

NOTE: On August 19, 2012, Circle of Mercy ordained Leah Knox into Christian ministry, with the blessing of the Alliance of Baptists. Below are the charges offered to Leah and the congregation on that occasion.

Charge to Leah Knox on her Ordination Day **Nancy Hastings Sehested** August 19, 2012

You, Leah Knox, are called by the will of God to be a minister of the gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ. Our spirits rejoice in God our Savior, for God who is mighty has done great things for you. Are you not living testimony to the power of God?

On this high and holy day, I offer you an ancient story to carry with you on your journey: Ruth the pilgrim and Naomi the refugee.

Leah, you are one of my Ruths. You are taking the risky step that all pilgrims make, a Ruth willing to step with all the heart-courage within you into an unknown adventure on an unmarked trail. It is clear to us that this journey has been jump-started by God's divine sparks. May the daring courage of Ruth always reside with you.

As a Naomi who sometimes feels like a refugee, I am lugging some failures and heartaches on the way. I depend on Ruths like you to carry the hope for me when I am unable to carry it for myself.

Your hope infuses hope into me. You will need to weep with us Naomis for a while. But keep us on the journey...until our hurts meet up with hope...and we can embrace together God's new life again.

You were called to this journey long before we ever set eyes on you. Like all baptized believers, you were drenched with the mercies of God. And like all baptized believers, you were ordained by your baptism to bear witness to the love of God.

You know that there is no clear biblical precedent for setting people apart for ordination. So why ordination? It has become a "Good Housekeeping seal of approval." There are ambiguities.

In the early Christian community, there was the ordaining of a few to keep an eye on the many at the food table. The ordained ones were servants to the community. They were set apart to make sure that everyone received enough so that no one would go hungry or be left out. This is still a need in our communities, a need for making sure that everyone receives from the bounty of God's mercies and that no one is left out.

You have had some experience of being left out, so you are already alert to practicing the grace of a hospitable God. You are called to keep inviting the left-behind to Christ's table.

As you know, our community believes that every valley is lifted up and every mountain and hill made low, and we are all standing on holy ground.

So why ordination? There are ambiguities. But today we face them and say "Yes." This is a God-good happening. We lift you up by putting you on your knees. We call you out by putting you among us. We give you a temporary place of inequality to speak a word about equality. We call you out in order to call us out.

Keep holding the awe and wonder of such a day as this. May our hands on your head and shoulders be imprinted in your body as a sign of this body of Christ who goes with you. May our words of blessing seep into your bloodstream, coursing through your veins with fortification to withstand any of the flaming darts of the Evil One.

As an aging Naomi, I could pass along a number of travel tips for the journey: like, keep your sense of humor alive and kicking. Keep a few truth-daring and mercy-giving friends close by you. Keep doing your inner homework. Plus, as much as it is in your power, make 2 Timothy 2:23 your motto: "Avoid stupid and senseless controversies."

But this one thing I offer. Remember, you know The Story. The sacred story. The grand story of God's never-ending love for you and us and all of creation. It's in you. It has brought you up and caught you up and it is life for you.

Even when the story has been smashed into tiny, tiny pieces, and made into shards for wounding, don't worry. The treasure is still whole in you. So take thought of what is noble, and ease into the work of living as peaceably as possible with all.

Hold fast to what is good in it. The redeeming power of Christ's story of resurrection new life and hope is still there.

Bless those who persecute you, and who persecute others. You know the story. God's mercy never ends.

Weep with those who weep. Resist despair with those who resist. You know the story. Be patient in the tough times of tribulation. They still are coming. You know the story. Be constant in prayer. You know the story. Practice hospitality. You know the story.

And if you lose the story, remember it has not lost you. It is written on your heart. And our Holy One is still writing gospel good news in you and through you and around you. You are becoming the story.

So go ahead! Rejoice in this hope. You know the story.

And may the peace of Christ that passes every feeble attempt at understanding it, may such peace always be yours.

Charge to Circle of Mercy Joyce Hollyday

Just before the dawn of this millennium, singer-songwriter Holly Near was invited to contribute a piece to a book titled *Prayers for a Thousand Years*. She assessed the state of the world—both its beauty and its suffering—and wrote a prayer called “I Am Waiting for Instructions.” Here’s a piece of it:

I am waiting for instructions.

