

# Yes, Send Me: My Journey to Ordination

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On my 35th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood, I am filled with gratitude. I give thanks to God for those who paved the way for me, a woman, to be ordained. I give thanks for those who mentored, encouraged, supported, nurtured, and all who steadily prayed for me. Many who contributed to my learning and development, saw my authenticity and believed in my leadership. And just as I Cor. 3:6 says: “I, (Paul) planted, Apollos watered, but God made it grow”, we never know what impact we can have on someone’s life.

I am an Episcopal preacher’s kid (bishop’s kid), with God and the church at the heart of my life and grounding me in faith. We moved to Brazil when I was just 22 months old, and for thirteen years, the Brazilian culture and the Anglican/Episcopal Church profoundly shaped who I am and my call to ministry. I have always felt a deep connection to God, as someone who accompanies me daily, and I couldn’t wait to turn seven so I could become an acolyte. I believe I was the first girl acolyte at All-Saints in Santos. I proudly donned my red cassock and white surplice, serving whenever I could. I served as chaplain during ordinations, as a chalice bearer, and even stepped in to teach Bible lessons for children when no teacher was available.

We moved to the United States in 1977, the year after the 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention (1976) voted in favor of women being ordained to the priesthood and to the episcopate. When I presented myself at St. Stephen’s in Armonk, New York to serve as an acolyte, I heard the typical response: “girls sing in the choir, boys are acolytes.” I was extremely disappointed at this impediment, and a few months later the vestry even discussed whether the offering would be affected on Christmas Eve if I served as an acolyte. I served and the offering plate was plentiful.

As often as I could, I accompanied my father to the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, where he worked. It was there that I met the Rev. Mark Harris and he invited me to serve on the planning team for national college gatherings. Little did I know I would serve as a priest in the same diocese as him many years later. This experience helped shape me for the call I would later discern. In the late 1970’s during my high school years, I was the first girl on a local recreational soccer team. I’m grateful to my brother, who, while we lived in Brazil, let me join him and the other boys for street soccer. He knew I could hold my own — or maybe even outplay a few of them, I say humbly. When I left home, the church remained my anchor; in college, I attended St. Andrew’s in Greencastle, Indiana, every Sunday and often brought friends along with me. Recently, while worshiping there, I encouraged them to remember their mission to the college students. I explained that this church had been my anchor, and along with the Rev. Ken Schomaker, they contributed in my discernment to the priesthood. Again, you never know what impact you will have on someone’s life.

My father, the late Rt. Rev. Elliott Sorge, 1983–1993, was elected bishop in the Diocese of Easton,) so after college I moved to Easton and worked with the migrant health project. There, I met a group of Roman Catholic sisters who have been by my side since 1985, supporting me with their constant prayers. I attended Trinity Cathedral where I met the dean, the Rev. Mark Sullivan (currently lives in Delaware, where he retired). He took me out on visits to the homebound, which included lunch. Mark was always a good listener and encourager in my life, the process for ordination, and my ministry. Look at all these Delaware connections!

I am grateful for St. John's in Austin, Texas and the Rev. Murray Powell, who took me in as their first woman seminarian for my field education. There were some who would not receive the chalice from me because I was a woman seminarian, but I may have won them over by the end of the year. My first experience with a woman priest presiding at Eucharist was with the Rev. Mayfield, at St. David's in Austin when I was in seminary. Keep in mind that was the only laywoman professor in seminary.

I was the first woman ordained in the Diocese of Easton — as deacon on June 3, 1989, and as priest in 1990 at 26 years old. I am thankful to the commission on ministry, the standing committee, the Cathedral chapter, the bishop, and all of my brother clergy who welcomed me. I was ordained 15 years after the Philadelphia Eleven women were ordained priests. These first ordinations took time in many dioceses. Jobs for women clergy were not plentiful, to say the least, and thus, I learned to be creative in living out my priesthood. I was the first woman vicar at St. Paul's in Hillsboro, supplemented by work at the Senior Center in Caroline County.

I served as the first woman rector at St. Peter's in Williston, North Dakota and also at St. Michael's and All Angels in Cartwright, North Dakota from 1995-2013. Nobody knew what to call a woman priest. When I was pregnant with my daughter, the joke became: "Our 'Father' is going to be a 'Mother'(literally)". There were not any pregnant pastors in town. In 2014, when I began to serve at St. Luke's in Seaford, Delaware, I was finally a second woman rector. One of my joys as Conference Leader for CREDO, is leading a conference for ordained clergy women under 45 years of age, where I was not the youngest ordained woman in the room.

Sustained by the Holy Spirit in baptism, God who began the good work within me, continues to grow me. And now, thirty-five years later, I look back and begin to see the legacy of all who paved the way, including all the lay women who were willing to be firsts as acolytes, chalice bearers, vestry members, delegates to convention, and deputies to General Convention (1970). It is important for me to remember those who made way for me. Courageous people continue to lead movements for gender, sexuality, racial equality, and inclusion. I am thankful. Like the prophet Isaiah who answers the call to whom shall I send, we too, must say: "Here I am, send me" (Isa. 6:8).

I guess, I too, said “yes, send me” and my legacy was meant to lead the way for others to follow where they are called. I pray that I have done so faithfully with the support of so many saints along the way graciously watering and nurturing.