

THE VOICES OF TWO WOMEN WAITING FOR CALL

The Voice of Sandi Decker:

Persistent Voice began 17 years ago this fall with the voice of a woman awaiting call. At time of this writing, six members of my 2006 M.Div. class still await first calls (5 women and 1 man). While some of us have chosen to wait, others eagerly desire to serve in a congregation *yesterday*. Our stories are as unique as the individuals who live them.

My family has been fortunate. While the Spirit is working on its own time table to connect us with our first call, my husband remains employed in Dubuque and we are able to continue living on campus.

The other day, I attended chapel at Wartburg. There was no doubt I wanted to hear a friend preach, but I felt just a bit uncomfortable about going up to the “Castle.” I had it all planned out – I would slip in late, stand in the narthex, hear the sermon, and quietly slip away before anyone noticed. Ah...but that plan was foiled as I heard the sermon.

My friend, Tim, preached beautifully, just as I was sure he would. His words resonated deeply with the many gathered in that space. The Spirit was at work! What I heard was a message about feeling far away while surrounded by others and feeling alone amidst the crowd. Moreover, I heard the resounding message that Christ is with me regardless. Then I realized this community that I am hesitant to consider my own any longer is also with me, regardless. While on the one hand, I may no longer “belong,” I was reminded that I am a loved child of this great and mighty Castle and of our great and mighty God.

Unlike the original plan, I stayed after the service. I purposely hung in the background as much as possible. Yet, people seemed to come out of the woodwork to greet me. It was great to catch up with old friends and treasured people. I ended up having some wonderful conversations with some beautiful souls. And just like in the old days, the conversations ranged from laughter to compassion to discernment to truth telling to reassurance to joy.

Admittedly, many of the after chapel conversations began with *me* reassuring *them* that I am in a good space and that I consider myself fortunate to be in this situation economically. I received a number of the furrowed brow, caring and intent eyes, serious look, hand-touching-my-arm greetings that expressed deep interest and concern about how I am doing. I know these looks were meant well and I take them for what they were. Yet, someday when I'm in their position, I hope I remember not to give the same look as I greet someone awaiting call.

In the meantime, ministry opportunities abound. Spouses enter into conversations about their fears, adjustments, and confusion. Seminary kids face the trials of daily life – everything from breakups with boyfriends to not being invited to a birthday party. Friends share moments of laughter and trepidation. And I, a fortunate graduate awaiting call, am called to this place for the time being. Thanks be to God.

The Voice of Stacy Grau (as interviewed by The Persistent Voice staff):

Persistent Voice: How are you? How is it going?

Stacy Grau: My experience of late has been people questioning me about what I'm doing wrong in the interview. I know that question is something that most of us who wait have to face

PV: It sounds similar to people trying to make sense of someone having a serious illness. They want to believe it must be something the person did; otherwise they might find themselves in the same situation.

SG: Yes, I think so. I do have people supporting me, standing up for me, and invested in their process with me.

PV: If I may ask, how are you doing financially?

SG: It's been a struggle, but when things get bad, an interview mileage reimbursement check comes through or someone calls me about a Sunday pulpit supply. It's my personal contacts that have been getting me through.

PV: You're still living on campus.

SG: Yes, the seminary has been very helpful. Because there was room, they say when I get a call I can sign a promissory note to pay my rent.

PV: What can we do to help you feel a part of things while you wait?

SG: It's strange. Because I'm not yet ordained I'm not on the synod list to receive announcements or newsletters. When you wait you are simply in a "gap" or a "hole." But it's been getting better lately. My assigned synod did invite me to the fall theological conference and paid for my registration. That was really important.

PV: I recall vividly others who have waited for calls, men as well as women, feeling that people don't want know the news if it's still not good news.

SG: Yes, it's kind of "Out of sight, out of mind." People say, "I'm so glad to see you but I don't know what to say."

PV: What *would* be helpful for you to hear, Stacey?

SG: It's hard to answer that. I *do* know the phrase that is not helpful is: "We will pray for you." Not that I don't want people's prayers, but saying only that feels like they are discounting me. It's like, "We don't know what to do, so we will pray." I have, however, learned the value of networking. And I know I have people that I can count on, a list of people whom I could call when I need them. That means a great deal.