

***Policy Statement and Recommendations***  
***190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978)***  
***(Definitive Guidance/Authoritative Interpretation on issues related***  
***to homosexuality and ordination)***

***Introduction***

- 1 The General Assembly was asked by the Presbyteries of New York City and of the Palisades to give “definitive guidance” concerning the eligibility for ordination of the professional ministry of persons who openly acknowledge homosexual orientation and practice. One thing has become very clear in consideration of this request. The church must respond to this issue. Numbers of persons both within the church and outside it experience homosexuality, either as a transient part of their growth as persons or as a continuing force in their own lives or in the lives of family members and friends. New data in psychology and the social sciences have appeared that challenge the church’s traditional posture on this matter. The time has come for the church to confront this issue, to reexamine and refresh its theological understanding of homosexuality in the light of God’s revelation to us in Jesus Christ, and to renew its practical approach to mission and ministry among homosexual persons.
  
- 2 The issue submitted to this General Assembly is a call for guidance to individual Christian persons, congregations and presbyteries concerning the status of self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons within the church. Specifically, the presbyteries seek guidance on the matter of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Difficult questions are involved in this request. Should the General Assembly foster the creation of a new situation in the church, in which practicing homosexual persons would be free to affirm their lifestyle publicly and to obtain the church’s blessing upon this through ordination? Or should the church reaffirm its historic opposition to homosexual behavior? These questions must be dealt with in the context of the whole life and mission of the church. To answer them, we must examine the nature of homosexuality according to current scientific understandings, interpreted within the context of our theological understandings of God’s purpose for human life. To this purpose, in all its rich variety, the Scripture attests. Church membership, ordination, pluralism and unity in the church, and the Christian response in ministry and mission must then, in turn, be examined.

***Homosexuality Within a Theological Context***

- 3 New data and hypotheses in psychology, sociology, endocrinology, and the other secular disciplines cannot in themselves determine a shift in the church’s posture on this issue. Very frequently these disciplines

shed new light upon our understanding of homosexuality and how the church should respond to it. Frequently the results of scientific inquiry are tentative and inconclusive, neutral in their theological and ethical implications, or even weighted with unspoken values and assumptions that are misleading against the background of biblical faith. Therefore, we must address the task of theologically interpreting these extrabiblical data, while at the same time renewing our understanding of Scripture and tradition in the light of those data in the sciences.

- 4 Medical and psychological theories concerning homosexuality and its causes are complex and often contradictory. Among the multitude of hypotheses and conclusions currently being entertained, a small but significant body of facts emerges that enlarges our understanding of what homosexuality is and how we should respond to it. It seems clear that homosexuality is primarily a matter of affectional attraction that cannot be defined simply in terms of genital acts, although the homosexual orientation may be so expressed.
- 5 Most human beings experience occasional homosexual attraction, although not always consciously. It is reasonably certain that somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of the human population is exclusively or predominantly homosexual in orientation. Exclusively homosexual persons appear to be remarkably resistant to reorientation through most psychiatric methods. Most exclusively homosexual persons believe that their condition is irreversible. Some secular therapists working with those motivated to change report some success in reversal, and counselors employing both the resources of Christian faith and psychotherapeutic techniques report a higher rate of success. It appears that two critical variables are involved. First, do therapist and client believe that change is possible? Second, how convinced is the client that change is desirable?
- 6 The causes of homosexuality now appear to be remarkably numerous and diverse. There is no one explanation for homosexual affectional preference, and thus neither the persons involved nor their parents can be singled out as responsible for the homosexual orientation. Most authorities now assume that both heterosexuality and homosexuality result primarily from psychological and social factors affecting human beings during their growth toward maturity, with some possible influence from biological factors. Most homosexual persons do not consciously choose their affectional preference, although they do face the choice of whether to accept it or to seek change, and of whether to express it in genital acts or to remain celibate. However, although homosexual affectional preference is not always the result of conscious choice, it may be interpreted as part of the involuntary and often unconscious drive away from God's purposes that characterizes fallen human nature, falling short of God's intended patterns for human sexuality.

