

Myth 3: Full Inclusion for LGBT Folk Will Produce Schism

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If the unity of the Presbyterian Church (USA) is so fragile that the full inclusion of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons will wrench it apart, then maybe *it is* time for a restructuring. If welcoming our sisters and brothers is going to break us, we are already in serious need of repair.

What is more likely is that the full inclusion of LGBT folk threatens the *power structure* of the church rather than its theological integrity. Holding the line against full inclusion assures the continued dominance of those seen as “protectors” of the church, leaders whose authority is assured by their resistance to change in any meaningful way for our community and its allies. The full inclusion of LGBT members would likely reveal the true struggle in this church, which is resistance to the redistribution of power in any equitable and truly welcoming way.

The inclusion of our LGBT sisters and brothers has become the threatening fault line in the rhetoric, nurtured in the fear of what change will bring about. The decades-long delay against inclusion has become so mired in the language and practice of fear that we now believe that living into the fundamental principles of Christianity will actually destroy us. No, it will not destroy *us*, but it will eliminate the dysfunctional behavior of reducing others’ status to raise one’s own sense of importance and righteousness. Such a change will help to shift the church back to its *dominant Christian mission* of a radically welcoming and loving God, instead of a limited and exclusive institution.

Think about it for a moment. The PC(USA) may actually be known more for whom it refuses to welcome fully than for whom it fully embraces. It is, constitutionally, a resistance movement against God’s creation. In the long run, more than any decision, this aberration of call, misguided by fear and selfishness, will split and plunder the church.

What would it be like to have the constitutional barrier of G-6.0106b removed, along with other limiting AI’s, definitions, and interpretations? How many people, leaders, would suddenly be called upon to answer questions to their congregations and the world about gender identity, sexuality, differing views on Scripture, mission, past practices, and future outreach? What would it be like to suddenly be in such a situation? It would be wonderful! Finally, the fresh air of

the Spirit would make it possible to be freed from the gender dominance and exclusive practices that we know in our hearts to be wrong.

It's not time!
It will split the church!
It will tear apart our unity!

Do these responses sound Spirit-filled and faith-based? Or do they sound like the cry of those afraid of losing something; those holding on too tightly to what most of us believe should have been released long ago?

Today, the church's fear of doing what is right produces violence and support for hate crimes against the communities we marginalize by our exclusion. The LGBT community continues to be pushed back in this church, and with each thrust away from the table, these actions reinforce the perception and responses of those who become more assured that LGBT people are less than. We embolden those who find encouragement for hatred toward LGBT folk each time we reaffirm LGBT persons are not fully welcome. Our witness to the world includes the message of discrimination, homophobia, and marginalization. How was this ever right before? How could it be right now?

There is little hope for us not to fracture as a church unless we clean house of these hurtful messages and practices

The recent ruling in favor of The Rev. Dr. Janie Spahr in which she was found not guilty of violating her ordination vows by "marrying same gender couples" summarizes the attitude toward LGBT folk from the institutional perspective of the church. Janie was found "not guilty" because the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission said that she could not be found guilty of something she could not do, that is marrying anyone other than a man and a woman. Clearly, the court reaffirmed that there is no place for the LGBT community in their eyes – based on the Constitution, except as limited, diminished, second-class citizens.

What does that say to our LGBT family? If this were a decision against you, what would you hear in the words and actions of the court and the Constitution upon which they based their decision? I think you would hear:

It's not time!
It will split the church!
It will tear apart our unity!

Schism as the result of full inclusion for LGBT folk is a myth. It is a fear used to fund-raise by opponents and propel the status quo that benefits no one, not even those who hold the power now, for it has become an infection affecting all.

The church will not split as a result of opening its doors to the LGBT community. It will strengthen and grow in ways we could not even imagine. However, membership is not the reason to change the Constitution, nor is fear the reason to keep it flawed.

It is about Justice and Love. There can be no justice and love in this church until G-6.0106b is removed and all other references that limit participation and definition of membership for LGBT folk have been deleted or changed.

Fear and Schism are the twin myths that have become accepted remedies for maintaining the exclusion of LGBT folk from the church on a constitutional and institutional basis.

*It's time now!
It will prevent schism!
It will bring us together!*

Once again, I call for all the progressive groups to come together for this General Assembly with one voice and embrace the call to cure this church of the twin soul-sicknesses of procrastination and homophobia.

Here's what I believe we are called to do: Remove G-6.0106b from the Book of Order, strike the *Authoritative Interpretation of 1978/1993*¹, change the language of marriage in the Directory for Worship, and correct the Heidelberg Catechism in our Confessions.

- *Using LGBT folk to hedge and hold onto power? True.*
- *Schism if LGBT folk were welcomed fully? Just another myth.*
- *What are we waiting for? I have no idea.*

¹ <http://www.presbyweb.com/Documents/DefinitiveGuidance1978.htm>