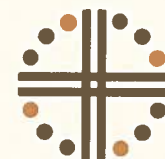


May 11, 2011

Dear National Capital Presbytery,



**NATIONAL CAPITAL**  
**PRESBYTERY**  
Missional • Pastoral • Prophetic

Tuesday the deciding vote was taken on revising G-6.0106b to read in a fashion which does not preclude a Presbytery or a congregation from ordaining and installing monogamous homosexual persons in committed relationships from elected office. Some Presbyterians grieve this action while others support it. This action signals a shift in our life together as Presbyterians which liberal, conservative, progressive, evangelical, and middle of the road folks recognize as something that will not likely shift back. We Presbyterians tend to hem and haw on an issue for 30-40 years before it settles into something. Most folks from both sides of the aisle and even the middle section seem to agree that this shift will probably not shift back.

The question then becomes how shall we live in a community of mutual submission and mutual forbearance on this side of this shift? We need to talk about that together. For some who read the Bible more as an exact moral guide, they continue to see the Scriptures as forbidding homosexual practice. For others the inclusion of persons previously excluded is right and proper. They note that what we know about homosexuality now is more than was known by the Biblical writers and thus it is appropriate to adjust our morality accordingly. Each values the Biblical text as unique and authoritative. Each disagrees with the other regarding the moral indication of the text. Both read the text in a fashion valued by our church.

As I read the new wording of G-6.0106b, the particular Presbytery and the particular congregation is charged with the assessment of the gifts any candidate for elected office might manifest. In that regard a congregation may still exclude practicing homosexual persons from office. A Presbytery is still free to exclude homosexuals from minister membership in the Presbytery. Yet also a congregation may discern the gifts for ordained office on the part of a homosexual person for the office even while the Presbytery in which they reside may choose to exclude monogamous homosexuals from minister membership in the Presbytery itself. And vice-a-versa. Even as I offer this distinction, I expect there are those who will differ with it. We Presbyterians are, after all, constitutionally contrarian. It's one of our endearing qualities.

*Strengthening & Transforming Our Congregations*

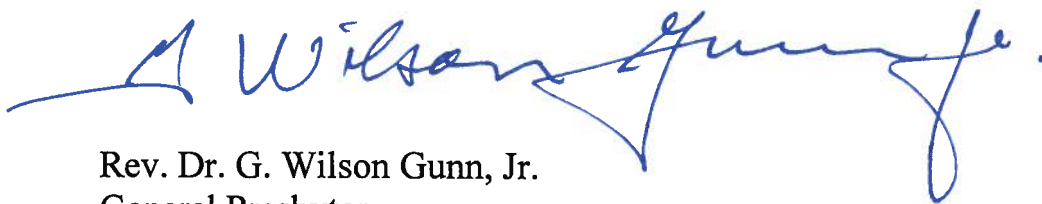
Our next chapter will be one about how we might listen, care, and honor the perspectives of those with whom we differ. How might those who promoted this change care for those who opposed it? How might those who opposed it continue in conversation with those who supported it? Can we practice a forbearance that honors the integrity of the other with whom we differ? What does that look like?

Our reality is that almost every congregation includes people of both of these perspectives as well as some who have more nuanced positions, some who have more naïve perspectives, and some who are just not that invested in this issue. How we have the next chapter of this conversation will have everything to do with the capacity of our more diverse congregations to continue to stay engaged with each other in ministry, mission and spiritual formation. Now we are invited to the practice of mutual forbearance in a culture that is more vociferously inclined. This is an opportunity to witness to the world how people of diverse perspectives can remain in conversation and covenant with each other.

Some wonder if we are becoming a church that just shares a polity and a pension plan. I'd add a few other things most of which are right there in our ordination vows. What I see sweeping across the church is a wonderfully networked set of congregations who work with other Presbyterians, across denominational lines, and in some instances across interfaith lines pursuing the Mission of God in the world in specific places. What I experience in you is a holiness of Spirit in congregations of every political inclination, cultural style, and language. What I see in you is the people of God, one in spirit, diverse in opinion, networked remarkably in mission and ministry.

