

CCPC Marriage Task Force Marriage Sunday Discussion

Agenda

- Introduction and Progress Update
- Background on Polity
- Potential Discernment Outcomes
- Early Findings
- Congregational Survey
- Discussion Time

Introduction

The CCPC Marriage Task Force (MTF) was commissioned by the Session in June 2011, and charged with two specific objectives:

- Develop and lead a process of discernment for the congregation
- Make a recommendation to the Session on whether or not to allow same-sex marriage ceremonies on Church property

Progress Update

- Met regularly as a task force to review information collected, discuss the topic of same-sex marriage and manage the discernment process
- Invited congregational discussion and feedback in a variety of formats:
 - ✓ Open Forum meetings (April and May 2012)
 - ✓ Listening sessions (Sep. and Oct. 2012)
 - ✓ Joint meetings of Deacons and Session (Nov. 2011 and Nov. 2012)
- Created briefing document on same-sex marriage in the PC (USA)
- Established the Marriage Resource Center page on the CCPC website, and established a dedicated email address (MTF@chevyCHASEPC.org) to receive questions and comments
- Conducted a congregational survey that asked important questions related to same-sex marriage in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Current Polity of the PC (USA)

- “Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. ***For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship.*** In a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.” - Book of Order, W-4.9001
- In 2012, the General Assembly’s Committee on Civil Union and Marriage sent two proposals to the full General Assembly:
 - ✓ The first -- an attempt to change the definition of marriage from between a woman and a man to between two people -- ***was narrowly defeated***
 - ✓ Another proposal calling for a “season of serious study and discernment” about the meaning of Christian marriage was approved

How Does The PC (USA) Enforce Its Polity?

- Individual pastors and members of the Session take vows to uphold the polity of the Church as it exists at any given moment
- Mechanisms exist for investigating and prosecuting alleged violations of polity:
 - ✓ Administrative committees at the Presbytery level
 - ✓ General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission
- Each case is evaluated independently, with the most common form of disciplinary action being a public censure of the individual(s) in question
- It is unclear to what degree significant monetary or other more severe sanctions might also be applied
- Regardless, any given proceeding could require investment of time, money, and energy to defend against allegations

Linking Discernment to Recommendations

Potential Discernment Outcome

Illustrative Recommendation

Maintain Status Quo We are opposed to any movement away from Christian marriage as between a man and a woman as a matter of our scriptural or spiritual beliefs.

Session should confirm that same-sex marriage ceremonies may not be performed on CCPC's sanctuary, or elsewhere on CCPC's property.

Wait and See We are generally supportive of the idea of same-sex Christian marriage, but prefer to wait until the denomination reaches a broader consensus.

Do nothing at this time, and continue to monitor developments within the denomination.

Linking Discernment to Recommendations

(continued)

Potential Discernment Outcome

Advocate for Change

We strongly support same-sex Christian marriage as a matter of equality and justice, and want to take practical actions that help move both our congregation and the denomination forward on this issue.

Force the Issue

We feel called to promote same-sex Christian marriage as a matter of moral conscience, courage and obligation, and are willing to defy PC (USA) polity to achieve these ends.

Illustrative Recommendation

Session should publish a statement encouraging PC (USA) to change its polity.

Session to allow same-sex Christian marriage ceremonies to be performed on CCPC property, following same current marriage guidelines used for heterosexual couples, and declare support if any CCPC pastor chooses to officiate at any such service.

Early Findings (Pre-Survey)

- Clear interest in issue by the congregation, but ***perhaps not “top of mind”*** given low participation in the MTF’s various discussion forums.
- Many people initially approach the conversation by voicing views on societal, political, and legal trends regarding same-sex civil marriage even though the central task of the MTF regards the Church’s current polity regarding Christian marriage
- Most commentary can be fairly characterized as ***generally supportive*** of CCPC adopting a progressive stance on the issue of same-sex Christian marriage
- Members are eager to ***understand how actions might affect CCPC*** standing within the PC (USA) and the health of the congregation
- We have ***heard very little opposition*** to the idea of same-sex Christian marriage, but wonder if our forums have been sufficiently conducive to participants comfortably expressing opposing views

