

*Answering common arguments against LGBTQ ordination and making our own in favor of inclusion.*

## **Common Arguments Against**

### **“Homosexuality is an abomination”**

The Hebrew word, [*toevah*], sometimes translated as ‘abomination’ or ‘detestable’, is also applied to the eating of shellfish in Levitical law, among other things, and seems to be a ritual-uncleanliness term, sometimes used to describe idolatry. Of course, it is not translated as ‘abomination’ when applied to eating shellfish, because abomination is a word specifically chosen in an attempt to paint a particular act as more heinous than the others listed in the same section of law. This is the long-standing translators’ bias impinging on the Biblical text.

Furthermore, the act described as ‘abomination’ was not describing a committed, monogamous relationship between two people of the same gender - which was not a category considered in Bronze Age Middle-Eastern thought. Rather, the ‘abomination’ in question would have been an instance of adultery and/or having sex with ritual prostitutes.

### **“Homosexuality is the ‘sin of Sodom’”**

The ‘sin of Sodom’ is inhospitality. Nowhere in scripture is the destruction of Sodom linked with same-sex activity of any kind. The story immediately preceding the account of the destruction of Sodom is of Abraham receiving the three strangers and being hospitable to them. This is contrasted with the reaction of the men of Sodom who seek to gang-rape the angel visitors while Lot protects them under the auspice that they have accepted his hospitality. Ezekiel, in listing the sins of Sodom lists pride, idleness, greed and *inhospitality*, but never mentions homosexuality. Jesus himself cites this reason by analogy claiming that the towns which are inhospitable to his disciples will end up worse than Sodom or Gomorrah. The association between Sodom and homosexuality is largely the fault of bad translation. The Hebrew word, [*qadesh*], meaning ‘temple-prostitute’ has often been mis-translated ‘sodomite’ though it bears no linguistic relationship to the city of Sodom.

### **“Homosexuality is like pedophilia or bestiality”**

Pedophilia in any circumstances constitutes rape because, by legal definition, a minor cannot be a consensual sex partner. Pedophilia is also a violation by any measurement because it is forcing sexual activity on someone who is not physically or psychologically ready for it. Love and sex between two consenting adults who are the same gender has nothing to do with pedophilia whatsoever, whether legally, morally or theologically.

Bestiality is a person having sex with an animal - this comparison is offensive, as if a same-gender partner was not even a human being. Love and sex between two people of the same gender has nothing to do with bestiality whatsoever, whether legally, morally or theologically.

### **“Homosexuality is like incest or polyamory”**

It must first be noted that the Bible openly approves of both incest and polyamory. Because of this fact, those wishing to make a purely “Biblical” argument should accept this as a point *in favor of* LGBTQ ordination. Nonetheless, this argument is false. Incest is very often also rape and sexual abuse, and in cases where it is not rape/abuse it risks offspring with severe genetic abnormalities. Incest is something that, despite the Bible, we have come to reject over time, even though royal families practiced it well into the last century. Polyamory is also something that the Bible approves of but which we reject. It is now our assumption that fidelity is best expressed, children best raised, etc. by monogamous parents. It should be noted that at least 50% of Americans, through divorce, practice serial polyamory, and that this is no bar to ordination. Homosexuality is not like either incest or polyamory.

### **“Homosexuality is unnatural”**

No matter how we interpret the word “natural”, this claim is false. That homosexual activity is observed in nature among other mammals is incontrovertible. Even if no other mammal engaged in any homosexual activity, there is no question that such activity occurs among humans, meaning that it is indeed entirely “natural”.

If the claim is that homosexual activity is “unnatural” because it does not lead to procreation, then we would have to condemn all sex that is not aimed at procreation as equally “unnatural”, and may have to consider preventing married adults who are not parents from being ordained - not to mention anyone on birth control, anyone who masturbates, etc.

If the claim is that homosexual activity is “unnatural” because it is dangerous or perverse, we should bear in mind that there are no sexual behaviors that LGBTQ persons engage in that straight persons do not do in far greater numbers. Homosexuality is natural by any reasonable definition of the word.

