges of authenticity and the projections of other members.

The difficulty discerning boundaries for friendships in the congregation.

Concern about appearance/dress code. Disrespectful comments made directly to me by lay people.

Even after 17 years in the same congregation, there are constantly new challenges in ministering to people and in relating to a changing culture. Ministry is something we can't “figure-out” once and for all.

Being a lightning rod for church members' personal issues.

1) How slowly things change. 2) The challenges of working on a pastoral team, made more challenging by differences in length of tenure, FTE and the fact that two of the four are a couple.

## Surprises in Ministry

The church is a microcosm of the world with all kinds of people. It has surprised me how some pastors suffer at the hands of their congregations.

To observe that often times I found greater seeking and faith outside the church, than within.

How a congregation with divorcés among church (lay) leadership could be so callous (unsupportive) toward a divorcing pastor, especially considering the circumstances. How hostile or simply insensitive congregations were to my daughter/my maternal duties while preaching.

I've been surprised by the level of universalism in my congregation and the fear of defining ourselves unapologetically as a Christian congregation. This has amplified my challenges in figuring out what leadership means in this congregation...it's really hard to understand my role. I also didn't imagine that I would be six years into this and still feel like I don't know what I'm doing (meaning so much is unquantifiable) most of the time. I've also been surprised at times at how lonely I can feel in my role, and the challenge of pastoring "friends."

Difficulty in relating to my peer group.

The lack of integrity of persons in power- who all happen to men  
Experiencing first-hand the injustice created and maintained by a patriarchal system.

How lonely it is at times. How messed up people's lives are. How deceptive the human heart is.

The politics of the church; the immaturity of people; the challenge of managing the people you work for .

The most surprising thing to me is the extent – breadth and depth, of the brokenness of people.

The false ideal that people hold about ministers and then project onto me.

The amount of spiritual attacks that came from Satan when things are going well in the church.

The amount of politics involved in keeping your position.

How difficult God's people can be. How passive aggressive most Mennonites are.

How little people read the scripture and how often people consider what it says to be optional.

The amount of politics.

How intensely the pastoral position has exposed and hooked my "shadow side" (need for control, over-responsibility, people pleasing, perfectionism) and my gifts (compassion, intuition, creativity, wisdom, leadership).

That I've lost friends (in the church--male and female) when I began to own my call, my voice in Christ. They preferred a "domesticated" me.

### **D) Surprised by authority**

Probably the most surprising thing is how long it has taken me to come to terms with my "power." I began by denying I was any different, but over the years have recognized that even though I am not a powerful person to me, even my role puts power in me. It's a great church though in keeping me humble and keeping me affirmed.

That I enjoy power.

## Surprises in Ministry

The spiritual and personal power of the office of pastor. People make changes because of my sermons. If I like something and say it, people often give it to me! I have experienced others seeing me as bringing God's presence with me.

The trust and confidence placed in the pastor. So many times I felt inadequate and poorly prepared for a situation, but the congregation anticipated that God's love and truth was in me.

The trust people have shown to me by comments and questions shared.

The extent to which people will trust me with their deepest pain or darkest struggles; the need for confession and my love as pries; this is always surprising and humbling.

How good I am with people, how much they open up their lives to me.

The extent to which persons shared personal/deep issue and struggles...

The way people open up to me; trust, appreciation.

To realize how the role or office affects the way people perceive and respond to me.

To have the former pastor call me his/her pastor.

People do respond to care.

People often respect what you have to say beyond my expectations.

That people treat me differently from when I was a lay person. Apologizing about swearing...I am invited out less!

The most difficult and surprising aspect has been the instant and huge trust/authority placed on me simply because of my title. It's been unnerving. It highlights the dangers and responsibility of ministry for me.

I am continually amazed at the depth of God's grace and the level of trust the congregation has extended to me.

The way that the congregation responds to you as an "official" of the church, but how much they don't want to be led by "official." I think in hiring a woman some congregations think that they are getting a non-hierarchical style; but they aren't really prepared not to have an authoritarian leader.

It brings a unique contrast of authority and servitude that is challenging to balance in a way that's healthy for both the congregation and the pastor.

It is a privilege to walk alongside people.

I am always amazed and humbled by the people whose lives have been affected by my decision to answer the call to serve in pastoral ministry. Many have asked me to personally mentor them.

I am beginning to like preaching, the part I feared most in the beginning.

We live in a small community. People respect me as a pastor. Also, the honor and privilege of sharing their lives with me has been a surprise to me and a sacred trust.

That the congregation has accepted me and affirmed me as a female in pastoral ministry and the subsequent peace within myself as to my role.

How well I have been accepted. I have always co-pastored with my husband. I think solo women pastors have more trouble being accepted.

The acceptance of people and the deep inner satisfaction.

That at my age and experience the church accepted me.

The trust that individuals feel towards me. Also, I am more outspoken than I realized I could be.

