

**CHANGES TO THE PCUSA CONSTITUTION
&
CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CPC is a Presbyterian Church

- **What does it mean to be Presbyterian?**
 - Representative form of government
 - Each congregation appoints elders to sit with pastors on a Session which governs the local church
 - Each church belongs to a Presbytery, a regional body designed to supervise and serve the local churches
 - Representatives from each Presbytery attend General Assembly, a national meeting, where denomination-wide policies are created or modified by vote

Presbyterian Church (USA)

- **What is the PCUSA?**

- The branch of Presbyterianism to which CPC belongs.
- Born of a merger between two Presbyterian denominations in 1983.
- Fifth largest Protestant denomination in the US.
- One of nine Presbyterian denominations in the US.
- National offices are in Louisville, KY.
- Governed by a constitution made up of The Book of Confessions and The Book of Order.

What influence does the PCUSA have over CPC?

- The influence comes in two areas
 - Our theology (beliefs)
 - Book of Confessions consists of 11 historic confessions of faith that we agree to be guided by.
 - How we govern the church (polity)
 - Book of Order contains sections on church government, discipline and worship.

Why have recent changes to the PCUSA Constitution become a touchstone for some congregations?

- For over 50 years the PCUSA has been debating essential tenets of the Reformed faith particularly:
 - The authority of Scripture
 - The Lordship of Jesus Christ
- Social issues such as abortion, sexual ethics and ordination standards have continually been debated as well.

What has this meant to CPC?

- Scripture warns us of the dangers of allowing the surrounding culture to impact the Church with worldly philosophies and morality.
- The Church must stand upon the truth that God has revealed to it in Scripture and against influences from the culture that would undermine its witness to God's revelation.
- In 2001 the Session was compelled to reaffirm to our members, to the Downtown community and to the world particular confessional statements found in ***The Book of Confessions***.

CPC is a Confessing Church

- **The CPC Session joins faithful believers throughout the Church in confessing:**
 - That Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all and the way of salvation (5.077; 6:043; 7:170).
 - That Holy Scripture is the true and God's revealed Word, the Church's only infallible rule of faith and life (3.19; 5.001-.003; 6.001-.010, .052, .184; 7.113).
 - That God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life. This includes, but is not limited to, honoring the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, which was instituted and blessed by God as the only relationship within which sexual activity is appropriate (4.087-4.091; 5.245-.251; 6.131-6.139; 7.247-.249; 7.070; 9.47; G-6.0106b).

What does the PCUSA believe about the Authority of Scripture?

- “What is to be our authority for knowing Christ’s will?” The Presbyterian answer is the foundational Reformation principle “*sola scriptura*” (“Scripture alone”), proclaiming Scripture as our sole authority.
- Scripture is the means God has provided for us to learn the mind of Christ.
- In our confessions, the PCUSA identifies with this affirmation of the Protestant Reformation.

The Confession of 1967

- Denomination moved from one confessional document (*Westminster Confession and Shorter Catechism*) to a *Book of Confessions*.
 - Added the *Confession of 1967* along with other creeds from churches history.
- The doctrine of Scripture in the *Confession of 1967* departed from that of the *Westminster Confession*
 - A shift from the theological consensus of the *Westminster Confession* to a *Book of Confessions* sowed the seeds of theological discord.

Authority of Scripture

- High View of Scriptural Authority
 - The Westminster Confession states “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth...wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” 6.004
- Lower View of Scriptural Authority
 - The *Confession of 1967* states “The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literacy fashions of the places and times at which they were written.” 9.29
- This shift has had the effect of undercutting the authority of biblical pronouncements related to faith and ethics.

What does Jesus Christ believe about the Scriptures?

- To live under the Lordship of Christ is to live a life in obedience to Scripture.
- Jesus himself confirmed the absolute authority of the Old Testament for others and submitted to it himself (Matt. 4:1-10, 5:18-19, 19:4; Luke 4:1-12, 16:17, John 10:35).
- Jesus declared that he came to fulfill the Scriptures (Matt. 5:17, 21:42, Luke 4:21).

What does the PCUSA believe about the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

- **1991 General Assembly** - Non-Christian ritual@ communion
- **1993 ReImagining God Conference** - Speakers reject Jesus' incarnation, divinity and atonement on the cross
 - "I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff."
- **2000 Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference** - "...what's the big deal about Jesus?"
- **2001 General Assembly** - Defeated declaring Jesus Christ to be "the singular saving Lord".
- **2002 General Assembly** - Approved *Hope in the Lord Jesus Christ* including a key paragraph opening the door to universalism.
- **Resulted in denominational strife**

Why has the recent change to the denomination's ordination standards become a touchstone for some congregations in the PCUSA?

