

“Why Stay?”

+Ralph:

Here are my musings on your request for reasons to stay in the ELCA. I hope they are helpful. First, let me say that I am indebted to Sarah Hinlicky Wilson’s editorial in the Winter 2009 Lutheran Forum.

For me, the biggest reason to stay in the ELCA is that there is no viable alternative. I’m not going to swim the Tiber. Missouri is out (frying pan into the fire). LCMC is an example of bad ecclesiology. CORE is setting itself up to repeat the mistake of 1987 by brushing aside the very different understandings of what it is to be church held by east coast evangelical catholics and Midwestern Word Aloners. If you leave the ELCA I can only surmise that you leave it for secular employment. So, to our congregations considering leaving I ask them, “Where are you going?”

Now, per your request . . .

Theological: That the ELCA has adopted a false teaching in contradiction to the biblical witness is nothing new under the sun. Since her beginnings the church has endured an infinite number of false teachings and heretical enterprises. The great sex debate is merely the latest false teaching to be endured and resisted. This is precisely why the “traditionalists” need to stay in the ELCA. The actions of the CWA are just that, merely an action taken by a small group of people. Until that action is received it is not authoritative for the church. We need people and congregations willing to serve as a dissent to the action taken by the CWA.

Biblical: Much as I don’t care for it because I don’t want to do it, there is Jesus’ command to love your enemies. In this case we love our enemies by being willing dissidents to the actions taken by the CWA. Furthermore, if we argue that the “revisionists” have misread and ignored the teachings of the biblical witness does not leaving misread and ignore the teachings of the biblical witness. Can you say “hypocrite?” The man said “Love your enemies.” You can’t do that by taking your ball and going home.

Ecclesiastical: This is the hardest one for me. I don’t know that there is a good ecclesial reason to stay. The ELCA, as evidenced by her actions in the sexuality debacle, practices an ecclesiology that is terribly broken (see Sarah Hinlicky Wilson’s editorial in the Winter 2009 Lutheran Forum). Yet, I think staying is the only option. Leaving for another Lutheran body (here I’m assuming congregations are leaving for LCMC or whatever CORE puts together) is simply a further splintering of the church that is contrary to Jesus’ prayer that we be one body. We don’t need another denomination on the American landscape. Such a course only allows you to build a church where you can hear only what you want to hear. Furthermore, in the case at hand, any new church body formed as a result of the actions taken by the CWA will only be known as the “anti-gay” church. Not exactly the best foundation to build upon.

Peace,

Rev. William C. Ridenhour
First English Lutheran Church
35 - 16th Street
Wheeling, WV 26003
(304) 233 - 2951
(304) 232 - 8614 (fax)