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Committee on the Ministry  
Ecclesiastical Council  
Golden Gate Association  
Northern California Conference  
United Church of Christ  
870 Market Street, Room 688  
San Francisco, Cal. 94102

Dear Friends,

As Chairperson of the U.C.C. Commission on Women I have had the opportunity to meet Jody Parsons, Loey Powell and Stacy Cusulos, read their corporate ordination paper and talk to them about their desire to be ordained together. I would like to share with you a few of my thoughts in support of their "collective ordination".

Collective ordination may be a new phrase to some of us, but I do not think it is a new concept to the Church. Being sent out to minister in twos and threes, experiencing God's presence among us when we are gathered in communities of two and three and many more images of Christian life and ministry are given to us by Jesus himself. Those images of shared ministry must have provided strength and support to those first Christians when they found themselves called to preach the good news in places where they were not always welcomed.

It is not surprising that again and again throughout church history people have witnessed to the importance of community as they have sought to reform and revitalize their church and world and give birth to something new. In our time we can see the importance of community as a basis for support and action in the emerging theologies of liberation and movements for human justice.

Women are one of the many groups who have found community critical to their sense of identity and effective action. Jody, Loey and Stacy are not alone in their desire to find ways to symbolize and actualize the importance of community in their own ministries. In my work with women seminarians, as Director of the Women's Theological Coalition of the Boston Theological Institute, the value of classes, field-work placements and support groups where women could talk together and work together was a recurring theme. In my involvement with the U.C.C. Commission on Women I have watched shared ministry in action as clergy and lay, volunteers and staff have worked together on programs and advocacy for women.



Women like Jody, Loey, Stacy and myself were fortunate to have had a community of other women as we prepared for ministry. Many of our predecessors were not so lucky and will testify to the difficulties of being one of the first women in ministry. But we need continuing communities of support, challenge and accountability as we practice ministry and test our visions.

Collective ordination and the covenant they have with each other is their way of affirming the importance of community in their past preparation and for the future of their ministry. Such covenants are not new. Many of us, men and women alike, have informally developed communities of support through the years - friends who prod and support us through letters and conversations.

Jody, Loey and Stacy want to do this formally, to make that covenant public and to have the importance of shared ministry recognized by you, the people and the churches ordaining them.

To affirm this community, to covenant together to share the joys and struggles, does not protect anyone from the loneliness that is part of human life and Christian ministry. ~~But a community can help us bear and celebrate the particularities of our call and responsibility.~~ Jody, Loey and Stacy are persons with different gifts and interests, with calls to different working places and communities. They have shared with you the particularities of their individual calls and commitments, as well as their shared vision of ministry.

I thank them for jarring all of us with set notions of ordination, asking us to re-examine our images of ministry and consider anew the possibility of people being sent out in twos and threes to proclaim the good news.

Sincerely yours,

*Barbara A. Gerlach*

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