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**Transgender minister talks about beliefs, experiences**

Rachel Hinson  
Reporter

As the first mainstream Presbyterian U.S.A. minister to transition from male to female and stay ordained, Rev. Erin Swenson has created quite a stir throughout many communities.

At a very young age, Swenson could tell that something was not right. Throughout her adult years, she suppressed feelings of wanting to change to a female because "it seemed completely wrong," she said Wednesday, Oct. 6, at Whitley Auditorium.

Swenson hit a point in her adult life where even though she had accomplished everything she had set out to accomplish — earning several degrees, learning to fly — she knew something was missing. For her, it was not enough.

"I was a successful person in just about every aspect of the word, but was I happy? No," she said.

Until she finally decided to make the transition, Swenson faced a life filled with depression and turmoil.

The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. was faced with quite a decision when Swenson wanted to retain her ordination during her transition. The biggest argument from constituencies against her continued ordination was that she was living a life of deceit — deceiving people in living as a woman when she was born a man.

When trying to defend her decisions to those that did not agree with her transition, she found that many people do not have a solid reason behind why they think a minister should not be transgender.

"Most people believe it's wrong just because it's wrong," she said, referring to the view that many in society are told a transgender life is wrong.

Now Swenson is faced with a new dilem-

*Swenson hit a point in her adult life where even though she had accomplished everything she had set out to accomplish — earning several degrees — learning to fly, she knew something was missing. For her, it was not enough.*

ma. She is a part of two conflicting worlds not completely fitting in in either one.

"In Christian gatherings, I'm always the transgender. In transgender gatherings, I'm always the Christian minister," she said.

Regardless of opinion, Swenson broke new ground with her transition from male to female and has opened people's eyes to new possibilities.

"I had never heard of a transgender minister before. I think it is a little odd, but definitely moving toward something religion needs to address. It's definitely moving toward the positive," said Heather Murray, an audience member at Swenson's speech.

Sometimes it takes something out of the ordinary to push us to an all-new level of understanding.

Contact Rachel Hinson at [pendulum@elon.edu](mailto:pendulum@elon.edu) or 278-7247.

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