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What We Are For

By Alan Hager

Members of Spotsylvania Presbyterian Church received a letter from me last month indicating that our church Session had unanimously requested our Presbytery to begin the dismissal process so that we could, pending congregational approval, depart from the PCUSA denomination. That is of course a potentially significant change, although it will not be a sudden change as the Presbytery's dismissal process rightfully includes a series of phases and plenty of opportunities for communication.

In the midst of making a stand because of changes taking place in our denomination it is easy for others (and even ourselves) to define who we are by what we are against. It is true we are concerned about many of these changes including the new ordination standard. As our letter to the Presbytery stated, our "request is the consequence of numerous actions and statements by the denomination including, but not limited to, the recent decision to change the ordination standard for prospective officers of the church."

We are seeing already some of the implications of this new position. This past month, two prospective ministers of the PCUSA who have been involved in church court cases because of their relationships with same gender partners have been allowed to continue in the path to ordination. While these two cases are not identical and include complex issues, it is clear that the change in the ordination standard contributed to one, if not both, of these decisions.

Another implication of the new ordination standard involves a minister in North Carolina who does not support the removal of the fidelity/chastity requirement. He has notified his Presbytery that he cannot recognize the ordination of those who are not living in "fidelity of marriage or chastity in singleness." This creates a confusing situation as to how a Presbytery can allow someone to be a member in good standing who cannot participate fully in the life of the Presbytery given his convictions. This minister is not alone as hundreds of other individuals, (elders, candidates for the ministry, and current ministers) share a similar conviction.

So our session has tried to help the church stand "against" this development, but the things we are "for" are greater and more important than the things we are against. For instance, we are "for" the grace of God. We believe God can and does bring change to people's lives. Of course this means that we do not condone what the Bible describes as sin. We are "for" outreach and ministering to people where they are- even if they do not share our convictions or meet the expectations we have for officers of the church. All are welcome at SPC. This is a place where people can share in the ministry of the church and particularly hear the gospel proclaimed in our worship services. We are also "for" the joy of the Lord and the excitement of being part of God's family. We are grateful for the good work God is doing among us and we long to spread that joy to our community.

So as the process related to the denomination continues and we have to at times clarify what we are concerned about and even the things we are against, let us also remember the many things we are "for" as a church and let them continue to shape and define us.