

PRESBYTERIANS WELCOME GAY CLERGY

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) recently announced its decision to welcome practicing homosexuals as candidates for ordination. When we caught wind of this news, we couldn't help but respond.

We knew that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was in trouble when it had to pass an amendment to its Constitution in 1997 affirming its teachings on ordination: married couples were expected to practice "fidelity" and single clergy were supposed to practice "chastity." The fact that such a staple of Christianity was a matter of debate suggested that it was just a matter of time before it was jettisoned. After all, if the biblical injunction proscribing homosexuality can be ignored, why should the sexual practices of the clergy matter?

With this announcement, the Presbyterian Church joined the United Church of Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Episcopal Church in allowing practicing homosexuals and lesbians to become members of the clergy. It also has something else in common with these mainline Protestant denominations: it is collapsing.

In the case of the Presbyterian Church, it has lost more than half its members since the 1960s; the other denominations are also in free-fall.

Liberal Christians, including liberal Catholics, have no explanation for this outcome. They never tire of saying how we need to relax the strictures for ordination—allow women clergy, ban celibacy, permit practicing homosexuals—and bingo, watch for a sharp increase in both vocations and membership. Well, they won on policy, but they got their clock cleaned on numbers. Orthodoxy works, both theologically and

sociologically, but that's not something liberals will ever figure out.