

**Betty Jane Bailey,  
A Ministry of Education/  
Un Ministerio de Educación**



*You don't know when you start the journey  
where it will take you and where you will end up.  
(Cuando comienzas la jornada, no sabes a  
dónde te va a llevar ni a dónde llegarás.)*  
– Betty Jane Bailey

**1. Getting to Know Betty Jane/Conociendo a Betty Jane**

Name/Nombre:	Betty Jane Bailey
A.B. Recipient/A.B. honor:	2001
Career/Carrera:	Minister/Ministro
Color of Hair/Color del cabello:	Brown/Castaño
Color of Eyes/Color de ojos:	Brown/Castaño
Siblings/Hermanos o hermanas:	None/Ninguno
Favorite Class in High School/Asignatura favorita:	Geometry/Geometría
Hobbies/Pasatiempos:	reading, needlework, museums, music, learning something new, photography/ leer, bordar, museos, música, aprender cosas nuevas, fotografía
Mentors/Mentores:	Irene Graessle, youth group leader/líder del grupo de jóvenes

## **2. I wanted to be part of a church.**

Betty grew up in a home that was “in no real way religious.”<sup>1</sup> Her mother sent her to Sunday school at a nearby Evangelical Baptist church. When encouraged to answer the altar call and be baptized by immersion, she did not want to do that. Yet at the same time, she wanted to be part of a church:

So at about thirteen, when most teens are questioning the church, I went to a different church. I joined a confirmation class at Emmanuel Evangelical and Reformed Church in Irvington, New Jersey. A friend was in the class and I went along. The idea of confirmation, at least as I had understood it through Catholic friends, appealed to me. I was confirmed at Emmanuel on Palm Sunday. I was active in the youth program until I went away to college.

One of the greatest influences on my life during that period was Irene Graessle. She advised the Youth Fellowship. She involved me and encouraged me. We became best friends. Irene was in a sense the one who rescued us from any kind of problem. I was bright – valedictorian in high school – but still was a very fragile person at that time.

By then I was doing some writing. Irene had me do a newsletter for the youth group. The high school sent me to the *New York Herald Tribune* for writing workshops. Although I attended occasional youth rallies and even won an honorable mention in a stewardship essay contest, I never felt much sense of denominational identity during my teens.

## **3. I was unquestionably drawn into the church as a vocation.**

Betty's father did not want her to go to college, “so I had to do that on my own.”

I went to Drew because the advisor at the high school took me in hand. They had ignored me for four years after I said well I might be a clerk – my family was not wealthy. I took the Pepsi scholarship test and received a recommendation that I definitely should go to college. Then the high school advisor said, “This girl will go to college.” The counselor had a friend at Drew who saw that I got a scholarship and an entrance.

At Drew University, a United Methodist school, she majored in chemistry for two years and then in sociology and psychology. She enjoyed social research. While she was not particularly active in the religious life on campus, she did attend chapel, led the chapel service once or twice and went on several retreats. As college drew to an end, she felt that she wanted to continue her studies, particularly in social work:

The idea of church social work appealed to me especially in terms of church settlement houses and group work. I chose Eden Theological Seminary because it offered a major in church social work. I was unquestionably drawn into the church as a vocation.

At the end of her first year, Betty began to realize that a master's degree in church social work was not a viable degree. She considered changing to a religious education or a bachelor of divinity program. The seminary would only grant her request for a degree in religious education if she returned to college for additional credits in education. The seminary discouraged the bachelor of divinity program for women, so she continued a master of arts in church social work. This two-year program also allowed graduation to coincide with her marriage, but the degree had no status. "I was the only one. The work world did not recognize the 1954 graduate as a professional social worker."

#### **4. Women experience the developmental stages of adulthood in a kind of circularity rather than in a straight line.**

Do women chart their course in a straight line? I don't think women of my time could do that. I thought at first that it was a downer. Then I realized that it enabled me to do many things.

Betty clusters her experiences around four sociological issues: gender, ministry, education, and international/ecumenical issues. Gender issues were obvious early:

At an early age, I was aware of the lack of inclusive language. I wondered why I had to be a HE. I did not believe that the word "men" really did include women. I contended that I had to hesitate a minute to figure out each reference. Was it inclusive or did it designate a gender? I saw this as a disadvantage to women that slowed up our thinking.

Career choice was also a concern. Betty's family had discouraged her from going to college. In college, women were given a rough time in fields such as chemistry that were unfriendly to women. In seminary, women were discouraged from entering the bachelor of divinity program.

