

Presbytery of Coastal Carolina  
Committee on Sessional Records  
and Higher Governing Body Directives  
**Recommendations to Presbytery**  
March 7, 2015

The Committee on Sessional Records and Higher Governing Body Directives met on Feb. 2 to review the **Proposed Amendments to the Constitution** put before us by the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly for our affirmative or negative votes. This report is to provide you with additional background material on each item and our committee's recommendations. It is important that you read the booklet thoroughly as this report does not repeat the information provided there. The booklet is available from the Presbytery office and is also online at [www.pcusa.org/resource/ga221-proposed-amendments-constitution/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/ga221-proposed-amendments-constitution/). Copies will be available for each commissioner to the Presbytery on March 7<sup>th</sup>.

We will be voting on these 9 amendments in the following order:

**A. 14-F Marriage – The Committee on Sessional Records and Higher Governing Body Directives respectfully commends to the members of the Presbytery, after prayer, to vote their conscience on this proposal.**

**Background Resources:** Please review the proposal found on page 16-18 in the booklet. For a side-by side comparison of the current *Book of Order* section W-4.900 which is being replaced in its entirety, please go to [www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-proposed-amendment-w-49000-marriage/](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/comparison-proposed-amendment-w-49000-marriage/).

For your reflection and prayer, the committee puts before you **some thoughts** shared at the Holy Conversations events held around the Presbytery and at other forums on this subject:

- **PRO:** In the same way that Presbyterians have deepened our understanding of the Biblical texts on women that say, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.” We can also now more deeply examine the texts in the Bible that might speak to same-gender relationships to see that at no point were same-gender loving relationships the subject of the Biblical text. Rather the texts were addressing violent acts of abuse and inappropriate sexual involvement of adults with children. (I Tim 2:12, NRSV)
- **CON:** On the other hand, many have expressed concern that approval of this marriage amendment is an utter disregard for the plain teaching of scripture on this subject citing Genesis 19, Leviticus 20:13 and 18:22, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11.
- **PRO and CON:** Although some are personally uncomfortable with same-gender marriage, this proposal permits them and their church to decline to host or perform such ceremonies while at the same time allowing others the freedom of conscience to allow them. This seems to be the principle of Mutual Forbearance at work in the life of the PC(USA), “that there are truths and forms with respect to which people of good character and principles may differ. And in these we think it the duty of both private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” (F-3.0105)
- **PRO:** “One of the issues for many is whether same sex marriages comport with biblical ideas of marriages. The truth is that people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would not be comfortable with the kinds of marriages which are represented in the Bible. For example, we would not be

comfortable with the biblical model that is one man, one woman, one concubine. Nor would we be comfortable with the idea of a widow being compelled to marry her brother-in-law. There is very little in the Bible which reflects the modern idea of one man & one woman united by love.” –Rev. Ellin Jimmerson, AL

- **CON:** Quote from a Review of Daniel Heimbach’s *Why Not Same-Sex Marriage: A Manual for Defending Marriage Against Radical Deconstruction* “The definition of marriage, [Heimbach] observes, is foundational to all of human society. Those who seek to alter the foundation must provide a compelling basis for such a radical change. This book shows that the arguments for the redefinition of civil marriage largely depend on individualism and emotional appeals. Such emphases on personal fulfillment undermine the common good over time. Thus, far from being an attempt to impose a theocracy, support for a traditional definition of marriage is support for the common good. According to this reasoning, defending a traditional definition of marriage is not an attempt to assert political power but a pursuit of societal flourishing.”
- **PRO or CON:** The Marriage of two people of the same gender is now a reality we must face in our culture. We need to find a way to communicate the love of Jesus to all persons, even persons that make us uncomfortable.

**B. 14-1 Confession of Belhar** – The 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly has asked us to vote on whether or not to add the Confession of Belhar to the PCUSA Book of Confessions. In order for this item to pass nationally 2/3 of the presbyteries must vote in the affirmative. However, in each presbytery a regular majority vote determines whether the item is affirmed or not. We did vote in favor of this same item several years ago. However, it did not receive the required 2/3 vote nationally. The version before you now has added scriptural references but has not changed the text of the confession itself. Please read the item carefully in the Booklet, pages 1-5.

**The Committee on Sessional Records and Higher Governing Body Directives respectfully recommends that members of the Presbytery vote in favor of adding the Confession of Belhar to the *Book of Confessions*.**

**C. Consent Agenda** (Items 14-A, 14-B, 14-C, 14-D, and 14-E)

**The Committee on Sessional Records and Higher Governing Body Directives puts before the presbytery items 14-A, 14-B. 1, 14-B. 2, 14-C, 14-D, 14-E (pages 6-15 of the booklet) as an omnibus motion (also known as a Consent Agenda).\*** The committee is recommending that commissioners vote in favor of all the items in the Consent Agenda.

*\*If any commissioner wishes to discuss and vote on any of these items separately, there will be an opportunity for items to be pulled from the consent agenda.*

1. **14-A Renunciation of Jurisdiction** – As you review this item found on page 6-7 of the booklet, please note that the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) was speaking to the *original* proposal brought to the General Assembly. Through the work of the General Assembly committee and the General Assembly plenary, the original proposal was significantly changed. The proposed as it is before you now is a restriction that *only* applies to Teaching Elders who have renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a *disciplinary proceeding*. (Disciplinary proceedings are the more serious offenses in the life of a church such as financial malfeasance, sexual misconduct, and other abuses of power.) This proposal does *not* apply to a Teaching Elders (Pastor) who renounce jurisdiction during a *Remedial Complaint*. (A Remedial Complaint is more about technical errors in ministry such as failure

to file certain reports, inattention to certain details during session meetings, or motions that maybe out of order in the life of the congregation or presbytery.) To see the official definition of Remedial Complaint and Disciplinary Proceeding please see D-2.0200 in the *Book of Order*. This proposed amendment, if passed, does *not* apply to Ruling Elders.

2. **14-B. 1 and B. 2 on the Preparation for Ministry Process** – these amendments are clarifications and updates to language in the *Book of Order* that are helpful to Presbyteries and persons seeking ordination in the PCUSA.
3. **14-C Child Protection Policy** – found on page 11-12. This amendment proposes to add five words to the *Book of Order* that will mandate churches adopt and implement a child protection policy in addition to a sexual misconduct policy. It seems that most other organizations have these types of policies in place and we, in the church, would be wise to do likewise. Many model policies are available for churches to adopt and use.
4. **14-D Minimum Composition of a Presbytery** – This item is well explained in the booklet allowing flexibility for a presbytery to be smaller than the current required minimum by action of its Synod and the General Assembly.
5. **14-E Interreligious Stance** - This is a re-wording of the PC(USA)'s long standing commitment to be in dialogue with other faith traditions in order to deepen our understanding of one another and opportunities to cooperate in making the world better. It adds language about being such dialogue by the power of the Holy Spirit as “a sign and means of God’s intention for the wholeness of all humankind...” see page 15 for complete wording.