



WESTMINSTER

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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WHY A CALL FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY NOW?

This Call for Marriage Equality was adopted by the Session of the Westminster Presbyterian Church on June 21, 2012. There are several reasons why the Marriage Study Group was formed at this time to make a recommendation for action by the Session. The elected leaders of the church are making a statement based on their understanding of Scripture, theology, social science and the polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA) that makes clear what they believe on the topic of marriage equality. This is a statement of the session, not of the whole church, and it would bind no one's conscience on this issue. This policy will be used to inform the debates and conversations leading up to the November Minnesota election and beyond. The ballot in November will call for a vote on a proposed constitutional amendment that reads:

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to provide that only a union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Minnesota?

- YES
- NO"

This policy would support a "No" vote on this constitutional amendment. Even if the amendment is defeated, however, Minnesota's Defense of Marriage Act would still limit marriage to one man and one woman. Therefore, the policy would continue to be useful in the future as we continue to work for marriage equality.

This policy statement can also be used to inform conversations in the church at all levels. There are many Overtures coming before the 2012 PC(USA) General Assembly in Pittsburgh that address the possibility of amending the Directory of Worship in the Book of Order to allow for marriage between two women or two men. There is also a call for an Authoritative Interpretation allowing Presbyterian clergy serving in states where same-gender marriage is legal to perform such marriages.

Call to Action:

Based on the "Our Hope for the World" statement¹ – which calls for our active engagement in creating communities that are loving, joyful, just, sustainable and peaceful - the Session of the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota calls for the following changes to be made: 1) in civil laws and policies so that all such laws and policies fully support marriage equality for all couples who wish to marry; and 2) in ecclesiastical policies to support full marriage equality for all who "are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage, a lifelong commitment is made by (two people) to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by a community of faith" (W-4.9001, revised). If such a change is not possible at this time, we call for an Authoritative Interpretation from the upcoming General Assembly to allow clergy serving in states where same-gender marriage is legal to perform such marriages.

A CALL FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY

In response to the grace of God through Jesus Christ, the mission of Westminster Presbyterian Church is:

- *to proclaim and celebrate the Good News of Jesus Christ;*
- *to gather as an open community to worship God with dignity and joy, warmth and beauty;*
- *to nourish personal faith through study, prayer, and fellowship;*
- *to work for love, peace and justice;*
- *to be a welcoming and caring Christian community, witnessing to God's love day by day;*
- *to work locally and beyond with our denomination and the larger Christian Church; and*
- *to be a telling presence in the city.*

For more than a decade, this Mission Statement and our shared experiences have led Westminster to expand the ways in which we are “a welcoming and caring Christian community” by actively reaching out to the local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) community. The LGBT community has been publically invited to “nourish personal faith” and “to work for love, peace and justice” along with the rest of the Westminster congregation. Westminster’s Session went through an extended examination of ordination standards and decided that sexual orientation should not be a factor in deciding who is qualified for ordained ministry. An increasing number of LGBT persons who are single, in long-term committed relationships, or joined in the covenant of marriage in other states, have joined Westminster. Their gifts and talents contribute immeasurably to our church community. Our decision to carry out this public policy study is, in large part motivated by these relationships that have enriched our common life. Our study of the issues raised by the question of whether to call for religious consecration of same-gender marriage is deepening our faith and our understanding of how we put that faith into action.

In June, 2011, the Westminster Session adopted our “Hope for the World” statement.¹ This statement calls for our active engagement in creating a worldwide community that is **loving, joyful, just, sustainable and peaceful**.

In the spirit of that call to action, we, as members of the Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church, call for marriage equality in Minnesota, in the United States, and in the practices and policies of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

We envision a loving community.

God’s two great commandments to us are to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We believe that God has created the peoples of the world to be one universal family. A loving community:

- Honors the loving aspirations of all people of all religious faiths
- Practices hospitality toward friend, stranger and enemy alike
- Seeks to reconcile people divided from one another.

