

A Pastoral Letter from PFR and the Fellowship of Presbyterians

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Meeting in Detroit, our 221st General Assembly has taken two significant actions on the teaching and practice of marriage according to the PC(USA)'s Book of Order. First, the GA approved an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) that now permits PC(USA) pastors to conduct same-sex weddings, and allows sessions to approve the use of church property for such ceremonies. Secondly, the GA approved a proposed amendment to the Book of Order that would replace current language with a description of marriage as a relationship between "two people, traditionally a man and a woman."

While the AI goes into effect immediately, the proposed amendment requires ratification by a majority of the presbyteries before any change could be made, a process that takes about one year. Both measures are designed to allow pastors and congregations to participate in same-sex weddings, in states where gay marriage is legal.

We grieve these actions by the General Assembly. We believe we will look back on this day and see the error of these decisions. But an Assembly of our denomination has spoken, and now we must move ahead without compromising compassion or conviction.

It is extremely important to understand that while the AI and the constitutional amendment broaden the denomination's interpretation of marriage, they do not require any pastor to officiate or any session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service with which they disagree. It remains up to each pastor and each session to determine what is and is not appropriate for their congregation.

Proponents of these two actions have made great effort to invite and welcome those who hold unwaveringly to a traditional interpretation of marriage to remain engaged in the mission and ministry of the PC(USA) with full integrity. Some will resolve to do this—others may not. Those of us who do remain in the PC(USA) will, no doubt, encounter other decisions and actions with which we will disagree. We are not here to fight and divide, but to continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to testify to the transforming power of his love that is available to everyone. We urge you in the strongest possible way to refrain from actions, attitudes, and language that would mar the image of Christ in your response to the Assembly's actions.

Let us commit to one another, and to Almighty God, that we will seek to embody the grace and love of our Savior across our theological differences, and in personal and congregational deliberations about our future in the PC(USA).