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July 7, 2014

Dear Friends in Christ,

In a previous letter, we promised to let you know of the actions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church USA which met recently. As we noted, a major issue was the biblical understanding of Christian marriage and human sexuality.

The Assembly made two significant decisions in this area. First, they approved an Authoritative Interpretation which permits pastors to conduct same-sex weddings and churches to host them. Second, the assembly approved a proposed amendment to the Book of Order describing marriages as a relationship between “two persons, traditionally a man and a woman.” This second action needs to be approved by a majority of the Presbyteries in order to take effect.

We, the Session, want you to know we are deeply grieved by these actions. We believe they strike against the clear witness of Scripture - from the creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2, to Christ’s affirmation of marriage being between a man and a woman, to Paul’s writings affirming marriage and condemning sexual sin, to the glorious ending of Revelation describing the end times as “the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband”.

Though all are welcome, and we may have differing viewpoints on these issues, we strongly disagree with the General Assembly legitimatizing marriage outside the clear biblical understanding.

The General Assembly did state clearly that **no Presbyterian pastor or church is required to conduct or host a same-sex wedding**. Each church (pastor and session) continues to have authority over what weddings are appropriate for their congregation.

Above all, we want you to know that Bethany church will continue to be **a place of welcome, grace and acceptance for all persons, no matter what our viewpoints, sins or struggles**. It all starts with grace, which we all need. We will continue to uphold and practice the biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant before God between a man and a woman. We will continue to be a light for the gospel within the cultural upheaval around us, loving with the heart of Jesus and poised for what God has for us in the future.

Here are practical steps we will be taking in light of these changes:

- Explore becoming part of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, an organization of churches **within the Presbyterian Church USA** that provides support, encouragement and resources for the building up of the local church.
- Hold teaching forums on Christian marriage that provide the biblical framework for marriage and permit honest dialogue in a spirit of grace.
- Explore concrete ways to express our concerns to those at the General Assembly level. We are currently withholding our per capita to General Assembly and redirecting it to designated missions.
- Commit ourselves to prayer for Bethany and the larger church, again in a spirit of grace for all.

In his letter to the Christians in Philippi, the Apostle Paul urged them to “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call” of speaking and practicing the good news of Jesus Christ. In this Bicentennial year and into our future, we will continue to do just that, joyfully and confidently. You are a vital part of that calling, as we are “blessed to be a blessing”.

Any questions or concerns? We want to hear from you.

In the love, power and joy of Christ,

John Hamilton  
Moderator of Session

Robbie Ytterberg  
Associate Pastor

Beckie Price  
Clerk of Session

Session Members: Joe Brickner, Bruce Carman, Ruth Doyle, Carrie Emerson, Deb Gossic, Eric Gregory, Marlene Haley, Kim Hartnett, Lorrie Just, Terry Kohlmyer, Wayne McGinnis, Domenic Poiche, Amy Ramage, Rich Ralston, Jean Roemer, Mike Segeleon, Kelly Timco, and Peggy Wolstoncroft