

Leading with bold imagination 3

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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This is the third and final post in a series of interview questions. Montreat Conference Center has an Institute for Church Leadership. Since I will be preaching at their "[Leading With Bold Imagination](#)" Conference that is coming up, they asked me a few questions. If you'd like to read the whole interview, here is [part one](#) and [part two](#). And if you have a chance to attend the conference, I would love to see you there. Montreat's setting can feed the soul.

Montreat: What would you consider one of the greatest triumphs in your ministry? What would you name as one of your greatest disappointments?

Carol: About eight years ago, when I was walking and praying, I felt a call to ministry outside of my local congregational context. That may sound strange, but I simply had this sense that my creative life would be pulling me beyond my particular faith community.

I went home and wrote the experience down in my journal. Other than having that spark of intuition, I was thoroughly confused. So I began to buy beautiful silk and learn how to embroidery. I figured that I would begin to learn how to design and sew liturgical art, and that would be my ministry beyond the local church. I also began to write every morning, mainly so I could get some ideas for stoles and banners. Soon I got tired of my needle and thread, but I never tired of that pen and paper.

I never imagined that I had much to say or much to offer. And—believe me—I'm not trying portray any sense of false humility. In academic settings, I had always been discouraged in my writing, so I really didn't think I had it in me. But as I kept picking up that pen and paper, a library began to develop inside of me and I couldn't stop writing. That's been my greatest achievement: that regular pounding on the keyboard in the wee hours of the morning.

My greatest disappointments have been that I didn't stay at my first two pastorates long enough. I served two small churches for three-and-a-half years each. There were many factors that led to me leaving, but I cannot shake the fact that in both

places, I quickly folded to the concerns and pressures that we didn't "have enough money" in search of a place that had "enough" to support a pastor. My deep fears of scarcity mingled with my shallow feelings of self-worth, and I allowed that toxic combination to dictate when I needed to move.

Montreat: What would you say to others who might follow your lead as innovators and imaginative risk-takers within their own faith communities?

Carol: This is a difficult time in ministry. There are generational, technological, and cultural shifts occurring right now—and the church is not faring well in most of them. Many people look at decades past and imagine that church leaders must have been much more awesome forty-five years ago.

Yet, I tend to see things a bit differently. God has called us in this particular season of the church *because* we are innovators and imaginative risk-takers. The Spirit is moving among us, giving us the prophetic imagination that we need to lead. We are enough. We have enough. And I'm excited to see what happens in the decades to come.