Occasion for the Congregational Survey

- The MTF conducted a simple survey of the congregation to:
 - ✓ Ensure we have provided every opportunity for all voices to be heard on this topic
 - ✓ Test the validity of the early findings that emerged through MTF's discussion forums
 - ✓ Allow the MTF to better calibrate CCPC's current position along the spectrum of potential discernment outcomes
 - ✓ Develop a data collection capstone to inform the MTF's final recommendations to Session
- The survey ran in January 2013 and was distributed via several methods:
 - ✓ Over the internet
 - ✓ During Worship Services
 - ✓ Direct mail to homes
- Participation was excellent, with over 280 responses received

Survey Results – Question 1

“I feel well-informed about the issues regarding same-sex marriage in the Presbyterian Church (USA), and understand the distinction between civil marriage and Christian marriage.”

<u>YES (1-3)</u>	NOT <u>SURE (4-7)</u>	<u>NO (8-10)</u>
77%	14%	9%

Respondents asked to choose the number on a scale of 1 to 10 which best reflects their opinion (1 = strongly agree; 5 = neither agree nor disagree; 10 = strongly disagree).

Survey Results – Question 2

“The Presbyterian Church (USA) should change the definition of marriage from the union of one man and one woman to the union of two persons.”

<u>YES (1-3)</u>	NOT <u>SURE (4-7)</u>	<u>NO (8-10)</u>
73%	9%	19%

Respondents asked to choose the number on a scale of 1 to 10 which best reflects their opinion (1 = strongly agree; 5 = neither agree nor disagree; 10 = strongly disagree).

Survey Results – Question 3

“As a matter of social justice, the issue of same-sex Christian marriage is just as important (and therefore should command as much of CCPC’s time and energy) as homelessness, hunger, prisoner re-entry, or health care for children.”

<u>YES (1-3)</u>	NOT <u>SURE (4-7)</u>	<u>NO (8-10)</u>
50%	29%	21%

Respondents asked to choose the number on a scale of 1 to 10 which best reflects their opinion (1 = strongly agree; 5 = neither agree nor disagree; 10 = strongly disagree).

Survey Results – Question 4

“It is important that CCPC remain in compliance with the prevailing polity of the Presbyterian Church (USA), even when it conflicts with our beliefs or preferences.”

<u>YES (1-3)</u>	NOT <u>SURE (4-7)</u>	<u>NO (8-10)</u>
29%	29%	41%

Respondents asked to choose the number on a scale of 1 to 10 which best reflects their opinion (1 = strongly agree; 5 = neither agree nor disagree; 10 = strongly disagree).

Survey Results – Question 5

“The CCPC Session should permit same-sex marriages to be performed on church property, regardless of possible denominational sanctions.”

<u>YES (1-3)</u>	<u>NOT SURE (4-7)</u>	<u>NO (8-10)</u>
53%	19%	28%

Respondents asked to choose the number on a scale of 1 to 10 which best reflects their opinion (1 = strongly agree; 5 = neither agree nor disagree; 10 = strongly disagree).

Survey Results – Selected Comments*

“I believe that the lifelong commitment of two persons to one another, regardless of gender, deserves Christian blessing and not simply civil recognition.”

“Having CCPC openly support marriage equality would be a tremendous step for the church and would help to show my daughter that her place of worship welcomes all families.”

“I think that it is important at present to work very hard on this issue within the overall church, not taking action in defiance of the 2012 General Assembly's stance on same-sex marriage.”

“This is NOT an issue that CCPC should wade into or get ahead of the curve on. If and when PC (USA) changes its position, then CCPC should conduct single sex church marriages. But not beforehand.”

“The Word of God is as clear as possible no room for misinterpretation, one man and one woman. Once we start to modify God's Words there will be no end to this practice, therefore, let us stand firm on His words.”

Discussion Time

What do the findings and survey results mean to you?

What other perspectives should we keep in mind?

How would you like to see CCPC move forward from here?