



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Reaching those unconnected to Jesus and together, worshiping God
and growing into Christ-like maturity, impacting our community and the world.

October 23, 2008

Dear Friends,

Our session and I would like to keep you informed as to our continued response to the actions of the 218th General Assembly (GA). For more on those actions, please go to our church's website <http://www.fpcyakima.com/feature2.cfm> or contact the church office (248-7940) to have a packet mailed to you.

First of all, the leadership of our church is committed to affirming the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, and the sanctity of marriage. While we are not presently taking steps to withdraw from our denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), we believe that certain actions of the GA are steps in the wrong direction, and we have entered into a season of discernment. As is the case with all who follow Jesus Christ, it is our responsibility to stand for Biblical truth. Thus, we have taken the following steps over the last several years in what we believe is a faithful witness to God:

1. The session of First Presbyterian Church of Yakima has aligned itself with the Confessing Church Movement. The session's desire for our church is to take a stand in these days of moral confusion. We want to declare that God's Word has revealed to us matters of faith and lifestyle. As such, we have adopted and applied the Three Core Confessing Church Standards:

That Jesus Christ alone is Lord of all and the only way of salvation.

"Jesus said, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by me.'" (John 14:6)

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men and women by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

"No one who denies the Son has the Father; He who confesses the Son has the Father also." (1 John 2:23)

That Holy Scripture (the Bible) is the Triune God's revealed Word, the church's only infallible rule of faith and life.

"Thy word [O Lord] is a lamp unto my feet and a light to my path."

(Psalm 119:105)

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in the things that please God." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

That God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life.

This includes honoring the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman, the only relationship within which sexual activity is appropriate.

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (Galatians 5:13)

"Jesus looked up at the woman who had been caught in an obvious and serious sin and said to her, 'Woman, is there no one here to condemn you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'" (John 8:10-11)

2. Our session has voted to withhold our per capita payments to the denomination as a statement of our concern regarding the denomination's direction. That money is currently being held in an escrow account. As always, those within our congregation who prefer their per capita be sent to the denomination continue to have that option.
3. Our own Curt McFarland served as a commissioner to the 218th General Assembly to provide our church and presbytery a voice in the matters of the denomination.

4. More recently, our church sent five staff and one elder to the Presbyterian Global Fellowship (PGF) Conference. PGF is a group of individuals, churches, and organizations within the denomination who are committed to renewal. The mission statement of PGF states their purpose is to transform mainline congregations into missional communities following Jesus Christ. The values of PGF are as follows:

Christ-Centered - Demonstrated by a steadfast commitment to Jesus as the living and reigning Lord of all life and the only true hope for the world. *We confess that we have neglected the source of all life and have chased other gods. This idolatry is particularly apparent in our context with regard to issues of wealth, poverty, and power.*

Outwardly-Focused - Demonstrated by a conviction that Christ calls us not primarily for our own benefit but for the sake of others. *We confess that we have become distracted from our primary calling of discipleship and love of neighbor.*

Biblically-Reformed - Demonstrated by a loyalty to Scripture as God's unique and authoritative message of salvation and as our guide for daily living. *We confess that we have created standards of convenience instead of remaining true to God's Word. This moral confusion is evident in our context with regard to the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as God's desire for human sexuality.*

Globally-Connected - Demonstrated by our commitment to use relational networks and new technologies to build vital relationships with the global church. *We confess our tendency to trust in our own culture and to confuse it with the gospel. We acknowledge our need for global partners, for their support, admonition, and example as we seek to be congregations that display the unity of the Church and "lead lives worthy of the calling with which we have been called."*

Locally-Empowered - Demonstrated by the reality that the local movement of the church is still God's primary means of justice, mercy, and love in the world. *We confess that our churches have become less effective in our local communities, and we pray that God will enable us to find strength and courage for Christ's plan of redemption.*

The strategy outlined by PGF includes these steps:

Cast Vision - Pronounce the heart and character of the missional church and its imperative in the world.

Collaborate - Connect with one another to share best practices, exchange ideas, and provide inspiration for living as a missional community following Jesus Christ.

Coach - Provide support, leadership training, and encouragement to clergy and lay persons who are choosing to live and serve in a missional community following Jesus Christ.