You all continue to be in my prayers. I pray that you each be in each other's as well.

Grace and Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "G. Wilson Gunn, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rev. Dr. G. Wilson Gunn, Jr.  
General Presbyter

Frequently Asked Questions  
The Change in Ordination Standards of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

1. What has changed in the ordination standards for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, elders and deacons?

*The primary change is the removal of language from the PCUSA constitution that required those ordained “to live either in fidelity in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness” and replacing it with the words that those ordained must be “joyfully submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” The amendment also requires that “The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office... Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the Confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.” Presbyteries make that determination for ministers of word and sacrament; Sessions make the determination for elders and deacons.*

2. How did the change in ordination standards happen?

*The change was recommended by the 2010 General Assembly and has now been approved by a majority of the 173 presbyteries in the United States. Fifty-five percent of the ministers and elders voting in those presbyteries have approved the amendment.*

3. May congregations now ordain people who are openly gay?

*The new standards do not list specific behaviors that would automatically exclude someone for consideration for ordination, a change from the previous language . Each examining body is responsible for looking at all possible factors to determine if someone is being called to ordained ministry.*

4. What if an ordained minister, elder or deacon changes presbyteries or churches?

*If pastors, elders, and deacons are ordained in one location and move to another, they shall be examined according to the standards of that ordaining body before being able to take office. Those standards may or may not conform to the standards that were used by the body that originally ordained them.*

5. Will a congregation be required to change anything?

*A congregation cannot be forced to receive pastors or ordain elders and deacons of whom they do not approve. The congregation retains the right to elect its officers.*

6. Is the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians mandated?

*No, it is not required, but it is no longer prohibited by specific Constitutional language.*

7. Is a presbytery required to receive, by transfer of membership, an ordained sexually active gay or lesbian minister?

*No, each presbytery determines which ministers to receive into its membership.*

8. May a congregation continue to uphold the previous standards?

*Yes. The authority for ordaining elders and deacons is fully vested in the local congregation. The new language calls the ordaining body to be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying ordination standards to individuals.*

9. May a congregation or presbytery now ordain or install a sexually active homosexual?

*Yes, if after a thorough examination, the congregation or presbytery believes the person to be called by God to serve as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, elder or deacon and not to be living in violation of the church's ordination standard, its Confessions, or Scripture.*

10. Does the new language give candidates who are sexually active outside the covenant of marriage between a woman and a man the "right" to be ordained?

*Nobody has a "right" to be ordained. Ordination is based on a sense of God's call as confirmed by the ordaining body.*

11. May a presbytery continue to function with the standard of "fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" when examining candidates for ordination?

*Yes, as long as the standards used are applied on a case-by-case basis. The new language calls the ordaining body to be guided by Scripture and the Confessions in applying ordination standards to each candidate.*

12. May questions about a candidate's sexuality be asked or are such questions forbidden?

*Any question is allowed during an examination. The acknowledgement of being sexually active outside the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman does not automatically disqualify a person from being ordained.*

13. Is a congregation required to call a pastor who is openly gay or lesbian?

*No.*

14. What do other denominations like ours say about this?

*The revised language is are very similar to Cumberland Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Church in America, which are silent on the issues of marital status, marital fidelity, sexual orientation, and other specific exclusions (see below).*

#### Constitution of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church

*The office of minister of word and sacrament is unique in the life of the church as to responsibility and usefulness. God calls persons and sets them apart for this ministry. The persons who fill this office should be sound in the faith, exemplary in conduct, and competent to perform the duties of the ministry. Persons who become ministers of the word and sacrament are due such respect as belongs to their office, but are not by virtue of their office more holy or righteous than other Christians. They share in the same vocation that belongs to all Christians to be witnesses to the gospel in word and deed. They differ from other Christians only with regard to the office to which they are called, which is their station in life.*

#### Constitution of the Reformed Church in America

*Ordination issues are spread throughout their documentation, so rather than reprint it, we refer you to their website: <https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=2054>*