

The Consequences Will Surprise You

While I was on sabbatical in the fall of 2001, my congregation approved nominees for elder and deacon. One nominee was Sally, a long-time Presbyterian and a beloved member, who was also a lesbian in a long-term relationship.

I was shocked and dismayed. My deep evangelical foundations shook. I feared that the roof would fall in. I feared a divided congregation. I was pretty sure the Session was not of one mind on this matter. And I was right. It wasn't.

Yes, Sally and her partner cared for each other in sickness and in health. But there were serious constitutional standards that the Session could not, and would not, ignore or defy.

Session recessed for a week to reexamine the Book of Confessions, Book of Order and Bible in light of this pending decision. When it reconvened, each elder spoke – some for ordination, some against. Elders listened to each other's reasons. Then we took a 20-minute recess to be alone, pray and listen to the Spirit.

When we came back together, each elder, one by one, offered reasons – supported by the Bible and the church constitution – for his or her vote. As it turns out, one critical question that focused the Session's mind was: *Would our Beloved Lord Jesus ever call a 25-year, covenanted relationship of love and care unholy?*

The outcome wasn't at all what I anticipated. The vote was unanimous – all ten for ordination! I was stunned. It was, as I came

to believe, a demonstration and celebration of God's infinite and all embracing love.

Did the Presbytery investigate and discipline us? Yes.

But since Sally's ordination, the Lord has blessed us. Many estranged believers are returning. Many "un-churched" are coming in. Our Sunday School is bursting and our youth group keeps growing. Our youth speak out – proud and grateful for their church that publicly welcomes gays and lesbians.

By God's grace we meet our Presbytery's shared mission "askings" and support all denominational special offerings. We have added staff and undertaken several building projects. All of this since the day I thought the roof would fall in.

I now believe that all the pious and proper polity explanations in the world would never have had the *evangelical* power of that one simple, public act of ordination to ministry.

It's true, I was afraid. But the consequences surprised me. "Behold," says the Lord, "I am doing a new thing, can you not see it?" (ISAIAH 43:19)

And I say to you, my brothers and sisters: *Rejoice. Be not afraid.*

In Christ,
REV. DR. RANDALL TREMBA

*Minister of Word & Sacrament
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church
Shepherdstown, West Virginia*

Graduate of Wheaton College (1969)
and Fuller Theological Seminary (1973)



To learn more about Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church you can visit: <http://bit.ly/RevTremba>