- 7 Human sexuality has a dynamic quality. Within the constraints of nature, nurture serves to transform both sexual identity and intersexual preference. Our sexuality is vulnerable to shaping influences from many directions.
- 8 As the embryo develops, the single root organism unfolds and differentiates, sometimes making a boy, sometimes a girl, sometimes a sexually ambiguous being. Following an initial gender assignment, we believe and nurture one another and ourselves into authentic or inauthentic sexual beings.
- 9 We find here a parallel to the Genesis account of the creation of humankind, which speaks of the precious and precarious balance of male and female life together that perpetually needs both our affirmation and God's upholding grace. Genesis offers polemic against deviations from the wise separation of humankind into man and woman. It is this separation that makes union possible. In creation, God separates woman from man so that they are constituted with yearning for each other. Becoming one flesh they portray the glory of his image in the earth.
- 10 To say that God created humankind male and female, called man and woman to join in partnership as one flesh, and commanded them to multiply (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24) is to describe how God intended loving companionship between a man and a woman to be a fundamental pattern of human relationship and the appropriate context for male-female genital sexual expression. However, to say that God created humankind male and female, called man and woman to join in partnership as one flesh, and commanded them to multiply is not to state that God intended to limit the possibility for meaningful life to heterosexual marriage. Jesus' own celibate lifestyle and his commitment to his own ministry rather than to the biological family (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21) demonstrates the blessing of God upon life lived outside the covenant of marriage.
- 11 This biological and theological argument has implications for homosexuality. It appears that one explanation of the process in which persons develop homosexual preferences and behavior is that men and women fall away from their intended being because of distorted or insufficient belief in who they are. They are not adequately upheld in being male and female, in being heterosexual, by self-belief and the belief of a supporting community.
- 12 Therefore, it appears that what is really important is not what homosexuality is but what we believe about it. Our understanding of its nature and causes is inconclusive, medically and psychologically. Our beliefs about homosexuality thus become paramount in

- importance. Do we value it, devalue it, or find it morally neutral? Do we shape an environment that encourages movement toward homosexuality or one that nurtures heterosexual becoming?
- 13 We conclude that homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity. This we affirm, despite the fact that some of its forms may be deeply rooted in an individual's personality structure. Some persons are exclusively homosexual in orientation. In many cases homosexuality is more a sign of the brokenness of God's world than of willful rebellion. In other cases homosexual behavior is freely chosen or learned in environments where normal development is thwarted. Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously sought or chosen, it is neither a gift from God nor a state nor a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world.
  - 14 How are we to find the light and freedom promised to us by our Lord through the Holy Spirit in such a world? Where do we find norms for authentic life, which in truth transcend the conditioning of history and culture, and the power to live by them?
  - 15 We dare begin no other place than with the living Word, Jesus Christ, who in risen power transcends time and space and the limitations of our values, norms, and assumptions to confront, judge and redeem us. It is here that all theological confession and affirmation must begin – in the light of God as revealed to us in the incarnate and living Word, Jesus Christ. It is his exposure of our sin, his obedient sacrificial love, and his being raised in power to continue his activity of redemption of this world (1 Cor.15: 20-28) that brings us new light. This same God in Jesus Christ comes to make us whole, to redeem creation, and to restore it to the goodness proclaimed at creation. Yet the prelude to this redemption is divine judgment.
  - 16 To look at the Christ is to see at once the brokenness of the world in which we live and the brokenness of our own lives. This comes as the supreme crisis in our life.
  - 17 Yet, in the moment of this crisis, the Spirit of God brings the confirmation of divine forgiveness, moves us to respond in faith, repentance and obedience and initiates the new life in Christ.
  - 18 Jesus Christ calls us out of the alienation and isolation of our fallen state into the freedom of new life. This new life redeems us as sexual beings but is impossible without repentance. To claim that God's love for us removes divine judgment of us is to eliminate the essence of divine love and to exchange grace for romantic sentimentality. There is a necessary judgment in God's love – else it cannot redeem. It was this Christ who said to the woman in adultery, "go and sin no more" (John 8:1-12), and to the rich young ruler "One thing you still lack.

Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor... and come, follow me.”(Luke 18:22 and parallels.)

- 19 Jesus Christ calls us out of the alienation, brokenness, and isolation of our fallen state into the freedom of new life in Christ. We deny that this new life liberates us to license and affirm that it frees and empowers us for lives of obedience whereby all of life becomes subject to his Lordship.

### ***Scripture and Homosexuality***

- 20 We have already indicated that we must examine scientific data but must move beyond them in order to understand what our sexuality means and how it should be expressed. We anchor our understanding of homosexuality in the revelation in Scripture of God’s intention for human sexuality.
- 21 In order to comprehend the biblical view of homosexuality, we cannot simply limit ourselves to those texts that directly address this issue. We must first understand something of what the Scriptures teach about human sexuality in general. As we examine the whole framework of teaching bearing upon our sexuality from Genesis onward, we find that homosexuality is a contradiction of God’s wise and beautiful pattern for human sexual relationships revealed in Scripture and affirmed in God’s ongoing will for our life in the Spirit of Christ. It is a confusion of sexual roles that mirrors the tragic inversion in which men and women worship the creature instead of the Creator. God created us male and female to display in clear diversity and balance the range of qualities in God’s own nature. The opening chapters of Genesis show that sexual union as “one flesh” is established within the context of companionship and the formation of the family. Nature confirms revelation in the functional compatibility of male and female genitalia and the natural process of procreation and family continuity.
- 22 Human sin has deeply affected the processes by which sexual orientation is formed, with the result that none of us, heterosexual or homosexual, fulfill perfectly God’s plan for our sexuality. This makes it all the more imperative for revelation to make clear for us how our sexual relationships are to be conducted so as to please God and challenge us to seek God’s will instead of following our own. Though none of us will ever achieve perfect fulfillment of God’s will, all Christians are responsible to view their sins as God views them and to strive against them. To evade this responsibility is to permit the church to model for the world forms of sexual behavior that may seriously injure individuals, families, and the whole fabric of human society. Homosexual persons who will strive toward God’s revealed will in this area of their lives, and make use of all the resources of grace,

- can receive God's power to transform their desires or arrest their active expression.
- 23 Within the context of general biblical teaching on human sexuality, a number of passages dealing specifically with homosexuality are significant for our response to this issue. These are, of course, complementary to the wider biblical themes of creation, fall and redemption.
- 24 Three Scriptures specifically address the issue of homosexual behavior between consenting males: Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, and Romans 1:26-27. Romans 1:26-27 also addresses the issue of homosexual behavior between consenting females. These three passages stand in an integral and complementary relationship. Leviticus 20:13 regards homosexual behavior as an "abomination."
- 25 In the Reformed tradition, the Leviticus passages are considered part of the moral law and thus are different in kind from Levitical proscriptions against certain foods, for instance, which belong to the ritual law. Jesus declared "all foods clean" (Mark 7:19) – one declaration among many that the ritual law of the Old Testament is transcended and fulfilled in him. Moral law in the New Testament is not the means of salvation, for that is Christ alone. Rather, obedience to the moral law is a fruit of grace and salvation.
- 26 Genesis 19:1-29 and Judges 19:16-26 show that homosexual rape is a violation of God's justice. II Peter 2:6-10 and Jude 7 suggest a wider context of homosexual practice in Sodom, implying that such rape was but one expression of prior homosexual practice in the population.
- 27 Romans 1:26-27 speaks to the problem of homosexual passion, describing it as "dishonorable," as well as homosexual behavior, which is described as "unnatural." By "unnatural" the Scripture does not mean contrary to custom, or contrary to the preference of an particular person, but rather contrary to that order of universal human sexual nature that God intended in Genesis 1 and 2.
- 28 We emphasize that Paul here includes homosexual behavior in a larger catalogue of sins, which includes pride, greed, jealousy, disobedience to parents, and deceit. Homosexual behavior is no greater a sin and no less a sin than these.
- 29 Two other texts, I Corinthians 6:9-10 and I Timothy 1:9-10, show further New Testament opposition to homosexual behavior. I Corinthians probably distinguishes between the more passive partners or catamites (*malakoi*) and the more active partners (*arsenokoitai*). Homosexual relationships in the Hellenistic world were widespread. We may safely assume that some were characterized by tenderness,

