



The SPC Post

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Denominational Update SPC and the Future- Can We Be United though Not Unanimous?

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In monitoring the vote on changing the ordination standards taking place within the Presbyterian Church, we continue a series of recent newsletter articles that deal with common questions and concerns raised by the potential change. It does appear that the change is more than likely as the current vote is 82-60 in favor of change. You can find past newsletter articles and other information concerning denominational issues at the church website www.spcontheweb.org.

As the church has spoken repeatedly on behalf of holding onto traditional views of marriage and resisting the attempts to allow for the ordination of persons sexually active outside of marriage, what are people to think if they are members of SPC but do not share these particular views? Are they welcome here?

It is understandable that people within the church (or those visiting SPC) could feel alienated if they had mixed feelings on matters of marriage and sexuality. These are not simply theoretical issues. Most of us have friends and family members we deeply love who are gay or involved in relationships that do not meet the definition of traditional marriage. It is important to keep a couple of things in mind if this reflects your concerns. First of all, no church can share all the values and views you possess. In fact, it should not. Any church you might be a part of will have some positions and views that do not match your own which means there is a healthy diversity within the body and not just a uniform mentality that constitutes that group.

Second, our church's statements in support of traditional marriage and the current ordination standard are not a reflection of the church's involvement to care for people. It would be extremely unfortunate if our church took on the posture of trying to maintain some perceived notion of purity by avoiding the world around us or casting judgmental statements toward individuals and groups who do not share our convictions.

We desire to be gracious in meeting people where they are, realizing that many will not automatically share all of the stated values of our church.

And most important, people who do not share all the motivating factors for being concerned about the denomination can still support the church's actions and statements because of their commitment to the well-being of the body of SPC. Our church has a clear and long standing history of what it believes in relation to these matters facing the denomination. The challenges associated with a new position on ordaining leaders are directly at odds with the values of SPC. It will undoubtedly wound the body of this fellowship and those who love this body can stand with it even though it may not reflect their own views on particular issues. You can refer to last month's newsletter at the church website to see specifically why the new position on ordaining officers will be disruptive to the ministry of our church.

Aren't these discussions highlighting the differences within the church body and promoting divisions in our church?

It is frustrating to see the church potentially being divided due to publicly speaking out on matters of sexuality and ordination. But it is important to realize that this topic was not chosen by the session of SPC. In fact, after 30 years of speaking decisively as a denomination on the issue, it continues to be brought up in the Presbyterian Church. It appears it will be allowed to be raised until the church changes its position on the matter. Not only has the debate been allowed to continue, but the denomination has in numerous ways endorsed or helped promote changing the position on ordination even though the constitution prohibits it. This factor alone can be a legitimate source of consternation by members of the church.

(continued on page 2)



Denominational Update

(continued from page 1)

The differences that might be aggravated by discussing the issues being debated in the denomination will be even more pronounced when the denomination crosses the threshold of allowing persons sexually active outside of marriage to be considered for ordination. We will potentially not only feel the divisions within our church, but see the exodus of many members and friends out of our church body. In order to preserve the unity of this congregation, the session feels it is necessary to speak with a clear voice even though we realize it is not a unanimous voice of the membership. And of course there is no such thing as the possibility of a unanimous voice on this issue.

And it needs to be highlighted again that the issue of sexuality is not the only concern before us. The denomination has taken a number of actions that have strained our ability to stand with it in mission and ministry. There have been inflammatory positions taken regarding Israel and the complex situation of the Middle East; equivocation on the importance of confessing faith in Jesus for salvation; and the imposition of increased costs on all church's staff dues to pay for health benefits for same gender partners. Underlying all of these issues is the view of the authority of the Bible and how to apply it to our time.

Will we risk losing our property by raising objections to the actions of the denomination?

Our church is a member of a local presbytery, the Presbytery of the James, which has a responsibility to be involved with the actions its churches might take as well as some of the forms of communication churches might employ. Since we do not own our property (or the contents), there could be scenarios where our church acts or speaks in such a confrontational manner that it would jeopardize our use of this property. However, we should not be in fear of the denomination. Our presbytery has a dismissal procedure approved that congregations who feel compelled to make the most dramatic course of action- leaving the denomination- can follow with the possibility of retaining their property. As in all things, we should always seek to communicate with respect and a view toward how the work of our Lord is reflected by what we say and do.

So please continue in prayer for our church session and the things taking place. And please feel free to contact me or a member of Session at any time to discuss concerns or thoughts you may have. May God be glorified in us and through us.