

# Open Theological Declaration to the PC(USA)

## INTRODUCTION

We believe that the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA), held in June 2008 in San Jose, California, did in some of its actions transgress the spirit and the letter of the confessions, constitution, and understandings that have long been established to govern the content and practice of our faith; that it violated the relations we are called to as colleagues in ministry and brothers and sisters in the faith; and that it brought confusion to the church communities to which we witness and minister. In so doing, the Assembly failed to honor the authority of Scripture to govern our faith and practice.

In this declaration we seek to enumerate objectionable actions, describe our reasons for finding them objectionable, note their nature and/or effect, to state our responses, and propose means for redressing these errors.

We believe that Scripture calls on us to take these actions (see especially Ezekiel 33-34, Matthew 18:6-9 and Mark 9:42-50).<sup>1</sup> We do so with sadness, yet with conviction, after much prayer and reflection. We do so with love for our brothers and sisters. We do seeking to be humble, faithful servants of Christ and the Church.

We also take these actions believing that Scripture and our confessions authorize us to call the church and its governing bodies to recognize their errors, amend them, and restore the church to its constitutional and connectional communion. Our stand is

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<sup>1</sup> CF. **Ezekiel 33-35.**

**Matthew 18:6-9:** 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of stumbling-blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling-block comes!

'If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.

**Mark 9:42-50:** If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

'For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

consistent with our current discipline and is grounded in the Second Helvetic Confession, (see especially Chapter Two).<sup>2</sup>

Guided by G-1.0307<sup>3</sup>, we affirm that councils, indeed, may err. This one has. The erroneous actions of this Assembly have threatened the very notion of covenanted orthodoxy and orthopraxis. As we are reminded in G-1.0304<sup>4</sup> that right belief and right practice are inseparable.

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACTIONS AND PRESBYTERY RESPONSES

### **I. The 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) fractured the trust within the denomination in the areas of practice, theology, and polity by adopting a new authoritative interpretation of G-6.0106.b. In doing so the 218<sup>th</sup> General**

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<sup>2</sup> BOC-5.011 — INTERPRETATIONS OF THE HOLY FATHERS. “Wherefore we do not despise the interpretations of the holy Greek and Latin fathers, nor reject their disputations and treatises concerning sacred matters as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures. Neither do we think that we do them any wrong in this matter; seeing that they all, with one consent, will not have their writings equated with the canonical Scriptures, but command us to prove how far they agree or disagree with them, and to accept what is in agreement and to reject what is in disagreement.”

BOC-5.012 — “COUNCILS. And in the same order also we place the decrees and canons of councils.”

BOC-5.013 — “Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of councils; much less by received customs, or by the large number of those who share the same opinion, or by the prescription of a long time. WHO IS THE JUDGE? Therefore, we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided. So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men which are drawn from the Word of God. Certainly Jeremiah and other prophets vehemently condemned the assemblies of priests which were set up against the law of God; and diligently admonished us that we should not listen to the fathers, or tread in their path who, walking in their own inventions, swerved from the law of God.”

<sup>3</sup> **G-1.0307** — “That all Church power, whether exercised by the body in general or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative; that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no Church governing body ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws than from the right of judging upon laws already made, and common to all who profess the gospel, although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men.”

<sup>4</sup> **G-10304** — “Truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior’s rule, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man’s opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

