

Laymen on Committees

In the 1997 Synod of the ELCE, a proposal was submitted by St Timothy's, Sunderland, whereby women would be permitted to serve as lay members of the Executive Council of the ELCE. When put to the vote, the motion passed, but was opposed by two delegates. The question was referred to the CTSC.

In September of 1987, the Synod of the ELCE adopted the recommendation of the Barnes Pastoral Conference that women not be elected to the Executive Council of the ELCE. It should be noted that this was not presented as a requirement of Scriptural doctrine, but as a matter of prudence:

5. The Executive Council exercises a number of functions that entail headship and teaching authority. For example, as part of its management of 'all the affairs and business of the church within the limits that Synod may impose' Council has acted as board of elders for mission stations, and is responsible for the supervision of missionaries (including missionaries-at-large) and the teaching staff of Westfield House. It also exercises oversight over the ministry of the ELCE by functioning as a church examination board, determining the suitability of candidates for ordination; by determining the suitability of candidates for enrolment as students at Westfield House; by determining the eligibility of other candidates for a call (CRM status). In each such case it is possible to identify in advance that it is a case in which the participation of women in the discussion and determination would entail the exercise of the authority and teaching functions referred to in Thesis 15 (*Study Theses*).

The nature of much of the other routine work of the Executive Council (Bylaw II.5, *op. cit.*, but note II.1) would not necessarily preclude membership of women on the Executive Council. Nevertheless, prudence suggests that it would be unwise to have among the membership of such a small committee a member or members who are in principle excluded from several important functions of the committee. Therefore we recommend that women not be elected to serve on the Executive Council.

It may validly be questioned whether circumstances have not changed in the meantime. For example, the Executive Council is not currently acting as board of elders for any mission station, nor is it supervising a missionary or missionary-at-large. Furthermore, the ELCE has been experiencing difficulty in finding men capable and willing to accept nomination to positions on the Executive Council.

In addition, the question has been raised, whether the exercise of functions of the Office of the Public Ministry is appropriate for lay people, either men or women. In general, it must be maintained that the public exercise of the Office of the Keys is no more appropriate for lay men than for lay women. For this reason, it is appropriate that, at all levels of decision making within the church, functions that are part and parcel of the public exercise of the Office of the Keys be referred to those who have been called by God to this office, as, indeed, regularly happens.

Furthermore it might be questioned whether the headship of men over women might be violated by women serving on the Executive Council. We do not believe that women serving on the Executive Council in and of itself constitutes a violation of such headship. Just as it is not the holding of a position on the Executive Council by a lay person in itself that would constitute a violation of the authority of the Public Ministry (although an abuse in the exercise of that position may entail a violation), similarly, it is not the holding of a position on the Executive Council by a woman in itself that would constitute a violation of

the headship of men (although an abuse in the exercise of that position may entail a violation).

Should disputes arise over the participation of lay persons in this or that decision-making process, the matter should be referred to those whom God has called to the office of the public exercise of the Office of the Keys, that is, to the pastoral members of the committee, or to the Barnes Pastoral Conference.

If this principle is observed, it is appropriate for competent laymen, men or women, to serve as members of the Executive Council.

- The 47th Annual Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England adopted the above in the form of a resolution on 27 October 2001, understanding the same to be a ratification of the vote of Synod 1997.