

The Week of the Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 17, 2022

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7, the Calling of St. Stephen

I am a retired deacon of the ELCA. In my mid-fifties I felt a strong desire to change careers. I had worked in the supermarket business since I was 16 years old, and for one large company for 32 years following college graduation. I had also volunteered in my congregation for several years and found it fulfilling. I thought that I would like to serve in the church as a church administrator. I spent just over a year trying to be sure of my sense of call. I wondered if I were simply unhappy in the supermarket business and seeking merely another job or was I being called by God to work in the church? I spoke with several people about my questions. Finally, one pastor told me that he still had occasional doubts. He said that some days he would wake up certain that he was where God wanted him to be and that on other days he thought that God was calling him out of ministry. That helped me to make the decision to proceed with candidacy.

When I met the Candidacy Committee for the first time, I was asked whether I was certain that I did not desire to become a pastor. I replied that I didn't feel that I had the gifts for things like hospital visits or comforting the ill. Since I had never been seriously ill, I felt parishioners would realize that I couldn't really empathize with their situations. The next question was why do you want to be a church administrator? My response was ". . .to do what I can to make the pastor's work easier". My several years of volunteering in my congregation helped me to see that the pastor did things that I felt I could do just as well which would free him or her up to do the tasks the pastor is best suited to do.

When I began my internship at a congregation in a suburb of Albany, NY, they were just completing a merger with another congregation. They were also completing an addition to their building at the same time. The bishop told me that part of my task was to "keep the pastor sane" because of the amount of extra work he was doing. Among the things I did was to work with the congregation's attorney to complete the final details of the merger documents. I was also asked to work on the application for the small mortgage needed to finance debt remaining following the renovation. God had a surprise for me a few years later when I had a similar task when the congregation I served in my first call purchased a neighboring house and property.

I served a rather large congregation in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. We had an elevator that began to make automatic emergency calls to the fire department reporting that somebody was stuck in the elevator. In each instance there was no such emergency. The fire department asked that the problem be resolved to avoid false alarms. When I contacted the elevator company, they denied responsibility and claimed it was the telephone company's responsibility. The telephone company also denied responsibility and blamed the elevator company. After several calls to both companies, I finally asked that each company send a repairman to the church to meet and get the problem resolved. The two men met and the situation was quickly cleared up.

Stephen and the others were called to do the routine work of the church so the Apostles could build the church. The above stories are descriptions of times when I have tried to fashion my ministry on that example. In retirement I am trying to make myself available as a volunteer to continue to try to make the work of the pastor easier.

Prayer: Gracious God, as you have called workers to various tasks in the world and in your church, so you have called us to serve you, using the gifts you have given us and the talents with which you have blessed us. Grant us joy in serving you, your church, and our sisters and brothers. Through your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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