

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

C H U R C H

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Dear FPC Member:

In 2010, the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly recommended a change to the language in the Book of Order concerning ordination standards for deacons, elders and ministers. Here is the specific language:

Current Book of Order Language – Ordination Standard

G-6.0106b is a provision in the PC(USA) Book of Order (Constitution) that provides the following standards for persons ordained as church leaders (deacon, elder or minister).

“Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional 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 (W.4.9001), 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.”

219th General Assembly (2010) Recommended Change to Book of Order

“Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G.1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G.14.0450) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W.4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

Cherokee Presbytery and all the First Presbyterian Church Marietta Commissioners to the Presbytery have recently voted not to change the Book of Order. (As information, the Presbytery votes to ordain or install a minister and the congregation votes to elect and install Deacons and Elders.)

However, it now appears, based upon votes cast so far, that the change in the Book of Order will be approved by a majority of the Presbyteries. When all the votes are certified, the change becomes effective July 11, 2011, the day following the voting deadline.

We the Session at First Presbyterian Church Marietta believe that:

First Presbyterian Church Marietta has consistently believed and stated that church is the place all people, as sinners, come to join other sinners in Christ's mercy. We proclaim Jesus Christ in all our ministries. Our relationship with Jesus Christ is the most valued relationship we have, yet we continue to sin and seek forgiveness and Christ's transformation in our lives.

As the church welcomed each of us, we welcome all people into Christ's church, regardless of their sin or separation. We come to the church to hear the call of Christ to balance our love of neighbor while holding to our own integrity. As Christ's disciples we go out into the world to love the sinner and to walk with them, so they may know Christ and his redemption. That means that our love of others is greater than our differences of opinion.

As Christ's disciples, our lifestyle should set a good example and our repentant attitude should be apparent. We have honored the intent of the long-existing standard for conduct in our leaders, both ordained and non-ordained. The standard set forth in the current Book of Order has served this congregation well. Through our reformed faith, we believe that no one of us is perfect, that our fallibilities send us to God through Christ, and, in humility, that we benefit from Christ's grace.

Therefore:

First Presbyterian Church Marietta will continue to hold its present ordination standards for the offices of Deacons and Elders of this congregation. We understand that the amendment language, that is likely to pass, will allow us to abide by the same standard that we have long honored. Cherokee Presbytery's committee on ministry (COM) has taken action to affirm that they will not be changing their pattern of examining ministers for ordination or installation within our Presbytery. First Presbyterian Church Marietta supports the Presbytery's position.

We urge our members to support First Presbyterian Church Marietta as we move forward to answer God's call to spread the Gospel message. In our continuing desire to be faithful to Christ, we will continue to serve and care for members and those outside of our community.

First Presbyterian Church Marietta is currently committed to remaining within the PCUSA and we will continually dialogue with other churches who seek to remain faithful and discern God's future for our church. Our Presbyterian connectional system of ministry has allowed this congregation to lead in our Presbytery and beyond. We seek to use our connectional church system to negotiate the disagreements within our Presbyterian family.

In conclusion; we seek what is God's direction in these matters, trusting that God is the only Sovereign in life's dilemmas. We ask and encourage you to communicate with the leadership of the Church; the Session and our Pastors. We pray that you will pray with the leadership for the gifts of wisdom and grace in these days. As we stand together, Christ will continue to use his Church.

For further conversation about this issue, please contact any member of the Session, one of our Pastors. Names and Contact Information are attached.

In Christ,

The Session and Pastors

Attachment: List of Contacts