



presbyterians for renewal

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TO: The Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage
RE: Response to the September 2009 Draft of Preliminary Report to the 219th General Assembly
DATE: November 13, 2009

In our previous communication to the Special Committee dated August 13, 2009, Presbyterians for Renewal expressed our conviction that “marriage between a man and a woman is God’s good provision for human well-being, for the ordering of society and family life, and the only relationship within which sexual union is appropriate and blessed by God.” We continue to affirm this standard as the way of Christian discipleship given us in Scripture, taught in our Confessions, and held by the vast majority of Christians in all times and places. This standard is not a human invention, but the loving gift of our gracious God. Presbyterians for Renewal will continue to work, pray, and hope for the day when this simple standard will, once again, be joyfully and boldly affirmed by the whole of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

We were saddened but not surprised to see that the Draft of your Preliminary Report indicates that the Special Committee is not able to make such an affirmation at this time. The Special Committee has compiled much useful information on laws governing marriage and civil union, how our understanding of marriage developed in the Reformed Tradition, the relationship between civil union and Christian marriage, and the effects of current laws on same-gender partners and their children. This was indeed part of your mandate from the General Assembly. But when it comes to the place of covenanted same-gender partnerships in the Christian community, the best the Special Committee can do is express the diametrically opposed viewpoints that are present in the committee: one holding the standard expressed above, and another that would “expand marriage to include same-gender couples” (p. 21). The report states, “This conflict is a crisis of conscience – on all sides” (p. 22).

Presbyterians for Renewal believes this impasse is regrettable but instructive; and perhaps God provides in it an opportunity. Could it be that the best service the Special Committee can now render to the denomination would be to help us understand the roots of the conflict? What are the biblical, confessional, and theological grounds for each of these positions? We urge the Special Committee to continue on the path of being *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. Let each constituency lay out their case for the denomination to see.

Presbyterians for Renewal believes the revisionist position that would bless same-gender relationships as the equivalent of marriage can only be defended by ignoring or rejecting the clear teaching of the Bible and our Confessions. At the same time, we wholeheartedly concur with the Special Committee that “it is our Christ-given duty to stay at the table, especially when we disagree” (p. 24). We call upon the Special Committee to help us disagree in a Christ-honoring way. Let us focus the dialogue on Scripture

and the Confessions so the denomination can plainly see which position is genuinely rooted in the authoritative sources of our faith and life.

Finally, we commend the members of the Special Committee for your obvious commitment to respectful dialogue and Christian forbearance with one another. Your assignment is spiritually and emotionally challenging. Your covenant (p. 26) is a model for the whole denomination. Be assured that all members of the Special Committee are in our prayers for the anointing and leading of God's Spirit.