**Assembly voided all previous authoritative interpretations, including those of the 1978 and 1979 General Assemblies, regarding homosexual practices and ordination standards. It also voided all previous General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission decisions regarding G-6.0106b. The Authoritative Interpretation says, “*Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.*”<sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>5</sup> The Presbytery of Boston respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to do the following:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:
  - a. Strike the current text of G-6.0106b and insert new text to read as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]
    - i. ~~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. Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate’s sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.~~
  - b. Amend G-14.0240 as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]
    - i. “Preparation and Examination for Office
    - ii. “When persons have been elected to the office of elder or deacon, the session shall confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the office. The session shall provide for a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine the officers-elect as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; and the duties of the office; *and readiness to assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation.* If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation (see W-4.4000). If the examination is not approved for one or more elected officers, the session shall report its action to the congregation’s nominating committee, which shall bring nomination(s) to a meeting of the congregation for any office(s) not filled.”
  - c. Amend G-14.0450 by inserting a new paragraph “b.” and by re-lettering current paragraphs “b.” through “d.” as “c.” through “f.” The text shall read as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]
    - i. “Final Assessment of Readiness to Begin Ordained Ministry
    - ii. “In the final year of theological education or when a candidate has satisfied all of the requirements of this section, and before the candidate has received a call, the committee on preparation for ministry of the candidate’s presbytery shall conduct a final assessment of the candidate’s readiness to begin ordained ministry. A summary of this assessment shall be reported to the presbytery and shall be transmitted to a calling presbytery when requested. The committee on preparation for ministry shall report to the presbytery when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. This consultation shall focus on

A. Procedural Errors:

1. The General Assembly erred when it failed to allow debate on the second provision of Overture 05-09. This overture attempted both to change the fidelity and chastity amendment (G-6.0106b), and to provide an Authoritative Interpretation that would nullify all previous Authoritative Interpretations concerning ordination standards, particularly those speaking to homosexual behavior as sin. The Assembly debated the proposed revision of the Constitution to substitute a revised wording for G-6.0106b, but it did not allow debate on the proposed Authoritative Interpretation attached to the overture.

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the outcomes of inquiry and candidacy and shall include each of the following requirements of certification:

- iii. ¶“a. demonstration of readiness to begin ministry of the Word and Sacrament as required to fulfill the candidacy phase of preparation;
  - iv. “b. *demonstration of readiness to assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation;*
  - v. “~~b~~. c. presentation of a transcript showing satisfactory grades at a regionally accredited college or university, together with a diploma;
  - vi. “e. d. presentation of a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, the transcript showing satisfactory grades, and presentation of a plan to complete the theological degree including Hebrew and Greek and exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek texts;
  - vii. “~~d~~. e. presentation of satisfactory grades together with the examination papers in the five areas covered by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.”
2. Provide the following authoritative interpretation: Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.

**RATIONALE**

The opening paragraphs of the Form of Government are a powerful statement of the fundamental Christian and Reformed affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. In support of this primary affirmation, Chapter I of the Form of Government calls Christians to attend to the Scriptures, insofar as they set forth “Christ’s will for the Church,” and Chapter II identifies the church’s confessions as its guides, subordinate to the authority of Jesus Christ and to the witness of Scripture. Our church thus has bound itself to a hierarchy of authority in which we are to obey Jesus Christ its Head, and, additionally, to heed first the Scriptures and then the confessions, to the extent that they accurately bear witness to Christ’s will. This fundamental hierarchy of authority is accurately and eloquently reflected in the first three of the constitutional questions, the assent to which is required of each candidate for ordination and/or installation. Although the hierarchy of the church’s authority is clear, it is subverted by the current language of G-6.0106b, which substitutes for our obedience to Christ two concepts that are foreign to Reformed understanding: “obedience” to Scripture and “conformity” to the confessions. The proposed amendment would remove this paragraph and substitute new language, which (1) reflects the church’s understanding of where its authority is to be found, and (2) reaffirms the church’s reliance on the examination of candidates by its governing bodies as the principal means by which to ensure the commitment of its ordained officers to the duties of faith. The amendment additionally would insert appropriate language to ensure that each such examination would include discussion of the constitutional questions and the governing body’s determination of the candidate’s readiness to accept their principles and live by them to the extent any of us is able. In order to be able to rely on Jesus Christ as its Head and as its chief guide in all of life, the church must shed any subordinate source of authority that would bind its ability to follow where he leads. The overture therefore also calls for the rescission of past interpretive statements that have had the effect of limiting Christ’s freedom to use his servants as he would choose.

