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# The World Is My Parish

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*Festschrift* for  
Norma Cook Everist  
Distinguished Professor  
of Church and Ministry  
Emerita, Wartburg  
Theological Seminary



## *Introduction to This Issue*

**N**orma Cook Everist, to whom this *Festschrift* is dedicated, is known as master weaver of community. I had the profound privilege of teaching with her as my colleague at Wartburg Theological Seminary, where she fostered a learning community of shared power and partnership that built on the gifts and insights of all, preparing graduates for leadership in the church and world. Prof. Everist previously taught at Yale Divinity School and is a widely known lecturer and the author of many books, chapters in books, articles, and educational resources.

Dr. Everist served nationally and internationally on many task forces and committees in the areas of ministry, leadership,

theological education, gender studies, and ministry in daily life. Two recent books that reveal core commitments are *Open the Doors and See All the People: Stories of Church Identity and Vocation* and *Seventy Images of Grace in the Epistles: That Make All the Difference in Daily Life*. She communicates on her blog, “Conversations on the Church’s Vocation in the Public World”: <http://normacookeverist.blogspot.com/>. Emerita Distinguished Professor Everist now lives in Mason City, Iowa, where she is mentor to many via Zoom. She is a pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and a member of the Lutheran Diaconal Association.

I have witnessed the weaving ability of Norma Cook Everist in many settings and heard from others her astute skills of observation, interpretation, and making connections. Those who know her service as a parish deaconess in St. Louis, inner city minister in Detroit and New Haven, parish associate at churches in Connecticut, lecturer in practical theology at Yale Divinity School, and professor at Wartburg Theological Seminary each have stories of her attention to life-giving relationships and building up community for the common good. I recall many occasions in meetings either ordinary or of major consequence, where my colleague was able to weave together the contributions of others and invite us to wiser deliberation. Her powers of intuition and analysis in the moment never cease to amaze. The weaving of relationships by Norma Cook Everist strengthens the warp and weft that bind us in life together as Christian community.

We observe the weaving of multiple callings by Norma Cook Everist in the articles of this *Festschrift*: ministry as deaconess, supporter for diaconal ministries, advocate for the leadership of women in church and society, broker of Christian witness for civil society, embracer of the global church for Christ's sake, pastoral caregiver in the healing of souls, practitioner of evangelical witness, partner in ministerial accompaniment, preacher of the Gospel, and friend extraordinaire. Even more, she has served as professor of church and ministry, wise educator, teaching theologian of the church, author of generative texts, faculty colleague, advisor to students, confidant and counselor to alumni, visitor of congregations, dedicated church woman, caring family member, and protector of the weak. In living out her baptismal vocation Norma Cook Everist embodies these words from the mission statement of Wartburg Theological Seminary: "learning leads to mission and mission informs learning." John Wesley is known for the claim: "I look on all the world as my parish." From early life onward and throughout her awe-inspiring career, we can echo this sentiment about the legacy of Norma Cook Everist: "The World Is My Parish."

Deaconess **Heidi Michelsen** remembers how important it was for her, as a young deaconess student, to see the picture of Pastor Norma Cook Everist wearing a clerical collar, and also to know that although she had been ordained as a pastor, Dr. Cook Everist continued to be active in the diaconal community. That "both/and" thinking paved the way for many more deaconess-pastors throughout the years. Prof. Norma Cook Everist brought that same sensibility to her work with the Committee for a New Lutheran Church, as she advocated for the importance of the diaconate in the life of the church.

**Mary Elizabeth Moore** explores how service has been a challenging term in church history and in relationships across race, gender, and social class. Service has been touted as a Christian value, yet also used to stratify the church as some were granted power over others, while others were expected to serve, even suffer, for the larger good. This article re-visions Christian service and diaconal ministries, drawing upon the case study of Norma Cook

Everist and the baptismal and diaconal traditions of the ecumenical church. Liberating service is animated by liberative theologies and shaped by five values: the sacrality of all life; love-in-community; daily witness to grace; mutuality and accompaniment; and the endless pursuit of justice and peace.