*From the sky comes the scope of my unlimited possibility,
from the trees comes the calendar of time, ring by ring,
from the wind comes the passion that fills me just before I learn,
from the water comes my gratitude, for in it I recognize myself.*

From paintings on the stone and drums on the mountain I am reminded that I am not the first. From the inquisitive and demanding nature of my niece I am reminded that I am not the last.

From the girl in the sweat shop whose little fingers bring in ten cents an hour, to the poet who shakes the world round when she speaks “Good Morning”...to the activist who wraps herself around a tree as the blades drown out the sound of her beating heart...to all these I cry out.

...From the motion of people, movements, in search of higher places, at first the object of disapproval and fear, we grow like dancers hurling through space...like skaters holding each other up for the world to see...

I have torn open my soul, worked to a sweat, wept with humiliation, struggled with confusion, battled with apathy and disillusion, confronted my beliefs again and again until I thought I would drown in sorrow; and yet, here I am...I have learned compassion in spite of myself, I do talk to the trees and listen to the wind, and I am waiting for instructions.

I too have often felt like someone who is waiting for instructions. Yet, tonight, I have been handed the task of issuing some: offering the charge to Circle of Mercy, saying a word about what Leah's ordination means to us as a community of faith and inviting a response.

Let me first of all thank you, Leah, for bringing the vulnerability and strength of your journey into our Circle. Whenever anyone opens up her life as you have to us, it becomes an opportunity for all of us, as Holly Near puts it, to “confront our beliefs again and again.”

And secondly, I want to thank this Circle for receiving Leah. We always knew that this was going to be a temporary journey together. The people of God are nothing if not wanderers on the move—from Adam and Eve's quick exit from the Garden to Sarah and Abraham's venture away from their homeland, from our ancestors' Exodus out of slavery to Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem and the Apostle Paul's missionary trips—Leah joins a long line of sojourners in the faith. And I am grateful that this Circle warmly received her and Brynn for the time that they stopped here.

And thirdly, I thank the Apostle Paul, who really did my job for me tonight. Could there be any clearer instructions for how we are to go forward from this moment than the words found in the 12th

chapter of the Letter to the Romans, our passage tonight? So I offer Paul's words, with a bit of embellishment, as our charge tonight.

Let love be genuine. Live honestly and authentically, Circle of Mercy, as we seek, in our own small way, to be a manifestation of the Body of Christ and the Beloved Community.

Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Let us not be naïve about the power of sin and brokenness in the world; let us continue to name it and witness on behalf of good, with creativity, compassion, and courage.

Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve God. Bring your whole being, all your passion and spirit, to loving God and one another.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Be the hope for one another, be as present as you can be, surround your sisters and brothers with prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers; associate with the lowly. Share what you have and welcome everyone as Christ would welcome them. Take to heart these words from Cuba's poet-philosopher José Martí, who said during the struggle for Cuba's independence: "If I survive, I will spend my whole life at the oven door seeing that no one is denied bread and, so as to give a lesson of charity, especially those who did not bring flour."

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. I know no clearer statement of human solidarity. This is what it means to be a faith community—to accompany one another, as we do every Sunday during the sharing of our praises and petitions, and beyond, carrying one another's joys and burdens and dividing the load.

Bless those who persecute you. Live in harmony with one another. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Surrender the right of revenge. Confess and forgive freely. And make every effort to live in peace.

From the Hasidic tradition comes this tale:

An old rabbi asked his pupils how they could tell when the night had ended and the day had begun.

"Could it be," asked one of the students, "when you can see an animal in the distance and tell whether it's a sheep or a dog?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

Another asked, "Is it when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it's a fig tree or a cypress tree?"

"No," answered the rabbi.

"Then when is it?" the pupils demanded.

The rabbi replied, "It is when you can look on the face of any person and see that he or she is your brother or sister. Because if you cannot see this, it is still night."

The witness of Jesus Christ, the Holy Scriptures, and our ancestors and contemporaries in the faith has given us our instructions. May we see this special moment in our life as another encouragement to live as sisters and brothers, with compassion toward all, in peace and loving hope. Amen.