- a. It is the Moderator's responsibility to insure, per *Robert's Rules of Order*, that all motions receive adequate consideration through debate. When the Moderator did not allow debate, the Stated Clerk should have corrected him immediately when he called the question on both provisions in the overture, after only having debated the first provision. He did not do so. -
  - b. The Moderator and Stated Clerk neglected to separate these two important issues for individual consideration when they had chosen to do so on matters of much lesser import to the life of the Church.
  - c. The Assembly itself also erred when it called the question as a body despite repeated attempts by various delegates to separate the two provisions, and to allow for debate on the second provision.
2. Further, after the General Assembly approved an overture rendering all previous Authoritative Interpretations "without further force or effect," it then corrected a previous Authoritative Interpretation from the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly that it had just annulled. The logical process was thus voided.
  3. *Intent & Effect*: By these actions, the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly stepped outside of the spirit and letter of our shared rules of order. It discouraged honest and open debate, and has thus broken our denominational covenant and damaged our covenant life together.
- B. Constitutional Errors:
1. The General Assembly committed its greatest constitutional error by legislating through Authoritative Interpretations. Authoritative Interpretations have been abused by recent Assemblies on a number of occasions in an effort to change the Constitution's plain meaning without proper ratification by vote of the Presbyteries.
  2. Further, by reversing all previous Authoritative Interpretations that have rightly proclaimed the biblical norm of fidelity in marriage between one man and one woman, and chastity in singleness, the General Assembly has attempted by fiat to accomplish what four previous denominational votes have disallowed by ever increasing margins.
  3. *Intent & Effect*: These constitutional errors have violated our trust and broken our denominational covenant by abusing the normal process for constitutional reform.
- C. Judicial Errors
1. The intent and meaning of G-6.0106b, otherwise known as the fidelity and chastity amendment, is clear and plain. The Authoritative Interpretation approved by the General Assembly obscures and confuses it. Even if it is removed and replaced, no ruling by any of our governing or judicial bodies could contradict the plain meaning of the Scriptures on this particular subject.

Therefore, the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly erred judicially by overruling court decisions that rightly interpreted and applied this provision of the Constitution and Scripture.

2. *Intent & Effect*: This injustice to our Constitution has violated our trust and broken our denominational covenant by incorrectly overruling the GA PJC.

**II. In conjunction with the new authoritative interpretation of G-6.0106b, the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly's proposal to retranslate the Heidelberg Catechism appears to be an attempt to advance and influence passage of the proposed amendment of G-6.0106b, being debated by the presbyteries, from:**

*Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historical 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.*

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*Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions of ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes a candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.*

- A. Confessional Errors: The argument proposed for adopting a re-translation of the Heidelberg Catechism is historically, biblically, theologically, and logically unsound.
  1. The proposal ignores the historical context in which the current translation was adopted. The current translation was adopted precisely because it spoke to a specific concern facing the United Presbyterian Church U.S.A. when it was adopted. Homosexuality was becoming an increasingly important topic for moral and ethical evaluation and discussion throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. It was not considered an important topic when the catechism was written in 1562.
  2. The proposal ignores the biblical warrant for the current translation. The apparent rationale for adopting a re-translation into English appears to center on the desire to remove the phrase "homosexual perversion" from the litany of proscribed behaviors contained in the answer to Question 87. Proponents argue that this language is not contained in the original German of the Catechism, and that most other English translations lack this phrase. This argument is accurate and would be more compelling were it not for the fact that the litany in the

question quotes from I Corinthians 6:9-10<sup>6</sup>, which definitely refers to homosexual practice in a negative manner. If we are to be Biblically accurate, then we must indeed maintain the current translation contained in the *Book of Confessions*.

3. The proposal follows a different rationale than governed the text of the Westminster Standards. If fidelity to the original text were the prime criterion, we would be forced to strip the *Book of Confessions* of all historic amendments made to the Westminster Standards by our antecedent denominations, and then re-adopt the original 1646 version of the Confession of Faith. In so doing we would reject our current adopted standards with regard to marriage and divorce, the place and role of the civil magistrate, ordaining women, and we would advocate covenanted uniformity of religion in any nation where there are Presbyterians. None of us could accept this outcome.
4. *Intent & Effect*: So then, we are effectively left with an important constitutional and confessional change that removes a reference to 1 Corinthians 6:9 and ignores Scripture. This error, and its apparent motivations, place in jeopardy our standing in the Reformed community of faith throughout history and thus world. Thus, it violates our denominational covenant and further erodes our trust.

