

UMC Commissions 'Non-Binary' Transgender Deacon

The United Methodist Church commissioned Deacon M. Barclay—who identifies as a “non-binary trans” person—this week.

Barclay sees sexual orientation as “completely separate from gender identity,” and identifies as queer or bisexual, according to the denomination’s site. The UMC reports Barclay came out as a lesbian in 2013 and married a partner.

“I know it’s not particularly common in The United Methodist Church, but I intend to wear a collar every single day because for a person like me to navigate society in a collar provides some profound and urgently needed pastoral opportunities, particularly for queer and trans people,” Barclay says.

Barclay is now a provisional deacon and can be ordained in 2019 after evaluations.

The Northern Illinois Conference commissioned Barclay, who is the communications director for Reconciled Ministries Network and was a liason for the United Methodist Alliance for Transgender Inclusion (UMATI).

“Reconciling Ministries Network believes that human sexuality is a good gift from God. RMN is committed to supporting the integration of healthy, loving expressions of sexuality and spirituality for everyone. We celebrate the sexuality and spirituality of same and opposite gender-loving persons and pledge to provide resources that lead to a deeper understanding of God’s precious gift,” according to the RMN website.

Though UMC has no official position on transgender people according to the Book of Discipline, official statements condemn homosexuality.

“While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church,” the Book of Discipline states. “Self-avowed practicing homosexual is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, board of ordained ministry or clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual.”

The UMC Judicial Council ruled in April that gay men and lesbian women could not serve as members of the clergy.

“We acknowledge that the decision does not help to ease the disagreements, impatience and anxiety that permeates The United Methodist Church over the matter of human sexuality, and particularly this case,” said Bishop Bruce R. Ough, president of the Council of Bishops. “Our compassion and prayers of intercession extend to all those who are hurt, relieved, confused or fearful.”

LGBT members, like lesbian Bishop Karen Oliveto and provisional Deacon Barclay, must face administrative or judicial review before they can be removed from office.

“Self-avowal does not nullify the consecration and cause removal from office,” according to a statement. Until the review’s completion, the bishop remains in good standing.
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