The way I have been accepted and affirmed as a pastor even when I felt unsure about my role. I really feel that I have been “loved into pastoring” by this congregation.

The authority people have given to me so quickly.

How free persons are to share their life and their problems with me.

To participate in the struggle, losses and joys that are part of people’s lives and to experience a deepening of their spiritual growth and development.

The opportunities given to enter into people’s lives especially in times of crises and as a result, the discovery that I have gifts for ministry to those who are dying.

The deeply satisfying experiences. The fact that congregational members/attendees welcome me into their lives at their most vulnerable time (births, deaths, crises, accidents, surgeries). They trust me, it is humbling.

### **E) Surprised by demands of role**

So many things to do and so little time. I have to have priority what I have to do first, second and so on.

How many different “hats” you have to wear; mostly it’s exciting because no two (?) are the same. Sometimes it’s frustrating; nobody (very few) can do all of these things as well as they should be done!

The overwhelming sense of responsibility for the spiritual nurture of a group of people.

The multiplicity and variety of experiences that are part of this vocation – never boring, no two days or weeks the same.

The increased expectations I’ve placed on myself, feeling the need to live up to the role.

It’s 24/7—constant on call—unless you arrange otherwise.

It’s ever present sense of responsibility; always more to do and change (except on sabbatical)

The breadth of skills required; the number of hours I perceive I need to put in order to be effective and poor remuneration.

## Surprises in Ministry

Through God's leading; I have been able to perform the tasks set before me.

The humbling experience of being all things to all people and still feeling as though I'm not worthy of my title. Also, I have a difficult time telling people I'm a pastor .

Managing an office and secretary; they never trained us for that at seminary.

### **Other:**

Need of women members for a woman pastor.

The equipping that God has provided for me. Discovering hidden gifts and talents and touching other people's lives.

God giving contentment in it over these many years!

How different my first and second churches were.

God's power and healing seen in people's lives when I have faithfully exercised my gifts.

The anointing from the Lord for ministry and preaching.

To be blessed by senior saints of the church.

I am passionate about preaching, but that is only the visible tip of the iceberg. Underneath is a darkness of tangled relationships and power struggles.

Discovering I was good at things; skills I didn't know I had.

The endless variety of experiences.

That God's grace is becoming more and more "enough" for me! Thanks be to God!

The shift from initially being interested in pastoral care to now having more interest in visioning and preaching.

That God is teaching me to learn to love those who are unlovable. That people who have been "churched" their whole life are still angry at God.

That the Lord takes those he chooses and trains all who will listen and obey. Sure takes the stress off when the "man" is in charge.

My deep connection with the children in the congregation. When I was on sabbatical they were the ones missed.

### **Men's Responses:**

#### **A) Surprised by invigoration**

Discovering the incredible richness of working at the spiritual formation of a people.

The love and loyalty of people.

How positive the congregation has been most of the time and the support I have felt from them. How God is able to work through me in spite of me.



## Surprises in Ministry

That I learned to like what I thought I would hate, and that I turned out to be quite successful at it.

How fun it is!

The joy and gratitude received from people and too, the "guff" received at times, but mostly the gratitude received.

The joy and blessings of leading a person to Christ.

How congregational loyalty by members to one another and their growth can be impacted by the "consumer mentality" of the world.

The privilege to work with people in all kinds of situations: life, death, sorrow, weddings, funerals, etc.

Grace offered by members of congregation.

How much I enjoyed ministering to people during a loss by death. Funerals turned out to be a highlight in my ministry.

How quickly I have come to love and respect the people of the congregation- in spite of isolated challenges and criticism.

Joy of helping people grow in faith and self understanding.

How fast time goes because there is always something new to do...!

Personal growth.

How God uses it to leverage sanctification (real righteousness) in my life.

The way God has groomed me from a musician into a minister.

The graciousness with which congregations receives its pastor. The value of good administration. Personal growth through sermon preparation and visitation.

I am a pastor!

I can do the job (with God's help)!

The extent to which I am invited into the very personal lives of people from celebrations like weddings, anniversaries and birthdays to the sorrow of illness and death.

Participating in people's lives during important transitions in life stages from birth to death.

I have received a great deal of affirmation for which I am grateful, though sometimes amazed.

Seeing difficult people completely change as they accepted the Lordship of Christ in more areas of their lives.

Length of my first pastorate (19+years) and that it was almost always a positive experience.

The reality that God uses a guy like me, people like us, to enlarge Christ's kingdom.

The growth of God's church.

I could stay in one church for eight years without either really wanting to leave or being kicked out.

Seeing people grow spiritually through the struggles.

**B) Surprised by depletion**

How isolating the experience can be; the larger the church, the more isolating the experience.

The level of stress that is managed on a weekly basis within myself.

**C) Surprised by disappointments**

How slow the church moves or responds.

The difficulty in leading people to a deeper commitment.

It has been strange that, because of my role, I am much more involved in the life of the church than my wife. Previously we had been equal participants in the life of our congregation. This was surprisingly hard.

