

Bishop Board Recommendation



Regarding Ordination for Women in Lancaster Mennonite Conference

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

We, the Board of Bishops of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, believe that our shared faith and life must flow from a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, and our full obedience to the Holy Scripture, the written Word of God, as guided by the Holy Spirit and discerned in the community of believers. We are committed to biblical authority and to upholding the core values of historic Christian faith and Anabaptist understandings.

As a conference, we must continue to grow in the discipline of community discernment regarding issues of faith and life, including the counsel of our international brothers and sisters. Mutual discernment will require humility as we seek God and desire to respect and honor one another and avoid divisions.

In the Bible study (*following*), we see evidence that men and women were recognized and active in ministry in the New Testament church. Given our best understanding and use of the principles of biblical interpretation, we recognize that committed, faithful followers of Christ can come to differing conclusions concerning the practice of women in leadership and ordination.

We resist the current polarization between forms of traditional patriarchy and modern egalitarianism. We should on the one hand refrain from reading contemporary notions of egalitarianism and individual equality back into Galatians 3:28 and other passages, eliminating all role distinctions between men and women. On the other hand, we must affirm the fundamental unity and equality of women and men inherent in the gospel, allowing for changing roles as the Spirit leads in the church. We desire both the courage to follow our convictions and the humility to respect differing points of view among us.

Ultimately, we believe that this matter must remain at the level of church polity (church governance) rather than confession (essential biblical beliefs). Therefore, we will strive to resist the polarization of either/or thinking on what we do not consider to be a confessional issue. In such cases, we believe it is better to seek the unity of believers as envisioned by our Lord in John 17 and described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6: *“one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*

The Board of Bishops bring the following recommendation:

- That Lancaster Mennonite Conference respect each member congregation in its discernment of Scripture, as led by the Holy Spirit, to call and affirm persons to serve in ministry and pastoral leadership, and,
- That the LMC Board of Bishops license and/or ordain, regardless of gender, those who have responded to God’s call, who have been affirmed by their respective congregation, and who meet LMC qualifications for credentialing.

This recommendation includes the following understandings:

- To most fully respect the differing Scriptural understandings, beliefs, and practices of our congregations, the role of bishop and similar conference oversight roles, will be reserved for men.
- The Board of Bishops will assist in defining protocol for healthy, God-honoring male and female relationships in ministry teams.