

Peace Candle on the 40th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the opening up of ordination to women. The Manyano gave each of the women living out the call to ordained ministry in this district a beautiful red stole. Gifts were extended in abundance and the Bishop of the Cape of Good Hope District got down on one knee pleading for the women to forgive for all the ways men have hindered our ability to serve or allowed us to walk alone.

Words were spoken, “We forgive Bishop, but waiting on the next step—the move to repent.”

I have to share that I am incredibly honored to stand with the women in the Cape of Good Hope District as one ordained and serving in solidarity with, but felt this morning you might be interested in hearing some of the things that still go on for women who are called by God.

Here are the stories collected from the women of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa—Cape of Good Hope District:

A male colleague serving as a visiting preacher for me came into my church said I was avoiding him, put his head in my bosom, held on tight, and later said he was joking around. My choir saw the whole thing and took his side.

The uncertainty of an appointment in a connectional system where too many congregations still struggle with female clergy.

A female Superintendent arrived at an Easter gathering and was not allowed to sit with her male colleagues. She was ushered to a space all by herself and fetched later at a more appropriate time by a male lay leader.

It is so hard, for we can't just be ourselves, we have to always be proving ourselves.

A male colleague placing both hands on me as if I were a piece of furniture or a small child and moving me around till I was standing just where he wanted me with the entire congregation's eyes fixed on the scene.

Serving communion while pregnant and a member refusing to receive naming I was unclean.

Many shared on assumptions made: If you don't introduce your male pastor as handsome, why are we always introduced as beautiful? If you don't kiss your male minister square on the lips, why would you think it is okay to do so with your female minister? If you don't tell your male minister what to wear or how to cut his hair, why would you with your female minister?

All of the women agreed that they have received the most pain not from men, but from the women in their midst. The umbrella of patriarchy has caught women in ways they often don't see. "There is only one pastor" and they will be referring to the man. Women will degrade rather than uplift.

These are the named struggles from the women in this district, so we celebrate the 40th anniversary of a door opening to women for ordination and pray for the door to open wider and wider for them to be full participants in the ministry that God has called them to. O Lord, hear our prayer...

Holy Spirit of God,

The words in the bible, "for a time such as this" were for Esther called to stand in courage. The words, "Give me a drink" were spoken by Jesus to an unnamed Samaritan woman at a well who later would draw people to the well that never runs dry with the words "come and see." The words "where you go, I go" were spoken between Ruth and Naomi—who teach women how to stand in solidarity. The words "Let it be" were lifted into the air by Mary as she accepted the role of bringing into the world the way that leads to life eternal.

We thank you this morning for the gift of feminine voices that teach us how to find our way to you and the way that leads to life. We wrestle with the fact that a door opened 40 years ago, is a door today that still needs to be opened more fully. Rise up within your people O God the ability to hear, see, and live into the new ways you will be opening up before us. Let the voices of women be heard, let them be honored, and let room be made for them among the men in order that your people O God might receive a fuller blessing.

We thank you for the men who have courage to lead, creating space for women to share in ministry and to speak out in the moments when women are being silenced—not heard—dishonored--degraded.

Forgive us for the ways we fail to live in unity and open the door wider and wider O God to the new day where all those, called to ordained ministry—all--can stand together and be received. The heavens await the sound of varied voices lifting up your glory O God, deliver us to that day.

It is in the name
of the Almighty and Everlasting God,
Jesus the Christ
and the Holy Spirit that I pray
Amen