Marriage is a gift given by God so that love may thrive between two people. Marriage remains the single most affirming relationship through which a couple can express their love and share their sexuality. This gift is given to all, regardless of the gender of the person one chooses to love; we have no right to exclude people who love someone of their same gender because it denies one of God’s hopes for all God’s people. In Genesis 2, God declares that “It is not good that the man (Adam) should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” (v. 18) we have been created by God to be in relationship with others. Unless a person feels a special call to

celibacy, he or she should not be denied access to an institution created by God to sustain a special, loving relationship between two people, and between these two people and God.

How we can state this in the face of a long history of biblical interpretation that claims that all forms of homosexual activity are condemned by Scripture? Detailed theological writings addressing key texts in scripture that appear to condemn homosexual behavior are identified in the notes section of this document.² Here we will only present a form of interpretation that leads to new conclusions of openness to affirming monogamous, committed same-gender commitments between two people in the covenant of marriage.

The interpretive process is described in the context of the debate about PCUSA ordination standards by Dr. Mark Achtemeier, an Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Dubuque Seminary. Achtemeier describes himself as “an out, self-affirming, and practicing conservative evangelical.”³ For most of his career, he was staunchly opposed to the ordination of LGBT Presbyterians on biblical grounds. He agreed with the assertion of many conservative Christians who interpret the Bible as condemning all same-gender sexual activity - that homosexuality is “a kind of destructive addiction, a disordered inclination toward damaging behaviors that was comparable in some respects to alcoholism.”⁴ With this view of homosexuality, all appeals to justice and equal rights for LGBT people made no sense. Instead, these appeals seemed counter-productive, helping people pursue self-destructive behaviors. Achtemeier’s views began to change with his service on the PC(USA)’s Theological Task Force on the Peace and Unity and Purity of the Church whose report was adopted by the 217th General Assembly (2006). The Task Force met for five years of intense conversation and sharing, and for the first time, Achtemeier talked *to* rather than *about* homosexual Christians. Because of his studies and his experiences with the Task Force, he now fully supports removing the bar to ordination for LGBT persons as well as to same-gender covenant of marriage. He is clear that his change “has not involved any kind of retreat or qualification of my strong commitment to the authority of Scripture, the Lordship of Christ, and the belief that God calls people to lives of personal holiness.”⁵

When interpreting Scripture, Achtemeier encourages us to ask what is “the purpose of the Lawgiver?”⁶ He analyzes the issue of the Bible’s legal proscriptions concerning usury, the charging of interest on loans. Both the Older Testament and Jesus himself explicitly condemn the act of lending at interest. John Calvin argues that lending at interest cannot be judged “simply ‘in accordance with a few passages of Scripture’;” rather, he says, “that in order to arrive at an accurate understanding of the biblical commandments, we must go beyond a mere surface reading of the texts and consider instead the intention of the Lawgiver.”⁷ Interpreters have to determine what the purpose of a biblical commandment is in order to fully understand its meaning.

At the time the Bible was written, the people who were taking out loans were the very poor who needed extra money to survive. “Calvin notes that the context of the commands in the Bible is concern for the poor and destitute...Charging interest is heinous in God’s eyes because it makes a profit on the backs of poor people and in the process makes their plight even worse.”⁸ By Calvin’s time, the people who were lending at interest were mostly not lending to the poor for survival, but rather to business people who were using the money to make more money. The lenders were taking a small portion of the profit made by people of substantial means rather than harming those who could least protect themselves. Calvin argues that in this new setting, the commandment not to loan at interest is no longer relevant since its primary purpose is to protect the poor. Loans at interest that harm the poor are still prohibited, but not all such lending.

The same principle of biblical interpretation can be applied to texts commonly read as condemning same-gender sexual behavior. Achtemeier, William Stacy Johnson, Jack Rogers and others argue carefully that the behavior which biblical lawgivers prohibited is fundamentally different from the behaviors of same-gender couples in loving, monogamous, long-term relationships. Biblical writers clearly prohibit specific behaviors, but what kinds of behaviors are they? In the world in which Scripture was written, same-gender activities tended to involve

under-age youth seeking favors of older patrons or teachers, idolatrous pagan worship or exploitive domination of the weak or slaves by the strong. (See the references in Note 2) Scripture rightly condemns such behavior. If the intent of the lawgiver is to condemn exploitative sexual practices however, then the commands do not speak against faithful, monogamous, loving relationships between two people of the same gender who intent to commit themselves to each other for a lifetime.⁹

Biblical references: *Deuteronomy 6:4-7; Matthew 22:36-40; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14; 1 John 4:7-12*

Resources: www.minnesotansunitedforallfamilies.com, www.whymarriagematters.org, www.freedomtomarry.org,

We envision a joyful community.

