



TO THE MEMBERS OF IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

May 11, 2011

Dear friends,

This past Sunday we confirmed 16 incredibly bright, searching, and faithful young people into the full membership of the church. You would have been inspired, touched, and hopeful as you heard their statements of faith....every one of them.

After sharing what God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit meant to her, Corrinne McClure summed up what the church meant to her with that little ditty she learned in Sunday School years ago: "I am the church; You are the church; We are the church....together!"

For over three decades the Presbyterian Church (USA) has been studying, debating, and praying over the issue of what it means to affirm the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of life, especially as it pertains to the full inclusion and ordination of our faithful gay and lesbian members. In a sense, it boils down to the question, "What does it mean to be the church...together?"

Most of you are aware that on Tuesday the 87th presbytery in our denomination approved what has been called "Amendment 10-A," which outlines the gifts and requirements for ordained service. It reads:

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. (G.1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-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 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.

Please notice several things:

This decision begins with what is the most important affirmation that we expect of all deacons, elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, "joyful submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life."

In addition, this will have important effects on our life as a church...together. This reaffirms our historic principles which guided us from 1789 to 1996 (when G.0106b was adopted, the so-called "fidelity and chastity amendment) in which each session and presbytery will continue to determine the suitability of individuals seeking ordination within its bounds. The main difference is that persons in a same-gender relationship may be considered for ordination and/or installation as deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament with the PC(USA). All other church-wide standards for ordination remain unchanged.

It goes without saying that reactions to this change will be varied, both throughout our denomination and within Idlewild. Many believe that the church will be strengthened by this

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Pastor

Elizabeth Gayle Walker
Associate Pastor for
Adult Ministry

Margaret Burnett
Associate Pastor for Outreach
Ministry

Corinne Nienhuis
Commissioned Lay Pastor

Denton McLellan
Parish Associate

Anne H.K. Apple
Interim Associate Pastor
for Congregational Life

Stephen R. Haynes
Theologian in Residence

Ted Gibboney
Director of Music Ministry

Elizabeth Houston
Director of Children's Ministry

Frank Kelly
Director of Youth Ministry

Ashley LaRue
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change and see it as an action, long in coming that moves toward a church as generous and just as God's grace as we receive the gifts for ministry of all those who feel called to ordained office. Others will consider this change as one that compromises biblical authority and acquiesces to our contemporary culture. And for many, the feelings on both sides run deep. This amendment permits Presbyterians to hold and respect diverse views.

So what does this mean for Idlewild? Simply put, my hope and prayer is that we will continue to be the church... together.

- As Presbyterians, we will continue to believe that the best way for us to discern God's will for the church is through seeking it together—worshipping, praying, thinking, studying, and serving alongside of each other. We will continue to believe that we are all children of God, saved and taught by Jesus Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit.
- We will continue to hold the authority of scripture high, confessing scriptures to be the word of God written, witnessing to God's self-revelation. As I have said many times, the issue is *not* the *authority* of scripture that divides us, it is different *interpretations*, and it has always been the case. As I have been studying the early church during this Easter season, I have noticed once again how many arguments and divisions there were in those post-resurrection days. They disagreed on what to eat and with whom to eat; on circumcision, on the nature of Jesus Christ and the role of scripture in their lives, and yes, even on matters pertaining to sexuality! But they stayed together, worshipping, studying scripture, eating together and serving God, and the world took notice!
- We will continue to confess Jesus Christ as Lord of all and the Head of the church, who calls individuals to ordained ministries. It is this same Jesus Christ who is the foundation of our faith and to whom we cling.
- We will continue to be a community in which, as our Vision of Idlewild states, "All voices are heard..." and "all who enter find a home." We will pray that all members of Idlewild, and all Presbyterians, may strengthen and support one another, witnessing to the Gospel, promoting the peace of Jesus Christ, and working together to realize the reign of God in all creation.

In short, we will continue to be the church—*together!* Thanks be to God!

I invite you to join me in the prayer that our PC(USA) leaders have asked us to pray:

Almighty God, we give thanks for a rich heritage of faithful witnesses to the gospel throughout the ages. We offer gratitude not only for those who have gone before us, but for General Assembly commissioners and presbyters across the church who have sought diligently to discern the mind of Christ for the church in every time and place, and especially in this present time.

May your Spirit of peace be present with us in difficult decisions, especially where relationships are strained and the future is unclear. Open our ears and our hearts to listen to and hear those with whom we differ. Most of all, we give thanks for Jesus Christ, our risen Savior and Lord, who called the Church into being and who continues to call us to follow his example of loving our neighbor and working for the reconciliation of the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Grace and peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter being a large, stylized 'S'.

Steve

P.S. This letter will be posted on our Member News web page (www.idlewildchurch.org/membernews).