



When God Calls

Delia P. Estrada

When I was thirteen years old I attended youth camp at Mount Wesley in Kerrville, Texas. I was hooked and remained involved through my senior year. Even though I wanted to be in church work there was little emphasis placed on women being called to ordained ministry. I graduated from college and became a schoolteacher. In later years a new pastor at my church saw that I was involved in the community, appeared on television, and was very outspoken for the teachers' union. He asked me to serve on the Administrative Board. I did and the rest is history.

After being selected to attend the Lay Administrator's Program at Perkins School of Theology, I became very involved in ministry at my local church. Some years later, I attended the Diaconal Ministry Convocation in St. Louis, Missouri. It was at this convocation that I decided to be in ministry. It was a ministry that I could be involved in without having to itinerate and inconvenience my family, or leave my job as a schoolteacher. It was God's grace that had

brought me to this time as I was trying to discern my call.

In 1985, I decided to register at Perkins School of Theology and take courses in the summer. Then in 1991, I was consecrated, the first Diaconal Minister for the Rio Grande Conference. After my consecration, I would constantly ask, "Why can't I serve communion?" The answer was always

the same, "If you want to do that you need to become an elder." I would respond, "But Diaconal Ministers have to take graduate courses in seminary, and that is more theological study than a licensed local pastor has to have. The answer was always the same, "Become an elder."

My years in diaconal ministry were a learning experience. I worked with my home church and I also maintained my

teaching position. I was there to assist the pastor and not to step into the pastor's role. I assisted with communion and baptism and on occasion I would preach and also visit the sick, but I was always reminded that only an Elder could administer the sacraments.

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

PSALM 121:1, KJV

Has the creation of the deacon as an ordained office of Word and Service complicated the ordination process?

Q 72

Study of Ministry Report to 2008 General Conference

www.gbhem.org (click "Final Study of Ministry Report")

We have been so focused on the higher education standard that we have not created alternative ways to call, form, and support leaders. Our educational norm and its associated costs make it too difficult for new churches in communities of new immigrants or with lesser economic resources, particularly, to have ordained ministerial leadership.

Q 68 (4)

Study of Ministry Report to 2008 General Conference

www.gbhem.org (click "Final Study of Ministry Report")

In 1998, I retired from my teaching position after 29 years of service. When the Diaconal Ministers were given the option to stay as Diaconal Ministers or transfer to the Order of Deacon, I made the transfer. I was ordained a Deacon in Full Connection. I opted to be a Permanent Deacon. I was appointed to serve in my local church where I assisted in worship activities; from preaching, assisting with communion, establishing outreach programs, and serving in community. Even though I now had "Reverend" in front of my name, I was still only assisting in communion and baptism. I finally came to accept that *Diakonia* was a set apart ministry and that at this moment in time I was called to that particular ministry setting of love, service, and justice. During this time I was never compensated for my work, but I was glad to be in God's service. The experience and learning that I received cannot be measured, but when there is no compensation, the congregation questions the credibility of the ordination. It also diminishes the accountability the church has toward the Deacon. The only accountability for me was my annual report to the charge conference.

In January 2001, I was appointed to pastor the church in Rio Grande City. There were still questions from certain

people as to how could that be possible since it was clearly stated that Deacons could only assist in communion and baptism; and now I was serving as pastor of the church.

I immediately called Rev. Jaquin Garcia for information and he sent a paper that was titled, "License for Pastoral Ministry and the Ministry of the Deacon." I still have the original copy he sent me. I guarded it with my life, just in case anyone had questions about my ministry and my appointment.

While appointed to Rio Grande City I enrolled in the Course of Study at Perkins, became an elder and was ordained in 2004 by Bishop Joel N. Martinez. After three years in Rio Grande City I was appointed to El Mesías UMC in San Antonio, Texas. In 2006-2007, I had a two-point charge I was appointed to El Mesías UMC and Program Coordinator for Campus Ministry with the Southwest Texas Conference for The University of Texas Downtown Campus. During this time in my life the Philippians 4:13 passage which is my favorite, kept me going. Every day I would say to myself, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

In March of 2007, I received a call from Bishop Martinez, who wanted to know if I would accept the appointment to be the District Superintendent of the Northwest District of the Rio Grande Conference. After much prayer and conversing with my family, I made the decision to accept the appointment. At present, I am in El Paso, Texas, and as I look out my front door I see the most beautiful mountains and I recall Psalm 121:1, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." (KJV)

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