



## **Why I Love the Church**

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For the last little bit, say, 2000 years; the Church of Jesus has mastered both the use and pronunciation of one word. We have used it so well that many think it is synonymous with being a Christian. It's a powerful word and when wielded like a two-edged sword it can destroy both evil and good. It can topple systems of oppression and injustice, as well as squash any ounce of creativity and imagination. Of course, that word is, "no."

Just think of how many creative, imaginative, even wonderfully pedestrian things The Church has said, "no" to over the years. Think of how many people have left The Church because they were told, "no" too many times – to their fresh ideas, to the people they love, to how they view themselves. We have even said, "no" to people who wish to volunteer to use their gifts in serving one another. And yes, we have even said, "no" to people who answer the call to serve as a minister.

But you know, over the last 40 or 50 years, The Church has gotten better about saying, "no" to people who express a call to ministry. We've learned a new phrase – "yes, but." "Yes, you can serve, but since you are (fill in the blank), you cannot be ordained." And so, we created different strata for recognizing and authorizing ministry. It may not have been our intention from the beginning, but we have since developed a caste system among clergy. You can be ordained or commissioned. For many, the "gold standard" is ordination. Those who don't or can't go to seminary, while still doing everything an ordained minister does, will be commissioned. Ordained ministers can move freely within our denomination. Commissioned ministers cannot. And because of that, many commissioned ministers feel "less than" their ordained colleagues.

Our commissioned ministers are often bi-vocational, working a full or half-time job while serving their congregations; or they are serving 2 different congregations. Many of our congregations have said they "cannot afford an

ordained minister.” Many more congregations in our region have already (or are seriously considering) transitioned from full-time to part-time ministry.

The Regional Commission on Ministry (RCOM) is actively creating multiple paths towards ordination. They recognize that all of the work a minister does is ordained ministry. Yes, some have the ability to attend graduate school. Others have the ability to be apprenticed by mentors, other clergy, and support teams. And so, RCOM has begun a program for ministers who have been commissioned in our region for at least 5 years and have maintained the requirements for standing in each of those years, to become ordained.

Currently we have 12 Commissioned Ministers who have met and exceeded those requirements and are on the path towards ordination. All of them were at one time told by our region, “no you cannot be ordained” for various reasons. Because they were women, because they were black, because they didn’t have a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited institution, or for whatever reason. And yet, they all chose to serve in our region with honor and distinction.

I love the Church because, today, we are recognizing and honoring the selflessness and sacrifice ALL ministers make when answering God’s call to Christian vocation. And I love the Christian Church in Mid-America for equipping our ministers with the tools and best practices for every congregation and ministry setting being served in our region!

In short, I love The Church because The Church is saying, “YES!”