



# News and Action

A Newsletter of The Presbyterian Coalition

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## In This Issue

[Revelation and Homosexual Experience](#)

[The First of Institutions](#)

[Is the Marriage Debate Over?](#)

[Is Marriage Worth Defending?](#)

[Compassion for People; Faithfulness to the Scriptures](#)

The church's acceptance of homosexual marriage will not broaden the understanding of marriage, it will destroy it.

[The Presbyterian Coalition](#) is actively engaged in a strong defense of the biblical and historical teaching and practice of marriage.

## Marriage



Marriage and civil unions are on the agenda of the coming [General Assembly](#), meeting next July in Minneapolis. One of the questions before the Assembly will be "the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community." The Assembly will receive a report and recommendations from a [special committee](#) created in 2008 and appointed by Moderator Bruce Reyes-Chow.

The committee met in late September. It adopted a [consensus report](#) which, according to one observer, lacks any presentation of the church's biblical, traditional, and constitutional teaching on marriage as being authoritative and binding upon all who vow obedience to the church's polity. The committee is soliciting comments from Presbyterians (limited to no more than 1000 words and submitted by November 15th to [this address](#)), and is expected to adopt recommendations at their January meeting.

While the definition of marriage has remained the same over centuries, laws and customs sometimes change. Something approximating a revolution might seem to be occurring in the U.S. as well as in European countries. The question before the upcoming General Assembly will be how the church ought to respond to apparent cultural shifts. Presbyterians are not the only body of Christians asking that question. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) recently adopted [a policy](#) that changed its position on both homosexual marriage and ordination.

Is this an issue that matters for the Church? Should the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) follow the ELCA's lead by reversing its message in order to appease a changing culture? In this edition of *News and Action*, we offer a number of articles to stimulate your thinking on the application of ancient biblical truth to the realities of life in today's world.

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Let's network to accomplish godly

We won't exhaust the subject here. But we hope this edition will help you begin to explore the issues and will lead you to take action at home and in your congregation and presbytery. We also hope you and your congregation will take steps to effect a biblically faithful General Assembly outcome next summer. Please [contact me](#) if you are looking for suggestions on how to do that!

--Terry Schlossberg, Renewal Advisor

## Revelation and Homosexual Experience

Eminent German theologian **Wolfhart Pannenberg** challenges us to think about the meaning of being "one holy catholic and apostolic Church." His article belongs in the annals of classic theological statements on the Church, marriage, and homosexual practice. Pannenberg concludes with the following assertion:

*Here lies the boundary of a Christian church that knows itself to be bound by the authority of Scripture. Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. [\[Read the entire article\]](#)*

## The First of Institutions

Lutheran theologian and ethicist **Gilbert Meilaender** begins with Luther's catechism and Pannenberg's conclusion. He proceeds to explain why marriage is close to the very heart of the Gospel, and counters many of the current arguments favoring same-sex marriage:

*[W]e dare not permit the church's public teaching, on the matter of homosexuality or any other matter, to be taken over and determined by a desire -- however sincere and well-intentioned -- to "affirm" every person in whatever state he or she may be. That is not the gospel.*

*To articulate the Christian norm for life is not the church's only task, but it is a necessary task. If we fail here, affirmation of and compassion for those who fall short mean little. Indeed, once we can no longer say what it means to "fall short," we have little need for compassion and few problems for pastoral practice. But then we also are poorly positioned to take*

change in the PCUSA!

*seriously the law written in our hearts, the desire of human beings for what is noble and God-pleasing, the good news that we have been set free from captivity to our own distorted images of what it means to be satisfied and fulfilled.*

*For the sake not only of those who have been baptized into Christ's body, but also for the sake of a world which, even if only inchoately, wants to follow the way of life, we have a responsibility to conform our public teaching to what we have ourselves been taught by Scripture about our creation as male and female and about marriage as the first of institutions. We have no authorization to do otherwise. [\[Read the entire article\]](#)*

### Is the Marriage Debate Over?

**Mark Galli**, the senior managing editor of *Christianity Today*, raises the question many of us are asking. He challenges us as orthodox believers to ask ourselves how we can argue for the sanctity of marriage and behave like heterosexual hypocrites:

*We cannot very well argue for the sanctity of marriage as a crucial social institution while we blithely go about divorcing and approving of remarriage at a rate that destabilizes marriage. We cannot say that an institution, like the state, has a perfect right to insist on certain values and behavior from its citizens while we refuse to submit to denominational or local church authority. We cannot tell gay couples that marriage is about something much larger than self-fulfillment when we, like the rest of heterosexual culture, delay marriage until we can experience life, and delay having children until we can enjoy each other for a few years.*

*In short, we have been perfect hypocrites on this issue. Until we admit that, and take steps to amend our ways, our cries of alarm about gay marriage will echo off into oblivion. [\[Read More\]](#)*

### Is Marriage Worth Defending?

This is the question posed by elder **Alan Wisdom** as he takes a comprehensive look at the subject from a biblical, theological and historical perspective. This edited version of a section of his paper, titled "*A Battle Far From Over*," includes a short summary of the situation in the PC(USA) today.

*Those tempted to pessimism should ask themselves: Are they responding to reality or to distorted depictions of reality? America is not a nation where everyone acts like the stars of "Sex and the City." While there are some disturbing trends, there are also developments that show the enduring strength of marriage. The high tide of sexual irresponsibility in the 1970s and 1980s seems to have receded a bit. [\[Read more\]](#)*

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## Compassion for People; Faithfulness to the Scriptures

We should not leave this subject without hearing from a Presbyterian pastor who ministers in this realm every day -- for, as Gilbert Meilaender says, the ethic must precede and be the foundation for pastoral ministry. **Mark Brewer**, a Coalition board member and pastor of Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles, shares his response to the special committee's question, "What is the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community?"

*Perhaps surprisingly, I like being forced to wrestle with marriage and homosexuality. I don't like the heat and heartache, but I do appreciate confronting this "tip of the spear" in the culture wars. We have many gay and lesbian people active in our church. Many are perplexed that I accept them as people but oppose their desire for a same-sex marriage. Thus, I cannot speak in the abstract about marriage, since I face real people whose hearts are torn. When I face my friends on these matters, I try to engage them in three dimensions. [\[Read the entire article\]](#)*

### More Resources:

The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) speaks to the subject of marriage in both the [Book of Order](#) (Directory for Worship) and the [Book of Confessions](#). Those documents, and many other resources related to marriage, are linked on [this page](#) of our website.

Please consider sending an overture to the GA on the subject of marriage. Here's a [draft overture](#) to consider. If you need assistance with the overture process, contact The Presbyterian Coalition at 703-680-4571 or [terry@presbycoalition.org](mailto:terry@presbycoalition.org).

We hope you will forward this newsletter to those you know who could benefit from the information. Let's network to accomplish godly change in the PCUSA!