**Kristin Johnston Largen** describes the ongoing need for more women in ministerial leadership positions to visually embody the transformation the Holy Spirit is working in the church for the sake of the gospel and the world. The Holy Spirit is at work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), inviting the church—the body of the Christ in the world—to grow and be transformed. In congregations this invitation takes different shapes, depending on the context and what is needed for faithful proclamation and embodiment of the gospel. The Spirit is calling for and creating fresh instantiations of the body of Christ that are diverse, welcoming, and inclusive, and that include the "bodies" of all God's children. Having more women in leadership is one way to exemplify the larger call for diversity in the ELCA.

In our deeply divided society, Christian communities can give a public witness to the need and possibility of civil discourse by engaging openly in dialogues on today's issues. **James Childs** discusses how the ethics of dialogue is set forth in terms of justice, humility, openness, trust, and truthfulness, all aspects of the neighbor love Jesus commanded. Dialogue is a path to the discovery of shared values and seeks mutual enlightenment rather than attempting to win a debate at the expense of other participants. This process is reflected in the work of Norma Cook Everist.

**Winston D. Persaud** draws on his experience of a wider, inclusive expression of the "one holy catholic and apostolic church." He argues that there is much to be learned about being the church—local, national, and global—in which both mainline and evangelical churches reflect diversity of race, ethnicity, skin color, culture, class, and gender. In the face of that diversity, there is the common, fundamental confession of faith in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Duncan Wielzen** employs the story of Jesus healing a leper (Mark 1:40-45) as a model for confronting Caribbean communities facing a "crisis of connection." The article reflects a modest exercise in a narrative theological reading of the Markan text. The central question becomes: what can be learned from a narrative reading of the story of Jesus healing a leper that may contribute to turning the tide for individuals at the receiving end during the Covid-19 pandemic and other crises? This story uncovers the nitty gritty of human connection, including the basics of empathizing, reaching out, touching, and consenting.

**Sara A. Funkhouser** addresses the crisis of defining and confessing the Gospel in U.S. American society. This calls for a renewal in our understanding of evangelism, especially as it relates to the identity of believers in Jesus Christ. Grounded in a Lutheran understanding of vocation, while also engaging with ecumenical works, the article addresses how we are called through

baptism to love and serve the neighbor, which includes learning how authentically to talk about the work of the Triune God in our lives and in our world.

**Rhoda Schuler** shares how a young pastor just out of seminary capitalized on the initial “honeymoon” period with a parish, introducing an adult faith formation process during her first year. She was blessed with an amazing lay woman who served as catechist, leading the small group of “Voyagers” in the weekly discussion of the Gospel reading. Over three years, this dynamic duo of pastor and lay leader crafted a process that was welcoming to people from a variety of backgrounds, including one Millennial who was uncertain about the existence of God and a woman from the “greatest generation” who was a lifelong Lutheran.

The sermon by **Man-Hei Yip** on Luke 7:18-30 invites us to pause and reflect on the salvific activities through the Coming One, who has embodied the subversive good news to the world by transcending borders and boundaries. Jesus Christ gives new meanings to our lives in these precarious times.

**Craig L. Nessian** develops a theology of friendship in the way of Jesus Christ. In contrast to classical understandings, Christian friendship is grounded in the *perichōrētīc* dance of the Triune persons. Jesus names us friends, not servants, and invites us into his community of friendship with others. The sacrament of foot washing characterizes the practice of the church in service to one another as friends, especially in times of suffering and for those in harm’s way. The life and ministry of Norma Cook Everist embodies Christian friendship.

The **Currents Focus** feature provides an introduction and case studies by Wartburg Theological Seminary ethics students on two ELCA social statements and five ELCA social messages. These include “Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy” (2000), “Human Rights” (2017), “Gender-based Violence” (2015), “The Body of Christ and Mental Illness” (2012), “Our Calling in Education” (2007), “Immigration” (1998), and “The Death Penalty” (1991). Case studies encourage participants to reflect on the respective issues, applying the statement to their own lives and church in society.

