

OVERTURE TO AMEND THE DIRECTORY FOR WORSHIP

On 11/15/07 Baltimore Presbytery voted to send this overture to the 218th GA The Session of Govans Presbyterian Church (concurring Sessions of Brown Memorial Park Avenue, Deer Creek Harmony, Faith, First and Franklin Street, Light Street, and St. John United Presbyterian Churches) moves:

THAT, the Presbytery of Baltimore approve the following proposed overture to the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA (2008):

That the Directory For Worship of The Book of Order be amended in the following manner: (strike through indicates portions to be deleted; italics indicate additions)

W-4.9001 Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a ~~civil contract~~ *covenant* between a ~~woman and a man~~ *two people* and according to the laws of the state also constitutes a *civil contract*. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which ~~a man and a woman~~ *two people* 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~~ *between two people*, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.

W-4.9002 a. In preparation for the marriage service, the minister shall provide for a discussion with the ~~man and the woman~~ *two people* concerning

(The remainder of this section remains the same)

W-4.9004 The service begins with the scriptural sentences and a brief statement of purpose. The ~~man and the woman~~ *two people* shall declare their intention to enter into Christian marriage and shall exchange vows of love and faithfulness. The service includes appropriate passages of Scripture, which may be interpreted in various forms of proclamation. Prayers shall be offered for the couple, for the communities which support them in this new dimension of discipleship, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness. In the name of the triune God the minister shall declare publicly that the ~~woman and the man~~ *two people* are now joined in marriage.

(The remainder of this paragraph remains the same)

W-4.9006 A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage *or civil union* and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the opening statement, the declaration of intention, the exchange of vows by the ~~husband and wife~~ *couple*, and the public declaration by the minister reflect the fact that the ~~woman and man~~ *two people* are already ~~married to one another~~ *united* according to the laws of the state.

Rationale

Currently in our churches and communities same gender couples are living together in loving, committed, monogamous relationships. They are raising children, caring for aging parents and making positive contributions to their communities. These couples include new and long time members of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Their relationships are equivalent to a marriage in every way but formal recognition by the church and by most states in which they live, though some states are recognizing their relationships as marriages or civil unions.

By changing the definition of marriage in the Directory for Worship we would recognize committed, life-long relationships that are already being lived out by our members. We would honor and support the love and commitment they practice in their lives every day. We would bear witness to the love of God as it is expressed between these couples and as we offer that love to them on behalf of the church.

In addition, as the legal recognition of same gender relationships goes through transitions throughout the country, PC (USA) clergy and sessions are faced with complex decisions regarding ecclesiastical authority and property use. Ministers of Word and Sacrament currently can face ecclesiastical charges if they perform marriage ceremonies or civil unions that may be legal in their state. Same gender couples who are members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) can come to their Minister and request that Minister to perform their marriage as an agent of the state, only to be denied that important time of pastoral care and ministry because of church law. Broadening the language to offer marriage to any two people removes the religious barriers faced by Ministers, Sessions, church members, and other Christians while continuing to honor the laws of each state. Changing the language in this way emphasizes that the Directory for Worship defines marriage within the bounds of our denomination and does not determine what is legal or illegal in civil law.

For the good of loving, monogamous same gender couples in our church and for the community and for the greater ministry of our Clergy, Sessions and Churches we propose these changes to the Directory for Worship.