**III. When the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly adopted the social policy recommendation encouraging Presbyterians to seek and engage in worship services with Jews and Muslims, it invited clergy and laity of the PC(USA) to violate the integrity of Christian worship by diminishing the Gospel that is to be central to Christian worship services. Related to the issue of the equivalency of Muslim, Jewish, and Christian understandings of God, when the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly approved a Study Guide for a previously received Trinity Paper, it failed to follow due process and implicitly sanctioned a theological statement based on suspect biblical interpretation.**

- A. Biblical Errors: The most profound errors of this Church Council are biblical. While a range of valid methods and approaches to biblical interpretation is practiced, this range must be defined confessionally, and it must be faithful to a Reformed theological framework. We acknowledge and confess that we look to Jesus Christ as the Word of God Living, yet we also affirm, with the Confession of 1967, that

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<sup>6</sup> I Corinthians 6:9-10 — “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (NIV), *Or* “Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God” (NRSV).

Scripture is the Word of God Written.<sup>7</sup> Faulty interpretation and skewed exegesis of Scripture gave rise to two unbiblical actions of the General Assembly. These were (1) the recommendation encouraging Presbyterians to seek worship opportunities with Jews and Muslims,<sup>8</sup> and (2) the approval of a study guide for the previously received Trinity paper.

1. While specific language that Muslims, Jews, and Christians worship “a common God” was removed from the final resolution, the recommendation encouraging common worship between Jews, Muslims and ourselves was based on the assumption of the removed language. This practical recommendation remained unchanged in final form. This recommendation is not congruent with the Scriptural witness to the Divinity and the univocal Lordship of Jesus Christ, or of the full divinity and co-equality of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Father within the Godhead. We worship the thrice-holy, Triune God. Because of their theology, neither Muslims nor Jews can participate in worshiping the Triune God. So, too, we betray our faith when we deny the Divinity and presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit in any worship context. This recommendation is based on a profound misrepresentation of the Trinity. Therefore we cannot sponsor worship together and should not be encouraged to do so.
2. Further, the argument has been made and advanced that the Study Paper on the Trinity utilizes only Scriptural language and imagery for the discussion of the Deity. Although this is true, the method employed continuously throughout this paper routinely confuses the natures of simile and metaphor to such a degree that it effectively confuses what we think we know about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In a great many places it skirts perilously close to propounding either pantheistic (God is everything) or panentheistic (God is in everything) views of God.
3. One may argue, and many have, that studies of such important topics as the Trinity risk “pushing the envelope” theologically and philosophically, but that such risks must be taken as we delve deeply into the Doctrine of God. We agree that we should study deeply, but we also believe that we must mine with care the great treasure-filled depths of God’s Word. We must always pay primary attention to contexts, historical situations and literary genres of the texts we study. Our goal should always and only be to reflect the truth contained therein,

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<sup>7</sup> *Book of Confessions* / 9.27 — “The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated.”

<sup>8</sup> We do not take issue with other aspects of the recommendation, such as dialogue, social interaction, study, and projects of mutual concern.

and never to speculatively invent or intuit material that is at best tangentially contained. To do so we risk becoming false guides.

- B. *Procedural Error*: Theological issues aside, copies of this thirty-seven page, recently revised Trinity paper were not made available for commissioner review until six hours before the vote, and copies of the study guide were never provided to commissioners at all. Commissioners were asked to approve a study guide that they had not reviewed for a paper whose revisions they did not have adequate time to review—and that with limited debate. In today’s environment of conflicting points of view and distrust following due process is essential.
- C. *Intent & Effect*: In the aggregate, these errors represent a fundamental disconnect between historic, orthodox Christianity and the rulings of our General Assembly. These rulings do violence to our unity with the Church universal and threaten our relationships with mission partners all over the globe. These rulings have violated our trust, broken our denominational covenant, and continue to threaten our unity with the Church universal.