### **“Homosexuality is dangerous and/or unhealthy”**

As mentioned above, this argument is nonsensical because there is nothing, *no specific sexual activity*, that LGBTQ persons engage in which straight persons do not engage in in greater numbers. If we are going to have sexual-act litmus tests for ordination, we should at least be fair about it. But the above claim, that LGBTQ activities are somehow especially or inherently dangerous or unhealthy, makes no sense whatsoever, because there are no exclusively LGBTQ sex acts for us to consider.

### **“Homosexuality is a choice”**

Putting the ocean of anecdotal evidence against this claim aside, there is no scientific consensus supporting the claim that homosexuality is a choice in the vast majority of cases - quite the opposite, no credible American scientific organization would support that claim. Because sexuality is more than brain chemistry, scientific studies will never tell us all we want to know about ourselves, but the evidence that homosexuality is not a choice in the vast majority of cases is consistent and overwhelming.

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### **“Sexual orientation can be changed with ‘reparative’ therapy”**

Even in cases where “reparative” therapy isn’t simply abuse, this is not true in the vast majority of cases. The fact remains that some “reparative” therapies are abusive and even criminal. Beyond Ex-Gay is one example of an organization and conference for the survivors of these therapies. Truth Wins Out is another. Attempts to change a person’s sexual identity overwhelmingly fail (except in a few rare cases), which leads to an escalation of force used by those who are committed to the false idea that a person’s sexual identity is a malfunction of some kind. This is a view that is not shared by any credible American scientific organization, and should not be encouraged by the church.

### **“Homosexuality damages society and/or traditional marriage”**

Claims like these are actually impossible to demonstrate or prove, but they are common nonetheless - perhaps for that very reason. There is little question that fighting over homosexuality damages the members of society who are denied equal rights under the law and are treated as second-class citizens. As for marriage, we don’t think any responsible observer would attribute our current problems with marriage in the US to LGBTQ persons. There is no situation where a societal ill can be legitimately laid at the feet of the LGBTQ community, where no other causes or circumstances can be identified. The above argument is rendered meaningless, and is simply an expression of fear, or perhaps frustration, deserving a pastoral response - but not validation.

Furthermore, ‘traditional marriage’ is a recent social construct. Our contemporary romantic ideal was a terrifying innovation 100 years ago. Traditionally, marriage has involved polyandry, polygyny, surrogate pregnancy, concubinage, arranged marriages, marriage between children, and others. The Bible approves of at least 8 types of marriage, including marrying war hostages, marrying slaves, marrying up to 700 women, marrying a sibling’s widow, marrying one’s rape victim, and others. We rightly reject these many forms of ‘traditional’ marriage.

### **“Paul condemned homosexuality”**

The passage from Romans 1 popularly cited as the most damning New Testament condemnation of Homosexuality is a warning against the dangers of self-righteousness, not a polemic against Homosexuality. If anything it ought to be read as a strong caution against the belief that we can keep the church pure by keeping the wrong kind of people out. We are all in exactly the same position before the grace of Jesus Christ and no rule, least of all one as arbitrary as G-6.0106b, can ensure the faithfulness of the body.

Furthermore, we do not support every claim we can cherry-pick from the epistles. Paul also condemns women speaking in assembly or uncovering their hair. As a church, our polity should not, and does not, depend on proof-texts lifted out of context. Rather, Paul and the early church consistently defied social boundaries as they welcomed, as equals, many excluded and supposedly ‘unclean’ persons.

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### **“Ordaining LGBTQ people makes it harder to work with churches in the rest of the world”**

To what degree are we willing to compromise our conscience and our polity for the sake of ‘getting along’? Many churches in other countries do not ordain women either - it is a fact that our ordination of women makes it more difficult to work with ultra-conservative denominations and some international churches. Shall we cease to ordain women then? There are places in Africa that are currently debating whether to jail and execute LGBTQ persons. Must we deny our reason and conscience to support jailing and executing sexual minorities as well? We are better off as a witness of justice, equality and conscience for the whole world to see. This is the way the church has always been at its best, choosing the love of God for all persons over the injustices of the world, loving the unclean as Jesus did.

