

Dear Committee on Civil Union and Marriage,

Thank you for soliciting comments across the PC(USA) as you undertake this important work on behalf of the General Assembly.

We recognize that people of good will may disagree on certain matters, and we desire forbearance when conflict arises. But we also believe that all opinions cannot be equally true. God has revealed truth in Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And while we hold that God alone is Lord of our conscience, we believe our conscience is best formed through Scripture, of which we also hold the confessions and standards of our church to be a faithful and reliable guide.

Based on our Reformed understanding of Scripture, we affirm:

1. God intends sexual behavior to occur only within marriage.

Sexuality—including gender differentiation, physical union between male and female, and procreation—is part of God’s created design (Gen.1-2). Genesis 2 connotes joy in sexual relationship, for they “were both naked and were not ashamed.” This phrase appears just after “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh,” indicating that God intends sexual behavior to be limited to marriage. The idea of two becoming one flesh through sexual union is reiterated in the New Testament.

2. God intends marriage to be between one man and one woman.

In Genesis 2 the nouns “man” and “woman” are singular. Jesus uses singular nouns when he quotes and interprets Genesis 2 (Mk. 10:2-12) and when he speaks of marital bonds (Matt. 5:31-32). Other New Testament teachings likewise speak of marriage in terms of one man and one woman (Rom. 7:2-3, 1 Cor. 7, Eph. 5:21-33, 1 Tim. 3, and Tit. 1:6).

3. Marriage points beyond itself.

As Reformed Christians, we do not hold marriage to be a sacrament. Yet marriage is *sacramental* by pointing beyond itself. The prophets described God’s relationship with his people by using marriage imagery: God the faithful husband and Israel the unfaithful wife (Jer. 3:20). Paul likewise speaks of the relationship between husband and wife as analogous to Christ and the Church. In marriage, a man and a woman reach out to—and covenant with—someone who is markedly “other.” Likewise, the Creator in Christ seeks out persons—created in God’s image yet “wholly other” than God—casting his lot with them in everlasting covenant.

Because we affirm the above, we believe:

1. Certain sexual behaviors are contrary to God's design and are thus rightly called sin.

The biblical witness is clear that certain sexual behavior is sinful, including incest, bestiality, rape, adultery, promiscuity, and homosexual practice (see Ex. 20:14, Lev. 18, Prov. 6:32, Jer. 7:9, Matt. 15:19, Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 5:1-11, 1 Cor. 6:9-20, 1 Tim. 1:10, Heb. 13:4, 2 Peter 2:10, and Jude 7). Jesus did not abrogate laws regarding sexual behavior but intensified them (Matt. 5:17, 27-28). And the early Church maintained that refraining from sexual sin (*porneia*) is essential (Acts 15:28-29).

2. The Church should not condone sexual behavior outside of marriage.

The intensity, passion, and vulnerability involved with sexual intercourse make it more than a casual transaction for mutual satisfaction. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul reflects on the powerful spiritual impact of sexual union: "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?" While it may be unclear how sexual partners become "one body," those who engage in sexual union outside of marriage are, in some way, *bonded* by that act. But such a "marriage bond" is a counterfeit, for it does not involve a covenant of faith, trust, and full surrender to the other person; it is only focused on self-satisfaction. Such a relationship does not point beyond itself and fails to portray the deeper meaning of marriage.

3. The Church should not endorse homosexual civil unions for its members.

The increasing acceptance of homosexuality in our culture and in parts of the Church has arisen, in tandem, with the view that there are a variety of equally acceptable sexual orientations, which are possibly genetically determined. We should not casually accept such assumptions. There is no consensus within scientific/ psychological communities as to whether or how biology plays a role in homosexual behavior (American Psychological Association's website: www.apa.org/topics/orientation.html#whatcauses). Even if such consensus were reached, we are not the sum of our genes. By conforming ourselves to the mind of Christ we attain a powerful freedom in Christ and can strive—with God's grace—not to be directed by biological impulses alone. Scripture unambiguously presents homosexual behavior (which civil unions would endorse) as outside of God's design and intention.

4. Departure from basic Christian teaching on marriage will cause great suffering within the PC(USA) and the broader Church.

At times the church has failed to show God's abundant love and grace to those who identify themselves as gay and lesbian, treating them as outcasts and causing them great pain. But an affirmation of homosexual behavior is

not a solution. God's creational intention for us, expressed in his Word, is never in conflict with what is also inherently good for us; indeed, God is the one who has made us and we are the wonderful work of his hands (Ps. 139:13-16). Affirming homosexual behavior would fail to speak the truth in love so that we may all be built up to the full measure of the stature of Christ (Eph. 4:13-16). And it may also show a lack of solidarity with those who have made a courageous choice—in this instance—to take up a very personal cross and deny their homosexual impulses. If we should move away from the biblical understanding of marriage, we will obfuscate the Church's witness, jeopardize our relation with many denominations, and undermine the unity of the PC(USA).

“Let marriage be held in honor by all” (Heb. 3:4). May God bless us as we strive to be faithful to his Word.

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