- 1978 Authoritative Interpretation (AI)
 - reaffirmed the sanctity of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman to be a God-given relationship to be honored by marital fidelity
 - Homosexual behavior is a sin and the church's present understanding of God's will precludes the ordination of persons who do not repent of homosexual practice.

General Assembly Actions

- 1993 General Assembly
 - Self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons.
- 1997 General Assembly
 - “Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.” G-6.0106b

GA Actions -continued

- 1998, 2001 & 2008 Presbytery Votes
 - Efforts to change the constitutional standard failed to gain approval by a majority of presbyteries.
- 2011 Presbytery Voted
 - Removed the constitutional requirement in the Book of Order that all ministers, elders, and deacons live in “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness”.

New Ordination Standard

- The new language reads:
 - *“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 effect of the new language opens up the possibility that persons in same-gender relationships can be considered for ordination.

Why has the New Form of Government become a touchstone for some congregations?

- Some of the concerns about the FOG include:
 - The meaning of the word “church” shifted increasing the role of the denomination at the expense of congregations.
 - Sessions’ ability to determine the distribution of benevolences is reduced, by allowing presbyteries to assess payments to support both per capita and mission budgets.
 - Ordination standards can be easily changed without amendments to the *Book of Order*: the areas of examination for candidates have been removed from the constitution.
 - Interim pastors are able to be called as the next pastor of the congregation they are serving, undermining the purpose of interims.
 - Presbyteries can remove pastors from their congregations without holding congregational meetings.
 - The church’s commitment to inclusivity is broadened.

Why are these PCUSA decisions of concern to the Session?

- Not consistent with the core values that have been defined by the Session: **Christ Centered, Biblically-based, Worship Focused, Missionally Committed, and Relationally Connected**
- Run counter to the Session's Confessing Church statement .

How has the Presbyterian Church USA dealt with theological controversy?

- Differences have resulted in separate denominations:
 - Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
 - Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)
- PCUSA affiliate organizations established
 - Like-minded persons discuss, discern and further theological issues, programs and initiatives.
 - Fellowship of Presbyterians is one of these groups

What is the Fellowship of Presbyterians (FoP)

- A group formed by seven large PCUSA churches to examine how to respond to the theological drift away from basic tenets of the Reformed faith such as the authority of Scripture and the Lordship of Jesus Christ which led to the change in ordination standards that has just been ratified by a majority of Presbyteries.

Why did CPC send representatives to the recent FoP Gathering?

- Gathering's Purpose
 - Revitalize our denomination around Reformed theology—remove it from a kind of “organizational sclerosis”
 - Find a way for those who differ with the theological drift and change in ordination standards to remain in the denomination and yet adhere to their beliefs.
 - Pastors Pat & Denny and Elders Gerry Mello and Anne Cowburn sent to consider the effect these changes will have so that we can discern God's will for CPC and make informed decisions based upon the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Church Options the FoP is Developing

- **Tier 1 - Nurturing Mission & Ministry In-place**
- **Tier 2 - Overlay Presbytery Concept**
- **Tier 3 - Intra Presbytery Option**
- **Tier 4 - New Reformed Body**
 - **Option 1:** Leave the PCUSA
 - **Option 2:** Become a “Union Church”
 - **Option 3:** Join the New Reformed Body and remain an affiliate member of the PCUSA

What is the New Reformed Body?

- An association, not a new denomination, under the FoP umbrella.
- Biblically and theological like-minded congregations committed to core beliefs that affirm the essential tenets of our reformed faith.
- Entrepreneurial and Missional leadership
- Provides a choice for congregations to remain in the PCUSA as an affiliate member or join a separate and distinct entity.

How is CPC Going to Move Forward?

- CPC is holding fast to the truth of the Bible, our Creeds and Confessions, Core Values, Mission and Vision.
- We are looking for ways to reconcile our beliefs with those of the PCUSA.
- Our primary goal is faithfulness to Jesus Christ's purposes for His Church.
- Attend FoP conference in January to gain more clarity about the various options available to congregations.

What Can You Do?

- Join your Session and Pastors in praying and seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance so we are able to discern the mind of Christ and fulfill God's will and purpose for CPC.