

After discussion within the Session of Heritage Presbyterian Church from July to November 2017, the Session has addressed the following recommendations from the General Assembly, June 2017. The bold print are those recommendations from the Report by the Ad Interim Committee on Women Serving in the Ministry of the Church. The normal print is HPC's response.

1. That Overture 3 from Westminster Presbytery, "Declare that the 44 Assembly Erred in the Formation of an Ad Interim Committee on the Role of Women as not Being Properly before the Court, and Dismiss the Ad Interim Committee with Apology," be answered in the negative.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation. Each step along the way, this report was moved forward by an implementation of our denomination's operating rules, or what was deemed as an acceptable variation. From an "end-to-end" viewpoint, this is not the way we typically want things to happen. The report is finished, and we should review and render judgment on it, and thank the members of the Committee for their work.

2. That sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly recognize that, from the founding of the PCA, there has been a variety of views and practices regarding the ways in which women may serve the Lord and the church within scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination, and that such mutual respect for said views and practices continues.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation. The key here is "within scriptural and constitutional parameters, without ordination". These should be within the current constitutional parameters, not how some would like to bend/revise/delete our present constitution. Also, the Scriptures have a definite interpretation within the Reformed tradition, with widely accepted understanding of what they mean. We need to keep our current constitution (Scripture, Westminster standards) including what we have in the BCO, and outside of those structures, exercise freedom in the broad context of the regulative principle. We should allow other churches within the PCA to do the same.

3. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly strive to develop, recognize, and utilize the gifts, skills, knowledge, and wisdom of godly women in the local, regional, and national church, and particularly consider overtures that would allow qualified women to serve on appropriate committees and agencies within the church.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation in general, but recognizes there are limitations. Neither this report, nor the PCA in general, have defined what "qualified" means in this context. Or for that matter, what "qualified" men mean in serving the church, outside of ordination.

Some of the committees, boards and agencies currently require ordained men. For some of these bodies, we have implemented this criterion for ensuring doctrinal purity as the primary rationale (as ordination requires training, trial, and examination). However, for other positions, we also need “professional skills”, such as financial management, knowledge of tax laws, personnel management, property management, fundraising, etc. Women as well as men who are non-ordained can and should serve on the appropriate committees (although as non-voting members at levels above the local church) and boards and agencies, and in fact, do.

The Session further thinks this Recommendation combines two separate ideas – serving in the local church, and serving on committees and agencies of the denomination. Serving in the local church has its own set of qualifications to consider: e.g., does the Director of Christian Education in a larger local church need to be ordained? A case would have to be made to state this in the affirmative. There might be good reasons why it would be so in certain contexts – but would there be benefit to require this universally across the PCA? Could it be filled by anyone (man or woman) who has the heart and experience for the job – as it often is in most of our smaller congregations? Serving on national committees and agencies should require some level of experience and formal education (not exclusively a seminary degree) as well as satisfying our intent on keeping us a “grass-roots” denomination.

We should consider how we bring non-ordained men onto national committees and agencies, what makes them “qualified” to serve, if the positions truly do not need ordained men to fill them. These same qualifications should apply equally to women.

For HPC, we have the question of how to further implement the recommendation to “develop, recognize, and (use) the gifts, skills, knowledge and wisdom of godly women”. We do this already, on an informal basis. Women serve and lead on a variety of committees and stand-alone activities. The Session has and will continue to review the resources mentioned within this Report, to consider the practices of other PCA churches, and discuss what we at HPC can do. We will also conduct one-on-one discussions within our own congregation, to see where women might want to use their gifts.

4. That sessions, if possible, establish a diaconate of qualified ordained men.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation and this is what we do at HPC. This should be the norm. The BCO defines for us what men “qualified to be deacons” means, at least in general. This does provide the qualitative distinctives, without demanding any quantitative requirements. This allows individual churches to decide how mature in the faith a man is to be

considered eligible to be a deacon. For example, the BCO does not require anyone to pass a standard test on biblical knowledge with a passing score of 85% or better.

5. That sessions consider how to include non-ordained men and women in the worship of the church so as to maintain faithfulness to Scripture, as well as utilizing the gifts God has poured out to His entire church (see exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26 in Chapter Two of the Report).

