



## Presbytery of Lake Michigan

Presbyterian Church [U.S.A.]

February 8, 2023

Dear Siblings in Christ:

You may have heard about the recent controversy and concerns about a decision of the PC(USA) ordination exams proctored this month from the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC). The only text option for those taking the exegesis examination is a text from Judges 19 that features dehumanization, rape, and the murder of a sexual assault victim, and was labeled one of four "texts of terror" in Phyllis Trible's 1984 book *[Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives \(Overtures to Biblical Theology\)](#)*. A Presbyterian News Service report of the response to this text can be found [here](#).

We affirm that the Presbytery of Lake Michigan takes the issue of violence, sexual assault, and trauma very seriously. Trauma can manifest in many forms and at different times and can be embodied, cultural, or generational. Ongoing exchanges over the last week on a number of different platforms have ranged from whether the ordination exam is the appropriate venue for exploring these kinds of issues, to how we show care to those who are carrying burdens we may not all fully understand, to how we prepare candidates for the challenges of ministry. For some sexual assault survivors, the resulting conversations themselves have been traumatizing.

This week, a number of mid-council leaders from around the country met to resource each other on how to respond to trauma in our communities, with an upcoming meeting with denominational leaders about the process used to create this particular ordination exam. We wanted to make sure that you are aware these conversations are being held, and that they are being treated very seriously.

While our Committee on Preparation for Ministry did not have any candidates scheduled to take this particular exam, we call on members of the Presbytery of Lake Michigan to model beloved community together by holding space for all those affected by violence and trauma. May we welcome opportunities to listen, and may we recognize the legitimacy of the trauma and harm that sexual violence has caused.

We recommend the following resources for further study:

- Book: *[Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk](#)*, Delores S. Williams, by Orbis Books, 1993.

- Book: *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Overtures to Biblical Theology)*, Phyllis Trible, by Fortress Press, 1984.
- Periodical: “[How Christian theology and practice are being shaped by trauma studies: Talking about God in the face of wounds that will not go away](#)”, Shelly Rambo, by The Christian Century, November 1, 2019.
- Scholarly Article: “[Trigger warnings, covenants of presence, and more: Cultivating safe space for theological discussions about sexual trauma](#)”, Stephanie M. Crumpton, from Teaching Theology and Religion, Volume 20, Issue 2, pp. 137-147, April 2017.

For those of you who find you are carrying a special kind of burden in the wake of these events, please know that, to the best of our ability, we see you, and we validate your lived experience as real. Please let us know if there is any kind of support we can offer at this particular time.

Peace,

Rev. Fran Lane-Lawrence  
Executive Presbyter/ Stated Clerk

Rev. Chrissy Westbury  
Associate Presbyter