



## From the Pastor: CCPC and Same-Sex Marriage

In these last few weeks, the issue of same-sex marriage has taken center stage in our national discourse. North Carolina became the twenty-ninth state to vote a constitutional ban on gay marriage. President Obama declared his personal support for gay marriage, changing his earlier view of rejecting marriage in favor of same-sex unions. Our own congregation also began a discussion in Open Forum sessions presented by our Marriage Task Force. My purpose in writing this article is to clarify what is happening at CCPC.

The Presbyterian Church (USA), the denomination of which we are a part, has long defined marriage as between a man and a woman. In the PC(USA) pastors are specifically forbidden to marry people of the same gender. This creates a particular dilemma for churches in the District of Columbia where same-sex marriage is legal. What will we do when faithful members come to us and asked to be married in the church?

Shortly after same-sex marriages became legal in the District, the Session established a Marriage Task Force "for discernment and education on the role and stance of CCPC concerning the question of marriage between gay and lesbian couples," (minutes of the session meeting June 15, 2010). The Task Force has engaged in extensive study of the many considerations involved in the issue, including theology, church polity, and pastoral concerns. To date, the Task Force has met for

information sharing and discussion with the Session and Deacons and at two Open Forum presentations. The Task Force will offer more opportunities for education and discussion in the fall. Look for study materials to be made available on the church website this month.

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The theological concerns center around the understanding and use of Holy Scripture. Both those who affirm and those who oppose gay marriage can find texts to support their point of view. Biblical interpretation is an important area of study to fully understand the issues involved.

The Presbyterian Church's polity is based on the belief that God works through the community of faith to reveal God's will for the people. We struggle together to know God's will as we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because God works through flawed human beings, it is a messy process. The church is constantly evolving and reforming as God has "more truth and light yet to break forth out of his holy Word." (from a sermon by Pastor John Robinson as he sent the Pilgrims off to the Colonies, quoted in the 2010 Book of Order G-18.0101)

As stated above, church polity clearly forbids Presbyterian clergy from performing same-sex marriages. Clergy and sessions of churches that authorize the performing of such marriages risk disciplinary action. Congregations risk expensive

legal fees and put clergy at risk for removal from ordained office.

At the PC(USA) General Assembly this summer, the Assembly will consider overtures to change the definition of marriage as “between a woman and a man” to be “between two people.” The Assembly will also consider overtures that will allow for more pastoral discretion in whether or not to perform a marriage ceremony. The Task Force will be watching what happens at the assembly very closely.

When speaking of pastoral concerns, the Task Force and I recognize the need for compassion and care for those who might come to be married. How might we minister to them in light of the restrictions? We also recognize a pastoral concern for CCPC. Same-sex marriage raises strong feelings and the congregation is not all of the same mind. People of good faith hold differing understandings of God’s purposes in this matter. The intention of the Session in creating the Task Force is to move ahead deliberately, thoughtfully, and prayerfully with humility, respect, and concern for all.

The process this church undertakes to discern its stance on same-sex marriage is my greatest concern. How we make our decision is at least as important as what decision we make. We live in a culture that too easily shuts down conversation before it has had a chance to begin. People have many questions and concerns that need to be heard and considered. We must listen to each other with openness and respect. God has created of us a community of faith and bound us together in love. It is this unity of love, respect and struggle to fulfill God’s purposes that gives witness to a divided world that peace and reconciliation are possible even in times of difficult disagreement.

The Marriage Task Force is one of the finest working groups I have known. The process they are leading is a great benefit to the church, as CCPC, and to the church at large. Please keep the members of the Task Force in your prayers as they continue to lead us in this process and work toward making a recommendation to the session on what stance CCPC should take. The time will come to pray for the session as they make that decision. Please take advantage of the opportunities offered to further study and discuss the complexities of the issue and

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the stance of the church. We have much to learn from each other and God has much to teach us. May God’s Spirit guide the whole church in the ways of justice, love, and compassion.

*~ God’s Blessings, Pastor Molly Blythe Teichert*

*Members of the Marriage Task Force: Carol Crawford, Julia Fegley, Grace Hyslop, Betty-Kay Kindred, Rich Lindahl (Chair), and Britt Reynolds.*