



What else is there to say about the ELCA decision?

I told you at the end of last month's *Question for Pastor* to check back next month, because there was a lot more to be said on the question regarding homosexuals being allowed to be pastors (as the ELCA church body recently voted in their summer assembly).

Last month I included the response by our synodical president to this ELCA decision. He laid out the reasons why it is not "ok" to have gays and lesbians serve as pastors, (in a nutshell: because God has *clearly* stated in His Word that He is not "ok" with it.)

Having said that, I need to remind us that while homosexuality is a sin, one that the vast majority of people can't relate to, there are many other things that are also sin - things that we *can* relate to and often commit ourselves. A pastor once related an incident where one of his ushers asked, "What do I do if some gay people come in to worship?" The pastor answered, "Seat them right next to the other sinners... the ladies who were gossiping in the church basement before worship, the guy who is hungover from getting drunk last night, the young couple that is living together and aren't married..." i.e. Seat them anywhere you like, because the rest of us are also sinners in need of the forgiveness Jesus' purchased for us on the cross.

The whole point is that we need to take care with regard to this issue not to come off as "holier than thou," because we are sinners too. Jesus said, "I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." The Gospel message of repentance and forgiveness is there just as much for people who aren't practicing a homosexual lifestyle as it is there for those who are.

So that brings up another question: "If we are all sinners, how can we single out the sin of a homosexual lifestyle as being a disqualifier for the ministry?"

For starters, there's the fact that God spells out in His Word (in the books of Timothy and Titus) that the qualifications for being a pastor include: "Being the husband of but *one wife*." But maybe the biggest reason someone leading a homosexual lifestyle is disqualified for pastoral ministry is the lack of an attitude of repentance - the attitude God requires of all sinners and with all sins. With gays and lesbians who do not acknowledge that their lifestyle is a sin and contrary to God's plan, there is an attitude of defiance and not repentance. Instead of a desire to change and follow God's plan of sex only within a marriage relationship between a husband and wife, there tends to be a "That's the way I am and I don't need to change," attitude.

Let's put it in perspective with a couple of comparable examples: Let's say a person who regularly cheats customers out of money wants to become a pastor. He comes to the seminary and clearly states "I am a swindler and proud of it. I want to be a pastor." The response would be the same as to the homosexual, "When you come to the point where you are willing to change that lifestyle then we can talk. Otherwise, it's not going to happen." Or take the example of a heterosexual couple living together without being married. The guy decides he wants to be a pastor. He goes to the seminary and says, "I want to be a pastor. I'm living with someone - have been for quite some time - and we are committed to each other but feel no need to get married. I think I can be a good pastor.." Again, the response would be the same, "When you come to the point where you are willing to admit your lifestyle is a sin - not something God condones - and you want to change that lifestyle, then we can talk. Otherwise, it's not going to happen."

One other question that comes up is "Well, if those people have desires for folks of the same sex, then that must be the way God made them. And if God made them that way, how can we keep them from becoming pastors?"

There's a false assumption in that question. The assumption that all desires we have as human beings are "because that's the way God made us." The Bible is very clear many times over (e.g. Romans 1:21-32) that there are many desires that run contrary to the way God made us. (We usually refer to it as our

"sinful nature") Each and every human being has desires that are not God-pleasing. Our response to those desires needs to be to seek God's help to curb those desires and replace them with God-pleasing desires and actions.

The bottom line on all these questions is that we turn for our answers not to popular opinion, not to what's currently accepted in society, but that we turn to God's Word. God has created everything that exists. He's given us instructions about how He's created things to work. He's given us instructions on what is unacceptable. His Word really is "the final answer" for our tough questions.

Thanks for asking,
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Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net