



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 18, 2015

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Approves of Same-sex “Marriage”

A majority of the presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was reached on March 17, approving an amendment to the church’s constitution changing its definition of marriage from being between “a man and a woman” to “two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”

The change was recommended last year by the church’s General Assembly, but required approval by a majority of the church’s 171 regional bodies, known as presbyteries, to become official.

The change was approved when the Presbytery of the Palisades in New Jersey became the 86th such body to approve the amendment. As of the evening of March 17, the count stood at 86 presbyteries in favor, 41 opposed, and one tied.

One wonders what John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and president of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) would have thought about his state pushing such an unorthodox measure over the top.

Following the completion of the voting, and verification of the results by church leaders, the change will take effect on June 21. The amended language in the church’s *Book of Order* alludes to tradition while changing it and will now read: “Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives.”

The amendment provides that no member of its clergy will be compelled to preside at a same-sex “marriage” or to host such a ceremony on church property.

A report from the AP noted that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has nearly 1.8 million members and about 10,000 congregations and is now the largest Protestant denomination to authorize same-sex “marriages” church wide.

Two of the church’s top General Assembly members released a statement on March 17 that urged “mutual forbearance” amid disagreements over the amendment. “We hope that such ‘up/down’ voting does not mark the end, but the continuation of our desire to live in community,” they noted.

Carmen Fowler LaBerge, president of the conservative Presbyterian Lay Committee, was quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* as saying that the new definition of marriage was “an express repudiation of the Bible” and approved “what God does not bless.”

The Presbyterian Lay Committee has urged Presbyterians to protest the change by withholding their donations from the national church until the original marriage definition is restored.

The *Monitor* also quoted the Reverend Robin White, a leader of More Light Presbyterians, which advocates for acceptance of homosexuals within the church, who said many “families” headed by same-





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sex couples “have been waiting for decades to enter this space created for their families within their church communities.”

The *New York Times* reported on March 18 that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) “has been losing congregations and individual members as it has moved to the left theologically over the past several years.”

An AP report in the *Christian Science Monitor* on March 18 noted:

Between 2011, when the Presbyterians authorized gay ordination, and 2013, the latest year for which figures are available, 428 of the denomination’s churches left for more conservative denominations or dissolved, though some theological conservatives have remained as they decide how to move forward. The losses helped pave the way for approval of gay “marriage,” since many opponents had left the church.

However, not all tradition-minded Presbyterians have left the church. The *Times* quoted Paul Detterman, national director of theologically conservative Fellowship Community, who said: “Our objection to the passage of the marriage amendment is in no way, shape or form anti-gay. It is in no way intended as anything but concern that the church is capitulating to the culture and is misrepresenting the message of Scripture.”

Detterman added, “We definitely will see another wave, a sizable wave, of conservative folks leaving,” but explained that he and others were staying because “this conversation is dreadfully important to be a part of.”

The amendment to the *Book of Order* continues a trend in the Presbyterian Church that has been in existence for several years. As noted, the church authorized the ordination of people with same-sex partners in 2011, and last year it allowed ministers to preside at same-sex weddings in states where the unions were legally recognized if local church leaders approved.

By making its acceptance of same-sex “marriage” official, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) joins the only other major Christian denomination that permits such “marriage” church-wide — the 1.1 million-member United Church of Christ, which made such a move in 2005.

AP reports that the Episcopal Church, which elected its first openly homosexual Anglican bishop in 2005, will discuss its position on same-sex “marriage” at a national meeting in June.

In 2009, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America decided to allow clergy and congregations some discretion in deciding whether to officiate at same-sex ceremonies, but stopped short of formally recognizing same-sex “marriage” as a denomination.

The United Methodist Church, the second-largest Protestant denomination in the United States, prohibits “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” from ordination and does not allow same-sex weddings.

The Southern Baptist Convention has issued multiple statements in opposition to same-sex “marriage.” A statement issued at the SBC meeting in New Orleans in 2012 resolved, in part:

That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, June 19–20, 2012, oppose any attempt to frame “same-sex marriage” as a civil rights issue....

... We express our love to those who struggle with same-sex attraction and who are engaged in the homosexual lifestyle; and ... we encourage our fellow Southern Baptists to consider how they and their churches might engage in compassionate, redemptive ministry to those who struggle with



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homosexuality; and ... we proclaim that Christ offers forgiveness of sin for those who turn from their sins and believe on Christ for the forgiveness of sin.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* similarly rejects homosexual actions, describing homosexual acts as “acts of grave depravity,” while also offering compassion, stating: “This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.”

If past history is any indication, it can be expected that large numbers of traditionalist-minded members of the PC (U.S.A.) opposed to the new definition of marriage may be reevaluating their relationship with their church.

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