**IV. In creating a two million dollar legal defense fund for the denomination to use for property cases in civil courts, the General Assembly increased already strained relations among the member churches of the denomination. Contributions to the fund are voluntary. However, the fund is housed in the mission budget. This presents an apparent disconnect between mission regularly understood and our exegesis of and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:1-11, which is that we do not take each other to secular court.<sup>9</sup>**

- A. *Error in Judgment*: Although the General Assembly was certainly within its rights and followed due process in creating this fund, the action was unwise because it appears to equate property defense with the mission of the church. Further it seems to invite Presbyteries to seek civil legal action to preserve property interests, rather than seeking reconciliation or, if failing to achieve that, to dissolve denominational

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<sup>9</sup> **1 Corinthians 6:1-11**: When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?

In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that.

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

ties amicably.

- B. *Intent and Effect:* The action threatens the unity and witness of the Church Universal and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Among the negative consequences are the following: At best, it supports those who believe the PC(USA) is primarily interested in things material. At worst, it can be seen as a declaration of war against its own congregations. The action further erodes our trust, damages our witness, and threatens our covenant life.

## RESOLUTIONS

The errors of this Assembly fail to live up to its professed theme of justice, mercy and humility.<sup>10</sup> Our trust has been violated. Our denominational covenant has been broken by our own highest level governing body. We refuse to break that covenant. We will honor it by constitutional, confessional and biblical adherence. It pains us, but we must take corrective action in an attempt to restore this broken covenant and the Church herself. Therefore, we, the Presbyters of Beaver-Butler Presbytery, make the following resolutions:

- I. We will continue to uphold biblical standards for ordination, particularly in areas of sexuality regardless of any Authoritative Interpretation, Advisory Opinion, alteration to the Constitution, or retranslation of our confessions.
  - A. We will not recognize ordinations that are constitutionally or biblically unsustainable. We will closely examine each candidate seeking admission to our Presbytery.
  - B. We will not ordain candidates whose behavior violates the clear meaning of G-6.0106b of the Book of Order.
  - C. We dissent from the Stated Clerk's Advisory Opinion #22<sup>11</sup> and will not support it, based as it on an Authoritative Interpretation that contradicts our established constitution. "Local Option" (creating the conditions where ordinations are recognized in some presbyteries and churches, but not others) runs counter to Presbyterian polity.
- II. We will not seek or promote common worship opportunities with Jews and Muslims, when they do not recognize the Unity and the Divinity of the Trinity, and we must affirm the Trinity. We will dialogue with Jews and Muslims, seeking to introduce them to the Triune God.
- III. We will not be governed by the Authoritative Interpretation adopted by the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly because it is constitutionally, biblically, and judicially

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<sup>10</sup> The official theme of the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly was "Justice, Mercy, and Humility," based on Micah 6:8.

<sup>11</sup> Please see [www.pcusa.org/constitutionalservices/advisory-opinion.htm](http://www.pcusa.org/constitutionalservices/advisory-opinion.htm) for the official Stated Clerk's Advisory Opinion #22

unsustainable. This interpretation cannot change the plain meaning of the Constitution, which still holds full force and effect in Beaver-Butler Presbytery.

- IV. We will discourage our congregations from giving to the new legal defense fund Extra Commitment Opportunity, believing that it encourages actions that run counter to I Corinthians 6:1-8. We urge congregations and Presbyteries to “rather be wronged” than engage in civil law suits over property.
- V. Rather than promoting same gender civil unions, we will support biblical definitions of marriage in our society.
- VI. We will encourage other Presbyteries and/or congregations to join us in this declaration.
- VII. We will continue to proclaim the Gospel, grow our members in the One Lord Jesus Christ, and participate in the transforming work of God according to His Word within our denomination and Presbytery.

We will abide by these statements. Our consciences are captive to the Word of God. We will not accept discipline that, like many of the General Assembly actions, rests on human institution instead of God's Word. We trust in God through Christ for His deliverance and grace.

Our Defender is Strong,

The Presbytery of Beaver-Butler

I certify that this document in an accurate presentation of the *Open Theological Declaration to the PC(USA)*, as amended and adopted by Beaver-Butler Presbytery at its stated meeting on July 28, 2009.



Rev. Dennis D. Burnett  
Assistant Stated Clerk