



March 29, 2011

Dear Friends of First Pres,

Every now and then a church can face something from a source beyond us that has the capacity to impact us. We have such a matter soon upon us. I am writing this letter about something that comes to us from our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA).

For the last 35 years, our denomination has been wrestling with many theological issues that swirl around human sexuality – and particularly the issue of homosexuality. In the next few weeks, it is quite likely that you will begin to hear in the news about the passage of “Amendment 10-A.” This amendment to our *Book of Order* (the book that governs Presbyterian congregations) was passed by our General Assembly last summer and then sent to the Presbyteries for ratification. If a majority of Presbyteries pass the amendment, then the *Book of Order* is changed accordingly. Many amendments on this issue have gone to the Presbyteries over the years, and all have been defeated. But the trend in the voting this spring suggests to me that this time this version of the amendment will likely pass, and when this passes it will make the national news. Hence, our Session<sup>1</sup> wants you to be aware of the issue and what we are already doing here at First Pres before you read any articles that might appear in the newspapers.

Amendment 10-A is a significant shift in the PCUSA regarding who can be ordained as ministers, elders or deacons. Currently, the *Book of Order* states that “those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture...among these standards is the requirement to either live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness (G-6.0106b).” The new amendment will replace that language with the following: “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 key in the new amendment is not what it says, but what it doesn’t say. While “submitting joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ” is an obvious expectation for ministry, it becomes ambiguous related to issues of sexuality. By eliminating the previous language, this new statement now will open the door in some places within the PCUSA for the ordination of self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons.

The reasons the vote will likely pass this year are three-fold. Some pastors and elders who vote on these issues in Presbytery meetings have changed their mind about the issue. Other pastors and elders have grown weary of the recurrent debate and have not come to Presbytery meetings to vote. Third, a few congregations have now left the PCUSA and their absence has affected the vote in certain Presbyteries. All this is to say, that nationally we are about to face a change in the PCUSA. What has been a national standard will eventually have to become a more local standard. Each Presbytery and each congregation will be left to make their own decisions about how they will respond to this new standard.

While the news of Amendment 10-A is a large new reality, you should know that our denomination actually has more significant issues of theology that have us divided. The battle of Amendment 10-A is only one of many issues that divide the PCUSA. For that reason I began meeting with a group of six other pastors last summer. With the support of our Sessions, we have been studying what is really needed to get a denomination that has been in numerical decline

<sup>1</sup> Our local First Pres governing body is comprised of Elders and Pastors which are collectively referred to as the Session. The Session meets monthly.

since 1965 to somehow turn around. These pastors serve congregations similar to First Pres, and the larger movement we now represent, is referred to as **The Presbyterian Fellowship**. We have been pursuing an idea that allows churches who share common interpretation of scripture and who have a long history of shared ministry and relationship with each other, to find a way to stay together both within and outside the denomination. In February, we drafted a letter and presented the concept to what we believed were sympathetic churches and pastors. The letter outlines our rationale as well as the structures necessary to make this new fellowship happen. (I have already mentioned this letter which was on our website and which you may now view at [www.fellowship-pcusa.org](http://www.fellowship-pcusa.org) under the Documents tab along with videos and other material regarding the Fellowship.) This group of seven pastors is meeting with various groups within our denomination to explain what is needed. We continue to hear from many congregations who are interested in joining this group. We are also preparing for a summit meeting in Minneapolis, MN on August 25 – 27. This meeting will help us provide the theological and structural plan necessary to move us forward. We do not yet know the nature of the outcome, but we know that life should be different within the PCUSA.

Our Session recognizes that a new day is coming in relationship to our denomination, and it stands ready to lead us as a body as these details unfold. Creating a new denominational entity is no small task, but I trust the Lord will strengthen us for this time. It is our great desire that this new idea be positive for the whole church. It will allow the space needed for each group in our denomination to create ministry in the manner they think best without having to endure the constant rancor and endless debates.

As regards this Amendment 10-A and our community here at First Pres, our Session will form a more specific response in the near future. But let me say four things today that our Session has heard me say as your pastor and which they support:

1. I continue to believe in the way the scriptures have been interpreted on the issues of sexuality. After years of study, I stand in solidarity with centuries of biblical interpretation and with most of the global church.
2. While I do not agree with the change in ordination standards, I do appreciate people who see this issue differently. Most of those who see this in a different way within the church are coming from a position of real compassion and integrity, and in most cases are sincere followers of Jesus.
3. I hope we at First Pres can model something for Colorado Springs by creating a climate where we can be accepting of people even if we don't affirm an idea. That would allow us to live in both "grace and truth" (John 1).
4. The present actions of the PCUSA do not require a change in our selection of leadership here at First Pres. Our church government is not a top down in a way that suddenly orders us to change. Even with this new amendment, it is very unlikely that much will change in our Presbytery (Pueblo) which has always resisted these amendments. Yet, in many ways, it may feel a bit different to think of being part of the PCUSA. Yet, please know that the work of **The Presbyterian Fellowship** is trying to find a new way to relate.

I want you to know that our Session will work constructively through this issue. Such a task is not what I would have wished for our church family right now, but it seems that God believes that we as a congregation will need to walk through this issue and it must be something that will help us and refine us. So let us go forward as we trust the Lord.

I covet your prayers for our church. Within our congregation, we will not all see these issues the same way. I trust that we can be respectful of each other during this period of ferment. The key for us will be to seek the unity of the Spirit even if we should disagree on particulars. I do believe our unity in Christ is even more important than our agreement on particular issues. And pray for our denomination that the Spirit of God would move and work through all of those leading to help create a new way forward—a way that will allow us to be the true church He is calling us to be.

Yours in Christ,



Jim Singleton  
Senior Pastor