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March 18, 2015

Our Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you may remember, last June the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved an amendment to the PC (USA) Book of Order to change the definition of marriage from “a woman and a man” to “two people, traditionally a man and a woman” and to give permission to PC (USA) churches to provide a service of Christian marriage to those couples who request that service of the church within the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry. The amendment also goes on to read, “nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder’s or the session’s discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.”

Although not all of the denomination’s 172 presbyteries have voted, as of Tuesday evening, March 17, 2015, this amendment was approved by enough Presbyteries (86 at current count) to allow it to be adopted as the official policy of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

While your Session is disappointed with our denomination’s decision, we are writing to inform you that at our regularly called meeting of March 17, the Session voted unanimously to establish a policy stating that FPC Houston will continue to maintain our historic understanding of biblical marriage as being between one man and one woman and will not authorize the use of our church property for any marriage, wedding or blessing services outside of that understanding. This position is taken regardless of any future action that might be taken by appropriate state or national civil authorities.

With deep respect to brothers and sisters in Christ who may disagree with our position, we continue to hold to the conviction that Scripture conveys the principle that God created us male and female in order to complete the revelation of His image within us. In addition, we believe that this revelation is further made manifest when a husband and wife join together within the covenant of marriage.

That said, as strongly as we will continue to hold to a historic Scriptural understanding of marriage out of our reverence for God and a desire to love Him first, we desire to follow the other half of Jesus’ command: to love our neighbors as ourselves. We acknowledge that all of us are sinners and stand on level ground with each other at the foot of the cross.

We are saddened that many LGBTQ persons have been ostracized, judged, excluded and rejected by Christians over many decades. So, while we intend to hold to our understanding of orthodoxy in our teachings and policies, we also hope to hold – with equal passion – to a commitment to radically love others in the name of Christ and to make this church a place of hospitality for all who want to discover and nourish a rich faith identity in Jesus Christ.

As we go forward together, let us continue to live into the transforming power of Jesus Christ and let us continue to pray for our church and for the PC (USA). May we be steadfast in our commitment to biblical truth – and to the truth that we are called to be steadfast in our love for one another.

On Behalf of Session,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Birchfield".

Jim Birchfield
Moderator of Session

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lesley Lilly".

Lesley Lilly
Clerk of Session

Compelled by the love of Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we carry the gospel to Houston and to the world.