God rejoices when human beings live together in harmony. We find joy in worshiping God and in celebrating the deep connections within the human family. A joyful community:

- Calls people together, embracing differences and affirming commonalities
- Rejoices and finds hope in the change that comes with God's ongoing creation and revelation
- Seeks and gives thanks for the well-being of all.

We celebrate the change in opinions and attitudes toward more open acceptance of same-gender relationships. This is happening because of advances in the scientific understanding of the development of gender identity/preference and because straight and LGBT people are talking to each other with honesty and joy. In these interactions, each learns from the other. We see this change in which people affirm commonalities and embrace differences, as a part of God's ongoing creation. Change is at the heart of the covenant of marriage. According to William Stacy Johnson, "Marriage is primarily about transformation; it functions as a 'means of grace'." Moreover, as Rowan Williams has argued, 'the mutual delight of the couple symbolizes something important about God: God delights in the human beings God has created...(and) God has determined to remain committed to us through thick and thin. Both this delight and this divine dedication are symbolized for human experience in the love between spouses.'¹⁰

Biblical references: *Psalms 16:1,2,11; 66:1-4; 95:1-5; Isaiah 35:8,10; John 16:16-24; Galatians 5:22-23*

Resources: www.marriageequality.org, Utube Zach Wahls from IA, "Why I'm defending my two moms."

We envision a just community.

Justice is God's abundant love made active in the world. We believe that all people are created in God's image. Therefore we stand with those who suffer and strive for a just world in which all people thrive in every aspect of life. A just community:

- Acts courageously to transform social systems and relationships among people
- Challenges inequalities that deny the fullness of life to some
- Practices love of neighbors and confronts hatred and bigotry.

We believe that "all people" means just that, and that LGBT people are included in the "all" who are created by God in God's image. We believe that the specific same-gender acts that are condemned in the Bible are very different from the act of a couple making covenantal commitments to mutual, monogamous, life-long loving relationships, surrounded by family, friends and religious community. Many have misused selected biblical passages to label people who engage in same-gender behaviors as sinful or sick, and such unjust condemnation has been the source of much suffering in the LGBT community.

Laws, stereotypes, and prejudices that harm LGBT people must be transformed into more accepting and nurturing ways of believing and acting both in religious communities and in civil society. We anticipate that this policy statement will be used in the civil debate - calling for the legalization of same- gender marriage - and in the church - calling for the Presbyterian Church (USA) to change the language that defines marriage in the Directory of Worship. In the PC(USA) and in most states, marriage is sanctioned only between “one woman and one man.” We will work to change that to “two people” or to other language that opens marriage to same- gender couples. (see Appendix 1)

Marriage exclusivity based on sexual orientation denies excluded people of the many rights and privileges that are granted to married couples by both state and federal governments. According to a Minnesota study by Project 515, “At least 515 state statutes provide rights and assign responsibilities to couples based on marriage... Among those who suffer most from the discrimination in Minnesota’s laws are children and other family members of these committed couples.”¹¹ According to a report by the Government Accounting Office, “as of December 31, 2003, our research identified a total of 1,138 federal statutory provisions classified to the United States Code in which marital status is a factor in determining or receiving benefits, rights, and privileges.”¹² These inequalities do in fact deny full legal protection and benefits to LGBT people and should not be allowed to stand.

