

ORDINATION STANDARDS
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ENDICOTT, NY
JUNE, 2011

On July 12, 2011, new language will become part of the PC(USA) Constitution which removes any reference to sexual behavior as a standard for ordained office in the Church. This is a major shift in the denomination's policy on ordination. It means, in essence, that persons in a same gender relationship or a heterosexual relationship outside the covenant of marriage may be considered for ordination and/or installation as deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The decision about a person's suitability for ordination/installation will now be made by each congregation and Presbytery.

The Session of First Presbyterian Church, Endicott, has spent time studying the Bible and interpretive resources, listening, praying/fasting and discerning how to respond to this change. We are deeply concerned about the ramifications of this shift. FPC's Core Beliefs state: "The Bible is God's Truth and the inspired Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience." We believe the weight of Biblical, theological and confessional evidence reveals that God has set clear boundaries that accompany his gift of sexuality, and these boundaries are for our own good. We believe that the full witness of the Old and New Testaments reveals that God's intention and desire for individuals, families and humanity is that people live in chastity in singleness or in faithfulness within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman.

The new wording of the Book of Order means that each ordaining body, including First Pres Endicott, determines its own standards for ordination within the parameters of the PC(USA) Constitution. We believe a sexual standard is one of many biblical standards of consideration for ordination. In response to the July, 2011 changes to the Constitution, the Session of FPC will advise the congregation's Nominating Committee, as they consider persons for nomination as elders and deacons, to continue to uphold the standard that ordained officers live "either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness." Ordained officers must be willing to submit to, and live in conformity with, the position and standards set by this local church. This same standard will be applied when hiring FPC staff persons.

While the Constitutional change has troubling ramifications for the heterosexual standards of behavior for leaders as well, the movement behind Amendment 10-A focused on the issue of homosexuality and ordination. We recognize that homosexuality is a scientifically, theologically and culturally complex phenomenon. We also know that this is a very sensitive issue and impacts many people on a very personal level. And we acknowledge that there are people within the congregation who articulate a different perspective and may disagree with the position the Session has taken.

People are welcome at FPC no matter where they are on their journey of faith or what issues they struggle with. When it comes to positions of leadership within the church, the Bible sets high standards. We humbly acknowledge that we are all prodigal children in need of a Savior, and all of us fall short of the biblical standards for leadership. At the same time, when a leader engages in behavior the scriptures call sin, the church should address the situation for the well-being of that individual and of the church. As Amendment 10-A says, we should lovingly encourage one another to "submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life." (G-2.0104b, new Form of Government)

We, the Session of First Presbyterian Church of Endicott, pray that we will be obedient to Jesus Christ and lead this congregation with grace and truth.

(Philippians 4:4-9)