

For Immediate Release
From the *Presbyterian Renewal Network*
July 9, 2010

Late yesterday evening the General Assembly voted by a comfortable margin (439 to 208) to send out to the church for our study and discussion two contrasting reports on marriage.

The assembly, after disapproving three overtures that would have reaffirmed the Church's biblical and historical teaching on marriage, then voted to answer all the remaining items of business on marriage by their action calling for study. Those overtures included redefining marriage as "two persons," and asking the General Assembly to issue an authoritative interpretation that would permit ministers to "conduct services of Christian marriage" for two people who have obtained a civil marriage license. This morning, an effort to bring the overtures back for consideration ended when a motion to reconsider failed by a vote of 275 to 407.

This General Assembly has issued a call to our churches to enter into much deeper study and conversation about marriage. This is an opportunity to do the needed work to help our denomination reappropriate the Church's teaching on marriage. There is a long history of the Church's teaching on this matter that speaks well to the cultural trends of our day.

Our Savior, in the Gospel, said "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female"—and then quotes God's own words in Genesis—"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?"

Scripture is replete with images of the people of God as the bride of Christ, from the prophet Hosea in the Old Testament to the marriage supper of the Lamb in the book of Revelation.

Neither the society nor the Church defines or redefines marriage. As the Westminster Confession of Faith says, "Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life."

Pastors still proclaim the warning in the marriage service from the 1946 *Book of Common Worship*, which says that "if any persons are joined together otherwise than as God's word allows their union is not blessed by God."

Jesus' words in the Gospel of John remind us that if we love him we will obey his commandments. Commissioners this day who spoke for and voted for this action of the General Assembly were a demonstration of that love on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Presbyterians.

True love for our erring brothers and sisters is not expressed by acceptance of behavior that is contrary to the will of God and the true wellbeing of all. True love is expressed in pastoral ministry that raises up hope for the forgiveness and transformation offered by our Lord Jesus Christ and made available to us through his death and resurrection.