There are at least two glaring examples in American history when citizens have been denied basic civil rights. Women, representing one half of the population were unable to vote for the first 130+ years of our nation’s history based on their gender, and African Americans were denied not only the right to vote, but their livelihoods, the right to self-determination and often their very lives based solely on the color of their skin. In each case, rights were denied because of attributes over which people have no control. The same injustice exists for same-gender couples who are denied the right to marry. In a just community, this inequality must be eliminated. The injustice of this inequality has been recognized by the Board of Directors of the NAACP that has voted to endorse gay marriage.

Biblical references: *Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 16:20; Amos 5:24; Micah 6:8; Matthew 25:35-40; John 10:10*

Resources: www.outfront.org, www.moveon.org, www.marrymeminnesota.org

We envision a sustainable community.

God created the world good and calls humans to be stewards of creation. We exercise that responsibility by showing care for natural, human and economic resources, and living as mutual partners in the global community. A sustainable community:

- Uses resources responsibly and fairly
- Lives in ways that allow future generations to flourish
- Respects and works to preserve the diversity of creation.

The debate about homosexuality is in part about whether or not to celebrate the diversity in God’s creation of humankind. Scientific studies clearly show that the human development of gender identity this is a very complicated process influenced by many factors. Evidence convinces us that sexual identity and orientation are not simply an individual choice, but a part of who each person is. Sexual orientation is a part of God’s created order and a part of the diversity of that creation. In the first account of creation in Genesis 1, human beings - both male and female - are created in the image of God. It is clear that both men and women are given the image of God.

Some argue that our “male-ness” and “female-ness” is characterized primarily by the anatomical fit of body parts that allow for procreation. Out of this understanding they build a theology that claims this gender complementarity to be a “law of nature.” Robert Gagnon, Professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary represents this theological perspective. He argues that the biblical passages that deal with

homosexuality are shaped fundamentally by “the simple recognition of a ‘fittedness’ of the sex organs, male and female.”¹³ But the claim that body parts determine sexual ethics is only persuasive if the reader accepts this set of theological beliefs. It is true that the first creation included two genders - each of which is equally made in God’s image - but there is no statement in the actual Genesis texts that there should be a prohibition against same-gender relationships. Procreation involving both genders is, of course, an important part of human life and marriage relationships, but the need for the majority of married couples to have children should not become an argument against forming legal marriages for those who choose not to or are unable to do so.

Biblical references: *Genesis 1:26-31, 2:7-25; Psalm 8; Psalm 24:1; Romans 8:18-25; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; Colossians 1:13-20*

Resources: www.minnpost.com/politics-policy, www.Huffingtonpost.com, www.twincitieshrc.org

We envision a peaceful community.

Peace is a gift of God entrusted to the human community. We are called as peacemakers to love our enemies, to pursue justice, to love kindness and to grant mercy. A peaceful community:

- Seeks freedom from discrimination, fear and tyranny for all people
- Resolves conflict through empathy, dialogue and forgiveness
- Treasures opportunities for prayer and reflection.

We call on people and communities that disagree over issues raised by human sexuality, biblical authority, church polity and secular public policy to continue in dialogue with one another truthfully and respectfully. We hope they can experience reconciliation and sustain or rebuild relationships of respect and mutual love. We hope that those who disagree can both give and receive forgiveness in the setting of prayer and reflection.

The covenant of marriage, at its best, serves to enhance the well-being of couples who choose to commit themselves to each other. We call for the choice to marry to be expanded to all people who want to commit themselves as a couple to a monogamous, mutual, loving, life-long relationship. Same-gender couples would be able to choose to marry for the same reasons that heterosexual couples make that choice.¹⁴ The process of gender formation is complex, but the preponderance of current scientific evidence is that sexual orientation is as much “who we are” as the color of our hair or whether we are left- or right-handed. As Jack Rogers reports, “In a comprehensive review of the literature on the subject of sexual orientation, David G. Myers, professor of psychology at Hope College, observes that based on all the available evidence, most psychologists ‘view sexual orientation as neither willfully chosen nor willfully changed’.” Attempts to change sexual orientation or enforce celibacy have most often resulted in a decrease in well-being and all-too often led to depression and too often attempts of suicide.¹⁵ Dr. Robert L. Spitzer, the author of an influential 2003 study that supported the use of “reparative therapy” to “cure” homosexuality has now recanted and apologized for that study, saying it was flawed and that it misinterpreted the data it collected.¹⁶ Soon after the report of Dr. Spitzer’s recanting his own study, the Pan American Health Organization issued a study that concluded that, “Services that purport to ‘cure’ people with non-heterosexual sexual orientation lack medical justification and represent a serious threat to the health and well-being of affected people.”¹⁷

