



The Bishop's Journal

It's Time We Agreed To Disagree

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS article, it is quite likely that the ELCIC will have experienced the first "irregular" ordination of a self-declared and practicing gay man. Despite fervent admonitions from my office, a congregation of our synod will have hosted such a service and been publicly supported through the presence of several synodical pastors and lay people. Press reports will have been filed, internet forums bombarded and disciplinary procedures initiated, and all to what end?

The fact is that we, like most of North American society, are deeply divided concerning the moral status of homosexual persons. Some believe that such individuals are engaged in a lifestyle that is intrinsically sinful, while others believe that

sexual orientation is in itself a morally neutral component of an individual's total personhood. In our church, these differences are profound and are based on quite different understandings of how portions of the Christian scriptures are to be read and interpreted. So, what to do?

For the sake of our much larger common mission, I think it's time for us to recognize and accept our differences on this question, and to allow different expressions of our church to follow alternate paths. I am of the opinion that an individual's sexual orientation should not impact his/her ability to participate in the church's approved candidacy processes. Congregations should be free to call or not call any approved candidate that they wish. Congrega-

tions and pastors should have the freedom to marry or not marry whoever they wish according to the dictates of conscience.

Similar local options inform much of our church's life. Some element of local option governs our church's confirmation, baptism, communion and funeral practices. Likewise with our liturgical, stewardship and governance practices. Each of these things are important expressions of how we exercise our Christian faith and local clergy and congregations make important decisions concerning them on the basis of their interpretation of biblical and scriptural principals. How or why would we expect questions concerning the very complicated realm of human sexuality to be addressed any differ-

ently?

Too much of our church's energy is being expended in seeking church-wide resolution to an issue over which we will long continue to disagree. This is energy that is being diverted from addressing an infinitely more important mission agenda upon which we do agree! We should certainly continue to pursue a common understanding. We should certainly continue to debate and engage these not-insignificant differences. However, in the meantime, we should not constrain those of our wider church community who wish to take a different path from that which you or I might chose. Our dogged insistence on maintaining the status quo is hurting all of us and contributing to the furthering of

unnecessary and hurtful divisions among us.

At the end of the day, we all have much bigger fish to fry. God has a mission to, in and for the world that we have been called to discern, support and advance. Our ability to do so collectively and effectively is not predicated upon being in full agreement on every question of faith and discipleship. Sometimes, when addressing our differences, the most faithful response is to agree to disagree. Let's get on with it!

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