

Reasons For Change # 3 Conflicted Witness

This is the third in a series of papers addressing the central reasons that the Session of CPC recommends to the congregation that Community Presbyterian Church seek dismissal from the PCUSA and seek affiliation with the EPC. This paper addresses the conflicted witness that results from CPC's affiliation with the PCUSA. A conflicted witness occurs when different members of the same church body are giving opposing messages about who Jesus is and the life He has called us to live.

This paper outlines five key areas in which the PCUSA position or practice conflicts with what we at CPC believe to be consistent with scriptural truth. This has led us to conclude that the PCUSA is no longer the most effective path to further CPC's mission and Four Fold Purpose as it continues to trend away from our mission and purpose.

1. We believe that Jesus alone is the Lord and Savior of the world
2. We believe in the scriptures to be the church's first and final authority in faith and life.
3. We believe in the sacred values and purpose God has for each human life
4. We believe that marriage is an institution ordained of God between one man and one woman
5. We believe ordination standards reflect obedience to scripture and should be observed and not be altered.

While CPC and the PCUSA differ in essential beliefs which are the subjects of this paper, CPC has always embraced those with whom we differ and we will continue to do so. We are commanded in Scripture to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and our neighbor as ourselves.

1. CPC believes that Jesus alone is the Lord and Savior of the world. *"No one comes to the Father except through me."* John 14:6. We affirm that Jesus is the only path to God and He alone is the Mediator who reveals God the Father. While we respect other religious expressions and treat all persons of whatever creed with dignity, we hold, nevertheless, to this singular claim of Jesus. This is for CPC an essential belief.

Conflicted Witness	Consistent Witness
<p>PCUSA – Divergent views of Jesus Christ An increasing portion of the leadership and membership of the PCUSA does not believe that <i>"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."</i> Acts 4:12</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An alarming trend within the denomination is seen in the results of the Presbyterian Panel of 2009 -2010. In answer to the statement: "Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved", the following represents the breakdown of those who disagree/strongly: members 36%; elders 31%; pastors 45% and specialized clergy 60%. Overall, more than 40% of those surveyed disagree with the statement. (1) 	<p>EPC- Salvation in Christ Alone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Being estranged from God and condemned by our sinfulness, our salvation is wholly dependent upon the work of God's free grace. God credits His righteousness to those who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation, thereby justifies them to His sight. Only such as are born of the Holy Spirit and receive Jesus Christ become children of God and heirs of eternal life." (EPC Essentials of Our Faith). (2)

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2. CPC believes in the scriptures to be the church’s first and final authority in faith and life. *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness”* 2 Timothy 3:16. We affirm that though written by human beings in human language, the bible speaks with the authority of God Himself, Scriptural judgments of good and evil, right and wrong, are always for our benefit.

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<p>PCUSA – Harmony over Truth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the 2006 the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity (PUP) after 5 years of study concluded that “we who disagree on some matters can learn much from one another as we mine together the scriptures in love” (See The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture paper) (3) 	<p>EPC – Consistency Of Scriptures Authority and Interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The Church finds her visible, yet imperfect, expression in local congregations where the Word of God is preached in its purity and the sacraments are administered in their integrity; where scriptural discipline is practiced and where loving fellowship is maintained.” (EPC Essentials of our Faith #5)

3. CPC believes in the sacred value and purpose God has for each human life. *“Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”* Psalm 139: 16. We are committed to the sanctity of life of the unborn child; all victims of abortion; the protection of children from infanticide, exploitation, and any other abuse; the homeless and hungry; the mentally ill; the sick, including the neglect and alienation of people suffering with AIDS; victims of substance abuse; neglect and abuse of the elderly; prisoner rehabilitation; and the ultimate issue of salvation for all people through Jesus Christ. (4)

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<p>PCUSA – Pro Choice Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Since 1970 every statement and resolution coming to the PCUSA General Assembly has supported free and open access to abortion without legal restriction. (5) In 1994 and again in 2001 overtures which expressed opposition to partial birth abortion, were rejected. In 2010, the PCUSA was one of 16 signatories to a letter sent to the White House in support of health care reform that does not create new restrictions to abortion. 	<p>EPC – Pro Life Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “The Evangelical Presbyterian Church is convinced that the Bible strongly affirms the dignity and value of every human life... Scripture teaches that we are not merely to avoid involvement in injustice. God's people are called upon to speak for the oppressed and defenseless. The Scripture passages cited above are evidence that God accords human value and dignity to the unborn child.” (EPC Position Paper on Abortion)

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4. CPC believes that marriage is an institution ordained of God between one man and one woman. *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”* Gen 2:24 We affirm God’s intention for humanity that those who enter into marriage shall seek in mutual love and respect to live, one man and one woman, in Christian fidelity as long as both shall live. (6)

