



June 1, 2011

Dear Christ Church Family:

Session has asked me to write you this important letter. In the coming days, you may begin to hear news reports that the Presbyterian Church (USA) has made a historic change in its ordination standards. As of May 10, 2011, sufficient presbyteries have voted to approve a change to the PCUSA constitution that will give sessions and presbyteries possible license to approve the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons—either homosexual or heterosexual—who are sexually active outside of the marriage of a man and a woman.

Such a constitutional amendment has been sought for decades by Presbyterian factions seeking to legitimize same-sex practice, and after repeated defeats and setbacks, the measure has just now been approved. It will take effect on July 10, 2011.

Christ Church has historically been resolute in its opposition to such an unbiblical decision, fully affirming and faithfully subscribing to the now-removed provision that read: *“Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament (Book of Order: G-6.0106b).*

This requirement reflects the overwhelming biblical consensus concerning Christian sexual morality over the centuries and conforms as well to our Presbyterian Book of Confessions. While the Bible’s position on sexual morality and God’s will for our sexual practice have not changed, the mood and mores of our culture are drifting far from God’s expressed will and mandates for our lives. Tragically, this decision by our denomination has followed our culture and has abandoned God’s loving precepts for how we are to live. With this unfortunate decision, the PCUSA will lose its moral authority to give solid Biblical and theological guidance to our culture.

No doubt your immediate question might be, “How does this action directly affect us here at Christ Church?” The short answer is that it does not. We are still free to establish the standards of our ministry in the manner that is in concert with the historic, orthodox principles of Biblical teaching as well as the practice of the global Christian Church.

In essence, this decision by our denomination dictates that each governing body (presbytery and session) has the right to determine the appropriate critical standards for ordination. While the new constitutional provision says that this is to be done *“under the guidance of Scripture,”* rather than *“in obedience to Scripture,”* it is clear that the motivation, design, and impact of this change is permitting

liberty to become license amidst our culture's sexual confusion. This constitutional confusion applies equally to heterosexual misconduct as well.

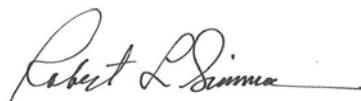
Consequently, Christ Presbyterian Church now chooses to reaffirm and continue two equally important and necessary courses of action:

- First, Christ Church will continue to love and value all persons, inviting all those who seek to know God to worship, learn, and labor beside us. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; we are all sinners in need of redemption. Therefore, we will choose to love and welcome as ways of caring for our friends and visitors. However, that love and welcome will continue to include a call to follow God's will, to repent, and to turn from any sin that separates one from fellowship with God. We will unapologetically love enough to relay God's intent that we be made whole through confession, repentance, and forgiveness.
- Second, Christ Church will not loosen our standards for the ordination of elders and deacons, or for the behavior of all who follow Jesus Christ. Christ Church will continue to require of its officers fidelity in heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness, just as God so requires. The new possibility of lowered standards will not mean the actuality of change in Christ Church's moral principles and practice. However, Christ Church will also not focus on any one sin while ignoring others. We will seek to be consistent in the application of biblical moral standards within the church.

Perhaps a second question is to determine, "What about the future?" I have recently become an active supporting member of a newly formed group within the PCUSA known as the "Presbyterian Fellowship." This group exists to bring evangelical churches together within the PCUSA and to begin to sketch a path forward in light of these changes. In August, this new Fellowship will gather in Minneapolis to sharpen our vision and pursue a future course. As I write this letter there are over 1,000 pastors and elders involved in this "Fellowship." Session has agreed to send Brett and me to this conference, and we will be reporting to you all that we learn. Upon return from this conference, I will hold a "town hall" type gathering where I can share information and take your questions. However, if you need or want to talk with me prior to this August conference, contact Lynn in the office and she will arrange an appointment for you. My door is always open to you.

The bottom line is this: please do not panic or make any rash decisions that would affect your relationship with Christ Church. We need to stay together and face this challenge in the same way we have faced challenges in our life together for the past ten years that I have been your pastor. We, your leaders, promise to stay balanced, levelheaded, prayerful, and focused on Christ, the Scriptures, and our Book of Confessions. Although the PCUSA may be in error nationally on this matter, Christ Presbyterian Church will remain steadfast locally. Nothing will change for us. We will continue to love those around us and point all persons to God's loving and gracious will for our lives. We will live in obedience to Scripture and under the guidance of our Book of Confessions.

Grace and peace,



Rev. Dr. Robert L. Simmons