**The Marriage Amendment (14-F)**

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being 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.

If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage be conducted by a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording the marriage contract. A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the teaching elder, who may agree to the couple’s request only if, in the judgment of the teaching elder, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.

The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session (W-1.4004–.4006). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The teaching elder witnesses the couple’s promises and pronounces God’s blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.

A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the statements made shall reflect the fact that the couple is already married to one another according to the laws of the civil jurisdiction.

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.

**In Support of the Marriage Amendment (14-F)**

1. The proposed language is better than the current W-4.9000 (you can compare!). The proposed language (approved by the General Assembly with a 71% vote, and supported by 78% of YAADs and 94% of TSADs) is
   1. A more accurate description of marriage, in that it recognizes the changing realities in the civil realm.
   2. Clearer regarding the relationship of church and state in marriage.
   3. Shorter! (461 words instead of 724)
   4. In the spirit of the new Form of Government, streamlined and less detailed yet focused on underlying principles – and will fit better in the proposed new Directory for Worship currently being studied.
   5. Welcoming of same-gender families, without minimizing or negating the value of marriage between a man and a woman.
   6. Not a “definition” of marriage – it is a brief *description* of the way that Presbyterians understand marriage, with a focus on the church’s role in making and sustaining the covenant and the worship service in which the covenant is celebrated.
2. Marriage matters! This amendment would provide a broader understanding of who is included, but not a fundamental change to what marriage is about.
   1. Marriage upholds the values of faithfulness, commitment and stability.
   2. As the proposed amendment affirms, marriage is a covenant that can strengthen Christians in their discipleship.
   3. A couple requesting to be married in the church is seeking the power of the Gospel to transform their lives, and the support of the community of faith for their solemn commitments.
3. This proposed amendment allows pastors to pastor and sessions to have appropriate authority.
   1. This proposed change supports congregational ministry by better addressing the current legal and cultural reality in the communities our churches serve; and it would be true in all states, regardless of differences in civil law. This language clarifies that pastors and sessions that want to provide pastoral care, including marriage ceremonies, for same-gender couples may do so.
   2. While allowing freedom of conscience in the interpretation of Scripture for all, reassurance is given to those who are concerned about being compelled to perform a service of which they disapprove. The language in the closing paragraph of the amendment is explicit about this protection.
   3. The amendment will help the church move on from decades of controversy about sexuality and focus on evangelism, worship and missions.
4. Regarding *The Book of Confessions* and the places where marriage is described as being between a man and a woman:
   1. The BOO has already altered the phrase “one man and one woman,” presumably to allow for remarriage after divorce, so there is a history of accommodation to change.
   2. When the UPCUSA adopted multiple confessions in addition to Westminster, in 1967, the sections prohibiting women in ministry were retained for historical integrity, despite the inconsistency with then-current practice. The church continues to live with this “tension” even after the confessional warrant for the ordination of women entered the BOC in 1991, with the addition of *A Brief Statement of Faith*.
5. From the Overture Advocate presentation in Detroit: “In light of these enduring principles, the concept and practice of Christian marriage has been revised often in response to changing cultural norms. People of faith have interpreted the institution of marriage and adapted to the prevailing customs as they discerned God speaking to their time.  Yet we have not wavered from the Biblical principles of fellowship, community, family, and inclusiveness, summed up in Jesus’ command to “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13: 34).”