

Reviving Grace in the Midst of Accord and Dissent
©2008 Ray Bagnuolo, September 28, 2008

Author's Note: I was ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament in November of 2005. Of the nearly 1,000 individuals ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament since that date, mine is the only ordination for an openly gay man. It is a distinction that I hope will soon be overwhelmed by becoming commonplace and forgotten.

The 218th General Assembly has come but far from gone. If not already, you may soon be involved in a discussion regarding the recommended ratification of the 218th General Assembly to amend the language of G-6.0106b.

The proposed change to the Book of Order and G-6.0106b reads as follows:

“Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.”

The proposed amendment replaces the existing language of G-6.0106b:

“Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”

The new language aligns the decisions for ordination more closely to those already in the Book of Order, without singling out a standard. The standard noted in the current language has been consistently and primarily used since its inception to prevent called Christians who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBT/Q) from being ordained.

The result of your process of prayer, conversation, discernment, prayer, and decision will be one of the most important outcomes in modern-day religious justice-reform. Its impact will critically address the lives of the faithful of our church and be felt far beyond the boundaries of the PC(USA). Religious communities will be looking our way for leadership. Also looking to us will be those seeking a church that has embraced the teachings of Jesus to a degree that reflects the diversity and needs of the Body of Christ in today's world – or not.

The purpose of this letter is to contribute whatever help I might be able to offer as you enter into this careful and sacred time, seeking your response to the recommendation of the General Assembly for ratification of the proposed amendment. As the first openly gay man called to serve a congregation in and ordained by the Presbytery of Hudson River, New York, I may have some perspectives or experiences that would be helpful to you in your discussions. I have no agenda, other than to be informative.

Yes, I am hopeful that the amendment will be ratified by the greatest possible number of our presbyteries; however, I humbly respect the differences of deeply-held beliefs that exist. You can be assured that I will do my best to answer your questions as transparently as I can. My goal is to be present with you, knowing that the choice you make will be between you and the Holy Spirit.

We may ultimately disagree, but I will stand by you and your beliefs, even in such disagreement.

Prior to the 218th General Assembly, I wrote a series of essays calling for unity within the progressive partnerships and attempting to dispel what I saw as “myths” related to welcoming Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBT/Q) individuals into the full work and worship of the PC(USA). These essays can be found online at www.raybagnuolo.net. They may be helpful to you in your discussions, and I invite you to use and reprint them, as you choose. There are many other resources to which I can refer you, as well.

If asked, I will travel as best I can, answer E-mails, phone calls, conference calls, or meet online. I complete my three-year term as Interim Minister at Palisades Presbyterian Church in Palisades, New York as of September 30. Our new minister is on her way, and I await God’s next call for me. In the meantime, I believe this is what I am being asked to do. I also invite any who might wish to join me in this outreach to let me know.

And, if none of this is of interest to you, let us continue in prayer together, as we seek a way beyond the accord and dissent to a place of grace and unity – embracing one another and our differences in the much greater love of God that envelopes us all.

Peace,
Ray

Contact Information:

Rev. Ray Bagnuolo, PO Box 828, White Plains, NY 10602-0828
Email: Bagnuolo@gmail.com;
Website: www.raybagnuolo.net; Blog: bagnuolo.blogspot.com
Phone: (914) 217-4173