**Congregational Forum on Denominational Issues #4**

**Current Events**

**March 25, 2012**

**OUR CORE VALUES - Commitments that are central to who we are as a church**

NUESTROS VALORES CENTRALES: Compromisos que son centrales a quienes somos como iglesia.

* There is one God who has revealed himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

*Hay un Dios que se ha revelado en tres personas: Padre, Hijo, y Espíritu Santo*

* The Bible is God’s inspired and authoritative word for faith and life

*La Biblia es la palabra inspirada y autoritativa de Dios para la fe y la vida.*

* Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone1

*La salvación es solamente por gracia a través de la fe en Jesucristo.*

* The goal of our ministry is to transform people into fully devoted followers of Christ.

*La meta del nuestro ministerio es transformar a la gente en seguidores completamente consagrados a Cristo*

* The decision to follow Jesus calls us to purity in every area of our lives2

*La decisión de seguir a Jesús nos llama a la pureza en cada área de nuestras vidas*

* Worship is our joyful response to God’s majesty, holiness, and love

*La adoración es nuestra respuesta gozosa a la majestad, al santidad, y al amor de Dios*

* The Gospel of Jesus Christ transcends race, language, and culture

*El evangelio del Jesucristo transciende la raza, la lengua, y la cultura*

* We are called to love one another, and love our neighbors as ourselves

*Somos llamados para amarnos unos a otros, y amar al prójimo como a nosotros mismos*

* All human life is sacred from conception to natural death, because we have all been created in God’s own image

*Toda la vida humana es sagrada desde la concepción hasta la muerte natural, porque todos hemos sido creados a la imagen de Dios*

* Prayer is the key that unlocks God’s power for Christian life and ministry

*La oración es la llave que abre el poder de Dios para la vida cristiana y el ministerio*

* All spiritual gifts are at work in Christ’s church, and are given for the common good3

*Todos los dones espirituales están en funcionamiento en la iglesia de Cristo, dados para el bien común*

* Every Christian has been shaped by God for ministry

*Dios ha formado a cada cristiano para el ministerio*

* Jesus is coming again

*Jesús viene por segunda vez.*

An excerpt from John Schuck, a Minister member in good standing of Holston Presbytery in Elizabethtown, Tenn. This is from his 2010 Holy Week service message *No More Crosses,* published on his website. *“A few years ago a poster advertising Mel Gibson's movie, The Passion, featured an image of Christ wearing a crown of thorns. The caption read: Dying was his reason for living. The movie itself was about his supposed last hours cobbled together from the various fictional accounts in the gospels. The four gospels that made it into the canon of holy scripture all contain a version of Jesus' trial and execution. In fact over half the gospel material has to do with his death. Why are we so obsessed with this man's death? Dying was his reason for living. Really? The belief that Jesus died for us or died for our sins or died to save us has been Christianity's theological centerpiece. His death and resurrection are two parts of this mythology. That mythology has little to do with the historical person of Jesus. Details about the trial and crucifixion are literary memes taken from other sources. It isn't that the gospel writers observed what happened and wrote it down. It is what we would call, for lack of a more sophisticated word, fiction.”* In December 2011 Schuck was elected clergy commissioner to the upcoming General Assembly.

Reverend Doctor Jane Spahr has been acquitted before on charges that she has performed same sex union/marriage ceremonies but did so again for approximately 16 same sex couples before Proposition 8 was approved. She was found guilty, “rebuked,” and enjoined “to avoid such offences in the future.” Upon appeal, the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission upheld her conviction, but included the following opinions along with the ruling: *“The best solution is for the General Assembly to amend the definition of marriage to authorize teaching elders and commissioned ruling elders to preside at the marriages of same-sex couples in civil jurisdictions that recognize such marriages as legal. The definition now found in W-4.9001 was never designed for these circumstances. It was adopted in a world where same sex marriages were inconceivable. By retaining that definition despite the increasing number of jurisdictions recognizing same-sex marriage, the church creates a form of second class citizenship for faithful Christians despite all the other places in the Book of Order where the full equality of persons regardless of sexual orientation is affirmed. I encourage the General Assembly to so act.”* And, “*Since the Directory for Worship is part of our constitution and the majority has found that it may give rise to disciplinary cases, then it should be immediately amended to clearly state that we fully welcome the LGBT community into their rightful place in our church, including allowing them to marry.”* According to the L.A. Times, “Spahr said she would continue to marry gay and lesbian couples regardless of the verdict by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission, the church's version of the U.S. Supreme Court.” Honorably retired, she remains in good standing with her presbytery.

***A Recent History of Ordination Standards in the PC USA***

• The Authoritative Interpretation of 1978

o The biblical revelation to Israel, reaffirmed in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, portrayed in the theology and human creation, specifically reflected in the ethical teaching in both the Old and New Testaments, and confirmed in nature, clearly indicates that genital sexual expression is meant to occur within the covenant of heterosexual marriage. For the church to ordain a self‐ affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be to act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ. The repentant homosexual person who finds the power of Christ redirecting his or her sexual desires toward a married heterosexual commitment, or finds God's power to control his or her desires and to adopt a celibate lifestyle, can certainly be ordained, all other qualifications being met.

• The Fidelity and Chastity Clause 2001

o 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.