Celebrate - Share and applaud when communities of faith live out the apostolic calling.

At our September meeting, the session voted unanimously to affiliate formally with Presbyterian Global Fellowship. This does not mean we are withdrawing from the Presbyterian Church (USA). By affiliating with PGF, we are committing to journey with brothers and sisters in Christ who are seeking to follow God at work in the world. We have come to realize that this is done better in community. We are choosing to be part of a movement, making a commitment to contribute to the fellowship, to receive from others in the fellowship, and to seek to be changed as the Spirit works in us, among us, and through us.

5. We have committed to be a part of the on-going conversation going with Presbyterians for Renewal (PFR). The mission of PFR is to mobilize the leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (USA) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ. The values of PFR are as follows:

Obedience - Submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ

Faithfulness - Anchored in God's Word and the historic Reformed faith

Conviction - Passionate about shaping the church's life and theology

Engagement - Involved positively in the structure and politics of the PC (USA)

Collaboration - Working with others who share our Mission and vision

Servanthood - Committed to ministry that reflects the graciousness of Christ

Prayer - Depending upon God's direction and power

The vision of PFR is that the Presbyterian Church (USA) will be a church that:

- Boldly proclaims Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God and the only Savior and Lord of the world
 - Confidently relies upon Scripture as the authority for our faith and life
 - Effectively equips disciples to live abundantly in Christ
 - Intentionally develops godly leaders for future generations
 - Consistently supports congregations as the primary agents of God's mission in the world
 - Willingly relies upon the healthy governing bodies for accountability, mutual encouragement, and shared witness
 - Courageously embraces action for social justice and evangelism as essential dimensions of our primary task, to proclaim the Good News
 - Faithfully lives with holy abandon in the power of the Holy Spirit, willing to risk all and serve all in order to show the love of Christ to all.
6. One of our active elders and I recently attended the gathering of the Presbyterian Coalition (PC) which coordinates the conversation of various renewal groups within the denomination. The PC is a movement of people committed to life and transformation in the Presbyterian Church (USA) by exalting Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, energizing its congregations, and upholding historic biblical leadership standards. It does this by...
- Coordinating with all individuals and groups who share the convictions expressed in the Coalition's Declaration, "Union in Christ," and who are working for a revitalized church;
 - Reaffirming the Coalition's commitment "that this work of renewal be carried on, in, and through the existing structures of the Presbyterian Church (USA) whenever possible";
 - Encouraging all individuals, groups and governing bodies who share our convictions, to act creatively and passionately to identify and implement strategies consistent with these convictions and purposes.

In regard to our own presbytery, Central Washington Presbytery has taken steps to ensure we are faithfully witnessing to God.

7. On Saturday, October 18, our presbytery voted to reject the amendment to our Constitution that removed ordination standards. I believe we are the first presbytery to vote. This is the fourth vote on the deletion of the ordination standards in the last twelve years. In each subsequent vote, the church has continued to uphold biblical truth and proclaim that those who are called to ordination must adhere to behaviors mandated in the Bible. In 1997, the vote of the presbyteries was 97 to 74 in favor of upholding the standards. In 1998, the vote was 114 to 57. Most recently in 2002, the vote was an overwhelming 127 to 46. This is good news and demonstrates that we are not alone and have increasing support in this denomination.
8. We also voted to approve a declaration of our concern. That statement is as follows:

Jeremiah 6:14 - "They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."

We believe that events at the 217th and 218th General Assembly have brought our PC (USA) denomination to a point of crisis. Actions of these assemblies have broken the connection and covenant that have existed in our church since the first meetings of our General Assembly.

Claiming that our unity is found in Christ or in mission, then removing every common element of belief or personal standard creates a false unity, as if what we believe and what we do has no bearing on our life together.

While we respect our General Assembly, we affirm with our Book of Confessions:

"As we do not rashly condemn what good men, assembled together in general councils lawfully gathered, have set before us; so we do not receive uncritically whatever has been declared to men under the name of general councils, for it is plain that, being human, some of them have manifested error, and that in matters of great importance. So far then as the council confirms its decrees by the plain Word of God, so far do we reverence and embrace them.

