

Ecclesia Reformata, Semper Reformanda!

The Latin words that we Presbyterians speak so often. “Reformed and always reforming.” But what does that mean, *really*? Well, the Reformed motto challenges both conservative and liberal views. It does not expect preservation for preservation's sake or change for change's sake. And most important, it signals that the modifications, whatever they are or will be, are orchestrated by God.

Part of our openness to being reformed comes out of who we are. The church, even at its best, is a frail and imperfect institution, filled with sinners. We are people who journey with Christ, who have not yet become what we will become, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Openness to being reformed comes not only because of who we are, but because of who God is.

I tell you that, to tell you this: The Presbyterian Book of Order is being changed – by the Presbyterians. At its meeting in June 2014, the General Assembly proposed an amendment to our church Constitution regarding marriage. So far, across the nation, a majority of the 171 presbyteries in our denomination have ratified the amendment, making it effective. The new language will now read:

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the wellbeing of the entire human family. 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 sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.

The amendment grants freedom of conscience to pastors in states where civil law permits it, to perform wedding ceremonies for same-gender couples, and it also allows sessions to authorize the use of church facilities for such ceremonies. Pastors would continue to be held responsible for pre-marriage counseling, and sessions must be in agreement, if the ceremony is to be held in the church facility. It does not require pastors to perform wedding ceremonies or sessions to authorize any service if it would violate their conscience(s).

At present, same-gender weddings are not permitted by Texas law, so the effect is largely symbolic for now, and does not affect our Henderson church. But, because the Book of Order will be modified, it may affect us at a later time. No matter how you feel about this news, please remember that the government of our Presbyterian denomination includes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God. The organization rests on that fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.

Over the years, the issues have come, and by the grace of God, some have gone – issues such as slavery, women's rights, civil rights, even numerous wars – some justified, some questioned. Now, this new issue has come before us, and the denomination has spoken. I hope you will ask me questions, if you have them. And I hope you will remember that my door is always open to you. I too, am *reformed and always being reformed*. Thank God!

Candice

Peter said to them, “You know that we Jews are not allowed to have anything to do with other people. But God has shown me that he doesn't think anyone is unclean or unfit.”
– Acts 10:27-28