



May 10, 2011

Dear St. Andrew's Family,

I am writing you to keep you informed about a significant change within Presbyterian Church (USA). You might be aware that our denomination has (along with all other mainline churches) been embattled over issues of human sexuality for over thirty years, specifically struggling over the question of the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian leaders in the church. In the next few days or weeks, it is apparent that our denomination will be taking an action I believe is inconsistent with the clear witness of Scripture and the doctrine of creation. The church is in process of repealing the constitutional provision requiring an ordained leader of the church to live with "chastity in singleness or in covenant faithfulness of marriage between a man and a woman."

Your first question might rightly be, "How does this directly affect us at St. Andrew's?" The short answer is that it does not. We are free to establish the standards of our ministry in the manner that is in concert with the historic, orthodox principles of Biblical leadership as well as the practice of the global church. While it is disheartening to have our national witness diminished by this policy change, I am highly confident in the local leadership and direction of our congregation.

In essence, the decision of the General Assembly and the denomination dictates that each governing body (e.g. presbytery and session) has the right to determine the appropriate critical standards for ordination. While the new provision in the constitution says that this is to be done "under the guidance of Scripture," rather than obedience to scripture, it is clear that the motivation, design, and impact of this change is permitting liberty to become license amidst our culture's sexual confusion. This constitutional confusion applies equally to heterosexual misconduct as well.

The next logical question is to determine, "What we are going to do?" Our session will gather to send an overture to our Los Ranchos Presbytery (the regional governing body of Orange County) with the aim of assuring a consistent biblical and ethical practice within our local realm of influence. Though we cannot guarantee the net result of this process, our presbytery has a long history of consistent voting to give good hope in this regard. Unlike many other Presbyterian churches that I know, St. Andrew's enjoys a positive and encouraging relationship with most of the leadership and sister congregations in our area.

The second step in our response to this issue centers around the proper use of money. On behalf of the session, we take quite seriously the stewardship responsibility of the Kingdom resources you entrust to us. For years, the current practice of the church has been to designate all resources to General Assembly (national) mission projects. The only



exception to this has been to pay "per capita," which amounts to \$6.50 per active member (or \$16,880.50 for the congregation as a whole). Per capita monies fund the bi-annual gathering of the national church.

Effective immediately, the session has voted to withhold any further payments of "per capita" to the General Assembly church. These monies will be redirected toward a new effort of relating to one another as churches.

For the past year, I have been meeting regularly with the pastors of some of our large, flagship churches to help determine a way forward. For thirty years, Evangelicals within the PC (USA) have been so busy saying, "No", that we have forgotten for what (or for whom) we truly stand. Instead of waiting for times of voting, it is time to prepare for the road ahead. We will start becoming the kind of churches we believe that God desires. We will start relating to our sister congregations who share our mission and common purpose in Christ, disregarding artificial boundaries of geography and the bureaucracy that often precludes us from uniting in the Gospel.

In short, we are "starting a new denomination without leaving the PC (USA)." This involves four key areas:

1. **Reclaim Our Core Theological Identity.** This will include a set of essentials around which we gather, beginning with an updated edition of "Union in Christ" (www.fellowship-pcusa.org/documents).
2. **Refresh Our Relational Unity.** This begins with a new role for presbyteries, refocusing on encouragement and our identity as transforming communities. We will form theological subsets within several current presbyteries and petition for 10-15 new presbyteries to be recognized in the near term. Approved or not, these new, small entities will begin and pilot the kind of networking already modeled by some presbyteries. Other variations in polity and alignment will follow once there is permission for more non-geographic presbyteries to form.
3. **Renew Our Leadership Vitality.** We recognize that we have a leadership development crisis in the denomination and in many of our congregations, and we need flexibility for new models of ordination and preparation.
4. **Release the Gospel Locally.** We are committed to forming new communities of all configurations, marked by a missional focus.

This means that we need not retreat into further isolation as a local church. Many other brothers and sisters in Christ share our convictions, passions, and concerns. But with the precipitous decline in our denomination, business as usual is not a faithful option.



ST. ANDREW'S
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

I hope that you receive this letter as the beginning of a conversation, not the end of it. We have much to pray for and even more for which to be thankful. I praise God daily for the privilege of being your pastor. We must not allow the denominational demise to distract us from our primary calling and mission of “following Jesus Christ to lead lives that reveal God’s Goodness.”

With hope in Christ,

Richard Kannwischer
Senior Pastor