

The Charge to Michelle Hwang  
At her Ordination and Installation  
Ark and Dove Presbyterian Church

June 27, 2010

Pastor Michelle – Welcome to ordained Ministry and welcome officially finally to Ark and Dove. The call to ministry which you at times evaded and then fervently pursued is now confirmed. The t's are crossed. The l's are dotted. Every jot and tittle seems to be in order. The mystery, bliss and mess of serving as an ordained minister now begins with the empowerment that comes from the laying on of hands and the confirmation of call from both a congregation and a presbytery. I could have said welcome to ordained ministry Reverend Hwang; but in a certain way the title "Reverend" smacks of power and privilege and diminishes the sense that as ministers, we are called to serve. You are called to serve Christ Jesus, the church and the people - as Jesus served.

Still ordination is not ordinary. Ordination is a sacred duty and a privilege. Ordination is not a sacrament in our tradition; but that journey on which you now embark is sacramental. You are called to feed and nurture the people and the church as a whole. In a world

filled with injustice and turmoil, in a culture in which the role of the church is very much in flux and often disregarded and unappreciated, in a denomination reeling with change; you are called to serve with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. Thankfully for Ark and Dove, the Presbytery and selfishly speaking for me; you have abundant quantities of these qualities. As we walk through this post modern period of a second reformation into an unknown and very different future, the gift of imagination will be very important. I hope for you and I charge you to cultivate your imagination; drink deeply of the wells that will nurture your creativity in ministry. Chew on the breads that will stretch you. One of the great temptations of ministry is to follow the mud ruts of the wagons that have traversed before us. I have learned that in a new church, it only take three years to cement the icy cold hands of stale tradition into place. Some things bear repeating and most things are best tweaked and or recreated. Often things need to be discarded. Gratefully this community is generally open to fresh paths and new horizons.

As you serve in ministry I hope you will allow the congregation the people, created in God's image to be a source of nurture and faith to you. Often when I look back and think about a ministry project or a

meeting or a pastoral call or a prayer or the week at Ark and Dove; I find myself deeply appreciating the work of our members and my colleagues and the way they have ministered to me even as I have tried to minister to and with them. It does not diminish ministry to receive the grace that God has granted to the people with whom we minister. I hope you will keep watch for the gifts people offer you and be open hearted enough to truly receive them.

As you serve in ministry, I hope you learn to count to ten. I am not so great at this, so I understand the cost of the quip that “haste makes waste.” There are many lenses through which we can look at ministry. The quick comeback, the knee jerk reaction, the tit for tat, the rush to judgment; all muck it up. The plain truth is often merely an angle of vision; pause and perspective are balms for impish impulsiveness. I am about getting to the point that I can count to six. I hope you do better.

Ministry is an exciting adventure. Around here often it's crazy. This permission giving stuff defies predictability as do the ebbs and flows of everyday living. Serving is sometimes just hanging on for the ride. Ministry is also a great privilege in that people invite you to places in their hearts that they show very few others. The depths of

pain and the heights of joy that people reveal are very often amazing experiences. Be a good steward of the trust and profound mysteries that people share.

Paradoxically because ministry is exhilarating exploration and a window to astounding revelations; ministry is also draining. Some faith ventures take “all you got.” Sometimes people are cranky with God, annoyed with the Holy and perturbed about God’s whimsical and seemingly capricious quietness. A lot of the time God calls us to change and if ministry is prophetic; we are calling the world to change and change is disorienting and not always welcomed. Some reactions are raucous. Some critiques really sting. Sometimes church leaves you bruised. Some stories suck the life out of you. Remember to Sabbath so you can recreate yourself. Remember to rest so you can run. Tend to your friendships outside of this congregation. Find some colleagues in whom to trust. Take your vacations. Honor your days off. There are crises in ministry, but most everything can wait until Tuesday. At times you may need to be frivolous to rediscover joy. Chance it. Allow your heart places to play. Allow your spirit spontaneity. And be gentle on yourself. Jesus already died, you don’t have to. What you do have to do is

accept the grace you offer in God's name to others. In order to be a spiritual guide to the people of the church, you must continue your own spiritual pilgrimage. Continue to jump into those baptismal waters sometimes they are rapids and sometimes gentle soothing spas. In either case they renew and refresh.