Biblical references: *John 14:27; Hebrews 12:14; Colossians 3:15; Matthew 5:9; Isaiah 11:6-9; Psalm 23:1-3*

Resources: www.minnpost.com/politics-policy, www.Huffingtonpost.com, www.twincitieshrc.org

Call to Action:

Based on the “Our Hope for the World” statement¹ – which calls for our active engagement in creating communities that are loving, joyful, just, sustainable and peaceful - the Session of the Westminster Presbyterian

Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota calls for the following changes to be made: 1) in civil laws and policies so that all such laws and policies fully support marriage equality for all couples who wish to marry; and 2) in ecclesiastical policies to support full marriage equality for all who “are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage, a lifelong commitment is made by (two people) to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by a community of faith” (W-4.9001, revised). If such a change is not possible at this time, we call for an Authoritative Interpretation from the upcoming General Assembly to allow clergy serving in states where same- gender marriage is legal to perform such marriages.

NOTES

1. The Session of Westminster Presbyterian Church adopted the statement, *Our Hope For the World* on June 16, 2011. It can be viewed at the WPC website at www.ewestminster.org/ourhopefortheworld.

2. These texts include: Genesis 19:1-29; Exodus 22:25; Deuteronomy 23:19; Judges 19:1-30; Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:18-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-17; and Timothy 1:10 For analysis see: William Stacy Johnson, *A Time to Embrace*, pp. 114-120, 123-155; Jack Rogers, *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality*, pp. 69-90; Mark Achtemeier, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home*, pp. 3-4,7-8. Also, as Johnson points out, a key question is whether one reads the texts narrowly or broadly. If they are read broadly then the gender complementarily and “one-flesh-union” as an order of creation, and all forms of homoerotic behavior are absolutized and become prohibitions of all same-gender behavior, including marriage. But if they are read narrowly to refer to relative goods to be judged among a broader set of goods, or to very specific unjust, dominating and hedonistic behaviors, there is certainly room for considering support for same-gender relationships that are, “exclusive, committed and intended to be for life.” (Johnson, 96)

3. “And Grace Will Lead Me Home: Inclusion and Evangelical Conscience” Address at 2009 Covenant Network Conference. p. 1 (Page numbers refer to printed text from <http://covnetpres.org/2009/11/and-grace-will-lead-me-home/print/>)

4. Grace p. 2

5. Grace p. 1 Also, Johnson, in arguing that Christians have to take the commandments and prohibitions of Leviticus seriously says, “The most important lesson of Leviticus is about what it means to live a holy life. In order for life, including nuptial life, to become holy, it needs to be set apart and consecrated to God. According to the biblical perspective, sex is a part of the world that God created to be ‘good’ (tov). Though our sexuality is ‘good’, it must be set within boundaries if it is to become ‘holy’ (qadosh).” (Johnson, 13) Marriage is the institution that is given by God to provide these boundaries.

6. “UNSETTLING QUESTIONS”, at Covenant Network Conference, April 4, 2007, p. 3. (Page numbers refer to printed text from http://www.covnetpres.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Achtemeier_M_Unsettling_Questions_2007.pdf)

7. Questions, p. 4, *Calvin’s Ecclesiastical Advice*, Mary Beaty and Ben Farley, trans. Louisville, WJKP, 1991, pp. 139-143. This principle is also articulated in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, viii, 6-10.

8. Questions, p. 3.

9. Questions, pp. 3-4. See also *Embrace*, 124-6 for similar call to find the “reason for the rule.”

10. William Stacy Johnson, A TIME TO EMBRACE: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law and Politics, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, p. 110.

11. *Unequal Under the Law*, Project 515, 2007

12. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04353r.pdf> In a letter from the Government Accounting Office, 2004.