- commitment, and altruism. Yet the New Testament declares that all homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian faith and life. No Scriptures speak of homosexuality as granted by God. No Scriptures permit or condone any of the forms of homosexuality. In Matthew 19:1-12, Jesus reaffirms God's intention for sexual intercourse, enduring marriage between husband and wife, and affirms godly celibacy for those not entering the marriage covenant.
- 30 The biblical revelation to Israel, reaffirmed in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, portrayed in the theology and human creation, specifically reflected in the ethical teachings in both the Old and New Testaments, and confirmed in nature, clearly indicates that genital sexual expression is meant to occur within the covenant of heterosexual marriage. Behavior that is pleasing to God cannot simply be defined as that which pleases others or expresses our own strong needs and identity; it must flow out of faithful and loving obedience to God. Sin cannot simply be defined as behavior that is selfish or lustful. Many unselfish deeds ignore God's expressed intentions for our lives. Homosexual Christians who fail to recognize God's revealed intent for sexual behavior and who move outside God's will in this area of their lives may show many gifts and graces. They may evidence more grace than heterosexual believers who so readily stand in judgment over them. This does not mean that God approves their behavior in the area in which they are failing to be obedient.
- 31 To conclude that the Spirit contradicts in our experience what the Spirit clearly said in Scripture is to set Spirit against Spirit and to cut ourselves loose from any objective test to confirm that we are following God and not the spirits in our culture or our own fallible reason. The church that destroys the balance between Word and Spirit, so carefully constructed by the Reformers to insure that we follow none other than Jesus Christ who is the Word, will soon lose its Christian substance and become indistinguishable from the world. We have been charged to seek "new light from God's Word," not "new light" contrary to God's Word.

### ***Church Membership***

- 32 Persons who manifest homosexual behavior must be treated with the profound respect and pastoral tenderness due all people of God. There can be no place within the Christian faith for the response to homosexual persons of mingled contempt, hatred, and fear that is called homophobia.
- 33 Homosexual persons are encompassed by the searching love of Christ. The church must turn from its fear and hatred to move toward the homosexual community in love and to welcome homosexual inquirers to its congregations. It should free them to be candid about their identity and convictions, and it should also share honestly and humbly

with them in seeking the vision of God's intention for the sexual dimensions of their lives.

- 34 As persons repent and believe, they become members of Christ's body. The church is not a citadel of the morally perfect; it is a hospital for sinners. It is the fellowship where contrite, needy people rest their hope for salvation on Christ and his righteousness. Here in community they seek and receive forgiveness and new life. The church must become the nurturing community so that all whose lives come short of the glory of God are converted, reoriented, and built up into Christian maturity. It may be only in the context of loving community, appreciation, pastoral care, forgiveness, and nurture that homosexual persons can come to a clear understanding of God's pattern for their sexual expression.
- 35 There is room in the church for all who give honest affirmation to the vows required for membership in the church. Homosexual persons who sincerely affirm "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior" and "I intend to be his disciple, to obey his word, and to show his love" should not be excluded from membership.

### ***Ordination***

- 36 To be an ordained officer is to be a human instrument touched by divine powers but still an earthen vessel. As portrayed in Scripture, the officers set before the church and community an example of piety, love, service, and moral integrity. Officers are not free from repeated expressions of sin. Neither are members and officers free to adopt a lifestyle of conscious, continuing, and unresisted sin in any area of their lives. For the church to ordain a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be to act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ.
- 37 The repentant homosexual person who finds the power of Christ redirecting his or her sexual desires toward a married heterosexual commitment, or finds God's power to control his or her desires and adopts a celibate lifestyle, can certainly be ordained, all other qualifications being met. Indeed, such candidates must be welcomed and be free to share their full identity. Their experience of hatred and rejection may have given them a unique capacity for love and sensitivity as wounded healers among heterosexual Christians, and they may be incomparably equipped to extend the church's outreach to the homosexual community.
- 38** We believe that Jesus Christ intends the ordination of officers to be a sign of hope to the church and the world. Therefore our present

understanding of God's will precludes the ordination of persons who do not repent of homosexual practice.

