

The Arguments Against Leaving the ELCA & Responses

By The Rev. N. Amanda Grimmer

ARGUMENT: Gays have been an oppressed sexual minority & have suffered much at the hands of the Church, in the name of Christ. Ordination of sexually active homosexuals is a way to show the loving and welcoming nature of the Church.

RESPONSE: Gays **HAVE** been an oppressed sexual minority and **HAVE** suffered much at the hands of the Church, in the name of Christ. This is tragic and wrong. Prior to the formation of the ELCA, both the LCA and ALC (predecessor bodies to the ELCA) ordained homosexual persons; and this has continued throughout the life of the ELCA. What is **new** in the ELCA's action at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly is the extension of "publically accountable lifelong monogamous relationships" (whatever they are) to people other than the one male and one female for whom marriage is designed by God, according to Scripture. Holy Trinity's issue with the ELCA is not over the ordination of homosexual persons; it is over the authority of Scripture and the holiness of the Name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ARGUMENT: The Bible says polygamy is OK. Why not other forms of marriage?

RESPONSE: The Bible does **NOT** say that polygamy is OK. The Bible is very critical of Lamech, who introduced polygamy. See Genesis 4:19-24 for the whole story. The way that Genesis tells the story suggests a deliberate attempt by Lamech to subvert God's original pattern of one man and one woman. Later in the story, Lamech taunts God by his boast of how much vengeance he would bring to bear on any man who would attack him for killing the man who wounded him. (He would bring seventy times the vengeance God threatened to bring on anyone who hurt Cain.) The Bible does **NOT** say polygamy is OK; in fact, the Bible is very critical of it.

ARGUMENT: The Church has made prior accommodations to the culture in addition to the one made at last summer's Churchwide assembly. In addition to its most recent cultural accommodation, namely "publically accountable lifelong monogamous same-gender relationships", the church has made cultural accommodation in its decisions to let divorced people be pastors and to ordain women.

RESPONSE: Neither decision was made in order to be culturally accommodating. The church lets divorced people be pastors because in Christ, all sins can be forgiven; one is not worse than the rest. We have all of us, divorced or not, failed to be what we would have wanted to be in any of our relationships. Divorced Christians live in the same covenant of grace and forgiveness as all the rest of us Christian sinners. This doesn't mean that divorce is not terribly wrong, it just means that God forgives everyone who repents. And so the Church is not being culturally accommodating when it says that divorced people can be pastors; it is being Christian.

The LCA's decision in 1970 to ordain women, was in answer to the question: what does it mean to "be a bearer of the Word of God"? Can a woman be a bearer of the Word of God only in the same way as Mary the mother of our Lord; or can she be a bearer of the Word of God in the same way as the Old Testament prophets? I Corinthians says both "A woman should keep silence in church" and also "When a woman is speaking in Church she should have her head covered." 1 Timothy says both "I forbid a woman to teach men" and in the next breath "Women are saved by childbearing", even though we know from other places in the New Testament, "All who call on the Name of the Lord shall be saved." So what is it? When we use the Bible to interpret the Bible (a Lutheran principle) we find in the Old Testament the prophetess Huldah, and we find in the New Testament the husband-and-wife team of Priscilla & Aquila, Philip's four prophetess daughters, all the named female deacons in the New Testament, and Mary Magdalene, the first witness to Christ's resurrection. When we use the Bible to interpret the Bible, we clearly see the Lord using women as "bearers of His Word" throughout Scripture. For this reason, the LCA voted to ordain women in 1970. Pastor Mandy was the 28th woman ordained in the LCA. (So early we were still counting.) But neither response was "cultural accommodation".

ARGUMENT: We in the ELCA have room for those who disagree with us. In fact, we need the voices of the traditionalists as well as the progressives. We are diminished if any of those who disagree with us leave.

RESPONSE: For years, each of your pastors has been loudly mocked and ridiculed by those seated around us as we have tried to speak at the microphone during Synod Assembly. This behavior has been witnessed by those members of this congregation who have gone to Synod Assembly as delegates. That's how much the ELCA wants to hear the voices of any who disagree. But our issue with the ELCA is not the discourtesy with which we have been treated; our issue with the ELCA is the authority of Scripture and the holiness of the Name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ARGUMENT: By voting to leave the ELCA, Holy Trinity is being schismatic. After all, Jesus prayed that His Church would be one, and Holy Trinity is breaking the Church's unity by voting to leave the ELCA.

RESPONSE: Holy Trinity is being schismatic only if you are claiming that the ELCA is the "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church" to the exclusion of the myriad other denominations of Christianity. Right now in the USA, there are 20-something denominations of Lutherans alone. We are not being "schismatic"; we are simply voting to join another denomination.

ARGUMENT: By voting to leave the ELCA, Holy Trinity is being purist and ignoring the words of Jesus who said "Let the wheat and the weeds grow together until the final harvest" (Mt. 13:24-30).

RESPONSE: Holy Trinity is not being "purist". We are not trying to uproot (or "weed out" of our community) anyone who does not agree with the majority. We hope no one leaves. But what we are trying to do is follow the words of Jesus (in Mt 10:14): "If any town will not receive your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake the dust from your feet." We are not kicking anyone out; we are just trying to leave ourselves.

ARGUMENT: By voting to leave the ELCA, Holy Trinity is being purist & ignoring the words of Jesus, who said in John 14 that in His Father's House there are many rooms. Why won't you just accept that there are several different ways to be Christian?

RESPONSE: As the punchline of an old joke says, there ARE several different ways to be Christian. So let's agree to disagree: we'll each be Christian in our own way – you in your way and we in HIS.

ARGUMENT: All Scripture is based on the Gospel. Christians are supposed to let the Gospel (which some people – not your pastors --often claim is the same as "the command to love") be the eyeglasses through which we read scripture.

RESPONSE: According to Jesus, the command to love is the summary of the law (Mt 22:37-40.) The Law is always what we are to do to be good. The gospel is always what God has done through Christ to save us. You cannot have the Gospel without the Law; or to put this another way, no one knows his or her need for the Savior without knowing his or her sinfulness. You don't need a Savior if you can get right with God on your own.

As one final thought ... what about the bisexuals? The ELCA voted at its 2009 Churchwide Assembly to "commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support, & hold publically accountable life-long, **monogamous**, same-gender relationships." The ELCA did this because they are concerned that people with a minority gender orientation might wish to live out their love and gain social recognition of their relationships, a recognition they have been denied historically. So, if it's good for homosexual and heterosexual people to be able to enter "publically accountable same-gender" relationships in accordance with their sexual orientation, how can this not also be good for bisexual persons? Isn't bisexuality a gender? And what is bisexuality but the sexual love of both males and females? All over the internet, people are calling for relationships of **polyfidelity**, in which 3 or more people commit to having a closed relationship and not getting sexually involved with anyone outside the group. So how can a move to accept same-gender relationships, limit these relationships to merely two people? To deny at **least** a three-person relationship to bisexuals, is to deny them the social recognition of their love and relationships. What's wrong with polyfidelity among whole groups of people? In fact, once you take marriage away from its God-given pattern of one man and one woman, isn't it haphazard and curmudgeonly to say "only two" to a bed?