

EDITORIAL: Hot letters & Baptistsâ€™ priesthood

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Not surprisingly, the rhetoric in Texas Baptist Forum, our letters to the editor section, has been loud and large this summer. People tend to write when they're upset.

The volleys began in early June, after the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board [voted to refuse](#) financial contributions from Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas, whose deacon body includes two practicing homosexuals. The board also asked the church to stop identifying itself as affiliated with the BGCT. Those measures effectively removed Royal Lane from the convention.

Editor Marv Knox

The first round of letters chastised the Executive Board's action to "excommunicate" Royal Lane and its failure to be "as inclusive as ... Jesus." The aggrieved almost always write first. They're the most motivated. But they're not, of course, the last to write. Other readers next defended the Executive Board for its firm stance on what they believe to be the clear teaching of Scripture. By now, the letters to the editor in-box is full, with charges and counter-charges as well as defenses and counter-defenses.

The rage among letter writers reflects readers' feelings about homosexuality, the most incendiary issue in the church today. The debate over the nature of homosexuality and the role of homosexuals in the body of Christ has just about sundered the Episcopal Church from the Anglican Communion. It regularly riles the Presbyterians. And it is a point of huge contention among Lutherans and Methodists. Baptists—even the most progressive among us—tend to be conservative compared to our Mainline

sisters and brothers. So, it makes sense that we have come later and, for the most part, more quietly and cautiously to confront this issue.

Judging by the Executive Board vote and letters to the editor, most Texas Baptists remain resolved to oppose affirmation of homosexual activity and, particularly, homosexual leadership in congregations. Many Texas Baptists call for loving ministry to homosexuals and decry the evil of homophobia. Many also repudiate the notion that only one sin is worthy of such public and prolonged condemnation. But they still point to about a dozen Bible passages as evidence that God's plan for humanity reserves sexual intimacy to the bonds of marriage between one woman and one man.

The newest factors in the letters about homosexuality have been the level of vitriol and abandonment of the Baptist principle of soul competency. Some writers stress only one perspective—theirs—should be expressed in Texas Baptist Forum. They claim contrary opinions have brought “shame” upon the Standard. One insists the editor should prepare to wear a millstone around his neck for allowing letters that support Royal Lane's interpretation of Scripture.

For 401 years, Baptists have affirmed the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers—the idea that individual Christians are both privileged and responsible to approach God directly, study the Bible seriously, and follow their beliefs according to the dictates of their consciences, guided by the example of Jesus and the influence of the Holy Spirit. This makes for messy Christianity, because we do not interpret God's will uniformly, and so we tend to disagree. When we disagree, we tend to argue. Many of us find that uncomfortable.

Some Baptists cannot embrace the paradoxes that result from the priesthood of all believers. They focus on the logical fact that opposing views cannot simultaneously be correct. And since they are sure they are correct, they are certain those who disagree with them must be wrong.

Instead, paradoxes produced by the priesthood of all believers should inspire a spirit of humility. We think we are right, but we may be wrong. And so opposing letters should inspire us to discussion, reflection and discernment. Differing viewpoints should be welcomed, not banned.