### ***Pluralism and Unity in the Church***

- 39 We of the 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978) realize that not all United Presbyterians can in conscience agree with our conclusions. Some are persuaded that there are forms of homosexual behavior that are not sinful and that persons who practice these forms can legitimately be ordained.
- 40 This is wholly in keeping with the diversity of theological viewpoint and the pluralism of opinion that characterize the United Presbyterian Church. We are concerned not to stifle these diverging opinions and to encourage those who hold them to remain within the church. As Paul clearly teaches in Eph. 4:1-16, as members of Christ's body we desperately need one another. None of us is perfect. No opinion or decision is irreformable. Nor do we mean to close further study of homosexuality among the presbyteries and congregations. Quite the contrary, the action we recommend to the judicatories includes a firm direction to study this matter further, so that fear and hatred of homosexual persons may be healed and mission and ministry to homosexual persons strengthened and increased. The pluralism that can bring paralyzing weakness to the church when groups pursue their vision in isolation from one another can bring health and vigor when they practice pluralism-in-dialogue.
- 41** We want this dialogue to continue. Nevertheless, we judge that it cannot effectively be pursued in the uncertainty and insecurity that would be generated by the Assembly's silence on this matter at this time. On the basis of our understanding that the practice of homosexuality is a sin, we are concerned that homosexual believers and the observing world should not be left in doubt about the church's mind on this issue during any further period of study. Even some who see some forms of homosexual behavior as moral are concerned that persons inside and outside the church will stumble in their faith and understanding if this matter is not resolved.

### ***Ministry and Mission***

- 42** In ministry the church seeks to express and portray the grace and mercy of Christ in worship, nurture, evangelism, and service to those within the covenant community. In mission the church

proclaims to all the good news of redemption and reconciliation, calls persons and nations to repentant faith in Christ, and promotes and demonstrates the advance of his rule in history through healing works of mercy and prophetic witness that aim at justice and liberation.

- 43** In its ministry and mission the church must offer both to homosexual persons and to those who fear and hate them God's gracious provision of redemption and forgiveness. It must call both to repentant faith in Christ, urging both toward loving obedience to God's will.
- 44** The church's grappling with the issue of homosexuality has already energized its membership in a remarkable awakening of prayer and theological study. Our study should continue with the aim of reaching harmony in our diverging positions on homosexuality and other crucial issues. Our prayer should be concentrated upon this process of internal reconciliation and also upon the creation of ministry with homosexual persons. Great love and care must be exercised toward homosexual persons already within the church, both those who have affirmed their sexual identity and practice and those who have in conscience chosen not to do so. We urge candidates committees, ministerial relations committees, personnel committees, nominating committees and judicatories to conduct their examination of candidates for ordained office with discretion and sensitivity, recognizing that it would be a hindrance to God's grace to make a specific inquiry into the sexual orientation or practice of candidates for ordained office or ordained officers where the person involved has not taken the initiative in declaring his or her sexual orientation.
- 45** The Christian community can neither condone nor participate in the widespread contempt for homosexual persons that prevails in our general culture. Indeed, beyond this, it must do everything in its power to prevent society from continuing to hate, harass, and oppress them. The failure of the church to demonstrate grace in its life has contributed to the forcing of homosexual persons into isolated communities. This failure has served to reinforce the homosexual way of life and to heighten alienation from both church and society. The church should be a spiritual and moral vanguard leading society in response to homosexual persons.
- 46** Through direct challenge and support the church should encourage the public media - television, film, the arts, and literature - to portray in a wholesome manner robust fully human life expressing the finer qualities of the human spirit. It should call upon its members and agencies to work to eliminate prejudicial and stereotypical images of homosexual persons in the public media.

