

Upcoming Film Follows a Transsexual's Ordination Journey

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The journey of a transsexual woman seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been documented on film, which is set to release next year.

"Thy Will Be Done: A Transsexual Woman's Journey Through Family and Faith" follows Sara Herwig, who transitioned from male to female and is seeking to "fulfill God's call."

In conveying Herwig's personal story, the documentary reveals the complex nature of the issue as faith groups, mainly the PC(USA), struggle to interpret their established policies and Scripture with regard to transsexualism.

Herwig began to pursue her call to ministry in 2001, seven years after switching from "Steve" to "Sara" — complete with a surgical procedure.

Before the transition, however, Herwig divorced his then wife Billie Preston with whom he had a daughter.

"When Steve confessed his sin to me, it was all about sin. It had nothing to do with gender identity," Preston says in the film. "And if we loved the Lord enough and I loved him enough, gave him enough of myself, then it would be okay."

Before beginning the candidacy process for ordination, Herwig had walked away from the church.

"Like many other transsexuals I had reached the point where it was either transition or just end it," Herwig states in the documentary.

Now, Herwig is on the road toward becoming a minister in the PC(USA), after having been approved as a candidate for ministry by Boston Presbytery in 2002, but faces hurdles as the denomination debates over transsexualism and ordination.

The PC(USA) currently requires clergy to live in fidelity in marriage (between a man and a woman) or chastity in singleness, which rules out practicing homosexuals. The denomination's constitution, however, does not contain any references to transsexuals in leadership roles.

According to the Rev. Jean Southard, a PC(USA) minister, the issue gets tricky when a transgender becomes involved in a relationship.

Herwig married Jenn, a biological female, last March in Massachusetts. They were married by Southard who was acquitted last month of charges of violating PC(USA)'s constitution and her ordination vows.

The film points out that conservatives recognize Herwig not as a female but as a gay man. At the same time, they maintain that Herwig is in a same-sex relationship with a woman and thus cannot be ordained.

Robert Gagnon, associate professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and a conservative ordained elder of the PC(USA), argued in a 2007 paper that "transsexuality is in some respects an even more extreme version of the problem of [homosexuality](#)" as it is a denial of one's own sex and "an overt attempt at marring the sacred image of maleness or femaleness formed by God."

"Jesus Christ, and not any innate human impulses, is Lord. Accordingly, persons who attempt to change their sex should be prohibited from becoming ordained ministers of the church," he said.

The film is scheduled for release in January 2010.