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<p>PCUSA – Tolerates Advocacy for unbiblical marriage Within the PCUSA there is a contradiction between the written policy which is aligned with CPC and the practice which supports same sex ceremonies.</p> <p><u>Policy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The constitution of the PCUSA states that “marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship” W-4.9001 <p><u>Practice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2008 the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission found that “It is not improper for ministers of the Word and Sacrament to perform same sex ceremonies.” • In 2008 a same sex couple signed a California marriage license, received a standing ovation and were declared legally wed at a General Assembly dinner. • In January, 2010, the General Assembly Special Committee report to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage provides no clarity to same gender couples who may wish to live in a covenanted and life-long partnership. It concludes that “our unity in Christ supersedes any other claim or argument clamoring for our attention.” (7) 	<p>EPC – Consistent and unified policy and practice for biblical marriage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman and between the participants and God. (Malachi 2:14-16). In this position paper we seek to think about marriage under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and God's written Word, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). We believe that God has revealed to all people in all cultures at all times a sense of morality in the ordering of human relationships. Therefore, there is a moral imperative, which governs all human relationships, including marriage.” (EPC Position Paper on the Sanctity of Marriage)

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5. We believe ordination standards reflect obedience to scripture and should be observed and not be altered. *Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.* 1 Timothy 4:12b. We affirm that those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life of obedience to scripture and in conformity to the historic standards of the church. Persons refusing to repent of any self acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

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<p>PCUSA – Permits Unrepentant Leadership The written policy of the PCUSA mirrors CPC’s position while the practice in one area is towards abandonment of the standard of fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness.</p> <p><u>Policy</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to scripture and in conformity to the historic standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament. (G-6.0106b) (8) <p><u>Practice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In November, 2009, The Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly handed down a ruling that upheld the right of an openly homosexual man, to declare a departure from ordinations standards as a “proper exercise of conscience.” In February 20, 2010, the John Knox Presbytery in Wisconsin voted (81-25), to ordain a candidate with a departure of the “fidelity-chastity” standard – which requires that ordained officers be faithful in heterosexual marriage or chaste in singleness. The candidate acknowledges being in a long-term same-sex relationship and contends that excluding homosexuals in committed relationships is not Biblical or faithful. In November 2009 the San Francisco Presbytery voted to ordain the first openly homosexual minister in the denomination with a departure from the “fidelity-chastity” standard to a position of advocacy for overturning that same standard. 	<p>EPC – Prohibits Unrepentant Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Candidates shall provide a written statement of any exceptions to the Westminster confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of this Church, and the Presbytery must act to allow or disallow the exceptions. The Presbytery shall not allow any exception to “Essentials of Our Faith.” Unrepentant homosexual behavior is incompatible with the ordination vows for the offices of Deacon, Ruling Elder and Teaching Elder. (EPC Position Paper on Homosexuality) “All Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life. The infallible Word of God, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is a complete and unified witness to God's redemptive acts culminating in the incarnation of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.” (EPC Essentials of Our Faith)

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Presenting a Consistent Witness

Because of these conflicting views of scriptural interpretation, the PCUSA has created a **conflicted witness to the world** and, by extension, to the local churches of the PCUSA. Churches like CPC are continually called to explain that they are not like other parts of the denomination that embrace non-orthodox positions. This defensive posture reduces the impact of CPC's ministries and mission. The elders and pastors of CPC believe it is time to align ourselves with a denomination and family of churches which will allow CPC to provide a **consistent witness** to His Word and Truth, locally and internationally. We believe the EPC is that denomination.

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1. *Religious and Demographic Profile of Presbyterians 2008*. The Profile reveals results of a survey of 3500 participants in the 2009-2010 Presbyterian Panel. See especially page 6 of the full report at www.pcusa.org/research. See also our paper on Reasons for Change: Christology.
2. All quotes and references in this paper and additional information can be found in the body of information in: Evangelical Presbyterian Church – Beliefs, Position Papers and Pastoral Letters at www.epc.org/about-the-epc/beliefs/, which include...
 - a. Essentials of Our Faith found in the EPC Book of Order
 - b. Westminster Confessions Larger and Shorter Catechism
 - c. Position Papers
 - i. Abortion
 - ii. Divorce and Remarriage
 - iii. Holy Spirit
 - iv. Homosexuality
 - v. Human Life
 - vi. Sanctity of Marriage
 - vii. Suffering, Death and Dying
3. PCUSA Peace, Unity and Purity Report. Page 18. See also *Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture* Page 3. Position adopted by the 123rd General Assembly (1983) of the PCUSA. The Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (USA). For more information see www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity/.
4. This is a quote from: Community Presbyterian Church Sanctity of Life Statement.
5. Some of these are: 1972, “Freedom of Personal Choice in Problem Pregnancies”; 1976, “Problem Pregnancies: Toward a Responsible Decision”; 1979, “A Religious Statement on Abortion: A Call To Commitment”; 1983, “The Covenant of Life and the Caring Community and Covenant and Creation: Theological Reflections on Contraception and Abortion.”
6. This is a quote from: Witness for Biblical Morality, CPC Session Resolution, adopted: April 11, 1991 and amended: May 1, 2000. Additional scriptures are: Genesis 1:27-28; 2:24, 19:1-29; Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Matt. 19:1-12 Romans 1:26-27; I Corinthians 6:9-10; I Timothy 1:9-10; II Peter 2:6-10 and Jude 7.
7. In the Draft of Preliminary Report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage to the 219th General Assembly (2010) Presbyterian Church (USA), you will find a very good summary of most of the issues regarding the history of the PCUSA on this subject. However, the report is unable to resolve – it defers to diversity and no clear definite statement in support of biblical prohibitions to same-gender sexual relations.
8. PCUSA Book of Order, see Form of Government.