

Lesbian clergy couple go on *Amazing Race*: "Just plain fun"

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Kate Lewis and Pat Hendrickson may be ordained clergy, but even before they became the latest couple eliminated from television's *The Amazing Race*, they knew that God wasn't really watching.

"We are religious people, but we have no illusions that God cares whether we win *The Amazing Race*," Lewis, 49, an Episcopal priest, said on the November 11 episode.

God may not have been watching, but millions of other viewers were.

Each week, millions tune in to the CBS hit reality series to witness couples—lovers, friends or relatives—thrive or slowly implode as they race around the world in hopes of winning the \$1 million grand prize.

What created a buzz around Lewis and Hendrickson, who is 65, wasn't their bickering, skillful racing to airports, hoisting furniture or vaulting over ditches (all tasks faithfully completed by each couple on the season's first two episodes). Instead, Lewis and Hendrickson got noticed as a pair of partnered (they say married), openly gay Episcopal clergy. Both work in southern California—Lewis is a priest at St. Cross by-the-Sea in Hermosa Beach, and Hendrickson, a deacon, works at St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School in Thousand Oaks.

Lewis and Hendrickson celebrated their union three years ago at St. Augustine by the Sea, an Episcopal parish in Santa Monica. Though they consider themselves married, the state of California does not.

"I know them both," said Robert Williams, a top spokesperson for the Episcopal Church, "and they're both faithful ministers of the gospel and very effective in their ministries in the Episcopal Church."

On top of being big fans of the show, Lewis and Hendrickson say they wanted to be part of the program so they could “show a different face to the world of what it could mean to be a Christian.”

Mitch Graham, a media spokesperson for CBS, says the show has “always had diverse casts,” but Damon Romine, entertainment media director for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, said he hopes the show, by featuring the couple, has been able to “move the needle toward acceptance and understanding.”

Hendrickson added that their appearance on the show wasn’t just about being a voice for the Episcopal Church and gays. “It was probably the most defining moment in my life since I was diagnosed with cancer 17 years ago,” Hendrickson said. “I had let myself mentally think, OK, I’m getting old.”

There was one other motivation. “Going on the race,” Lewis said, “is just plain fun.”

-Lilly Fowler, Religion News Service