

Adam Hamilton on Isaac Simmons (aka Penny Cost).

The following is copied from a comment on a [post](#) by Adam Hamilton in response to a question about whether a drag queen clergy is appropriate. (June 12, 2022)

Adam Hamilton wrote:

Hi Jon,

After posting this morning I took the rest of the day off to do yard work with my wife, then to take her on a date. Just now getting back to FB.

Jon, I know the GMC and/or WCA has made a lot of this - of a 23 year old gay man, a candidate for ministry in Illinois, preaching in drag. They have inferred that the future of the UMC is pastors preaching in drag, offering this as one more reason for people to join the GMC.

I know little about Isaac Simmons, the example you are referring to of a candidate for ministry preaching in drag. I've seen on UM Insight and the video that someone in the GMC or WCA prepared about Isaac as Ms. Penny Cost. I don't like talking about people I don't know, and commenting on their candidacy for ministry when I've not been on their DCOM or BOOM. Having said that, I'd like to offer some words of affirmation for Isaac, followed by questions I have.

I've never watched a drag show, but I know young adults who don't go to church who have. I don't know much about drag culture or drag queens, it is way outside my experience or expertise. But here's one thing I do know: Isaac is a human being - not a tool to be used to scare people, or raise money, or convince people to leave the UMC.

My youngest daughter has a host of friends who don't go to church, but will go see a drag show, including some who perform in drag themselves. I think Isaac would connect with many of them, and might just break down barriers for others.

I'm reminded of Paul's approach to ministry in 1 Corinthians 9:21-23, "To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings."

No, Paul was not preaching in drag, but he became as a Gentile to reach Gentiles - something unthinkable to most Jews. He lived as a Jew when among the Jews to connect with Jews.

I've tried to learn the interests and language of people who are different from me in order to connect with them. I'm currently trying to learn golf so I can connect with guys who worship on the golf course but never darken the door of a church. Sometime back our church held an Alpha Course at the local cigar shop to reach guys who smoke cigars there but don't know Christ. I've spoken in bars where people were drinking as they peppered me with questions about faith. At Christmas one of our campuses takes poinsettias to the women who work in the strip club located behind the church to say, "We care about you and you are welcome at Resurrection." It is not exactly the same, but it's a bit of how I see Isaac's work when I choose to assume the best, as opposed to what I think some have done, not only in assuming the worst, but in using him to create fear.

I have not forgotten your question - my answer is still coming - but some in the GMC/WCA seem to want to imply that if a congregation remains UMC, they can expect preachers

preaching in drag. Of our 15,000 UM clergy, (and Isaac, as I understand it, is not even a UM clergy, only a candidate exploring ministry) how many do you think want to preach in drag? I have zero concern that we'll have a flood of UM clergy just waiting to preach in drag.

I want to preemptively recognize that Isaac is also a poet and recently posted a poem that has blown up on some Christian websites - the poem is entitled, God is Nothing. I think you've got to watch to the last line to get the point I think he was making - it's words are designed to unsettle and are a protest against the pain and suffering LGBT+ people have experienced at the hands of many Christians who wield the Bible in a way that has brought harm to LGBT+ people over a long period of time.

As a poet speaking to empathetic ears, his poem was undoubtedly very powerful. To most others, it would have been disturbing (part of the point) and the significance was easily missed. I don't believe its point was actually that God is nothing and the Bible is nothing - but that faith, and invoking God and scripture, is nothing unless our invocation of God and scripture is lived with justice, compassion, with mercy and in a way that all are included. At least that is how I read it, and I could be wrong.

The poem is prophetic, but the problem with prophets is that at times they express things in ways that only alienate the very people they are trying to speak to. Pastors have to be prophetic, but sometimes prophets struggle to be local church pastors - they have a tendency to alienate the flock and drive them away. Which leads to the questions I would ask of any candidate for ministry, and, in response to your question, Jon, questions I would ask of preachers planning to preach in drag.

What will the impact of preaching in drag be on the congregations a pastor will serve? Is ordained ministry as an elder the best venue for expressing this ministry, or will it have the unintended consequence of harming the church's ministry because people did not understand? Will ordained ministry bring emotional or spiritual harm to the individual being ordained? Will the ministry of the individual be fruitful and effective in helping a local congregation fulfill its mission? Will it help them make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? Does the candidate love Christ? Are they pursuing sanctification? Do they have gifts for ministry? Are they a caring shepherd? An effective and inspiring preacher? A capable administrator? Will they lead the congregations they serve to reach unchurched people for Christ? Will they effectively disciple the people entrusted to their care? Will they inspire and equip people for Micah 6:8 ministry? I've got a host of other similar questions.

I have never met anyone else among the thousands of UM pastors that I know who has preached in drag. I did not sit on Isaac's DCOM committee so I am not qualified to answer these questions concerning him and his call to ministry. I do believe the BOOM's job is to make sure that those who are ordained can be appointed and will effectively serve churches.