When inclusive language in church became a current topic, she would examine issues around women in ordained ministry. In Chicago in 1983 when she started her Doctor of Ministry at McCormick Seminary, she conducted a four week study of churches in the United Church of Christ. She completed the degree at McCormick upon finishing her thesis, "The Mixed-Gender Multiple Staff: Problem or Partnership?"

I came to the conclusion that multiple staff work in a church revolves around trust.

Trust is a people issue, not a gender issue. If we are inclusive in the way we treat people we need to speak in those ways. And, as to God, we have no right to limit God by using only one set of words. God cannot be circumscribed.

By that time, many women and men worked together. However, the man was the senior minister and the woman was the associate.

I also found a lot of bleeding associate ministers by the ways they were treated by the congregation and by the senior minister. In one church, the church stationery did not have the associate minister's name on it with the other staff. She had to

write it in. Associate ministers were restricted. It was a time that ministry was defined as the senior minister who preached. Other people were not ministers. I wrote the thesis to say that associate ministers are ministers too.

Betty watched the maturing of the issues of gender:

A woman has run for president. There are women presidents of major universities – ones that wouldn't even admit me as a student because I am a woman. The newspapers have become more careful in their language.

I remember when a General Synod resolution was on the floor, saying that all communications from the national offices should be in inclusive language when referring to people. People claimed that it would be awkward to read. The moderator called on Mart,<sup>ii</sup> who testified as editor of *A.D.* that this recognized magazine had been using inclusive language for many months. Nobody had found it awkward to read. The resolution passed overwhelmingly.

## **5. I had been in ministry even during those years when I was not ordained.**

Gender expectations also influenced Betty's ministry path. Having married right after seminary, she followed her husband's career path and found her jobs where he went:

My life after seminary was a matter of finding things to do where he needed to live. Martin was on a very fast track, a straightforward timeline. I was not on a fast track. He had been editor of *A.D.*, *United Church Herald*, and a staff member of *The Messenger*. My work moved and varied by what I did because of this. Sometimes it was work; sometimes it was study. As I look back, I see that I had been in ministry even during those years when I was not ordained.

The big shift toward women in ordained ministry was only one of the changes in the concept of ministry:

When I was working on my M. Div., women were getting the preaching prizes and the A grades despite the fact that most of them had children to raise and worked at least part time in a church. The storytelling style of preaching seemed more familiar to women than the older style of proclamation.

One of the most important changes was the pressure to chart your own career path in the ministry. The denomination was not going to help as much as before. This left a lot of women struggling since their husband's jobs and careers made more money. As I did, they often had to move to another part of the country when the husband's job moved. There was no way that many women could chart a career.

I once was part of a discussion about how several men were picked out and nurtured for their particular job, being given training, etc. That cannot happen

anymore. I also see an acceptance of team styles in some conferences and at the national level.

## **6. I am interested in working toward helping people grow to be whole.**

Education, both her own and that within churches, was a third life issue. The day after she graduated from Eden, Betty married. J. Martin Bailey, her husband, was ordained in 1954. Betty Jane Bailey's turn would come in 1977 on her 46<sup>th</sup> birthday. Along the way, she received a Master of Divinity and a Doctorate of Ministry. She also completed course work in Middle East studies at Columbia University.

“At the time I worked on my M. Div., they said you did not need it to be ordained. I decided it was smarter to get it. Later,” she said, “I found that I could not have worked without it. I took organization development training and conflict management training.”

Upon graduation from Eden, the couple left St. Louis for Chicago where her husband would work and go to school. To her disappointment Betty could not find a job in either a church agency or a local church. She worked for two years for the Evanston, Illinois, Girl Scouts – her only job outside the religious system.

“However,” she said, “Girl Scouts offered wonderful training for their professional staff – how to staff a committee, etc. It supplemented my seminary training. I supervised volunteers. I directed the day camp. I learned an awful lot in that time.”

Sandwiched between moves, her work varied. She also volunteered within whatever local church she was a member as well as serving on area Christian education committees on Long Island, in St. Louis, and in New Jersey. In all these things the call toward the ordained ministry flowed – sometimes strong and sometimes weak. She returned to seminary during 1961, but a move to Montclair forced her to abandon studies before completing another degree.

Betty considered pursuing a teaching career in the public school but realized that too often what passes for education “is harmful at worst and bland at best. I am interested in working toward helping people grow to be whole,” she said, “and the most promising framework for this is the church, because its education is rooted in the Christian message.”