13. Robert Gagnon, The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics, p. 364.

14. See also Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., Sexuality and the Christian Body (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999) Rogers examines the place of sexuality in the Christian community, among the baptized. For him, marriage is valuable to the whole ecclesial community, not just to those who participate. "Marriage is peculiarly suited to teaching God's desire for human beings because it mirrors God's choosing of human beings for God's own sake." (Rogers, p. 27) "Marriage in Christianity is best understood as an ascetic practice of and for the community by which God takes sexuality up into God's own triune life, graciously transforming it so as to allow the couple partially to model the love between Christ and the Church." (Rogers, pp. 70-71) To deprive same-gender couples of the marriage union is to deprive them of the possibility of sanctification through the ascetic practice of marriage, and to deprive them of such a function within the community of the baptized. If humans are, as the Westminster Catechism puts it, to "glorify God and enjoy him forever," then same-gender unions raise the issue of such enjoyment in a way other unions do not. "[I]f human beings were so created to enjoy God, then the joy of sex, under sanctifying circumstances, cannot be unfitting." (Rogers p. 245)

15. Jack Rogers, Jesus, The Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church, 2006, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, p. 82, 83. Also from Grace, "As I began to expand my reading beyond the circle of people I already agreed with, I came across an interview with Andrew Sullivan, a conservative political commentator, a Roman catholic, and a partnered gay man. Sullivan wrote about attempts early in his life to follow the course his church recommended. As a committed Christian, he struggled hard to embrace a life of celibacy and renounce any hope of settling down with a life partner. I was startled by his testimony that, far from leading to the sort of flourishing one would expect, the results for him were morally and spiritually crippling:

The moral consequences, in my own life, of the refusal to allow myself to love another human being were disastrous. They made me permanently frustrated and angry and bitter. It spilled over into other areas of my life. Once that emotional blockage is removed, one's whole moral equilibrium can improve... These things are part of a continuous moral whole. You can't ask someone to suppress what makes them whole as a human being and then to lead blameless lives. We are human beings, and we need love in our lives in order to love others—in order to be good Christians!" At Grace, p. 4, quoting, Stahel, Thomas H, "'I'm Here': An interview with Andrew Sullivan," *America* 168:16 (May 8, 1993): 5-11. Available online at

<http://sullivanarchives.theatlantic.com/interviews.php.artnum-19930508.html#>

16. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/health/dr-robert-l-spitzer-noted-psychiatrist-apologizes-for-study-on-gay-cure.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&emc=eta1

17. http://new.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6803&Itemid=1926

APPENDIX A

THE STATUS OF MARRIAGE IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

The Book of Order Speaks about Marriage

The Directory of Worship (W-4.9001 “Christian Marriage”) states: “Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage, a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by a community of faith.”

Clearly, the PCUSA limits marriage to a covenant between a man and a woman, but it does recognize and allow for religious ceremonies that bless legal civil commitments between two people of the same gender as long as it is clear that the ceremony is not a marriage. The rule that currently governs the ability of clergy to (or not to) perform same-gender weddings was established in the General Assembly (GA) Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) in *Benton v. Hudson River*; which in turn relied on an Authoritative Interpretation of the *Book of Order* (BO) issued by the 203rd GA (1991). *Benton* has been applied by at least two subsequent PJC decisions: *Spahr v. Pby of Redwoods* (2008), Disc. Case 218-12; and *Southard v. Pby of Boston* (2011), Disc. Case 220-02. The most recent ruling on same- gender marriages occurred on February 21, 2012, when the GA PJC upheld the ecclesiastical rebuke (the lightest possible punishment) of The Rev. Jane Adams Spahr by the Presbytery of the Redwoods PJC after finding her guilty of performing ceremonies for same- gender couples that were marriages.

The heart of these decisions is that since there is no mention in the BO of same-gender marriages, a marriage service for two people of the same gender is not sanctioned. Other forms of civil union ceremonies that are distinguishable from marriages can be performed. Sessions can make church facilities available for union ceremonies but not for marriages of same-gender couples. The key theological distinction is that the marriage ceremony confers a new status on the couple while the same- gender union ceremony recognizes and blesses an existing status.

