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## Homesteader - April 7, 2015

### THE MARRIAGE AMENDMENT

By Carl Wilton/Edited by Richard Wyatt

"So, what happens now?" That's the question on the minds of many Presbyterians.

For more than 40 years, Presbyterians have been debating the question of full inclusions of gays and lesbians in the life of the church. That theological struggles has been going on for longer than I've been in ministry. With each year that's gone by, the number of Presbyterians favoring full inclusion has gradually been increasing, a slowly rising tide.

And this latest issue isn't the first time we Presbyterians have struggled to apply traditional Biblical interpretations to what we affirm is the leading of the Holy Spirit, remembering God's words to us, "Behold, I am doing a new thing, do you not perceive it?" Isaiah 43:19

time was when a divorced man (and, it was only men who were ministers) could not serve as a minister. It wasn't until 1953 that women were permitted to be elders. And it took even longer for women to be allowed ordination to word and sacrament. All in what had been for centuries, clear contradictions of Biblical imperatives. With each of these changes, the younger generation led us. With each of these changes some were unable to change. But, also with each of these changes, we remained a church able to embrace us all, even in our continuing disagreements.

Three years ago, a majority of presbyteries agreed with the General Assembly, voting to remove the constitutional bar to ordination for gay individuals.

A year ago, the Assembly voted to recommend changing the definition of marriage from being

From a purely demographic standpoint, it's hard to see how any church that favors moral convictions more common to retirees than to younger and mid-life adults can survive for long.

Although there's sometimes a tendency for those on the conservative side of the debate to dismiss the convictions of their opponents as unbiblical, anyone who takes an objective look at the arguments pro and con will see that it's not a matter of biblical fidelity, but rather of differing biblical interpretations. Advocates of same-sex marriage truly do not love their Bibles any less than those who oppose it. They just understand the scriptures differently. It is one of the wonderful hallmarks of the PC(U.S.A.) that we have room in our 'tent' for these continuing theological discussions.

The new language doesn't force any Presbyterians to change their views. It is permissive, not mandatory, speaking of what "may be appropriate" rather than what must happen. More than that, it offers explicit protection for any teaching elder (minister) or congregations who fears being forced to approve a same-sex marriage ceremony: "Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder's or the session's discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God." Individual convictions are protected.

"between a man and a woman" to being "between two people" (although noting that the the two parties have traditionally been a man and a woman.)

In large part, the rising tide of change has been generationally-driven. Pollsters tell us huge majorities of 30-and-under Christians do not view same-sex relationships as inherently sinful - and that most of them have little interest in any church that teaches differently. As younger people have been elected as commissioners to presbyteries, and as a corresponding number of older leaders have aged out, the shift has gradually taken place.



*"So many people having so much fun while examining issues related to faith."*

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To feel sorry for the needy is not the mark of a Christian -- to help them is.

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