# **Arguments in Favor of LGBTQ Inclusion**

## **Justification is by faith**

Justification comes by grace through faith and not through any human effort. Establishing a suspect standard of holiness for service in the Church contradicts our confessions where we proclaim that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but equally that all have been set free from bondage to sin and death in Christ. We are freed for service - a service which we unjustly and selectively deny to some who Christ has claimed.

## **We are sanctified by the Holy Spirit and gifted for service**

The Holy Spirit is the source of all holiness. Just as we are not saved by our own effort, we do not grow in grace by our own sweat either. There are no actions of repentance, charity, or mercy that any individual could perform which would make them worthy of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Our worthiness lies not in our personal righteousness but in the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, evidenced by the gifts of the Spirit.

## **LGBTQ persons have clearly demonstrated spiritual gifts for ministry**

There are among us at this very moment LGBTQ individuals with an interior sense of call who many have testified are gifted with spiritual charisms for ordained ministry. That there have been in the past, are currently, and will be in the future, powerful preachers, teachers, leaders, and caregivers who happen to be LGBTQ persons is amply witnessed. Since ordained ministry in the Reformed tradition is strictly a division of function, and not of holiness, there can be no justification for denying their gifts for service. With Peter we ask “surely no one can stand in the way of the Holy Spirit?”

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## **We call unclean what God calls clean**

“What I have called clean, let no one call unclean.” In the Acts of the Apostles, God encourages Peter to break the Law of Moses regarding purity - God directly tells Peter to commit the ‘abominations’ of eating shellfish with Gentiles. Peter’s vision is about the continuing expansion and inclusion of God’s call, begun in the OT with the many calls to hospitality and love of neighbor as well as aliens in the land. Even if we pretended that the OT condemned consensual, adult same-sex love (which it does not mention, much less condemn), that love would be right there on the table-cloth...with the shellfish. This is not Peter’s innovation, nor his revisionism, nor his denial of God’s authority, any more than it is for those who support LGBTQ rights and inclusion for now. It is merely the continuation of God’s ever-expanding call, breaking down barriers wherever the Spirit is found.

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## **We are made a community of equals in Christ**

Male nor female, Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free. Neither how we are born, nor who we are politically or socially organized, nor how we are economically related to each other, is to have any impact on our status as children of God in Christ. All children of God should be welcomed in ministry. We extrapolate this powerful good news in many ways already - beyond ‘Jew and Gentile’ to other races and nations; beyond ‘slave or free’ to other economic systems and injustices. The community of equals in Christ extends to LGBTQ persons as well.

## **Jesus is silent on homosexuality, and nowhere in the Bible are loving monogamous LGBTQ relationships dealt with at all**

Though Paul mentions it twice, Jesus does not talk about homosexuality at all in the Gospels that we have as canon. An argument from absence isn’t necessarily very compelling, but it is worth mentioning that for over 30 years we have energetically argued over something that the authors of the Gospels did not feel was worth mentioning even once one way or another. Paul, the first to write about Jesus whose manuscripts we have, encouraged people not to marry at all because he expected the imminent return of Jesus in his lifetime. He did not speak of committed LGBTQ relationships any more than the Hebrew scriptures did.

## **Our first and most important ordination is in baptism**

Our first and most important ordination is in Baptism, where we are adopted into Jesus Christ and given the ministry of every disciple. Ordination to a specific ministry in the church, whether of an Elder, Deacon, or Minister of Word and Sacrament does not confer any ontological change, override, supersede, or even amend the prior ordination into the ministry of the baptised. The distinction we make in the offices of the church is one of function and not of holiness. By saying that a baptised, called, and gifted individual is ineligible for a particular ministry by virtue of supposed insufficient holiness we are denying their Baptism. If one’s Baptism can be annulled by supposed sin, or is dependent on our effort and perfection, then we are all *doomed*.