## ***Decriminalization and Civil Rights***

- 47 There is no legal, social, or moral justification for denying homosexual persons access to the basic requirements of human social existence. Society does have a legitimate role in regulating some sexual conduct, for criminal law properly functions to preserve public order and decency and to protect citizens from public offense, personal injury, and exploitation. Thus, criminal law properly prohibits homosexual and heterosexual acts that involve rape, coercion, corruption of minors, mercenary exploitation, or public display. However, homosexual and heterosexual acts in private between consenting adults involve none of these legitimate interests of society. Sexual conduct in private between consenting adults is a matter of private morality to be instructed by religious precept or ethical example and persuasion, rather than by legal coercion.
- 48 Vigilance must be exercised to oppose federal, state, and local legislation that discriminates against persons on the basis of sexual orientation and to initiate and support federal, state, or local legislation that prohibits discrimination against persons on the basis of sexual orientation in employment, housing, and public accommodations. This provision would not affect the church's employment policies.

## ***Conclusions***

### ***I. Response to Overture 9 (1976)***

- 49 The Presbytery of New York City and the Presbytery of the Palisades have asked the General Assembly to give "definitive guidance" in regard to the ordination of persons who may be otherwise well qualified but who affirm their own homosexual identity and practice.
- 50 The phrase "homosexual persons" does not occur in the Book of Order of the United Presbyterian Church. No phrase within the Book of Order explicitly prohibits the ordination of self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons to office within the church. However, no phrase within the Book of Order can be construed as an explicit mandate to disregard sexual practice when evaluating candidates for ordination. In short, the Book of Order does not give explicit direction to presbyteries, elders, and congregations as to whether or not self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons are eligible or ineligible for ordination to office.

- 51 Therefore, the 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America offers the presbyteries the following definitive guidance:
- 52 That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in Form of Government, Chapter VII, Section 3 (37.03):...“It is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, everyone undertaking a particular ministry should have a sense of inner persuasion, be sound in the faith, living according to godliness, have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a lawful judicatory of the Church.”
- 53 In relation to candidates for the ordained ministry, committees should be informed by the above guidance.

## ***II. Recommendations***

- 54 Consistent with this policy statement and conclusions, the 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978):
- 55 1. Adopts this policy statement and directs the Office of the General Assembly to send a copy of the policy statement to all congregations, presbyteries, and synods and to provide it for widespread distribution.
- 56 2. Receives the background paper of the Task Force to Study Homosexuality as a study document, and directs the Office of the General Assembly to provide copies to all congregations, presbyteries, and synods and to make such copies available to others upon request.
- 57 3. Urges judicatories, agencies, and local churches to undertake a variety of educational activities, using both formal and informal church structures and organizations.
- 58 a. Since homosexuality is one issue that helps clarify general responsibility to God in the world and focuses many dimensions of belief and action, such educational activities should probe such basic issues as (1) the strengthening of family life; (2) ministry to single persons and affirmation of their full participation in the Christian community; (3) nurturing lifestyles in our families, congregations, and communities that celebrate the values of friendship with peers of one’s own sex and the opposite sex, committed choice of life-mates, joyous and loving fidelity within marriage, the establishment of homes where love and care can nurture strong children able to give loving service to others, and the fashioning of an atmosphere of justice, truth and kindness that

signals Christ's presence; (4) understanding how to extend ministries of deep concern and challenge to those who through choice or circumstance are sexually active, homosexually or heterosexually, outside the covenant of marriage; (5) helping those whose ability to show loving concern is destroyed by homophobia – the irrational fear or and contempt for homosexual persons.

