



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 21, 2014

## Presbyterians (PCUSA) Vote Overwhelmingly to Embrace Same-sex Marriage

One of the nation's largest mainline denominations, the 1.8-million-member Presbyterian Church (USA), passed resolutions June 19 at its General Assembly to recognize and embrace same-sex marriage. PCUSA delegates voted 317 (61 percent) to 238 (39 percent) to allow ordained clergy to conduct same-sex weddings, and also approved an amendment to the denomination's constitution to define marriage as between "two people" rather than "a man and a woman."



While the change to allow same-sex wedding ceremonies goes into effect immediately, it applies only to the 19 states that have legalized same-sex relationships as "marriage." A similar move was voted down last year, although the denomination did vote in 2011 to allow the ordination of clergy who are practicing homosexuals. However, until the vote this year PCUSA ministers technically faced discipline for blessing same-sex partnerships.

The 429 (71 percent) to 175 (29 percent) vote to amend the PCUSA constitution still requires the approval of a majority of the denomination's 172 presbyteries, but "the departure of many conservative churches from the PCUSA as well as the amendment's landslide victory at the General Assembly make approval seem likely," reported [Baptist Press News](#).

Hunter Farrell, director of Presbyterian World Mission, warned the denomination's Civil Union and Marriage Issues Committee that passage of the amendment would most likely prompt 17 of the 54 organizations partnering with PCUSA in world missions to sever their relationships with the denomination, and damage the relationships with 25 other PCUSA affiliates.

Homosexual activists within the denomination cheered the vote. "This vote is an answer to many prayers for the church to recognize love between committed same-sex couples," said Alex McNeill of More Light Presbyterians, one of the lead groups pressing the denomination to drop its biblically based prohibition of homosexual behavior.

But the Rev. Steve Wilkins, who represented the PCUSA's New Harmony Presbytery in South Carolina, said that "my heart breaks" concerning the moral change. "I don't think it's up to us to change the definition of marriage. In fact, marriage has been defined by us and revealed to us in God's Word."

Another conservative group, the Presbyterian Lay Committee (PLC), called the PCUSA's embrace of same-sex unions an "abomination," saying in a statement that the General Assembly had "committed an express repudiation of the Bible, the mutually agreed upon Confessions of the PCUSA, thousands of years of faithfulness to God's clear commands, and the denominational ordination vows of each concurring commissioner." The conservative Christian group within the PCUSA called upon members of the denomination to resist the moral slide. "You should tell your pastor and the members of your session that you disapprove of these actions," the statement said. "You should refuse to fund the



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General Assembly, your synod, your presbytery, and even your local church if those bodies have not explicitly and publicly repudiated these unbiblical actions. God will not be mocked and those who substitute their own felt desires for God's unchangeable Truth will not be found guiltless before a holy God."

The PLC recalled that when the PCUSA started in 1983 with the merger of two Presbyterian groups it had over three million members, a figure that has dropped to well under two million members in just 30 years.

Mark Tooley of the Institute on Religion & Democracy predicted that the latest move will prompt more members to leave the denomination. "By overturning natural marriage the PCUSA is only accelerating its already fast-paced demise," said Tooley. "Only declining denominations reject historic Christian standards, and in nearly every case that rejection reinforces the decline. Who respects a church that only echoes the secular world?"

Jeff Johnston, a marriage and sexuality analyst for Focus on the Family, said that since 2011 there has been a particularly heavy mass exodus of members from the PCUSA. "There's been an attrition from within the church, especially since they allowed the ordination of gay clergy," he said, noting that about 100,000 members left the denomination in 2011, and nearly 90,000 in 2012.

Phillip Bethancourt, executive vice president of the of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, told *Baptist Press News* that the large margin of victory for same-sex marriage by the PCUSA's General Assembly is an indication of the denomination's wholesale discarding of biblical truth concerning marriage and sexuality. "Here's what I find most telling about this vote," said Bethancourt. "While 54 percent of the American public supports gay marriage, 76 percent of the PCUSA does. It seems that the PCUSA is more pro-same-sex marriage than the American public ... by 22 percent."

He added that the numbers shouldn't be a surprise, "considering that white mainline Protestants in general support same-sex marriage at a 62 percent clip. Meanwhile, only 23 percent of white evangelicals support same-sex marriage. Why is it that the pathway to liberalism always seems to lead through the gate of shifting sexual ethics?"

The Associated Press noted that the PCUSA's vote moves it most closely to another pro-homosexual mainline denomination, the United Church of Christ, which several years ago became the first denomination to fully embrace same-sex "marriage." But other mainline churches are closing in. "The Episcopal Church has approved a prayer service for blessing same-sex unions," reported AP. "The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] has eliminated barriers for gay clergy [and] allows regional and local church officials to decide their own policies on ordination and blessings for same-sex couples."

The AP reported that "the largest mainline group, the United Methodist Church, with about 7.8 million U.S. members, bars ordaining people in same-sex relationships. However, church members have been debating whether to split over their different views of the Bible and marriage. Gay marriage supporters have been recruiting clergy to openly officiate at same-sex ceremonies in protest of church policy."



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