

More Light  on...

Ordination

Debates about ordination have challenged the church for generations. Much of the confusion surrounds questions about the meaning and understanding of ordination itself.

Before we were even born, God knew us and formed us and set us apart for service (Jeremiah 1:5). Indeed, we were created and given gifts specifically for the purpose of serving God's mission in the world.

Priesthood of all Believers

Because of this, baptism, membership, and ordination are integrally connected to one another and to Christian discipleship. As Reformed Christians, we profess a belief in the "priesthood of all believers." All members "accept Christ's call to be involved responsibly in the ministry of [Christ's] church." (G-5.0102) Responsible involvement includes proclaiming the Gospel, worshipping, praying, studying, serving, and seeking justice, peace, and freedom.

Membership cannot be denied to anyone who believes and trusts in Jesus Christ and his ministry and work in the world. "Failure to [extend the fellow-

ship of Christ to all persons] constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel." (G-5.0103) All professing members are granted full participation in the church. Christ-like diversity and inclusiveness are foundational beliefs and practices within the Presbyterian Church, where our unity empowers us to be open to the gifts of all of God's people.

Task of Ordination

Within the church, there are some whom God has called to serve particular functions and offices. While these duties are varied, "particular emphasis is given to proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the Sacraments." (G-6.0104) The persons called to carry out these duties are ordained to the offices of deacon, elder, and minister of Word and Sacrament.

Ordination does not increase one's importance or status in the eyes of God, the faith community, or society. Rather the ministry of all persons, regardless of its function, is valued and honored in all persons.

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More Light on Ordination

The ministry undertaken by all those who are ordained to offices within the Presbyterian Church is to be modeled after the servant style of ministry lived into by Jesus Christ. His mission is indeed our mission -- "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." (Luke 4:18)

Gift of Ordination

The call to ordination is a gift from God. It is not something that we deserve, have a right to, or can control. It is initiated by God alone -- the One who knows us, creates us, and ordains us. It is a call made out of freedom and wisdom, beyond the categories and perceptions of this world and firmly entrenched in the vision of the One who has gathered us all together.

God has a long history of calling those persons who have been perceived as outcasts by society into leadership roles -- Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Joseph, Deborah, Samson, David, Matthew the tax collector, Saul, and the women at the tomb. Each of these persons has faithfully listened to and followed God's call to particular and unique service among God's people.

Living Faithfully

As are all Christians, persons called by God into ordained ministry are also called to live faithfully according to God's covenant with God's people. They are required "to be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ." (G-6.0106a)

It is through the power of the Holy Spirit, while living faithfully, that persons called to ordained ministry are empowered to carry out God's call to participate in God's mission to the world, which is witnessed to in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

LGBT Persons and Ordination

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons of faith -- known, created, and set apart by God -- have indeed been called into ordained service within the church; they have been given gifts for ministry within the offices of the church; and, they are living faithful lives of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and the love of Jesus Christ. These calls are often affirmed by local communities that know the person best but denied by the governing polity of the PC(USA).

Given our Presbyterian beliefs in God's initiation of calls to ordained ministry, full participation and inclusion of all of God's diverse children, and the freedom and mystery of God to call whomever God chooses, we believe the church can and should honor, acknowledge, and recognize the gifts and calls of those LGBT persons who have been set apart for service, before they were even born.

For more information
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