

To: Ministers and Sessions of the Presbytery of Coastal Carolina

Date: March 16, 2015

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I want to thank all of those who attended the Presbytery meeting last Saturday for your active and, yet, respectful participation in the discussion voting on the Amendments to our *Book of Confessions, Form of Government, and Directory for Worship*. I believe that our moderator and vice moderator led us effectively and lovingly as we went through the day.

As many of you already know, our Presbytery voted 171-120-3 not to concur with the action of the General Assembly in the proposal that would give pastors (teaching elders) and sessions the authority to conduct same-sex marriages or to host them in their facilities. However, those who like to watch trends and crunch the numbers over the years are confident that the marriage proposal will pass a majority of the presbyteries across the country. As we wait to see if that is true, it is important to remember a couple of points.

1. **No one will be required to perform a same-sex wedding.** Just as Amendment 2010-A (which allowed sessions and presbyteries to elect and ordain officers who “submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life”)¹ did not require that any session or presbytery ordain either a person in an “out-of-wedlock” relationship or a practicing homosexual, so this amendment does not require any pastor to marry any two people that she or he does not feel are candidates for marriage – for whatever reason. (This is a longstanding freedom that pastors have always enjoyed.) Nor is any session required to host a marriage anywhere on its property that they do not approve of. What the amendment does is to permit those pastors who feel called to do so and those sessions who are in agreement, to allow same-sex persons to be married without the fear that the pastors might be dismissed from ministry.
2. **This amendment acknowledges our disagreement.** While some will see this as an endorsement of same-gender marriage by our denomination, this amendment recognizes that we, as a church, are deeply divided over this issue. What this amendment does is to allow pastors, who feel they are in accordance with Scripture and the confessions of our church, to participate in same-gender marriages. You may want to review the paper, *Our Challenging Way*, put out by the Theology and Worship Department of our denomination.²

¹*Book of Order*; G-2.0104 b.

² <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/theologyandworship/our-challenging-way/> or Google “PCUSA Our Challenging Way”.

- 3. Sessions have options.** There are two things that sessions can do in response to the passage of this amendment. (1) They can make a policy that either permits or prohibits same-gender marriages from taking place on their grounds or in their facilities. (2) They can register their unhappiness (or agreement) with the General Assembly's action with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery who will, in turn, inform the GA Stated Clerk of this action.

- 4. GA Staff and Programs are not part of this debate.** The amendments we dealt with on Saturday and some of the other actions of the 221st General Assembly were made by the commissioners to the General Assembly elected by the 171 presbyteries of our denomination (including our own). The actions of the General Assembly set the direction and scope of work of the staff of the Presbyterian Mission Agency and the other program people who work for us. When people are unhappy with an action of the General Assembly meeting, it is not surprising that they might look to reducing support to the General Assembly's program units as a way to "send a message." Unfortunately this has only weakened our staff's ability to provide valuable services to the whole church.

Let me thank you once again for your continued support of the ministry we endeavor to do together on behalf of our God in Coastal Carolina. It is a joy to serve with you in these difficult, yet exciting days in the life of the Church. As we hoist new sails to catch the wind of the Spirit, may all of us keep our eyes fixed on the head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

As always, if we can be of assistance to you, please feel free to contact your Mission Coordinator or me.

Bill Reinhold

William T. Reinhold, General Presbyter and Stated Clerk