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“God’s True Vision of the Way Things Ought to Be?” — It’s Not Really About Same-Sex Marriage

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The Douglas Boulevard Christian Church in Louisville has voted to stop performing legal marriages in light of Kentucky’s constitutional amendment outlawing same-sex marriages. As Peter Smith of *The Courier-Journal* [Louisville] reported:

Douglass Boulevard Christian Church made the unanimous vote Sunday [April 7, 2011]. The Rev. Derek Penwell, senior minister of the church, said it’s unjust that heterosexual but not homosexual couples can benefit from marital rights involving inheritance, adoption, hospital visits and filing joint tax returns, saving thousands in annual taxes. Our congregation believes it is unfair to provide different services and benefits to heterosexual couples than we can provide to gay and lesbian couples,” said a church associate minister, the Rev. Ryan Kemp-Pappan.



This argument has been encountered elsewhere, but Douglas Boulevard Christian Church, affiliated with the Disciples of Christ, now becomes one of the first congregations in Kentucky to take such a step.

The news article also reports that the church now draws about 80-120 worshipers weekly. In 2008, it declared itself an “open and affirming” congregation, accepting persons without regard to sexual orientation.

According to the report, “The church plans to continue offering religious marriage ceremonies for gay and straight couples, but the latter will need to get a separate ceremony through a justice of the peace to get legal recognition.”

The Christian Church of Kentucky, which numbers about 35,000 members, does not ordain non-celibate homosexuals, but the national denomination has no policy on ministers performing same-sex unions.

One key fact from the article in *The Courier-Journal*: The church hosts about eight to ten weddings per year, “most of them involving nonmembers.”

For many years, I have driven by this church in its present location. The congregation was once much larger, with many families attending. This article indicates that the congregation has followed the trajectory of liberal Protestantism right down to the dwindling numbers of both worshipers and weddings from within the congregation.

In the news article, no theological argument is offered — only a protest of the denial of same-sex marriage in Kentucky. Nevertheless, on the church’s Web page, Senior Minister Derek Penwell offered his account of how he changed his mind on homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

He writes:

But beyond what I take to be the inadequacies of a static view of biblical interpretation that seeks to match the brown shoes of scripture with the often black tuxedos of context, the thing I found most persuasive in changing my theological views of homosexuality was my contact with my brothers and sisters who are gay and lesbian.

To his credit, Rev. Penwell does not deny that the Bible condemns all homosexual behaviors as sin. Instead, he employs a trajectory hermeneutic that argues that new contexts require fundamentally different ways of understanding even what the Bible clearly addresses.

In his words:

In other words, I thought that maybe the Holy Spirit is in the process of revealing to us God's true vision of the way things ought to be with respect to homosexuality. If this is the case, then we need not necessarily say that God has changed (though my colleagues who are Process theologians probably wouldn't object to this description), but that the world has changed sufficiently to be able to receive the fullness of God's truth on this issue.

So, his argument is that the Holy Spirit may now be “revealing to us God’s true vision of the ways things ought to be with respect to homosexuality” — a vision very different from that actually found in the Bible.

And thus, the fundamental divide over biblical authority and interpretation is laid bare for all to see. The real issue is not same-sex marriage or even sexuality. The fundamental issue is the authority and interpretation of the Bible.

Peter Smith, “[Highlands Church Protest Gay-Marriage Ban](#),” *The Courier-Journal* [Louisville, Kentucky], Wednesday, April 20, 2011.

Rev. Derek Penwell, “[What is the What?](#),” posted Thursday, April 21, 2011. <http://douglassblvdcc.com/310/what-is-the-what/>

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