

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Our prayers are with you as you continue in ministry and witness to God's love through Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God for our partnership in God's mission and the opportunity to grow together in our faith as we reach out to God's people.

We are writing to you at this time to share with you about probable changes to the PC(USA) Book of Order. While not all the presbyteries have voted on these changes, it appears likely a majority will have approved these changes within a few weeks. We feel these changes may gain wider attention and want to share them with you in order for you to better understand what they may mean. If the majority of our presbyteries approve, the wording regarding the standards of ordination of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament, Elders and Deacons in our Book of Order will state:

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

The change in wording emphasizes the important responsibilities that sessions and presbyteries have to interpret Scripture and our Reformed confessions, and to apply church-wide standards as they discern the ordination of individual candidates for ministry. Ordaining bodies have always had, and will continue to have, the right and responsibility to determine their own memberships. Our church continues to affirm that all those called by God to ordained office acknowledge that Jesus is Lord of all and Head of the Church.

Passage of this amendment eliminates the explicit national standard that those who are called to office in the church are required "to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness." While this means that persons in a same-gender relationship can now be considered for ordination, it does not mean that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has endorsed same-gender relationships.

A decision on this amendment has not been easily reached, and the PC(USA) is hardly of one mind about it. However, whatever the impact this change may have on PC(USA) presbyteries and congregations, we in World Mission foresee no changes in our commitment to being in partnership with you as a result. We will continue to listen closely to the particular needs and gifts of our partners as we discern together how God leads us in God's mission. We always remember that we serve at the invitation of our global partners. We have always taken into consideration that our partners in other places in the world might have differing views on who is suitable for ordination, or who is suitable to be appointed as a mission co-worker.

We will be seeking an opportunity to discuss this further with you and we ask for your prayers as we move forward together in God's mission.

With you in Christ,

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(Also signed by respective Area Coordinators)