

The Rev. Ellen D. Lang
111 West 17th Street #450
Sioux Falls S.D. 57104

Grace Episcopal Congregation
Madison, South Dakota

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This is a letter to re-iterate what I have said to the congregation present on IV Advent.

First of all, I am deeply sorry and grieved over the turmoil in the congregation, caused by my changing the dossel before the service on II Advent. I did not know or understand that the congregation had intentionally decided to return (after four years) to changing the dossel for liturgical seasons, Holy Days and special occasions. I assumed....and that word "assume" is the root of my faulty reasoning... that some one had a momentary lapse of memory concerning the change to the permanent dossel.

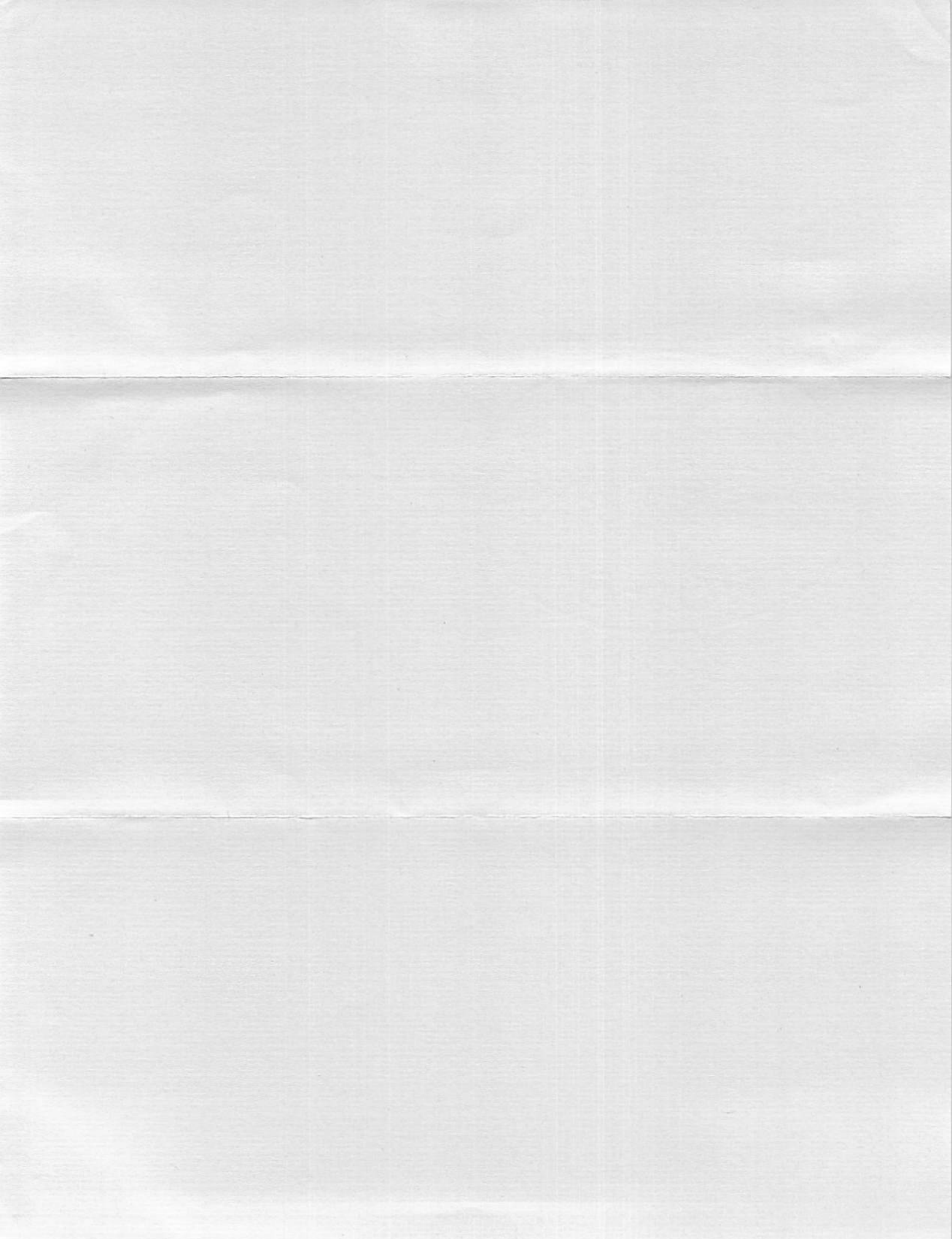
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But I over reacted in trying, as I thought, to "put things right"..... that is, putting them back to where I thought the congregation had decided they should be.

And this brings me to the source of this and all the other unhappiness that I have been made aware of in members of the congregation; our lack of common understanding about my role and the nature of my ministry to the congregation.

I know what a supply priest is. That person comes to the congregation to lead a service of worship, administers the sacraments and gives pastoral care when asked for. This model of ministry is most familiar to us all in the ministry of a chaplain for hospitals, nursing homes, etc. I have also filled this role in church congregations for a single Sunday or for a very short defined time. In these circumstances it is clear to everyone that the priest is not thought of as a member or leader of the congregation.

But when the ministry continues over a long period of time (4½ years to date), and members of the congregation insist from the beginning that "You are our priest, Mth. Ellen"....when I am repeatedly asked "Mth. Ellen, what do you think?"....when the congregation insists that they pay my expenses to convention as their ordained delegate....when I am asked to sign the yearly parochial report....when my name is listed as the priest for Grace Church, Madison, in the Church Directory....I admit that I lost sight of the restricted nature of "supply priest."



I have spent time with Bishop John Tarrant and The Rev. David Hussey in several meetings, during the past ten days and I have poured out my lament of confusion over the pain that has been expressed by members of the congregation and that I am feeling myself. They have helped to clarify the issues for me in this long term relationship. The most important learning point for me is the realization that the congregation and I both needed a Letter of Agreement...for me personally, A Job Description...so that all concerned would not so easily breach the boundaries of a mutually agreed upon relationship.

Bishop John and Father David have offered their help to the congregation in moving forward. Bishop John has also expressed his concern over the obvious condition of the church's building and the burden you are trying to shoulder. Bishop John and Father David are hoping to meet with the congregation within the next two months. That meeting will have to be during the middle of the week because of the Bishop's schedule. Until that time, I will attempt to fulfill the ministry of a "supply priest" for this congregation.

I ask you to help me remain mindful of the restricted nature of that ministry by not asking me (1) for guidance regarding your on-going housekeeping of the church and (2) matters concerning the ministry of this congregation.

And finally, 4½ years ago, when I observed the struggles some were having in completing the housekeeping chores, I suggested that you lighten those housekeeping labors by adopting the concept of a permanent dossel. In the same spirit of concern over your labors, I offered to take responsibility for the laundering of the Eucharistic altar linens. I return those linens and that responsibility to you now.

If this whole matter seems wrenching to the spirit and confusing to your understanding, I would ask you to be assured that God is in this. He is with us and for us.

On II Advent I preached a sermon on words from Isaiah that were ascribed to the ministry of John the Baptist in Luke's Gospel: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;'".....and I believe that we are about that task right now. We have begun a process that I pray will lead to greater understanding, spiritual growth and the Christmas promise of Peace for us all.



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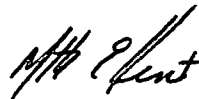
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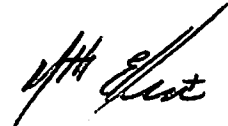
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I know you believe you
understand what you think
I said, but I am not sure
you realize that what you
heard is not what
I meant.