When her husband went to New York, Betty found employment at Wantagh Congregational Church. She brought the first high school students to General Synod at Cleveland. “That was during the time the number of kids in church school was expanding and there was not enough room,” she said. “I used to have dreams of opening the door to a closet and discovering three more classrooms.”

The new United Church curriculum broke the stereotype of one teacher sitting around a table with a group of children. Betty convinced the church to break down the walls between the small cubicles to create bigger classrooms. That gave two or more teachers

enough space to work together and share skills. When the open classroom idea also took hold in public schools, she was asked to produce a slide show for the local school explaining the values of the open classroom.

In 1958 she became a field worker for the Evangelical & Reformed Board of Christian Education out of Philadelphia. At the same time, their first daughter was born. Fortunately Betty's mother provided child care so she could travel. "I went around the area when a church requested a consultant," she said. "I went around New York State, New Jersey and some of Pennsylvania helping to train teachers, running an event, anything they wanted to know. It was an interesting five-day sprint."

In 1960 her husband's work in journalism returned them to St. Louis. The next year their second daughter was born. Betty spent most of her time then raising the children, going to classes at Eden Seminary, and "doing what I could do until we moved again."

She wrote for *International Journal of Religious Education*, a National Council of Churches magazine. She also produced television programs on Christian education. "It was such interesting work. If we had been able to stay in the area, I would have remained in that field," she said. "The multiple demands of a producer make it a fascinating job."

In 1967, she started work at Watchung Congregational Church in Montclair, New Jersey, as director of the nursery school. Her focus was still in education rather than being ordained.

## **7. In all these things, the call toward the ordained ministry has flowed – sometimes strong and sometimes weak.**

Betty re-entered seminary six years later "to test out where I was." In her ordination paper, she wrote:

I needed the time to explore and study before a final commitment to an ordained ministry. I have decided now to apply for ordination based on the belief that it is right both for me and for the understanding of the teaching ministry.



I have a very specific commitment to the teaching ministry of the church. But I do view Christian education very broadly and not at all limited to the traditional forms of programming. The methods and programs we use in our educational ministry reflect our beliefs about what God and persons are like and must be chosen with deliberate attention to those beliefs.

I believe the teaching ministry must be a part of the total ministry. It is destructive to place it on one side as the responsibility of the theologically trained or untrained lay people with the pastoral and preaching and sacramental ministries the responsibility of the ordained. Even though my work will probably always carry a

large load of educational responsibilities, I am sure that the only way these responsibilities can be kept in proportion is along with and as part of a role which includes all of the responsibilities of an ordained minister.

The church is a gathered community of people seeking to live together in love. They are equipping themselves for their own ministry and mission out *in* the world.... People in the church are also called to think theologically about life and events – to put them in a perspective which includes God. The gathered community of the church is also the place which prepares its people for service out in the world.

She wrote also about the gathered community as a responding community:

The gathering together must result in a sending back into the world to respond to events in the world in a healing way. This response may come in many ways – in direct service to people, living a loving lifestyle, in political pressure, in proclaiming the values and principles taught by Jesus.

In 1977, Betty was ordained as a minister in the United Church of Christ. Her position as director of parish education for Union Congregational Church in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, changed. Now, as the associate minister, she became minister of parish education. She remained seventeen years.



Betty—first from the left

Throughout those years she used her process skills. She helped with the committee process at several General Synods. She also wrote Office of Church Life and Leadership (OCLL) materials and served as Moderator of the Central Atlantic Conference. She taught at the Theological School of Drew University.

She exercised social justice advocacy. Before moving to the Middle East, she served four years as chair person of the Commission on Theology and Interreligious Relations of the New Jersey Council of Churches. She was a member of the Civil Rights Commission in Montclair.

## **8. I have spent my life as an ecumenical and international person.**

“My denominational wanderings,” Betty said, “were not a result of ecclesiastical promiscuity but rather a conviction that we are all part of one Body of Christ, sharing our gifts with one another.”

Betty is interested in the ecumenical movement and in churches around the world. She wants to understand the foundations of today’s separations. If she were starting all over, she said, she would study that as well as early church history:

I have the conviction that ministry today must be in the context of the whole world. My experience as a UCC non-governmental organization representative at the United Nations has convinced me of the problems of nationalism. My experience in Jerusalem convinced me of another definition of ecumenism – not only different “denominations” but across the ages.

