

Congregational conversations on marriage in a changing world

Report to the Session on the March 20, 2011 Congregational Conversations

Summary: The conversations were well-attended with over 60 people participating in 5 different small groups. By all accounts the discussions were robust and heart-felt, and a wide range of views emerged. The "next steps" expressed a desire for further discussion of this issue.

Notes from the flip charts and submitted sheets:

- congregation forum on marriage pulling together Bible study, religious versus civil views
- do Presbyterians consider marriage a sacrament?
- space use in general -- how do we serve the community?
- not excluding by being inclusive in these discussions
- continue conversations
- using models from the past
- want robust discernment process
- Session decision should not be precedent setting
- table Session decisions
- Session should consider rescinding permission to marry
- need period of study and discussion
- need policy on marriage
- what do we require of those who want to marry here?
- space use versus pastoral care
- CHPC space use policy needs to be revisited for all purposes
- need to understand Bible, Book of Order and civil issues
- we need to think and pray
- role of CHPC clergy in marriage versus use of sanctuary
- better communication of how decisions are made
- clear view to respond to demographic change
- when does majority rule over consensus?
- how to handle people's feelings
- "don't leave"
- civil decision
- support regardless of what civil laws say
- all over the map
- inability to communicate what Session does to the congregation
- were very puzzled by the lack of communication within the congregation/session about our previous discussions on these topics
- one long time member mentioning the Covenant Network and a new member not even knowing what the Covent Network was...
- protect everyone's views before decision is made
- inappropriate to rescind
- didn't we already decide this when we joined the Covenant Network?
- continue discussion before further decision
- continually try to discern
- principles populated with ideas
- Biblical scripture does not stand in the way of loving relationships
- look forward to having those with different orientations celebrate with us in church
- don't see why this wouldn't occur at church — it's legal and practical

- a minor technicality since we have wrestled with this issue before
- I don't believe everything Paul wrote (x2)
- Session probably needs clarity about what session would think
- should think about what is marriage and why is it important? Separate what we think we believe from facts (about lifetime commitment, how we present ourselves in society, service through marriage) These things are not dependent on sexual orientation
- would wish that all people getting married would be in a room with people would supported them
- marriage is different things to different people — civil marriage is a right of everyone, religious marriage is something bigger — do people getting married at church need to be members of the congregation?
- should we base our view of who can get married on Andy's invitation to the communion table? It is pretty inclusive, maybe that should guide us.

What does this all mean? It was very clear on March 20 that we need to have further discussions as a congregation, and not just on the specific issue of marriage. While several of those who commented were quite critical of the Pastor and the Session for poor communication with the congregation, it is apparent that the congregation as a whole does not share many stories of their personal faith, congregational experiences or denominational views with each other. I trust that the Session will prayerfully and expeditiously address this broader concern.

Action item: those who planned the March 20 Conversations will proceed to plan a forum on *Marriage in a Changing World* as the next step.

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April 8, 2011