



July 2008

Dear Members and Friends of Central Presbyterian Church,

This letter, from your Session (Elders and Pastoral Staff), summarizes major events from the General Assembly meeting this June in San Jose, California. The General Assembly (GA) is the highest level governing body of the Presbyterian Church USA, and meets every two years to discuss and decide issues of particular relevance to the national church.

At this meeting of General Assembly, the Trimble Family was commissioned for their missional call to Forman Christian College in Lahore, Pakistan. They are among the 50+ missionaries to represent the PCUSA around the globe, and they were among a very small group being sent directly from a local congregation. In addition, the GA added over one million dollars to the world mission budget of the PCUSA enabling us to become a more missional denomination.

The General Assembly took a series of additional actions, however, that may be cause for concern. The Presbyterian Church has consistently been governed by three books, the Bible, The Book of Confessions and The Book of Order. In an attempt to clarify the meaning of the Book of Order (BOO), the General Assembly has, from time to time over the past 200 years, issued documents referred to as Authoritative Interpretations. Historically, these interpretations have been consistent with and supported the "rules we live by" found in the Book of Order.

As you may be aware, one of the most contentious issues within the PCUSA (and indeed within a number of main line Protestant denominations) for the past 30 or 40 years has been the issue of ordaining avowed practicing homosexuals into ordained leadership positions within the church (Ruling Elders, Deacons and Ministers). The just concluded GA addressed this complex issue from a number of perspectives:

- GA retained the Biblical and Book of Order definition of marriage as a covenant before God of the lifelong commitment made by a woman and a man to each other, against an overture to change its definition.
- GA removed the Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of ordination requirements which stated a gracious and truth filled stance concerning love for, and ministry to homosexual people, yet *not ordaining them to offices in the church*. This AI had been in place for 30 years, providing guidance to our denomination on this particular issue.
- GA replaced the former AI with one allowing individual churches and presbyteries the latitude to set their own more local standards for ordination.
- The GA further recommended to all 173 Presbyteries of our denomination that they remove a portion of our Book of Order, (G-6.0106b.), which clearly restricts ordination to people in marriages of one man to one woman and those who practice celibacy in singleness, and replace it with wording that is less restrictive and more conducive to ordaining active practicing homosexuals.

- The GA also voted to explore the retranslation the Heidelberg Catechism (129 questions and answers of Protestant instruction), written in 1563, to be edited because, it is contended, that the English translation from the German language is incorrect. This would change an answer to one of its questions that quotes Scripture from I Corinthians that homosexual practice is a sin and not a biblical practice.

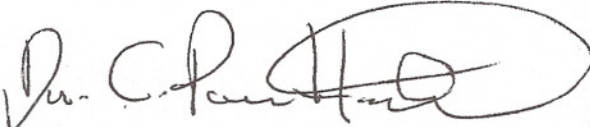
These decisions have different timings. The Authoritative Interpretation, which is a General Assembly document, is immediately effective. The Book of Order change and the Heidelberg Catechism change both require the assent of presbyteries (the Book of Order change would require a majority of presbyteries to approve, and the change to the Book of Confessions would require a 2/3 vote in agreement). It is certainly possible, and perhaps even likely, that the presbyteries will not vote to affirm the GA's recommendations concerning these actions. This would result in a dysfunctional situation where the GA's Authoritative Interpretation is in conflict with the Book of Order. Your Ordained Staff and Session will continue to monitor developments as presbyteries vote on these critical issues.

Within our Presbytery, the Presbytery of Donegal, there is no such dysfunction, since our Presbytery has soundly reaffirmed that it will abide by the PCUSA Book of Order when considering ordination of any individual within our Presbytery. Central Presbyterian Church also abides by the Book of Order regulations for ordination, and we were the Church who presented this overture to Donegal Presbytery.

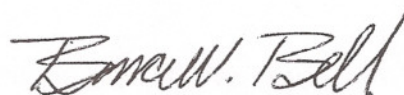
Your Session is concerned over these decisions of the GA and will monitor events at the local, presbytery and national level. We affirm all of the ordination standards, recognizing that we all sin and fall short of the Glory of God, but that all who own and repent of their shortcomings and sins are made fit for His service. We sincerely request that you pray for each elder and pastor who will earnestly be studying, discussing, and praying, in order to determine the most Christ-centered response to these critical issues. We want to remain faithful to the Lord and His Word in heart, mind, soul, and action.

If you have any concerns over these matters and would like to speak with the pastors and/or the elders, please call the church office and a pastor or elder will respond. With thanksgiving for being a part of the Body of Christ, may we stand together, united for the very sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Christ's Love and Service Together,



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Enclosed is a list of your elders, their phone numbers and email addresses if you desire to contact them.