This rule is particularly problematic in states where same-gender marriage is now legal. Currently, under *Southard*, the ruling is that the change in state law does not change the stance of the PCUSA. There are a large number of Overtures being sent to the upcoming meeting of the GA (220th) that will meet in Pittsburgh this summer. Most are calling for changes in the language of the Directory of Worship that would allow the

recognition and performance of same-gender weddings. There will also likely be attempts to get action that would create an Authoritative Interpretation that would allow clergy to perform same-gender weddings in states where they are now legal.

Book of Confessions (BOC):

Issues of marriage are addressed in several Confessions in the BOC. A common thread is that marriage is instituted by God for the union of one man and one woman. The substance of what the Confessions say about marriage is captured by the *Westminster Confession*:

6.133- Of Marriage ...

1. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.
2. Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife; for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of their moral and spiritual character; for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord...
4. Marriage for the Christian has religious as well as civil significance. The distinctive contribution of the church in performing the marriage ceremony is to affirm the divine institution of marriage; to invoke God's blessing upon those who enter into the marital relationship in accordance with his word; to hear the vows of those who desire to be married; and to assure the married partners of God's grace within their new relationship.

APPENDIX B
STORIES FROM MARRIAGE STUDY GROUP MEMBERS

Don Ristad, Marriage Study Group Chair

How I came to be involved in this committee

I was drafted. But for very good reasons: I happen to be a gay man who was married in a civil ceremony in California during the window of time when that was possible. And my husband and I had our marriage blessed at a worship service at Westminster a few months later. (Even though Proposition 8 overturned the right for same-sex couples to marry in California, our marriage and those for all same-sex couples married during those few months, is still valid.)

Ours is not an atypical story. Boy meets boy, boy falls in love with boy, boys make a commitment to one another to build a life together. Then the whole marriage issue became very personal. Having “come out” at a time when that was anything but easy, we decided at age 50+ that we wanted to declare our love for one another in a public way. Our reasons were clear: we wanted the support and recognition of our families, friends and community. We wanted what most couples anticipate with a commitment to marriage and more than just the type of shared responsibility that comes from sharing in a mortgage!

It is one of the most profound moments of our lives when we were able to stand in front of the assembled congregation at Westminster and experience their love and support for us - both as individuals and as a couple. We will never forget Tim Hart-Andersen’s homily when he said he thought this day would never happen: a dentist and an ophthalmologist seeking a marriage blessing!

We are changed people for having had the opportunity to share our love openly and honestly and receive the blessings from our pastors and church community. My husband and I are ordained leaders in the church - I am a ruling elder and he is a deacon. Our leadership roles are shaped by who we are. We both grew up in homes where our faith was nurtured from our earliest age. We both had enormous struggles when we felt outside the sphere of God’s love. Our family members are scattered all along the path from shunning to acceptance to sharing in our joy.

The sadness is that the journey has taken so long and has been so difficult. The joy is that we know that God loves us and has blessed our life together.

Judy Ericksen, Marriage Study Group Member

Why I am part of the Westminster marriage study group and will vote NO in November.

I have celebrated the marriages of many gay and lesbian friends over the years. Of course, these friends don’t live in Minnesota. I hope Minnesota follows the lead of its neighbor to the south, to legalize same-sex marriage in my lifetime. The first step is to defeat the proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman. The faith community should take a leadership position and put religious teachings into practice. Such as love thy neighbor as thyself or do unto others, as you would have others do unto you. Why should one group of people be denied access to an institution recognized and valued by our culture? Marriage is about love and commitment between two people. Their sexual orientation should not matter. Marriage matters. Minnesotans have the opportunity to be the first state to defeat the anti-marriage

constitutional amendment that 29 states have passed. And then the real work will begin. Step two is to legalize same-sex marriage in Minnesota. This would ensure equality for all couples who want to marry and enjoy the same rights that straight couples have. To paraphrase, "This anti-marriage amendment hurts many and helps no one."