In addition to her experience with several faith groups during her formative years, her work would take her also to an Episcopal Church, an Episcopal Diocese and a Presbyterian Presbytery:

As time went on I wrote about the Russian Orthodox Church. I worked for a Roman Catholic institution and, after bragging for years that I had related to every major Christian group except the Lutherans, I became a part of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

## **9. As an educator and as a journalist, we have something to offer.**

Interwoven throughout these years was another dimension of her ministry. With her husband’s sabbatical in Europe, the year 1956 began a chapter that would carry the couple into and through their active retirement years. This nontraditional retirement would bring them to another country to offer their skills.

“We chose the Middle East,” Betty said, “because we had been there several times and felt an affinity to the people. As an educator and a journalist, we felt we had something to offer.”

Their offering would come in person and extend through the publication of books. In 1962, Betty and Mart wrote *Worship with Youth*. In December, 1987, Pilgrim Press published their book, *Youth Plan Worship*. Their experiences in the Middle East would yield additional books, study guides that explain the various churches and their history.

They collaborated again in writing *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* These guides contain a country-by-country review of how Christians fare today. They offer information to assist visitors in connecting with the Christians and their issues.

Betty’s places of employment were open to her life of interruptions. Two years after beginning her work as a nursery school director in Montclair, she went to the Middle East with a group of Christian magazine editors. “The year 1969 began my devotion to the Middle East,” she said. “I stood outside the Damascus gate of the old city. I looked at it and said I WILL BE BACK.”

They did get back to the Middle East in 1982 when she did photography and interviews for *A.D.* “I might have followed Mart around,” Betty said, “but it paid off in the jobs. I had access to the publishers to do these things.”

After retirement, working with Tantur Ecumenical Institute and the Middle East Council of Churches in Jerusalem brought her in contact with many other groups. She spent 3 1/2 years as a volunteer there and Bethlehem in an ecumenical setting. Part of her work included helping both travelers and pilgrims meet and hear the stories of local Christians. It resulted in the conviction that much work still needed to be done in "sending countries" to convince Christians that there was more to the Holy Land than the ancient stones. Live Christian communities there were eager to share with Western Christians. Most mass tourism ignored this. Betty found a mission and ministry to help people adopt alternatives to mass tourism and to build solidarity with the Christians of the Holy Land through information and resources.

## **10. I treasure most my years working in the Middle East.**

Four years before she retired as minister of parish education at Union Congregational Church, Betty took a three-month sabbatical in the Middle East. The structured program combined both field trips and courses at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem:

Tantur was at the border, the green line between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The front door was Jerusalem; the back door was Bethlehem. It was a check point. The Arab staff came in the back door and climbed the hill. The other people would come in the front gate and climb the hill.

Preparatory courses at Columbia University in Middle East studies including law, films, history, and Arab science gave her a greater understanding of the Islamic legal system.

Union Church had sent many missionaries through the United Church of Christ. In the fall of 1994, the Baileys were commissioned by the Common Global Ministries Board (UCC/Disciples) and sent to the Middle East to work. Betty worked as assistant to the rector of Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research in Jerusalem.<sup>iii</sup> Mart worked for the Middle East Council of Churches:

We worked as volunteers for church institutions. It was CROP Walk time so I had people sign up. We walked from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and sent back our report. We promised everybody if they sponsored us they got a postcard.

In 1996 they moved to Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. Betty worked as Consultant on Resource Development for the Jerusalem Liaison Office of the Middle East Council of Churches:

We lived in a house with four apartments. Everyone was part of a family. This was during a period of time when occupation and closures and check points were a pain.

At least once I had trouble getting from Bethlehem into Jerusalem. I had to take the Valley of Fire – *Wadi Nar*. You look over the precipice and see a wrecked car or vehicle.

That was quite a trip. I had to get myself to Jerusalem in order to get to Jordan to get to Beirut. I never had a place to stay. I had to fight to get on the airplane because I had no visa. It was a time that required much courage. You would set forth like Abraham and Sara and not know if you would get there or not.

For a number of years after they returned to the United States in 1999, they led annual journeys to the Middle East. They have devoted their time to Israel/Palestine issues. Betty developed resources for study and worship and promoted alternative travel in the Holy Land. She serves as Consultant to the Middle East Office of the Common Global Ministries Board.

