

PALISADES PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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Moderator

August 26, 2007

The Session of Palisades Presbyterian Church moves that the Presbytery of Hudson River continue its quest for a just love, a loving justice, and a hospitality by sending the following Presbytery of Hudson River Overture to GA 218 on "Deleting G-6.0106b, and on Providing a New Authoritative Interpretation."

On Deleting G-6.0106b, and on Providing a New Authoritative Interpretation

The Presbytery of Hudson River respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to do the following:

1. Provide the following authoritative interpretation:

Interpretative statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.

2. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-6.0106b be stricken? [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through.]

~~"b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W 4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament."~~

Rationale

Current denominational policies regarding ordination contradict the foundational principle of Jesus' teachings — God is love. From the early chapters in the First Testament where we read of Abraham and Sara inviting three strangers to stay for dinner (Genesis 18) to the frequent accounts of disciples in the early Second Testament churches creating an environment of welcoming, reconciliation, hospitality, and generosity (Romans 13 and 14, 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 2, Colossians 3, Hebrews 13, 1 John, etc.), the story of our faith is one in which God and God's people are instructed to practice love. Jesus himself makes it clear that the greatest commandment is love of God and that the second is like it: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22, esp. 22:39). There are no exceptions to this expectation and yet our ordination policies certainly do not communicate a message of God's love.

Current denomination policies regarding ordination contradict the Great Commission of Christ, who instructed his followers to go into all the world, making disciples, baptizing and teaching (Matt. 28:16-20). The Scriptures call the church out of itself and direct us to practice hospitality towards all — even strangers (Hebrews 13), thereby demonstrating the message of grace and welcome that draws people into the community of faith. The Apostle Paul points out that "God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to [God]" (Acts 10:34-35).

Current denominational policies regarding ordination contradict Scripture's teachings about the freedom of God's Spirit to engage in surprising, new, and unpredictable activities (John 3). Who of us can say with absolute certainty precisely what is God's will with regard to the leadership of the church? For centuries we used biblical texts as the basis of our opposition to the ordination of women and inclusion of African Americans in our congregations. Now we know both practices were sinful violations of God's will. Likewise, A Brief Statement of Faith reminds us that same Spirit "calls women and men to all ministries of the Church" (*The Book of Confessions*, 10.4, line 64).

Current denominational policies regarding ordination contradict the value Scripture places on inclusive welcome (Acts 8:26ff, 10:28 and 11:17). So, too, current ordination policies conflict with numerous parts of the *Book of Order* that underscore the church's call to openness and inclusiveness (G-3.0401, G-4.0100-.0404) and the rights granted to members (G-5.0102 and G-5.0103, G-6.0107 and G-6.0108).

Current denominational policies regarding ordination contradict the church's understanding of the Sacrament of Baptism. The *Book of Order* tells us that in baptism "we die to what separates us from God." To be consistent with that teaching, we cannot then set up a barrier (ordination) that separates some of the baptized from their unity with God. Likewise we are told "baptism is a sign and

symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant" (W-2.3002), and "barriers of race, gender, status, and age are to be transcended. Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome" (W-2.3005). If we are willing to baptize all believers, then is it not incumbent upon us to ordain all believers who are called by God into service?

Current denominational policies regarding ordination contradict the basic principle of the church that grants all men and women who are church members the right to respond to God's call to special ministries as elders, deacons, or ministers of Word and Sacrament (G 6.0106a). There is only one status or church membership that means one's sexual orientation should not be regarded when considering service.

We thank you for approving this for the Docket and vote of the assembled Presbytery of Hudson River at the September 18, 2007 meeting to be held at the Presbyterian Center at Holmes, Holmes, NY.