

A Response to *Gay veteran's relatives upset church canceled memorial*

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I was deeply saddened and angered by the intolerance and hypocrisy expressed by the pastor of High Point Church in Arlington, in his cancellation of the memorial service of Cecil Howard Sinclair. As a Christian clergyman deeply committed to gaining civil and ecclesial rights for gay and lesbian persons, I was reminded of Jesus' words from the gospel of Matthew, chapters 5 and 7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Jesus continues, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged...Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay not attention to the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

One of the most sacred and fragile moments in a pastor's ministry is in the hour of preparation for a loved one's funeral or memorial service. It is the hour in which the grieving person should ponder the ultimate meaning of life and search for a loving Creator. It is the moment in which we look for unconditional love and acts of mercy. The pastor is God's representative of extending love to the grieving family.

The actions of Rev. Gary Simons betray the pastoral office. His actions, at best, are motivated by the *principle* of "love the sinner but hate the sin." At worst Rev. Simons fears the disapproval of his congregation and subsequent loss of finances and membership. In this scenario, Rev. Simons focused only on the speck of the "lifestyle of a sinner" rather than the plank of his own self-righteousness and manipulation of the facts. Sexual orientation is a gift from God, not a lifestyle choice. Homosexuality is not a sin. The sin of using people as sexual objects or practicing infidelity is more common among straight people than gay people. Look at the divorce statistics. I wonder whether Rev. Simons has canceled memorial services of any of his divorced members. I wonder how many of his flock have died and have had their lives celebrated in his church who have been unrepentant adulterers, gossipers, liars or drunks.

Jesus was in the love business, not the judgment business. It saddens me that so many of our churches have not embraced that reality and continue to betray the true gospel.

Submitted by Rev. Andy Noel
Bering Memorial UMC
1440 Harold Street
Houston, TX 77006
713-526-1017