The second quarter issue of *Currents* usually includes two of the major festivals of the church year: Easter and Pentecost. By the last Sunday of this issue we will begin the season of Ordinary Time. How do the extraordinary days of Easter and Pentecost frame the long ordinary season that follows? How do we preach in the postscript after the big days? Questions such as these are addressed in the introduction to **Preaching Helps** through the lens of John 21, a postscript to that gospel which already ended in Chapter 20. Can we help people be open to the life of faith after they’ve closed the book?

The editors of *Currents in Theology and Mission* give thanks for the authors contributing to this *Festschrift* and pray many readers will be inspired by the witness of Norma Cook Everist to good courage on their faith journeys.

**Craig L. Nessian**, *Issue Editor*

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## *In Memoriam:* Ralph W. Klein

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(December 1, 1936-December 29, 2021)

The January 2022 issue of *Currents in Theology and Mission* had already been released when we learned of the death of Ralph W. Klein, beloved professor, scholar, friend, and long-time editor of this journal. Ralph was appointed editor of *Currents* by John Damm, the academic dean of Christ-Seminary-Seminex, in 1974. Ralph asked to be relieved of this position thirty-five years later in 2009.

No one could express the vision Ralph Klein had for *Currents* more eloquently than Ralph himself. Interested readers will find Ralph's detailed history of the journal in *Currents* 43:1 (January 2016), which may be found in our online Archives; the issue which inaugurated the transition of *Currents* from a print journal to an online open-access journal: <http://currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/issue/view/2>. While we sought Ralph's historical record, we also asked for his hopes and imaginings about the future of the journal. In rereading his reflections, we can only wonder again at his marvelous writing ability, keen memory and eye for detail, humor and wisdom, and ever outward-reaching imagination.

Ralph collaborated with a multitude of ecumenical faculty colleagues, parish pastors, and editorial assistants over his thirty-five years as editor of *Currents*, beginning at Seminex and continuing into his long and fruitful years of teaching, writing, and serving as Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's beloved academic dean. He valued partnerships, as well as the people with whom he worked. His standards for excellence were well-known and many of us marveled at both the quality and the quantity of what he was able to accomplish. Peg Blumenberg and Ann Rezny (now deceased) were his long-time editorial partners in the 1980s and 1990s, and he recognized with gratitude how they "supplemented my editing and were masters of layout" *Currents in Theology and Mission* 43:1 (January 2016). Peg wrote these words of remembrance:

Ralph edited *Currents* for thirty-five years. He gave his very best to the journal and expected the same of those with whom he worked. He chose the content, reviewed manuscripts, asked people to write pieces to supplement and broaden existing submissions, scheduled editorial board meetings regularly and took its members' comments seriously, proposed ideas, and wrote thoughtful introductions to each issue. He also



submitted so many book reviews himself that often there wasn't space for them all, even with the small print we used in that section. I had come on board as a young mother of three and had many a short night meeting deadlines and trying to maintain those high standards. He supported and encouraged the technology that allowed me to do the production part from home and minimize commutes to the Hyde Park office. I did not know at the time that he required only about half the sleep of normal humans. No wonder he could fit so much in a day! *Currents* was just one of very many things on his extra-large plate—all of which he did exceedingly well, and with kindness, respect, and good humor.

We give thanks for the life of Ralph W. Klein, rich and fruitful in a multitude of ways. Especially, as his successors at *Currents*, we give thanks to God for the strong foundation he laid for this journal, his thirty-five faithful years of labor as its editor, and his support and cherished friendship through the years we have tried to carry on the work that he entrusted to us.

**Kathleen D. Billman and Craig L. Nesson, Co-Editors,**  
*Currents in Theology and Mission*

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