

The Presbytery of Cincinnati respectfully overtures the 217th General Assembly (2006) to approve the following:

The General Assembly amends the Policy Statement adopted by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America by deleting the following statements, as found in the Minutes of that General Assembly; and further, it amends the “position paper,” “Homosexuality and the Church,” adopted in 1979 by the 119th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States by deleting these same statements.

(1) “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.” (Minutes, page 262).

(2) “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.” (Minutes, page 262).

(3) “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.” (Minutes, page 262).

(4) “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.” (Minutes, page 262).

(5) “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.” (Minutes, page 263).

(6) “Yet the New Testament declares that all homosexual practice is incompatible with Christian faith and life.” (Minutes, page 263).

(7) “On the basis of our understanding that the practice of homosexuality is sin, we are concerned that homosexual believers and the observing world should not be left in doubt about the church’s mind on this matter during any further period of study.” (Minutes, page 264).

Rationale

A. Having read this series of quotations, readers of this overture may think that seeking to remove them is confrontational, at odds with cultivating the “disciplines of patience, mutual forbearance, and dedicated communal discernment” recommended in *The Final Report of the Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church* (lines 740-41). We remind our readers that the passages above, adopted in 1978 and 1979 by a majority,

have been read in the decades since by a homosexual minority as well. Indeed, the seventh passage is specifically addressed to this minority. We ask our readers to consider whether it was not this minority that was entitled to feel confronted—insulted, even injured.

- B. As *The Final Report of the Task Force* rightly points out, “The Reformed family of churches believes that there is no teacher but Jesus Christ” (line 52). If Jesus taught us anything, it is that we must love our neighbor as we love ourself. Like the Samaritan, our neighbor may be quite different from us and unpopular. Because mainline Christianity has not always felt the inclusive love of Jesus, it has lived to regret every one of its exclusionary practices.
- C. Under our Constitution, it is our *Book of Confessions* that declares “what [the church] believes”—our “convictions” and our “doctrines” (*Book of Order* G-2.0100). Nothing in our whole *Book of Confessions*, that “cloud of witnesses to one true faith,” declares homosexual practice per se to be sin. Their authors were surely aware of Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26-27, and the like. For example, the author of the Heidelberg Catechism (1573) specifically omits a possible reference to homosexual practice while otherwise incorporating a list of sins from 1 Corinthians 6:9. We are entitled to believe that the authors of our Confessions are silent here because they have been instructed by the great Teacher, first, on what it is that God really requires of us and then on how to read Scripture to begin with. *The Book of Order* rightly makes *The Book of Confessions* our church’s “guide in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures” (G-2.0100b).
- D. A Presbyterian belief that can be found in *The Book of Confessions* holds that when we “exclude, dominate, or patronize” our fellow human beings, “however subtly,” we “resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt” on our faith (The Confession of 1967, 9.44). In interpreting baptism, the Directory of Worship tells us that, “[a]s they are united with Christ through faith, Baptism unites the people of God with each other and with the church of every time and place. Barriers of race, gender, status, and age are to be transcended. Barriers of nationality, history, and practice are to be overcome.” (W-2.3005).
- E. While the Policy Statement of 1978 asks that “[g]reat love and care . . . be exercised toward homosexual persons already within our church,” the sentences that we seek to delete constitute a massive inhospitality. Gays and lesbians can hardly feel welcomed by a church that sees their sexual identity as an indication of the fallenness of the world.
- F. The Policy Statement of 1978 was at odds with informed opinion even then on whether sexual orientation has ever been a matter of choice. The Statement ignored informed opinion available even then about the danger of teaching gays and lesbians—especially young gays and lesbians—that they needed to reorient themselves sexually. To the social pressure from a heterosexual majority already felt by this sexual minority, the church has dangerously, uncharitably added the suggestion that they are cut off from grace if they are unable to make members of the other sex their chief objects of attraction.

- G. We seek to delete statements telling us that, no matter the fidelity, hopefulness, and charity of our gay and lesbian members in their intimate relations, those members are not permitted to make love. These statements will embarrass us more and more as time goes on because they are so alien to the example of Jesus, who taught that we are defiled only by what comes out of our heart. In 1978 and 1979 a majority read Scripture as imposing lifelong celibacy on millions of homosexual persons, all the while this majority considered the solace of covenanted, faithful relationships a birthright available only to itself. The sentences we seek to delete have made the Christian church a hypocrite.
- H. The Policy Statement of 1978 was hardly limited to, and is not to be confused with, “definitive guidance.” On the question of ordaining self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons, the lengthy statement offered to presbyteries a short section specifically identified as “definitive guidance,”¹ later considered by the Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly and then adopted by the 205th General Assembly (1993) as “authoritative interpretation.” Although we believe the “guidance” to have been in error, no part of “definitive guidance,” and thus no part of an “authoritative interpretation,” would be amended by adoption by this overture. Moreover, whether one agrees or not with the recommendation of the Task Force that the General Assembly “adopt no additional authoritative interpretations” and “remove no existing authoritative interpretations” on “sexuality and ordination” (*Report* lines 1461-62, 1466), adoption of this overture would do neither.

¹“Therefore, the 190th General Assembly (1978) of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America offers the presbyteries the following definitive guidance:

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, live according to godliness, have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a lawful judicatory of the Church.’”

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- I. We ask the General Assembly to yield to the Spirit of God and delete from the Policy Statement of 1978 those statements of longstanding insult to our gay and lesbian members. No less than our brothers and sisters and children who are heterosexual, they are part of God’s good creation.