



The SPC Post

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Denominational Update

What Difference a New Ordination Standard Makes for SPC

By Alan Hager

The voting continues on several important topics for the Presbyterian Church including the ordination amendment which would remove the prohibition of those sexually active outside of marriage from being considered as an officer of the church. At the time of printing the current vote stands at 74 (in favor of the change) to 54 (against the change). It seems more likely that this will be the year that the ordination standard changes. Last month I shared a Frequently Asked Question format to explore the implications and background of this issue. Please see last month's newsletter article (along with other helpful information and links) at the church website- www.spcontheweb.org We will continue with some more questions in the same format this month.

Does it really matter if some churches or presbyteries ordain persons sexually active outside of marriage? What impact could that have on our church if we do not approve or participate in such actions directly? The Presbyterian style of government is often called a connectional system. That means various portions of the denomination are connected with one another through their relationship within the structure of the church. SPC is a member of the Presbytery of the James (one of 173 Presbyteries across the country) and every individual congregation has a similar connection to a Presbytery and each Presbytery is connected to a Synod. Consequently, the act of one part of church is rightfully considered an act of the whole church. So we really are involved with the actions of churches even if they are far removed from us.

Furthermore, this new development on ordination standards is a reflection of what our denomination believes about the Bible. Like it or not, people will associate our congregation with the actions of the whole denomination. This particular position on ordination will convey that we do not take seriously the Bible's teaching on morality and what it says regarding leaders of the church. This would be the case in any denomination or association of churches but is compounded by the nature of being a connectional denomination.

Another consequence of this new position on ordination standards is that over time it can develop from being a possibility for some churches to consider to an expectation for all churches to live by. An example of this can be seen in the action of the last General Assembly to require all churches to increase their dues for all staff workers in order to provide health benefits for same sex partners who are not receiving benefits currently. This was done even when the official position of the denomination was to forbid people in such a situation from being officers of the church. It can also be easy to imagine newer clergy or clergy changing presbyteries in order to receive a new job to face resistance if they do not support the new policy of the denomination on ordination.

What has our church done in the past to try to make a difference or deal with this situation? The session and pastors of SPC have taken a number of actions over the years to deal with this issue. They have gathered together with like minded Presbyterians to monitor the situation in the denomination, prepare responses to various actions of the denomination that have raised concerns, and communicated repeatedly with the congregation. Some of those responses of the leadership of SPC have included a joint Press Release in 2008 when the General Assembly took a controversial step to potentially loosen ordination standards, a letter to the Stated Clerk of the denomination in 2009, and a statement on the nature of marriage (as one man and one woman) sent to a task force charged with studying the topic.

Over the years the session has restricted the money that is sent to support the denomination by designating our contributions to specific Presbyterian ministries. Currently, SPC has stopped giving any money to or through the denomination.

The church has reflected significantly on who we are and what we believe. Consequently, there has been the adoption of a New Vision Statement and the adoption of a Statement of Core Beliefs for SPC. SPC also became a member of the Confessing Church Movement as an attempt to identify with conservative churches throughout the denomination.

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Leaders of SPC also are active within the Presbytery working for renewal and reform. We have a number of individuals who work in ministries and committees of our local Presbytery, we send commissioners faithfully to meetings, and we have had a meeting with Presbytery representatives to address our ongoing concerns about the direction of the denomination.

The church session continues to monitor denominational actions and communicate with the church items of concern. One recent development that relates to denominational issues is a movement called the Fellowship PCUSA. This is a group of conservative churches who are seeking to stand together and deal with the potential new position on ordination. I have personally signed my support for this movement already. You can find out more about the Fellowship at their website www.fellowship-pcusa.org.

Of course prayer continues to be the primary need for this time. **There will be a Day of Prayer and Fasting which will begin with dinner and a prayer service on Wednesday, April 13.** Information on how to pray with related scripture passages will be distributed at this meeting so individuals can have a time of concerted prayer on Thursday, April 14.

Please plan to attend this prayer service and continue to keep the church in your prayers. If you have any questions or concerns in the meantime do not hesitate to contact the pastor or one of our session members.