- 59 b. Workshops in synods and presbyteries should be conducted both to explore ways to help homosexual persons participate in the life of the church and to discover new ways of reaching out to homosexual persons outside the church.
- 60 c. Courses on sexuality should be initiated by seminaries, colleges, and churches to provide officers and members with a systematic understanding of the dynamics of human sexuality as understood within the contexts of Christian ethics.
- 61 d. Contact and dialogue should be encouraged among groups and persons of all persuasions on the issue of homosexuality.
- 62 4. Urges presbyteries and congregations to develop outreach programs to communities of homosexual persons beyond the church to allow higher levels of rapport to emerge.
- 63 5. Urges agencies of the General Assembly, as appropriate, to develop responses to the following needs:
  - 64 A. Support for outreach programs by presbyteries and congregations to homosexual persons beyond the church to allow higher levels of rapport to emerge.
  - 65 B. Encouragement of contact and dialogue among groups and persons who disagree on whether or not homosexuality is sinful per se and whether or not homosexual persons may be ordained as church officers.
  - 66 C. Development of structures to counsel and support homosexual persons concerned about their sexuality and their Christian faith.
  - 67 D. Development of pastoral counseling programs for those affected or offended by the decision of this General Assembly.
- 68 6. Urges candidates committees, personnel committees, nominating committees, and judicatories to conduct their examination of candidates for ordained office with discretion and sensitivity, recognizing that it would be a hindrance to God's grace

to make a specific inquiry into the sexual orientation or practice of candidates for ordained office or ordained officers where the person involved has not take the initiative in declaring his or her sexual orientation.

- 69 7. Calls upon the media to continue to work to end the use of harmful stereotypes of homosexual persons; and encourages agencies of the General Assembly, presbyteries, and congregations to develop strategies to insure the end of such abuse.
- 70 8. Calls on United Presbyterians to reject in their own lives, and challenge in others, the sin of homophobia, which drives homosexual persons away from Christ and his church.
- 71 9. Encourages persons working in the human sciences and therapies to pursue research that will seek to learn more about the nature and causes of homosexuality.
- 72 10. Encourages the development of support communities of homosexual Christians seeking sexual reorientation or meaningful, joyous, and productive celibate lifestyles and the dissemination throughout the church of information about such communities.
- 73 11. Encourages seminaries to apply the same standards for homosexual and heterosexual persons applying for admission.
- 74 12. Reaffirms the need, as expressed by the 182<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (1970) for United Presbyterians to work for the decriminalization of private homosexual acts between consenting adults, and calls for an end to the discriminatory enforcement of other criminal laws against homosexual persons.
- 75 13. Calls upon United Presbyterians to work for the passage of laws that prohibit discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations based on the sexual orientation of a person.
- 76 14. Declares that these actions shall not be used to affect negatively the ordination rights of any United Presbyterian deacon, elder, or minister who has been ordained prior to this date.
- 77 Further, the 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (1978) calls upon those who in conscience have difficulty accepting the decisions of this General Assembly bearing on homosexuality to express that conscience by continued dialogue within the church.
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Excerpt from the Office of the General Assembly, Advisory Opinions: Note 8

"In 1978 the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted a statement known as an "authoritative interpretation" which said:

"For the church to ordain a self-affirming, practicing homosexual person to the ministry would be an act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ."  
(GA, 1978, p. 265)

In 1979 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted an identical statement. Those statements were reaffirmed by the 198<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1986 (GA, 1986, p. 194-199) and again in 1993 by the 205<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (GA 1993, p. 322). In 2001 the 213<sup>th</sup> General Assembly sent Overture A to the Presbyteries for a vote. That proposed amendment would have deleted that prohibition from the 1978 and 1979 statements (GA 2001, pp. 51-52). The proposed amendment failed and the 1978 language remains the standard. It is binding upon all PCUSA governing bodies..."

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**From the Minutes of the 1993 General Assembly 205, page 322  
(adopted as AI)**

1. Through the Book of Order and its established process for amendments.
2. Through the written opinions and decisions of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission.
3. Through an interpretation of existing provisions in the Book of Order made by General Assembly, which is clearly identified as an authoritative interpretation. (Since 1983 the Book of Order has required that requests for constitutional interpretation must first be referred to the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-13.0112)).

Therefore, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution finds that

- a. Current constitutional law in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is that self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons.
- b. Any changes to or interpretations of the constitutional law of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) under the present Book of Order must follow the change process described above in items 1., 2., or 3.