

WORKER PROFILE

Chosen

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There are so many people in my life who fascinate me. Each one holds a place in my memory, unique in their own way; each, an inspiration. My Grandmother Kay lead a life that some will only dream about; she lived for adventure and died only after she had experienced all life had to offer. She was in the U.S. Navy aboard a ship during the Korean War and was stationed in Japan for two years. She worked in an automotive shop during the depression to support her family. After my grandfather died, when my mother was 19, my grandmother worked too many jobs to count. This alone, paid for my mother's Valparaiso education. My grandmother saved every penny and when my mother was married, my grandmother set off to discover the world. Like Magellan, filled with curiosity and wonder, she conquered the unimaginable. My grandmother taught me that life is about living and experiencing and understanding the past and most of all, respecting it.

After my Grandma Kay died, in August of 1999, I had my first real conversation with the assistant rector at my church and another amazing person in my life, Reverend

Melody Williams. It was a Sunday morning before church and she pulled me into her office. We talked about life and grief and how wonderful my grandmother had been. After a few minutes the conversation evolved into one about essentially the future of my faith. I remember she asked me if I had ever thought about being a priest. At that moment, I melted; it was as if she had reached inside my soul and pulled out my faith. There it was, tangible, vulnerable and genuine, displayed for the world to see. I said nothing for a moment and then the next passed me by, I finally opened my mouth. My response was "yes" I had thought about it but never expressed it in words to anyone. How did she know? She didn't know...God knew. That moment was my calling. I have been called to serve God and His Church. There have been times when I have wondered and questioned if I have a strong enough faith to help other's to find theirs, but I am reminded of the saying, "If God is for us, then who can be against us?" God believes in me therefore how can I not?

Melody was the person who helped me to realize my calling. I trust her because I know in my heart it is true and she has experienced it all for herself. She has spent her life preaching the Word of God and she has helped me through so much. God was going to call me to be a priest and He chose her as the one to be there at that moment.

In a book entitled, *Bread, Wine & Women*, Susan

Dowell and Jane Williams discuss the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of England. "We are just trying to say that women have something special, unique, to offer Christianity - something that has never been properly heard before, since Christianity has hitherto really listened only to the male experience of life"(Dowell 43). Another argument made by Susan and Dowell is that it isn't about fitting, being male or female; it is about the grace of God. Unfortunately this grace has not made the process any easier. The following is a powerful statement made by June Osborne as she explains to the general Synod her calling.

"I stand before Synod today as the one who in her own best judgment believes that she might be called to be a priest, and on behalf of many who ask you to keep faith with that sense of calling...I long for you to allow me to minister the grace of God through priesthood. In the mercy of Christ and for the sake of our Church I ask you: please test my vocation." (The Reverend June Osbourne, speaking to the general Synod, 11 November 1992)

Melody, like many women, struggled all the way to the pulpit. Her journey was difficult yet the end result was amazing. Melody touches lives every day and helps people who struggle with the most important aspect of life; faith.

Faith is not an easy thing; faith is like the weather. Some days are beautiful with a clear sky and a light breeze; perfect. That same day can then turn into a rainy mess; cloudy and cold with a chance of thunderstorms. Faith is always there it just changes with the wind, but when the sky clears you find it has weathered the storm. Melody has experienced some showers and maybe even a drought or two but she always finds the sun and was called to help others to find their sunshine,

Melody's calling was not one moment in time; it was more of a realization. "I knew from a very early age that my soul and my being and who I am was destined to be wound up with God and my relationship with God and how that has worked out has surprised me, but I always knew I was in the direction of growing into a place where I could help others find the center of their own lives. "I look back on my life and I think that no one would believe this if I wrote it down...the struggle was really not so much with the church because I knew from the time I was about fourteen or sixteen I knew that my life was in the Church, in specific ministry. It was a matter of me finding a place where that could be realized and exercised and finding a home, I struggled with community; the struggles with the institutions don't end, but you find a home, somewhere where you can be who you are, so the struggle was more

about finding a place where I could be than a struggle with the institution...I learned very early that you aren't going to change institutions very readily and I watched with great interest as a Roman Catholic, while I was in school, with what was happening in the Episcopal Church because I knew that ordination was where I was headed, it was who I was. A Roman Catholic priest once told me, 'you already are the priest' what I find about priesthood and about who I am is that it has always been affirmed by the people I am with, it was just the institution that could not have done that until a certain period of time so it is something that always has been but not set aside for specific use until 14 years ago, it is astonishing to me I was ordained 14 years ago."

