

So the Holy Spirit is tied to a chain of hands after all?

On January 26, 2015, the first female bishop in the Church of England, the Right Rev. Libby Lane, was consecrated.

A week later, Feb 2, 2015, again in the Church of England, a traditionalist bishop, the Right Rev. Phillip North, was consecrated. Who laid hands on him? Only bishops free of the defect of ordaining women, that is, only bishops who had never laid hands on the heads of female deacons, female priests, or participated in the consecration of the first female bishop a week earlier.

Within the one Church of England there are now two distinct lines, two episcopal pedigrees – one with women deacons, priests, and bishops, and the other, a line of male bishops free of that defect. Both lines valid because they possess the one thing that cannot be tampered with – episcopal ordination by three bishops with proper pedigrees, **the unbroken chain of hands.**

Both sides are fuming, yet muddling through by “respecting their differences....” Decisive is the fact that **the chain of hands is unbroken.**

ELCA Lutherans may chuckle at this contorted waltz, but remember that in 1999 the ELCA changed its constitution¹ to require three bishops, at least one of whom is from the US Episcopal Church, to consecrate new ELCA bishops – until full communion has been achieved. Since then ELCA Lutherans, like Episcopalians, insist on the proper pedigree for their bishops.

This 1999 constitutional change effected a seismic shift in how the Gospel works. Gone is the Lutheran confession “where and when it pleases”² God in those who hear the Gospel “purely preached”³ and the sacraments celebrated according to that Gospel. Now what is non-negotiable law is the proper episcopal pedigree of ELCA bishops, **the unbroken chain of hands.**

¹ ELCA Constitution 10.81.01.

² Augsburg Confession V; Tappert, 31.

³ Augsburg Confession VII; Tappert 32.