## 11. Conclusion<sup>iv</sup>

*God, through the incarnation, puts the stamp of approval on being human. For our part, this means we are both free and responsible.... We are inheritors with responsibility for our own actions and for the world of nature and society.... We are free to develop in our own peculiar ways, in terms of our own potential and with love and concern for others. We are free to fail and begin again. God's gifts to us are many and varied, beginning with our lives themselves. Grace abounds far beyond anything we need or deserve. This I affirm and celebrate and am empowered by in the working out of my own particular form of ministry.*



## 12. What About You?

- When Betty was asked about her life goals, she said she might be a clerk. This signal to her high school advisor almost kept her from going to college.

**What role did her school and youth group advisors play in her goal-making?**

**What signals do you send about what you want to do with your life?**

**What keeps you from dreaming about a career?**

**What talents are you ignoring?**

**Would you say that you are floating through life or taking it in hand? Why?**

**Name the people who have guided your hand, awakening you to your real self and to dreaming about your future.**

- Betty's husband had a career that required several moves. She chose the attitude of doing what she could do until the next family move.

**How do you see what ways Betty did not wait for ministry but found it where she was?**

**How do you think flexibility equipped her for career work later?**

**What did Betty discover about herself throughout the interruptions to her life goals?**

**How would you feel if you had to wait to develop your own career path?**

**How would “blooming where you are planted” be an active choice? A passive choice?**

**What options do you see for couples who balance careers today?**

**What is practical today and what is still unrealistic about balancing marriage, family and career?**

- Betty discovered a passion: *I am interested in working toward helping people grow to be whole.*

**Name several ways you see that passion at work throughout her life.**

**How might holding on to that goal have guided her attitude as she moved from place to place with her husband?**

**How do you think her passion guided her choices of what work she would do?**

**Do you have a passion, a *why* about your life?**

**Has living your purpose found its *how* or *what* yet?**

- Betty said, “You don’t know when you start the journey where it will take you and how it will end up.”

**What does that say to you about the balance and blend of having set goals and of inviting your life work to emerge as your life goes along?**

**Why do you suppose she found her work in the Middle East so satisfying?**

- Betty holds the conviction that we are all part of one Body of Christ, sharing our gifts with one another.

**Tracing through her life work, how do see that she has lived out this conviction?**

**How has she responded to events in the world in a healing way?**

### **13. Church Family Project**

With your pastor, form an interest group around the Middle East using the resource books, *Living Stones Pilgrimage with the Christians of the Holy Land*, *From the Beginning: Resources and Study Guide to the Middle East* and *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?*

1. Divide into two study groups with the goal of discovering who the living Christians are today in the Middle East.

2. Group #1. Study the various living, worshiping Christian communities in today's Middle East.
3. Group #2. Research the several meditative pilgrimages and places to visit.
4. Groups present highlights of findings to the whole group.
5. As one group, plan an imaginative journey with itinerary to the Middle East.

## 14. Still Curious?

### Web Resources:

Visit Betty Jane Bailey's website, <http://www.holylandalternatives.net>  
Go to Holy Land Resources for alternatives to mass travel in the Holy Land and alternative sources of information on Israeli/Palestinian issues.

Visit Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc. Website: [www.AMEU.org](http://www.AMEU.org)

Visit American Educational Trust Website: [www.middleeastbooks.com](http://www.middleeastbooks.com)

Read about service opportunities for youth in the Middle East at the UCC/Disciples Global Ministries Website: <http://globalministries.org/get-involved/mission-opportunities/service-opportunities-for-youth.html>

### Print Resources:

Betty Jane Bailey. *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: Study Guide to the Peoples and Churches of the USSR*. Friendship Press, 1987

*From the Beginning: Resources and Study Guide to the Middle East*. Friendship Press, 1992

Bailey, Betty Jane and Alison Hilliard. *Living Stones Pilgrimage with the Christians of the Holy Land*. University of Notre Dame Press and Cassell of London, 1999.

Bailey, Betty Jane and J. Martin Bailey. *Who are the Christians in the Middle East?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003. The second edition will come out in 2010.

*Worship with Youth* Christian Education Publications, 1962

*Youth Plan Worship*. Pilgrim Press, 1987

---

<sup>i</sup> Betty Bailey's story unfolds through her ordination paper and her memoirs as shared in a phone conversation with the writer on November 21, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> The Reverend J. Martin Bailey, the Rev. Dr. Betty Jane Bailey's husband, is a journalist for the United Church of Christ.

---

<sup>iii</sup> Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem was formed after Vatican 2 when the Protestant observers talked to the pope and said we need to start an institute where we can study together. The Vatican opened this property. It is active today.

<sup>iv</sup> From Ordination Paper.

\*\*\*

Dallas (Dee) A. Brauning. *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, July 2009