• The Peace, Unity, and Purity Report 2006

o The PUP’s final report, to the 2006 Assembly, included an “authoritative interpretation” (AI) of G‐

6.0108 of the *Book of Order*, which affirmed the church’s standards for ordination but revived

the 18th ‐century practice of allowing candidates for ordination to declare a “scruple” (conscientious objection) to any constitutional provision. According the AI, it is the responsibility of the ordaining body (presbyteries for ministers, congregations for elders and deacons) to determine whether the declared scruple is a significant enough departure from “scriptural and constitutional standards for fitness for office” to be disqualifying. Before adopting the PUP report, the Assembly added an additional qualification to the AI, requiring ordaining bodies to determine “Whether the examination and ordination and installation decision comply with the Constitution of the PC (USA).” *General Assembly Backgrounder,* Jerry Van Marter, Presbyterian News Service, 5/29/2008

• The Authoritative Interpretation of 2008

* “The 218th General Assembly (2008) affirms the authoritative interpretation of G‐6.0108 approved by the 217th General Assembly (2006). Further, the 218th General Assembly (2008), pursuant to G‐13.0112, interprets the requirements of G‐6.0108 to apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Section G‐6.0108 requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case‐by‐case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination. However, the examining body is not required to accept a departure from standards, and cannot excuse a candidate’s inability to perform the constitutional functions unique to his or her office (such as administration of the sacraments).”
* The New Form of Government, 2011, G-2.0104b

Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. 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). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

• The PC USA’s policy is local ordination with national recognition

* Ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to ordered ministry. G-2.0701

• The Book of Worship on Marriage

o Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. *Directory for Worship*‐4.9001

Ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery, setting apart a person to ordered ministry. G-2.0701

 **A Brief History of PCUSA’s Stance on Abortion**

**1647** Westminster Catechism- *"neglecting or withdrawing the lawful or necessary means of*

*preservation of life...and whatsoever tends to the destruction of the life of any"* is sinful. Further, it teaches that our Christian obligation includes *"protecting and defending the innocent."* 1

**1869** GA statement: *“This Assembly regards the destruction by parents of their own offspring before*

*birth, with abhorrence, as a crime against God and against nature….”* 2

**1962 and 1965** GA statement: *"The fetus is a human life to be protected by the criminal law from the moment when the ovum is fertilized....As Christians, we believe that this should not be an individual decision on the part of the physician and couple. Their decision should be limited and restrained by the larger society."*

**PCUSA switches to pro-abortion stance**

**1970** GA statement: *“Women should have full freedom of personal choice concerning the completion or*

*termination of their pregnancies.”*

**1972** Language regarding "personal choice" and "responsible decision" regarding abortion began to appear in church documents. 3

**1983** GA adopted language affirming abortion as a "stewardship responsibility." (3)

**1988** GA Stated Clerk James Andrews filed an amicus brief with the US Supreme Court in support of

“abortion rights.”

**1992** GA statement: “*Problem pregnancies are the result of, and influenced by, so many complicated and insolvable circumstances that we have neither the wisdom nor the authority to address or decide each situation.”*

It considers moral judgments to be a matter of each woman's individual interpretation of what is right or wrong in her particular crisis situation, and

*“...acknowledges circumstances in a sinful world that may make abortion the least objectionable of difficult options.”*

Further, current policy states that

*“...no law or administrative decision should limit access to abortion; limit information and counseling concerning abortions; or limit or prohibit public funding for necessary abortions for the socially and*

*economically disadvantaged.”*

1 The Shorter Catechism, 7.068 and 7.069

2 1869 Minutes of the General Assembly, pp. 937-938

3 http://www.spiritrestoration.org/Church/Denominational-stand-on-the-issue-of-abortion.htm

**1996** GA rejected an overture affirming that *“partial birth abortion of a live fetus, except to save the life of the mother, falls short of God’s plan for humankind.”* (In 1997, PCUSA did adopt a position expressing "grave moral concern" about partial-birth abortions.)

**2006** GA statement: *“When an individual woman faces the decision whether to terminate a pregnancy, the issue is intensely personal….Humans are empowered…to make significant moral choices, including the choice to continue or end a pregnancy.”*

**2009** PCUSA’s Washington Office fought efforts to remove abortion coverage and funding from the

national health care bill. 4

**Over the past 20 years**, in each General Assembly a motion has been made to have PCUSA affirm the sanctity of life and oppose abortion. None of these motions have been approved.

**PCUSA currently** advocates for abortion in the following ways:

 **stated position**- *"the considered decision of a woman to terminate a pregnancy can be a morally acceptable, though certainly not the only or required, decision."* PCUSA’s sexuality curriculum teaches that, *"...it can be an act of faithfulness before God to intervene in the natural process of pregnancy and terminate it."*

 **financial support**- PCUSA actively supports and endorses the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (formerly the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, RCAR) and Presbyterians Affirming Reproductive Options (PARO). Both organizations are featured on the PCUSA website.

 **medical benefits plan**- PCUSA’s plan pays for abortion without restriction.

The PCUSA is officially “neutral” on the matter of abortion, neither condoning nor condemning it. (The 217th General Assembly did approve a statement that opposes “partial-birth” abortions.) But the PCUSA has financially supported the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), a lobbying organization that opposes all restrictions on abortion. It has gone to court to oppose the federal ban on partial-birth abortions. The PCUSA went so far as to give the RCRC a “partnership in mission” award. By remaining a part of the PCUSA, we too partner with the abortion advocates.

4 <http://www.layman.org/news.aspx?article=26589>