Sandy Wolfe Wood, Marriage Study Group Member

My road to the Marriage Study Committee

My path to marriage equality began when I was in elementary school and I got to know one of the architect's in my dad's office. Jess Ferguson was an amazing role model: he grew orchids, was well-read and willingly engaged a 10-year old in sophisticated topics, had an artist's sensibility, and was a careful and interested listener.

For my high school graduation, Jess gave me a book of Toulouse-Lautrec's black and white lithographs; not many people would have had the artistic sensibility to think of such a meaningful gift. My parents knew Jess was gay: they made Jess a big part of our family life so that, by the time I understood what "gay" was, it was totally normal.

Jess had a tough time as a gay man in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When my dad closed his architectural office in the mid-1980s, Jess left for New York. When he returned for a visit, he looked as happy as I had ever seen him: he also dressed more flamboyantly than he had in Pittsburgh, which meant he finally felt comfortable being who he was, no matter where he was. He trusted that he could be himself with our family, and I felt proud that his trust had been well founded. In the 1980s it took courage to show such trust.

Unfortunately, it was only a couple years later that my parents told me Jess had contracted AIDS and died shortly after. I loved this man who had been such a role model to me growing up, and a little piece of the artist he cultivated in me died that day.

Jess was a gay man bracketed by rules meant to control him, not unlike the way Jim Crow laws controlled blacks in the South throughout much of the 20th century. We are slowly eroding the antiquated mores that make gay Americans second-class citizens, but one obstacle stands between us and justice: that of marriage equality. Many, like Jess, were forced to live a constrained life because of who he was born to be; that's discrimination and we must end it.

APPENDIX C
STORIES FROM CONGREGATIONAL LISTENING SESSIONS

Rick Polenek and Terry McEowen

My life partner Terry and I recently joined the spring membership class and became members of Westminster in May, 2012. For the past 24 years we were active members of All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church, a predominantly GLBT congregation in south Minneapolis. Terry served as church organist and choir accompanist and I served on the Facilities Team and led the Lawn and Garden ministry. A year ago we made the difficult decision to leave that church family in search of a more traditional worship format. Leaving the safe and affirming environment of that faith community with no clear alternatives in sight might well have left us spiritually adrift.

But we were gently and quickly guided to Westminster. What we found was not only the traditional worship service and uplifting music program that we were seeking, but also an immediately friendly and welcoming church family. In her sermon on one of our first Sundays last summer, Meghan Gage-Finn touched on the difficulties faced by some young people in finding their sexual identities and dealing with the attendant bullying, and spoke words of encouragement to the effect that "it does get better." Terry and I immediately knew that we were home.

And when Tim Hart-Andersen announced from the pulpit that the Session of this congregation was considering taking a stand for marriage equality, our decision to join this faith community was once again affirmed. Terry and I have been in a committed, monogamous relationship for 28 years. Though neither of us lets our sexuality define who we are, our lives are to a large extent defined by the fact that we are a couple. And though we have taken legal steps to put in place many of the benefits and safeguards that legally married couples enjoy, there are many areas in which we are simply denied those benefits.

As Terry and I listened to the conversation in that Study Group session earlier this month, we both felt a strong sense of pride in Westminster as our newfound church, and as a Covenant Network Congregation, for taking this bold stand in the name of social justice. We both firmly believe that we are created in God's image and that God continues to bless our lives together.

Terry and Pat Hammink

Our son, Gerard, is gay. He came out to us 20 years ago, when he was 23 years old. During the past 20 years we have been advocates for our son and all GLBT persons. For several years we were very active in PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). We've taken our cues from Gerard regarding the most important justice issues for GLBT persons. For many years marriage equality, compared to other justice and safety issues, was not one of the top issues for Gerard, or for us. This changed in 2008 during the much-publicized Proposition 8 vote in California. Gerard was upset to learn of the large amounts of money from persons in other states that went into California to promote the effort to deny marriage equality to GLBT persons. This revelation changed how we all viewed the issue of marriage equality. It brought the issue to the top of the list. We strongly reject the effort in Minnesota to further restrict our son, and other GLBT persons, the same right that we have to be married if we choose.