

Notes from Coffee and Philosophy Discussion February 2024

Given the news from Alabama regarding the nature of frozen human embryos, does the Episcopal Church have national or international organizations that advocate for social justice/medical ethics type issues (socio-political issues)?

- In general, the Episcopal Church does not typically take “top down” positions on these kinds of issues. Individuals rely on their own research, analysis, and prayerful consideration to come to their own opinions.
- There does tend to be sort of “majority” opinions that most Episcopalians will embrace.
- There have been some local and national organizations (Anglicans For Life, National Organization of Episcopalians for Life), but there is advocacy on both sides of the pro-life/pro-choice debate within the Episcopal Church.
- There may be some policy resolutions that are adapted by general convention (election of clerical and lay delegates,) but even those don’t carry the same sort of “papal weight” as they do in Roman Catholicism.
- Individual parishes are free to adapt positions that are more “bottom up” perspectives. That is, the tenor of the congregation consistently leans in one direction on a gospel-based issue to such a degree that a particular position is part of their identity. This can be dangerous in some cases because you might be limiting your reach and alienating people- does everyone really think the same way and is this the hill the parish is willing to die on?

Social issues of incarceration and humane treatment of prisoners

- One parish did, based on their experience with prison ministry within their congregation, decide to put their weight behind advocating for legislation that would improve the lot of prisoners. Not sure if there was a legislative change, but the engagement and involvement in the prisons did result in improved conditions for the inmates. The parish also ran a successful skills training program, which resulted in a significant degree of rehabilitation and less re-offending. The key to the success was the inmate’s genuine desire to learn the skills and not just get released from prison.
- Literacy problems also contribute to criminal activity and recidivism. In one case, a residential counseling program for offenders had a high success rate, but that was because the program was extremely rigorous, and the offenders were told

that it was going to actually be harder to complete the program than to go to jail. If an offender was in the program, they were extremely motivated.

- The program started a GED preparation course, which increased success. From there, they also began a yoga program, which helped offenders self-regulate.

Mental health issues impact on societal problems

- Divorce between a child's parents typically results in the loss of a year's worth of education for the child.
- The problems often start early with attachment issues. The resources that used to be available through Head Start to help struggling parents (parenting classes, single parent support, meals for the kids) are no longer funded.
- Children with emotional needs, literacy delay, ADHD, autism, mental health issues, etc. can struggle in school- which can simply aggravate the challenges they already face. Holy Trinity Episcopal in Fruitland Park has a high school for kids with diagnoses in some of these areas where they work to adjust teaching strategies, materials, activities, etc. to address the gaps that these kids often have. The kids typically come in with a reading level of at least four grades behind. By the time they graduate, they can read at appropriate levels and often go on to college, sometimes with full ride scholarships.
- Wouldn't it be great if St. James could somehow sponsor a school starting in second grade to begin this process earlier, grounded in Christian education and development?
- Is there anyone doing anything like that now, with whom we could partner rather than reinventing a wheel that may already be turning?

Women As Priests, Pastors, Elders, Authority/Responsibility For The Church

- Mike Winger series on Women In Ministry discusses the "complementarian" (men and women are equally valuable and pleasing to God, but have different roles within the Church) and "egalitarians" (in Christ there is no male nor female, so there are no gender prohibitions for any role in the Church, including that of "elder" (Biblical word encompassing all the "leader of the congregation" titles we now have).
- Some complementarians more strictly limit a woman's role and some pretty much believe that women can hold any office in the Church except "elder" (Michael Winger's stance) and some others are anywhere in between.
- The series is thorough and lengthy- 7 different videos (1-2 hours each), and Winger analyzes many Scripture verses and scholarly works on the topic.
- In looking at rebuttal writings, there are some other perspectives- for instance, one author argues that Winger sometimes assumes masculine Greek pronouns are relating to only men, but those masculine Greek pronouns were also

sometimes used generically when writing about “someone” when the object could be male or female.

- The most persuasive Scripture for complementarianism is 1 Corinthians 14:34. The section that limits women speaking in the church seems like it doesn't quite fit the subject Paul was discussing in that chapter. It could be removed completely, and the chapter would actually make more sense. It might have been a later interpolation.
- If we look at the points Paul makes about the running of the church in totality, there would be other conventions that we no longer follow- keeping a list of widows over sixty and supporting them, women wearing head coverings.

Markan Priority

- Dating of books of the Bible is largely based on deductive reasoning, since there is no actual date recorded for each book.
- There was a brief discussion of how we evaluate when a book was written and which of the gospels came first.
- Most scholars agree that Mark was actually written first.