



Northwest
Ministry Network
OF THE ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

March 27, 2014

Dear NW Network Minister,

I heaved a sigh of relief today upon learning that the World Vision Board of Directors and President Richard Stearns announced reversal of a decision that would have opened the door for the charity to hire individuals who are married to a same-sex partner. If you have not been informed of these developments you may learn more about them from numerous news sources; including this release from [Christianity Today](#). As much as I was dismayed by the initial announcement, I was relieved by the reversal of the decision. I appreciated the swift and articulate response from President Stearns that was humbly issued on behalf of the World Vision Board. I applaud World Vision for the reversal of their decision and a recognition that Biblical benevolence and Biblical conviction are friends, not enemies.

I appreciated the clear and concise [response](#) of Assemblies of God General Superintendent George Wood upon release of World Vision's original announcement. I consider that to be courageous leadership. In addition to Dr. Wood's views on the subject, I have been asked by many to offer my views as Leader of the Northwest Ministry Network. I originally authored a response to the original hiring policy decision that prompted these discussions, and I now offer the following thoughts in light of the new realities. In doing so, I hope to encourage NW Ministry Network leaders and churches to engage in critical conversations on vital issues that we will continue to face in both the church and society.

For many years World Vision has been recognized as a premier humanitarian organization that has operated as a Christian para-church enterprise. Their efforts to provide relief from human suffering is widespread and unparalleled. Richard Stearns has moved our hearts with his articulate challenge to make certain that the Gospel of Christ we declare includes tangible expressions of God's love to those who are poor and in need. I thank Richard Stearns for the contribution he has made to me and the entire church concerning the benevolent heart we are called to embrace as followers of Christ. But the original World Vision decision that raised the furor was confusing to me. Not long ago World Vision fought legal battles to defend faith-based hiring rights of Christian organizations. They climbed to the top tiers of the American justice system and prevailed. They helped establish legal precedent for the rights of Christian organizations to adopt hiring practices that reflect their closely-held religious and moral convictions. Churches and church-related ministries have benefitted from these legal

precedents that serve to protect religious liberties that are under increased scrutiny and challenge. I am thankful for those efforts, just as I am thankful that World Vision reconsidered and reversed an ill-founded policy.

When the original public announcement was made by Richard Stearns there was a specific statement that caught my attention,

"This is not us compromising. It is us deferring to the authority of churches and denominations on theological issues. We're an operational arm of the global church, we're not a theological arm of the church. This is simply a decision about whether or not you are eligible for employment at World Vision U.S. based on this single issue, and nothing more."

I took exception to many parts of that statement, but there is one aspect of it with which I heartily agree. **Para-church organizations are not a theological arm of the church nor do they speak for the church, on this or any other issue. The moral and biblical authority to speak out on these critical issues rests with the Church and its leadership.** As Assemblies of God ministers we should be aware that there are well-established theological positions on the subjects of marriage and homosexual conduct. Marriage is defined as a covenant between a man and a woman and has stood as a building block for human societies throughout history. Marriage between a man and a woman is the only God-ordained means provided for the healthy expression of human sexuality. Any other attempts to mimic Biblical marriage fall short of God's intended design and purpose. The official position paper of the Assemblies of God on marriage may be accessed [here](#).

In the same way, the Assemblies of God has assumed its rightful place to establish a theological position on the matter of homosexual conduct. Homosexuality falls short of God's plan for the expression of human sexuality and outside of the Biblical definition of marriage. Each of us must determine how we will address and respond in loving ways to self-identified homosexuals. However, the Assemblies of God position is clear and considers homosexuality to be a sin, just as adultery, fornication, lying, stealing, gluttony and any other practice or attitude identified by the Scriptures as a shortfall to God's perfection is a sin. We have been created in God's image and can only hope to live up to that image through the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Assemblies of God position paper on homosexual conduct may be accessed [here](#).

I have long-held the personal view that the Gospel of Jesus is most effectively communicated by an intentional blend of both "declaration and demonstration," which is precisely the approach Jesus took. He not only declared the good news of God's Kingdom, he demonstrated it through signs, wonders, and acts of compassion that addressed human need and suffering. The Assemblies of God has taken intentional steps in recent years to formalize compassion ministries as one of the intrinsic purposes for our existence as a church as expressed in several places in our governing documents. You may read of the Assemblies of God commitment to this aspect of Jesus' ministry in this compelling

Enrichment Journal [article](#).

Perhaps one of the positive outcomes of this conversation is the opportunity we have to revisit the fact that God has called His Church to the ministry of compassion. The Assemblies of God is blessed to have direct affiliation with compassion and relief ministries that stand in alignment with our established positions on many important cultural issues. For instance, [Convoy of Hope](#) stands out as one of the fastest growing, premier relief agencies in the world today. In addition we are afforded direct access to [Assemblies of God World Missions Crisis Relief](#) , [Assemblies of God Disaster Relief](#) , [Assemblies of God International Ministries](#) , [Latin American Child Care](#) , [Calcutta Mercy Ministries](#), [Project Rescue](#), [Africa Oasis Project](#) and literally dozens of other localized and regionalized compassion ministries and missionaries around the world. A more comprehensive list may be accessed [here](#) where you will discover people and ministries addressing a wide array of human need. Every church must make its own determination as to how to invest compassion and relief offerings around the globe. Though not an exhaustive list, the organizations listed above align with historic Biblical values and beliefs. I urge your serious consideration of these worthy agencies. Perhaps the most compelling reason to consider Assemblies of God compassion and relief efforts is because they are always tied to a local national church. This enhances the possibility of exposing people to the Good News of Jesus. This is how we model Jesus' demonstration and declaration of God's love toward the world He created.

Issues surrounding homosexuality and gay rights have taken up residence in American society and in our daily conversation. Christian leaders cannot avoid the conversation. We must seek to approach this issue as Jesus approached all issues, with clarity about the sinful condition of the heart of man, but without condemnation that would prevent or preclude administration of God's redemption and grace. We must not succumb to the suggestion that the formation of theological and behavioral boundaries somehow demonstrates a lack of Christian compassion. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Creating healthy boundaries is an act of love in itself. Righteousness and mercy are both aspects of God's character and are certainly not mutually exclusive. We must prepare ourselves thoughtfully, prayerfully, and biblically in order to address critical questions we face as the "Day of the Lord draws near." Jesus warned us that it would not become easier to lead in those days, but more challenging. We are experiencing the truth of His words. May every conversation we have on difficult subjects be clearly marked by God's truth, knowledge, wisdom, and grace.

Prayerfully yours,

Les Welk
Network Leader

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