

IN MEMORIAM

Peggy Ann Brainerd Way (1931–2016)

Our colleague for more than forty years, Peggy Ann Brainerd Way died July 9, 2016, in hospice care following a brief battle with cancer. Peggy is survived by her daughter Rebecca Ann Way and son Stephen William Way plus four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. With Peggy's death at 85, the fields of pastoral theology and care as well as chaplaincy and many parish ministers have lost an advocate for effective, theologically wise practice and courageous witness to the full inclusion and support of all persons. The range of Peggy Way's professional contributions defies any effort to summarize the scope of her influence on the fields of pastoral theology and care as well as on the practice of ministry more generally. Hopefully, these brief reflections will bring to mind your own opportunities to learn with and from her across the more than forty years of her academic career.

Prior to receiving her PhD at Princeton in 1979, Peggy was the first woman to serve as a full-time faculty member at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the first of two women to teach at the Jesuit School of Theology in Chicago, and she also taught at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. In 1977, she became the first woman to serve as a full-time member of the faculty at Vanderbilt. After a decade at Vanderbilt and a brief pause from teaching, she joined the faculty at Eden Seminary in St. Louis, from which she retired as professor emerita. Subsequently, she returned to teaching at Argosy University in Nashville, where she taught in the Department of Counselor Education. When the Association of Practical Theology met at Vanderbilt in the spring of 2014, Peggy's students from Argosy pre-

sented in a workshop, and she was there to support them and cheer them on.

Peggy Way engaged in pastoral theology and care with the substantial foundation of a BA in psychology, an MSW, an MDiv, and a PhD earned with Seward Hiltner when she graduated from Princeton. She used to laugh about her two-volume dissertation on finitude (*Growth and Finitude: Limitation in Pastoral Work and Thought*). Perhaps that early exploration of finitude is a clue about the lifelong challenge of engaging her rich range of interests and commitments. It is no accident that Peggy and her husband Bill, also prepared as a social worker and pastor, began their ministry in Chicago, where she was at once a pastor, community organizer, and director of a social service agency. It is no mystery how profoundly her early experiences in congregational and community ministry shaped her; across her career, Peggy always was committed to equipping pastors with respect for the unique resources and the complex (she said “messy”) relational possibilities that congregational life illustrates. She saw the challenges of congregational life and loved the daily witness of staying with the effort to love it in all its complexity. As she would say, in congregations, as in families, we are “stuck with one another”; this was her reminder to respect the complexity of lived experience and the challenge of negotiating the “messy” differences that are part and parcel of relational life.

Of course, Way’s pithy, colloquial comment “we are stuck with each other” was also a core element of her theological anthropology: the challenge of particularity that punctures any easy presumption that if only one’s “correct” point of view were recognized, the world would be so much better. She was deeply mindful of irony, and her theology was shaped by Reinhold Niebuhr’s incisive challenge to any presumption of the correct point of view. She illustrated that theological commitment with a quick sense of humor that would not spare her own or other liberals’ pretense of singular correctness. Her liberative commitments always informed her academic life and expanded across the stretch of her career to resist every form of exclusion and to seek strategies for supporting effective, full inclusion.

Peggy entered ministry and theological education when the traditional hierarchies were powerfully in place. She first found her voice in resisting sexism when it limited access for women with gifts for leadership. Ordained in 1960 to ministry in the United Church of Christ, she and her husband Bill were that denomination’s first clergy couple. In 1968, she preached at Rock-

efeller Chapel at the University of Chicago a sermon entitled "You are not My God, Jehovah." She carried her passions for justice and practices of compassion into her opportunities to teach and lecture. As a clergywoman and professor of pastoral theology, she broke new ground wherever she went, and she never forgot that her privilege included the responsibility to open doors wider, whether for racial justice, disability rights, or LGBTQ rights.

In 2002, Peggy Way was the luncheon speaker at the Society for Pastoral Theology meeting, which is typically an occasion for a carefully reflective presentation. True to form, Peggy chose to make her address of about fifteen to twenty minutes in the form of a limerick as if to puncture any pretense about the moment. Nonetheless, she packed into the limerick a particularly insightful summary of her theological and professional commitments seasoned by her unique humor (*Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 12, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 63–73, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1179/jpt.2002.12.2.006>). We find here her deep theological commitments to honor the particularity of each person as a unique and gifted creation of God; to the priority for attending to congregational care in its messy complexity, wonder, and theological richness; to the need for humility and humor about human beings' predictable readiness to refuse our creaturely and shared communal status; to the difficulty of lasting change and the challenge that alterity brings to honoring the full humanity of all; and to the profound truth that ours is a good and finite life in which we are called to love. In a more formal way (minus the limerick), Peggy also published a volume that richly reflects her theological and professional commitments, *Created by God: Pastoral Care for All God's People* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005).

Without question, Peggy Ann Brainerd Way brought abundant gifts to the practice of care and to the theology undergirding it. She did so with grace, love, and humor that only deepened the reach of her brilliance for guiding our practice.

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