

November 3, 1977

Dear Susan,

The progression of events toward the ordination of Stacy, Loey and Jody has prompted this letter to you. We are concerned that you continue to feel your presence in and accountability to the feminist community of women in theology.

The concept of being ordained together is a natural and welcome development from the feminist theology which has as its starting point personal experience in community. It is in accord with the covenantal mode of the Hebrew and Christian traditions, and is in line with the style of mutual support of our foremothers who could not be ordained. Finally, it is a witness to the necessity for women to bond in solidarity and sisterhood with each other and with other oppressed people, if Christian ministers are to be more than reinforcing agents of the status quo.

Your decision to withdraw from the collective is deeply distressing to us, as it was to the other members of the collective. As women who are accountable to one another, we feel the necessity to share our concerned response with you in the hope that it will be a part of your education and growth toward what it means to live in a covenanted way.

Women's oppression, as well as the oppression of many other groups, comes in a variety of forms in a patriarchal, misygonist world. The most profound threat to patriarchy is lesbianism, the reality of women's love for and support of one another, including sexual expression if appropriate to the individuals involved. Lesbianism is the recognition that the full potential of human relationship is present between and among women; it is a critically important prerequisite for the mental, spiritual, physical and psychic health of all women.

A look at the current social scene, where backlash is apparent in a strong move to overturn the Bakke decision, in federal cutoff of abortion funding to welfare mothers/women, in anti-gay legislation in many places, and in Klu Klux Klan members packing the federally sponsored women's meeting in Houston this month impress upon us the urgency of witness. This witness of our lives and of our influence is part of what we understand to be the responsibility of Christian ministers.

It is not out of fear of institutional displeasure nor out of duty to 'those people' to whom we minister that we act. Our model for ministry does not permit such objectification. Rather, it is from our sense of ourselves and those around us as the Whole People of God with whom we proclaim the Good News that we are obligated to speak boldly and lovingly the news of human freedom and dignity.

This means that there will be times when we, like prophets of old, will be voices crying in the wilderness, alone in our conviction but firm in our communal faith that knows no geographic bounds. Perhaps this is your situation presently, and what an opportunity for witness it is!

Susan, the road for women in ministry to full personhood within the ranks of the ordained in the UCC is long and treacherous. Detours of cooptation abound, and it appears that you have chosen one. Creative and challenging ministry is never easy; there are no shortcuts through difficult social problems. Rather, there is our covenantal tradition, bonding in solidarity with others on the journey to assure that all make it to the end of the road.

In the case of Stacy, Loey and Jody's ordination, the road has indeed been made more difficult for your sisters. But the issues are clear. These women's ministry out of an informed commitment to the truth of women's lives is increasingly apparent for those who have eyes to see. We ardently hope that your ministry will spring from this solidarity, knowing the pain and vulnerability in which it might place you.

Sincerely,

Peggy Cleveland

Mary E. Hunt

Letter to Susan Cutshall
when she withdrew
from Mary E. Hunt
and Peggy Cleveland