

***The Denominational Concerns Task Force recognizes that the issue of women in ministry in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is very important to us here at Chapel Hill. In an attempt to get a glimpse of what it means, we've asked a couple of different EPC women pastors to share a little bit of their journey from the PC(USA) to the EPC. The following documents are their responses.***

---

Pastor Nancy Duff is the Associate Pastor of Small Group Ministries and Care Ministries at Centerpoint Community Church (formerly named First Presbyterian Church of Roseville, CA). A second career pastor, Nancy earned her Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2003, and was called to Centerpoint at that time. Nancy and her husband John have been married 27 years, and they have two young adult children.

Pastor Nancy was part of the pastoral team at Centerpoint through the time that the congregation changed denominations from PC (USA) to EPC. She has been active in the presbyteries of both denominations, first in the Sacramento Presbytery of the PC (USA) [also serving as commissioner to the Synod of the Pacific], and now in the Presbytery of the West of the EPC. During the years that Centerpoint was discerning whether God was calling the congregation to change denominations, Nancy served on several teams related to this process, including on her session's original discernment team, a logistical planning team, and the negotiation team. Originally hesitant about the reception she would receive as a woman pastor in the EPC, Pastor Nancy's experience in her new denomination and presbytery has been very positive, and she looks forward to sharing her journey with you.

---

To my Sisters at Chapel Hill and the surrounding area,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! My name is Betsy Rumer and I am the Pastor of Spiritual Formation at Memorial Park EPC church in Pittsburgh, PA. I've been asked to speak to you about my journey into the EPC.

Well, that journey began several years ago while still a seminary student. I was personally struggling with being ordained into the PC(USA) because of the theological issues at hand. At that same time, my church, Memorial Park, had also made the decision to leave the PC(USA).

When our church left we moved into the New Wineskins non-geographic Transitional Presbytery of the EPC; which was the body that eventually ordained me. Being a woman Teaching Elder in this body was easy and comfortable given that most of these churches were also folks who had left the PC(USA) where a more egalitarian interpretation (those for ordination of women) of Scripture was prevalent.

However, the New Wineskins Transitional Presbytery was always meant to be a temporary body with a life span of 5 years and after 4 years it was time to move our church and our Pastors into a geographic Presbytery.

Of course the issue here is that the EPC had very few women Teaching Elders and not all Presbyteries were open to having women pastors (since then, the EPC has made arrangements for churches falling into these Presbyteries to join neighboring ones).

The Presbytery of the East was to be our new home but they had not had a woman Teaching Elder in 25 years. The question was whether or not they were going to decide as a Presbytery to keep the issue of women

in ordained leadership as a non-essential or whether they were going to stand against it. It's one thing to say you want to move forward but it is a very different thing to prove it with your actions.

Well, even though I've always believed that the Lord's timing in all this was purposeful, I must admit that the process of entering into this Presbytery filled me with anxiety. I had no idea if I was going to be welcomed or even voted in.

I figured one of two things was going to happen: either the Presbytery of the East was going to vote for me and open a new door or they were going to say 'No' and that would cause other doors to close. Either way, I knew I would be okay because I had the full support of my Senior Pastor, Dean Weaver, the other Pastors, the Session and the entire congregation.

The process of transitioning into the Presbytery of the East consisted of two examinations for all Pastors not just women. The first examination was with the Ministerial Committee. We individually met with a group of 6 lovely, grace-filled men; all whom I found out later were complimentarians (those who do not believe in a biblical interpretation of women in ordained positions). In my examination, we met for about an hour and a half and of course the first question they asked me was to give them a Biblical basis for understanding women's ordination. They were not interested in my feelings or what I thought, they wanted me to show them from Scripture. I spent a half an hour walking them through the Old and New Testament showing them what I believe Scripture has to say on the subject. When we were done with that question they agreed my answer was both Reformed and Scriptural and so we moved on to other unrelated questions. In the end, the exam was a wonderful theological discussion between peers and the entire committee voted unanimously to send me to the floor for final examination.

An interesting side note, the chair of the committee called me later that day to encourage me and tell me what a great job I had done. He then offered to send me a paper on the egalitarian view versus the complimentarian view if I wanted it. Amazing that while he and I stood on opposite sides of the issue, he voted for me and fought for me. As you will read, I had this very same experience on the floor of the Presbytery.

The final step was to be examined on the floor of the Presbytery of the East. Now here is just a little story of how the Lord works. The day we were all to be examined, I had pneumonia and had not had a voice in a couple of weeks. I felt lousy and was scared knowing I was finally going on the floor in front of mostly men and mostly men who I knew did not share the same Biblical interpretation I did on the women's issue. AND that no woman had come on the floor in 25 years!

But a most amazing thing happened...a God thing...I was called up to the pulpit for examination and all of a sudden, I felt completely well and had my full voice! And then another amazing thing happened. The very first question asked me, which was of course on women's ordination, was asked in the loveliest of ways. The gentleman said, "My Pastor was the head of the Ministerial Committee who examined you and he said you did such a phenomenal job answering the question regarding women and ordination, would you please bless us by sharing your answer with us as well?"

Well that launched me into a wonderful time of teaching with questions and answers and discussion. In the end, I was examined on the floor for about an hour and then escorted out for the vote. When I was brought back in everyone stood and welcomed me with clapping and singing and hugging. It was an extraordinary moment! The vote was 34 to 17 so not unanimous and yet even those who voted against me welcomed me! I had men coming up and congratulating me saying that today the EPC had made history and they were thanking God!

So, here's what I discovered in going through this process. For the most part, those who do not believe in women's ordination just want the freedom to vote their consciences. They are not voting against us as women personally and once the vote is cast they are grace-filled.

And in the time I've been in the Presbytery of the East, since April 2010, I've experienced no discouraging remarks or lack of respect. Do I know there are those who disagree with my stand? Sure, but it has only once been communicated in a way that I thought was less than grace filled...and my skin is thicker than that! I am convinced that the EPC is my home theologically. It has been said by a few of us women TE's that "we would prefer to deal with whatever fallout there is from being a woman than to constantly fight theology! And the EPC's theology is right where we live."

Since I was welcomed into the Presbytery of the East there has also been another women TE voted in and she was a candidate that they ordained. They continue to practice the EPC's principle of liberty in non-essentials.

So, how have I felt since leaving the PC(USA) and joining the EPC? Set free!

And what has my reception been like with the male teaching and ruling elders? It has been easier than I anticipated.

But let me be candid with you...part of the reason I believe it has been easy is that I've been blessed to not have a chip on my shoulder about the fairness or unfairness of the women's issue. Neither am I angry at the EPC for its stance. I recognize that they **are changing** and that growing pains can be ugly. I try to return grace with grace and let the Lord be the one to change and soften hearts because He is the only one who can.

Just recently our church has moved into a newly created Presbytery of the Alleghenies and I expect that there will be the same kind of respect even as there will be those that sit across from me regarding the calling placed on my life.

I can earnestly say that God is good and on his throne here in the EPC.

Your Sister in Christ

Betsy Rumer

[brumer@memorialparkchurch.org](mailto:brumer@memorialparkchurch.org)

412-364-9492