## **The priesthood is composed of all believers**

In the Reformed tradition, from the very beginning, it was understood that every believer is responsible as part of the priesthood - that priesthood was not a special ontological status conferred by the church, but was rather a general calling conferred by the grace of God on all baptised believers. The fact is that every LGBTQ Christian is *already* called to ministry.

## **Exclusion of LGBTQ persons adds nothing of value to the ordination standards we already have**

Ignore for the moment that the average American becomes sexually active at 16 and gets married at 28, and that simple 'chastity in singleness' does not begin to address this societal reality in believers' lives. Apart from the exclusion of LGBTQ persons from ordination, G-6.0106b does nothing whatsoever to further or deepen the Book of Order's definition of ordained office or requirements for those seeking ordination. It can be omitted without losing anything of value.

## **LGBTQ persons already serve in other denominations and organizations, proving dire predictions false every day**

LGBTQ persons are serving in ordained ministry in various denominations currently and the predicted denominational collapses have not taken place. The real harm is being done however by our continuing to fight over this issue, which damages the peace, unity and purity of the church particular and universal, as well as the witness of the church to the world. Furthermore, we must never shrink from doing what is right for the sake of protecting our denomination. Even if acting justly causes a mass exodus from our denomination, that is no reason to continue to act unjustly.

## **No church that does not choose a LGBTQ minister, Elder or Deacon will ever have to ordain one**

Even if the PC(USA) is to begin ordaining LGBTQ persons this very moment, there is no church anywhere in the denomination which would be forced to accept any particular LGBTQ pastor, Elder or Deacon against its will. It is the Presbytery's function to examine candidates for Ministry of Word and Sacrament, and that will continue without interruption when G-6.0106b is erased from the Book of Order. The fact is that G-6.0106b does not protect anyone from anything. All it does is ensure that people who are demonstrably called to pastoral ministry are not allowed to live that calling out, and churches in need of pastoral leadership are unable to find it.

## **The church is currently lending tacit support to mocking, bullying, torment and exclusion suffered by LGBTQ persons**

LGBTQ persons are being mocked, bullied, tormented, and discriminated against at this very moment, possibly jailed or even executed overseas. Some in recent days have taken their own lives as a direct result of this hateful treatment. Every second we fail to stand up and declare unequivocally that God loves them and they are welcome, is a second we acquiesce to bigotry and tacitly support bullies. It is time to begin undoing the harm official church policies of exclusion have wrought.

## **Conclusion**

There are not even selfish reasons to retain G-6.0106b and continue to unjustly exclude LGBTQ persons from ordination. That single clause will not prevent frustrated congregations from leaving the denomination, nor will it convince parishioners frustrated with decades of conflict over this issue to remain. It will not maintain even a veneer of peace, unity and purity in the church. G-6.0106b does not put our current debates over ordination to rest. What it means is that barely more than half of the denomination is able to force its interpretation of ordination on every individual Presbytery, congregation, and member of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Getting rid of G-6.0106b will not force a single Presbytery or congregation to ordain or accept a single candidate they do not vote to accept. What it will do is enable thousands of congregations and dozens of Presbyteries who have been a slight minority in the denomination right now to consider, just consider, LGBTQ persons for ordination where they might be called to serve.

In a situation where believers disagree in good faith according to their conscience, where 30 years or argument has not made any progress in producing consensus, it seems most reasonable, most just, and best to allow freedom of conscience. Nothing is preserved when 51% of the denomination maintains a specific litmus-test and forces 49% to apply it. There is no other clause like G-6.0106b which is aimed at a specific issue in the same way in all of the Book of Order. G-6.0106b is an aberration in our polity, and we are better off in every conceivable way without it. It is not justified ethically, rationally, politically nor theologically. It is time for us to vote in favor of inclusion.

Have questions about one of the points raised or want to see citations to support these arguments? Go to:

<http://twofriarsandafool.blogspot.com/>

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