"The movement to ordain women originally arose from the clear fact that women feel called to be priests" (Dowell 75). There couldn't be more truth to that. People say that the Church has historically been run by males and it should stay that way. Well then, please tell me, who called me to be a priest? Dowell also speaks of ordination in general,

"In ordaining people to the priesthood, there should be no talk of anyone's 'natural' fittingness, since the whole thing is a matter of God's grace. Nobody is born a priest; priests are made by a

mixture of God's calling and human need. Far too much of the debate is centered upon the respective positions of 'women' and 'men' rather than the gifts of individuals, and whether the Church has the need of their particular skills in priesthood" (Dowell 35).

Vocation is a tricky thing; people define vocation in very different ways. For some, vocation is a way of life; for others, it is just a job. In the vocation of priesthood, it is never just a job. Priest connect with people, priest are trusted, people of God. "Vocation and calling are used interchangeably, vocation for me is living into who you were created to be and I think vocation is...all people have vocation. I think God calls us to be who we are." "Every Christian is called to ministry because we are baptized, we as Christians are called to go out in the world and to be Christ in the world and that is everyone's calling; everyone has a calling from the moment they are baptized everyone has a vocation, no matter where you find yourselves that is who you are and my job is to help Christians understand that and claim it...at least in my opinion that is what priests do (laughs)."

Michael Hamilton writes in his book on the ordination of women, "'The new life' which is our greatest

gift from God through Jesus Christ, is not limited to males only. Why, then, should males alone lead the people of God in the great thanksgiving for that new creation?" (Hamilton 9). Melody had no woman role model, there weren't any; she was one of the very first women who helped to pave the road for women now. She had seen it in herself to be a priest always but had always thought it was folly because she was a woman. She never thought she was making a mistake, but it just couldn't be realized. Yet here she is 14 years later, past the struggle and ministering the word of God to all who have an open ear.

Melody made the transition from Roman Catholicism to the Anglican faith while teaching religion at a middle school in Pittsburgh. It was not an easy transition for her; she had made a serious to the Roman Catholic faith. "Across the street from Sacred Heart Catholic Church, where I worked was Calvary Episcopal Church and I was always in my life one of these folks that as very much the participant in church, I would sit up front and all that sort of stuff. I was becoming more and more aware that I was on the outside, and one Sunday morning, I was sitting in the back row and I looked around and thought, why are you sitting in the back row? That morning during the Eucharist I remember physically and spiritually and emotionally, that I was on the edge, I was no longer a part of this community

because I was an observer that morning rather than a participant. I didn't receive communion that morning, I knew it was over and everyone at the altar were men except for the woman who was leading the singing, which had always been my role. I just said to myself, 'I can't do this anymore' this is not where I belong, at this altar. I did stay through the Eucharist, but then I slipped out the back and then just intuitively walked across the street to Calvary Episcopal Church and they had a 12:15 service so I walked in and found the chapel and sat down...a woman came to the altar, I was just sitting there beaming. As she moved through the Eucharistic prayers my first thought was, 'I've come home'. From that moment on I was Episcopal. I metaphorically call that little two lane road between Calvary and Sacred Heart the asphalt abyss I had to cross." Melody was ordained in the Episcopal church in 1989.

For Melody it was never a question of who she was, it was a matter of where she belonged. Like Siddhartha, she had to eventually cross the river, except her "river" was made of asphalt. It was inevitable that she would get to a point where she couldn't become all she had the potential to be where she was. So she simply moved from one side of her "river" to the other; on side Catholic and the other Episcopal. It wasn't like she had to reconstruct her faith, her faith had always been there and nothing could change that.

New Woman New Church New Priestly Ministry is the proceedings of the second conference on the ordination of Roman Catholic Women which took place November 10-12, 1978 in Baltimore, Maryland. In this is the Prayer Events. There are so many inspirational words in that section alone. Even though Catholic Women still can not be ordained this conference displayed their willingness to take all the steps necessary. In the last section of the book there is a prayer service there is a prayer that says it all.

Waiting.

Waiting does NOT surrender

The standard;

waiting does NOT submit
defeat;

waiting does Not suppress
the call.

Waiting is NOT retreat,
waiting is the preparation
for advance.

Waiting is NOT cowardice,
waiting is the courage
To cre-ation.

Waiting is NOT

Acquiescence,
waiting is the struggle

for fidelity.

Works Cited

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The Reverend Melody S. Williams. Personal Interview,

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