The way Christians fight.

Realizing that most people really don't want to change.

The capacity for negativism and complaint people have.

Biblical illiteracy and/or lack of commitment to follow Jesus' teaching if it is known.

The sense of not seeing progress like one would hope to see. At times the disrespect of the pastor and his family \_\_\_\_\_ the expectations of the congregation.

Lack of interaction amongst fellow pastors/bishops. As it relates to continual education the lack of interaction of churches (Mennonite) urban/suburban/rural etc.

In the Mennonite Church, how little it was respected or valued.

Learning more about Mennonites: conflict avoidance. Unity, fragility and fear around sexuality issues, especially homosexuality.

The extent of the immoral behavior I have dealt with i.e. marital infidelity, pornography.

That after 35 years of positive pastoral ministry I end with a painful six months.

The influence a few people have who want to control the church and its direction.

The poor interest of the church's directors in helping minorities or small churches.

To experience the extent of pain a congregation can give to its pastor at a time when help is the most needed.

Lack of commitment on the part of members to be \_\_\_\_\_.

Lack of spiritual depth in members. Complacency to apathy. Indoctrination to tradition has a negative affect on change. Personal and marital problems fester so bad that they are beyond my help when they finally admit them.

That even though I thought I could and did love the congregation and gave all what I had for them they still weren't satisfied and wanted something else.

I am surprised by the things people can do or accomplish at times on serving others, and at other times to be very self-serving.

How uncommitted most people are.

Slow rate of change.

How closely the behavior of my children were scrutinized by some congregational members.

How much the evaluation of my performance is based on personality and results with individual's agendas opposed to ministry objectives.

Lack of support from conference.

The political nature of it.

The sometimes disconnect between the processing of info and practice by well educated persons (Almost an abandonment of vocation skills from church life). A lack of respect for pastoral role while expecting respect for their own role or profession.

Mennonites do "witch hunting around divorce"; not greed and avariciousness.

The "control/power" issues that emerge.

### **D) Surprised by authority**

The power and trust in the "role" or "office" by people, i.e. a 26 year old being asked for advice by a 90 year old.

The large amount of trust people placed in me. I became surprised by the ritual of church attendance that did not seem to have much influence on the events and decisions of the week.

How few people with issues with me come or call to talk to me.

The joy and challenge of walking with people from birth to death and the special privilege of being a bearer of the kingdom in the city.

The way people look to me for answers because of my role.

The amount of trust and skill needed to motivate and move people.

The way I was accepted, or even the expectation that people had of me and my role as their pastor. I sometimes felt unworthy of the role of pastor, and in hindsight, cannot overstate the importance of the pastor's personality in shaping the congregation. I notice this especially now when in the role of chaplain, I have a window into the life of many congregations and pastors.

The high level of acceptance by the congregation.

The degree of private things being shared with me.

The level of confidence and trust the congregation places in the pastor. It is a joy and humbling.

The way people invited me into their lives. This was sacred ground, a trust, a blessing.

The trust people place in me. The “confessions” that I hear.

The openness with which I am invited into the lives of others- sharing intimate experiences, life stages etc.

### **E) Surprised by demands of role**

Feeling the weight of being responsible for the congregation and its members.

The unrealistic expectations by many in the congregation.

The challenge to take everyone’s various ideals of church seriously and creatively.

Time required for reflecting, preparation, etc.

The need to administrate. The drain of disagreement – for example, to remain in conference when it joined Mennonite Church USA.

That to survive in pastoral ministry, one must be extremely politically astute, i.e. who are both the spoken/unspoken opinion and decision makers, and stay on their right side.

It is hard to participate in worship as a pastor. Too many worries about the service to “enjoy” it and fully enter into it.

The expectation level in all areas.

How great the need for counseling, dealing with mental health issues. How relatively little power you have in effecting change.

The highs and lows.

That I could be so well liked by some and at the same time so well disliked by others. The same sermon heard in an opposite way.

Unpredictable fulfillments – letting the way unfold.

I can actually prepare and do back to back sermons.

### **Other:**

How much people either love you or hate you; very little in between.

That God can use my weakness for His purposes and glory.

How important patience is and how much it challenges your perception of self and others.

## Surprises in Ministry

Deliverance needs in peoples lives so they can function and minister to others.

I have continually been amazed at how God has used the people he puts in my path, both to help me and for me to walk alongside of.

Who God uses and chooses.

That I've always been hopeful and that I haven't given up. I've never had a church as bad as Corinth, but I sure get tired of Laodecia.

It is not a vocation that fulfills all of my interests and aptitudes. I need other identities.

Can't think of any.

The emotional attachment to the people of the church.

Experiencing God in hurting people.

Strong inner conviction to continue based on warm support during times of difficulty.

That I was not surprised.

God helps me to see a bigger picture of the past and future. God also uses the surrounding environment to prove that I'm on the right track and I am working with Him.

The (?) variety of activities, involvements and people.