But if men, under the name of a council, pretend to forge for us new articles of faith, or to make decisions contrary to the Word of God, then we must utterly deny them as the doctrine of devils, drawing our souls from the voice of the one God to follow the doctrines and teachings of men. The reason why the general councils met was not to make any permanent law which God had not made before, not yet to form new articles for our belief..." (BoC 3.20)

Thus, following our Constitution and Confessions, we make the following affirmations:

1. *That first and foremost, the church is captive to the Word of God and that God's Word is not subject to the whims of any council that drifts upon the winds of modern cultural norms. We are compelled to follow truth as it is revealed to us in Scripture and to see that truth is embraced by our congregations and our ordained leadership.*

"That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it." (G1.0304)

2. *That we reject any action that allows any part of the church to modify or ignore any mandatory provisions of the Book of Order without the advice and consent of the Presbyteries. Thus, we declare that actions taken to make mandatory ordination standards optional will have no force or effect in Central Washington Presbytery.*
3. *For Thirty Years, our denomination has been well guided by the DG/AI on Human Sexuality given in 1978. We believe that this report continues to accurately and graciously reflect the truth of Scripture on matters of homosexuality. We proclaim this guidance continues to hold authority in Central Washington Presbytery in all standards of belief and practice at the congregational and Presbytery level.*
4. *We reject as false the idea that there can be unity in our church without unified standards for faith and behavior in those who serve the church as ministers, elders, and deacons. There can be no universal ordination standards. No General Assembly Authoritative Interpretation can change any ordination standard found in the Book of Confessions or the Book of Order. Thus, we reject any ordinations done by a body that does so in violation of the Constitution, including G-6.0601b, and proclaim that such ordinations will have no force or effect in Central Washington Presbytery.*
5. *We regret that some Presbyteries have chosen to ignore the clear message of Scripture and our confessions on matters of human sexuality and have adopted ordination standards that neither conform to the historic Christian faith nor the standards of our church constitution. Central Washington Presbytery will survey the actions of these Presbyteries, through the Committee on Ministry, and shall direct that all ordained members of any Presbyteries determined by the COM to be in violation of our ordination standards shall not be allowed to labor within our bounds, nor submit a Personal Information Form directly to any Pastor Nominating Committee without prior approval of the COM.*
6. *Finally, we believe that we have come to a tipping point as a denomination. We affirm the words of the Wolfhart Pannenberg:*

"Those who urge the church to change the norm of its teaching on this matter must know that they are promoting schism. If a church were to let itself be pushed to the point where it ceased to treat homosexual activity as a departure from the biblical norm, and recognized homosexual unions as a personal partnership of love equivalent to marriage, such a church would stand no longer on biblical ground but against the unequivocal witness of Scripture. A church that took this step would cease to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church." (Church Times, June 21, 1996)

9. In addition to this very strong statement, our presbytery voted to adopted the following position and intention:

That the Presbytery of Central Washington establish a Task Force on sexuality, ordination, and denominational issues that will:

1. *Investigate how we can use prayer, discernment, and worship in the process of seeking God's will in these matters.*
2. *Monitor changes to the current polity issues; specifically, actions of judicial commissions that may change the current status of ordination law.*
3. *Contact individual congregations via their sessions to open dialogue about these issues.*
4. *Investigate what constitutional process we might use as a presbytery to move in a united way into a different denomination.*

10. Finally, our own session is developing an ad hoc committee with the charge to lead our session in a process of discernment regarding our own congregation's response to the actions of the GA. We will continue to communicate those responses as they develop through the church's website, letters, and "chat with the elders" sessions. Any of the pastors or elders would be happy to discuss these with you.

As we continue to respond to General Assembly, we do not want to lose sight of the mission God has given to First Presbyterian Church. We live in a broken world in need of God's message of salvation. More than ever, we are committed to reach, worship, grow, and impact for the sake of Jesus our Lord.

Blessings in His Service,



Jack Peebles
Senior Pastor

REACHING THOSE UNCONNECTED TO JESUS AND TOGETHER WORSHIPING GOD AND GROWING INTO CHRIST-LIKE MATURITY
IMPACTING OUR COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD.