

Dear members and friends of College Park Presbyterian Church,

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the decision our denomination (PCUSA) made regarding the standards for ordination to become a deacon, elder and pastor within the church. With the passage of Amendment 10-A, the Book of Order (G-6.0106) will now reflect the following:

Previously, the language said:

“b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”

The new language states:

“b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240; 14.0450) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

What does this mean? This change to the Book of Order allows each presbytery, at its own discretion, to interpret the sacred Scriptures and the confessions within boundaries that have been loosened to unacceptable degree; in this case, with respect to the standards for the ordination of deacons, elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. This new language eliminates sexual behavior and marital fidelity as specific denomination-wide standards for ordination and/or installation to office within the church. The change also allows a candidate to be ordained by one presbytery who may not be viewed as scripturally qualified for ordination by another.

Why is this important? For over twenty-five years our denomination has wrestled with this issue. This change will leave the standards for ordination subject to broader interpretation that, depending on the individual presbytery, could result in persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin, being ordained as deacon, elder or minister. Though our Central Florida Presbytery voted to oppose this amendment, someone ordained by another presbytery with beliefs contrary to those of our presbytery, could represent our church in the world just the same as Pastor Jeff or any of our elders or deacons. It removes the denominational consistency for ordination with respect to a number of specific issues.

We believe that this is in clear opposition to the Word of God, and further, will degrade the purity, unity, credibility and moral compass of our church. This action will also undermine the consistency of our standards, our beliefs, our witness, and who we are as a church. The effects of this action will be far-reaching and will likely have many impacts that are unforeseen today.

What is our response? The session has met and prayerfully discussed this issue, and we wanted to communicate our position on the action taken by the PC (USA).

We fully affirm the word of God as infallible, authoritative and inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is the guide for Christian living. Also, we believe that this action is a deviation from the Word of God to appease or blend with the cultural standards; is unacceptable; and is a departure from our historic traditions within the church. We are called to obey the Word of God and not our sinful desires; which, sadly, our denomination has chosen otherwise.

To be clear, we believe we are all sinners, and therefore all people, regardless of their sin, should be treated with respect and love, and should be welcomed into the fellowship of the body of Christ.

To be sure, however, we do also believe that those serving in positions of leadership have a role and responsibility that is different from that of the rest of the flock. Those whom God calls into leadership as a pastor, elder or deacon through ordination are, by definition, "set apart." Ordained leaders have special influence within the community of faith. In that position, they become role models for others. They become the more visible face of Christ's Church in the community and the world, such that everything they say and do reflects on the good name and reputation of Christ's Church and its ministry.

The sacred Scriptures clearly require those who are "set apart" as ordained leaders in Christ's Church must be held to a higher standard. This is essential to preserve the effectiveness of their leadership role, as well as the health and integrity of the Church's ministry. When the Church allows unrepentant sinners to be ordained as church leaders, it essentially condones the sin itself. The results are the confusion and corruption of its message; undermining of its credibility; damage to its ministry in the world; and leading astray those who most need to be led to reconciliation with Christ.

Therefore the Session of College Park Presbyterian Church agrees to the following statement:

We believe that the passage of Amendment 10-A is an act of disobedience to the Work of God and an abandonment of our church's historic principles. We therefore call upon this denomination, presbyteries, and churches that are in favor of Amendment 10-A to seek repentance from God and fully submit to the authoritative Word of God.

We must be willing to stand up for our faith and speak God's truth into the lives of those who are engaging in sinful behavior and encourage repentance before the Lord.

College Park Presbyterian Church prayerfully calls upon the denomination to repent and seek reconciliation with the Lord on this sinful act of disobedience and disregard for the Word of God. Though this issue is framed in changing the standards for ordination to allow the opportunity for unrepentant sinners of any type (including adulterers, as well as other promiscuous heterosexuals or homosexuals) to hold office within the church, the larger issue at stake here is obedience to the Word of God.

We will be joining with like-minded churches, who hold to the authority of scripture and who stand with us in opposing this amendment, to prayerfully seek God's will for our church. Through prayer, discussion and the guidance of scripture, we look to God to reveal His plan for our church.

Please pray for our denomination and the session as we seek God's guidance and discernment for the next step in this journey as His Church. We pray that we will never abandon the historic principals of the church and the authority of scripture that we hold onto as our guiding light in these dark days. We do all this for the Glory of God.

In Christ's Love,

The 2011 Session of the College Park Presbyterian Church