



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 10, 2011

Presbyterian Church USA Ordains First Homosexual Minister

Three months after a change to its denominational constitution went into effect, the Presbyterian Church-USA (PCUSA) ordained its first openly homosexual minister. Scott Anderson, 56, who had left the Presbyterian ministry back in 1990 after revealing to his California congregation that he was homosexual, “was welcomed back into the church leadership [October 9] as its first openly gay ordained minister,” reported the Associated Press.



Hundreds of friends and supporters gathered at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Madison, Wisconsin, to witness the occasion. “To the thousands of Presbyterians who have worked and prayed for almost 40 years for this day, I give thanks,” Anderson told the crowd. “And I give thanks for those who disagree with what we’re doing today, yet who know that we are one in Jesus Christ.”

Anderson selected the Rev. Mark Achtemeier to deliver the sermon at his ordination. “Achtemeier used to be one of the most vocal opponents of gay ordination,” reported the AP, “but he announced a complete turnaround after friendships with gay Christians prompted him to re-evaluate scriptural teachings about homosexuality.”

Achtemeier justified his evolving theology by claiming that the “kinds of covenanted, faithful same-sex partnerships we have today simply didn’t exist in the times when the Bible was written. What the Bible writers were condemning were the exploitative, violent, idolatrous behaviors that were going on in the pagan societies all around them.”

But other PCUSA members and groups have remained faithful to New Testament teaching and their denomination’s roots. “We want leaders to uphold the highest levels of conduct within the denomination,” said Forrest Norman of the [Presbyterian Lay Committee](#) in explaining his group’s opposition to ordaining homosexuals. “We want people to live in the way God called them to live.”

As reported by [The New American](#), the decision to allow homosexual ministers occurred after “delegates to the PCUSA endorsed the change to drop the requirement, written in the church’s constitution, that church ministers live ‘in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.’ The change required approval by a majority of the church’s 173 regional presbyteries, which occurred in May of this year, with Minnesota’s Twin Cities district casting the deciding vote.”



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Gary Green of the [Presbyterian Action Committee](#) argued that the move was evidence of a more serious problem in the denomination. "The decision to remove sexual conduct from PCUSA ordination vows is symptomatic of a deeper, ongoing struggle within the church over the authority of holy scripture," he said. "This action stands in contradiction to the PCUSA confessions of faith, which continue to teach that faithful Christians have the choice either to be faithful in marriage or chaste in singleness."

In a press release, the Presbyterian Action Committee noted that the PCUSA's *Book of Confessions* "still affirms traditional Christian teaching reserving sexual relations for the marriage of man and woman. However, the ambiguity introduced by the amendment allows PCUSA bodies so wishing to ordain ministers, elders, and deacons involved in same-sex or opposite-sex relationships outside of marriage."

Green said the move has negatively impacted the PCUSA's relationships with church bodies around the world with which it had partnered for years. "The National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, with almost 2 million members, has broken relations" with the liberal U.S. denomination, he reported, "and strong denunciations of PCUSA actions have come from Presbyterian churches in Ghana and Brazil."

He added that the "relaxed standard for sexual conduct will also estrange some PCUSA ethnically Korean and Hispanic churches, which has been a growing segment in the PCUSA membership during the current period in which the PCUSA has seen significant declines in membership."

Concluded the conservative Presbyterian leader: "The PCUSA appears to be following the course already traced by the UCC [United Church of Christ], Episcopal Church, and ELCA [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America]. Traveling down that road is likely to lead to more division, greater membership declines, and marginalization from the mainstream of U.S. and global Christianity."

In August [The New American](#) reported that a group of nearly 2,000 PCUSA members had met in Minneapolis "to discuss how to move ahead in light of the denomination's policy ... that allows open homosexuals to serve as clergy. The conference, organized under the umbrella of [Presbyterians for Renewal](#), was called for those members 'who are deeply troubled and whose integrity is deeply threatened by the move the denomination has made,' said the Rev. Paul Detterman, the group's executive director."

The New American noted that "among the options facing the group of conservative church members are either to stay with the PCUSA, forming a conservative faction within the denomination, or to break altogether with the two-million-member church (down from four million over the past four decades) and form their own denomination."

While some conservative Presbyterians would like to work from within to reform their denomination, others, such as the Rev. John Crosby, pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church in Edina, Minnesota, fear the PCUSA is beyond repair. "We have come off track, and Presbyterians have become a declining part of American life instead of a vibrant, growing part," said Crosby of the denomination that has lost more than half its members since its peak in the mid-1960s. "We have tried to create such a big tent trying to make everybody happy theologically. I fear the tent has collapsed without a center."

Photo: In this Oct. 5, 2011, photo Pastor Scott Anderson poses at his office in Sun Prairie, Wis.: AP Images



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