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation, but will proceed carefully and judiciously with any implementation. If we are to expand this list of who will routinely assist in worship in any way, we will need to define “qualified” in this context. We now move on to asking ourselves, “What elements should be open to women? What proper worship elements, that we don’t currently use, should be available to the non-ordained?” Examples of such elements are: leading music, reading the WCF, giving testimonies, and having female ushers. We should not implement, for the sake of greater inclusivity, any of these recommendations to have women lead the congregation during worship, without first considering the biblical rationale for such implementation.

Regarding our current practice, during special services we do have non-ordained members of the congregation stand and offer a prayer or praise (e.g., the Thanksgiving service). When we have these special services, we do in fact encourage women to share.

The Session believes we need to avoid an outcome-driven logic. We should not look at our worship service and ask “How can we change it in order to incorporate women?” That makes how we structure worship human-focused. We want God-focused worship. This is our first principle in how we structure the worship service and then we look to how we might have non-ordained persons participate. Therefore, the question becomes, “How do we select people (men or women) in light of that principle?”

6. *BCO 9-7* says: “It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (*BCO 7-2*) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (*BCO 17*).” Thus, for the well-being of the church, the committee recommends **that sessions and presbyteries select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the ordained diaconate.**

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation. The Session encourages the diaconate to select godly men and women to serve as assistants on an as-needed basis or as on-going, ad-

hoc appointments. A need may exist that would require such assistants to have continual interaction with the deacons, especially those involving professional skills, where they would have a ministry more commensurate with their education and skills.

For an example or two, in a mercy ministry, an assistant may be needed who knows the real estate/rental market to help someone find a new place to live, or someone who knows the local civic courts to help someone in need of answering local violations.

The Session leaves to the judgment of the deaconate what qualifies as “godly”.

7. That presbyteries and the General Assembly consider an overture that would establish formally the right of sessions, presbyteries, and the General Assembly to establish the position of commissioned church worker within the PCA for qualified and gifted un-ordained men and women.

The HPC Session rejects this recommendation. There is no firm Biblical grounding for this commissioned position, which is far different in need and description from the commissioning of people in the New Testament to perform a task. We should consider it adequate to support those women who want to work for the church full time in ministry with current standards. This would fit the current Constitutional model. This “commissioned” model further moves away from the priesthood of all believers, creating another layer/tier of “ministry” privilege.

Although various people were “commissioned” for various works in the New Testament, regardless of the length of time in order to accomplish it, there were no “commissioned positions” in Scripture. To assert that position is to read into the text (*eisogesis*). Such an irresponsible method of biblical interpretation always leads to other unforeseen and unintended errors. But we can predict such a new position within the PCA would cause confusion between those “commissioned” and ordained offices. Commissioned workers would need to have a financial “call” not unlike for TEs, in order to qualify for IRS-approved tax breaks, which was one of the points in favor of “commissioned position” by the Committee.

Furthermore, we would need to decide which out of many different staff positions in a church would be “commissioned” (consider Sunday School teachers, coordinators, ministry leaders, etc) and which positions would not receive the benefit. This would only further the dichotomy between big churches that can afford paid staff, and smaller churches that cannot. For example, the Sunday School Coordinator/Christian Education Leader might be a paid staff-member in a large church, whereas that is a volunteer position in a smaller one. The result would be that the “big church” staffer be “commissioned”, and the “little church” volunteer would not. In this case, the “commissioned position” becomes more about money and

prestige, rather than faithfully performing the ministry to which God has called someone.

8. That sessions, presbyteries and the General Assembly consider how they can affirm and include underprivileged and underrepresented women in the PCA.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation in principle, but has trouble with the language in the body of the report (which seems muddy, at best). We want the church to reflect all whom God has elected to salvation, regardless of race, sex, nationality, language or economic state. We want all such persons within our churches; we should not consciously create and develop “mono-cultural” congregations. We recognize that such developed more or less unconsciously from past years, and that “historical” condition is often hard to overcome within the church body and within the local community. God may bring many people of various cultures and conditions to our local congregations, we should accept them as equal members of God’s household, and seek their growth in Christ, and encourage them to participate in ministries of the local congregations.

The question before the Session is “How do we make things more encouraging?” (The language used in the report seems less focused.) We’re looking at how we enfold the members of CR into HPC’s life and ministries. This is where we are going, and we agree with the principle. How do we bring them alongside in HPC ministries? We are interested in doing this, so our effort is how we implement. Being pro-active in this is where we are.

9. The committee humbly requests to be dismissed with thanks.

The HPC Session accepts this recommendation, and amen.