

Pastor Anita Hill, St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran church, St. Paul, Minnesota, has been informed by the Candidacy Committee of the Saint Paul Area Synod that she will be received onto the clergy roster of the ELCA following the finalization of changes to the governing documents, Vision and Expectations (V&E) and Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline (D&G), expected at the April meeting of the ELCA Church Council. The changes will remove the policy barriers to service on the roster in the ELCA by ministers in committed, lifelong, same-gender relationships.

Anita Hill was ordained on April 28, 2001, at a ceremony presided over by Rev. Paul Tidemann, then pastor of St. Paul-Reformation. Present for the ceremony and participating in the laying on of hands were Rev. Paul Egertson, then bishop of the ELCA Southwest California Synod; Rev. Dr. Krister Stendahl, Bishop Emeritus of Stockholm, Sweden and retired Academic Dean of the Harvard Divinity School; Rev. Lowell Ehrdahl, Bishop Emeritus of St. Paul Area Synod; and Rev. Stanley Olson, retired bishop of the Pacific Southwest Synod (Lutheran Church in America). The ordination was an act of the congregation gathered, under a provision in the Lutheran Confessions that allows congregations to ordain when bishops can't or won't. The call and ordination were at that time acts of ecclesiastical disobedience, the subject of a documentary film, *This Obedience*, available through LC/NA.

The impact of these acts has rippled down through the years since then. St. Paul-Reformation was censured and sanctioned for its action of calling a pastor not on the ELCA roster. The sanctions were later lifted, but the censure remains in place to date. Bishop Egertson subsequently submitted his resignation from the leadership of the synod. But in August of that year, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly began the study of ordination and service by clergy in committed, covenanted same-gender relationships that in August of 2009 resulted in the elimination of the policies that forbade such service. Also in August 2009 the Churchwide Assembly passed the Social Statement on Human Sexuality.

And Anita Hill did just what she said that she wanted to do in an interview at the time of her ordination: "just carry on with the work of this place [St. Paul-Reformation]," the work of spreading the Gospel and helping people. For years, she has done this and is recognized within her synod and elsewhere in the ELCA for her ministry.

Emily Eastwood, Executive Director, Lutherans Concerned, said, "This is a particular wonderful and welcome piece of news: that Anita Hill will be finally received onto the roster she was called to, by the Holy Spirit and by the congregation she has served so faithfully since her ordination.

We rejoice in this recognition of the ministry and faithfulness of this dedicated servant and minister to the body of Christ.”

Also awaiting the Church Council passage of changes to V&E and D&G for his reinstatement is Pastor Bradley Schmeling of St. John’s Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia. He was removed from the roster of the ELCA in 2007 after an ecclesiastical trial, at the conclusion of which the Discipline Hearing Committee famously said that it found no fault with him or with his ministry and that the policy should be changed, before following the rule of the day and removing him from the roster solely for the reason of being in a committed, lifelong same-gender relationship.

It is very fitting and noteworthy as part of the celebratory context of this kairos time in the Lutheran Church that January 20th was the 20-year anniversary of the “extra-ordinem” ordinations of Pastors Jeff Johnson, Ruth Frost and Phyllis Zillhart, acts of faith and conviction by both the pastors and the two churches that called them, openly gay and, in the case of Ruth and Phyllis, in a committed relationship. Pastor Johnson was called by First United Lutheran Church and Pastors Frost and Zillhart by St. Francis; both churches were expelled from the ELCA for having done so. These pastors were also the founders of an organization that has grown into what is now Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries, an organization that advocates for the full inclusion of persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities within the Lutheran Church, encouraging congregations to consider calling sexual minority clergy and providing financial assistance, pastoral care, and legal advice to sexual minority pastors and to the congregations that support them.