

We Need Middle Ground:

In Essentials,

*Unity;*

In Non-Essentials,

*Liberty;*

In All Things,

*Charity.*

“God alone is Lord of the conscience.”

*Book of Order, G-1.0301;*  
Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.175

“Christ is obscured, or rather  
extinguished in us, unless our  
consciences maintain their liberty.”

John Calvin

## **Our History:**

We have been debating for 25 years whether gay and lesbian Presbyterians should be allowed to render ordained service.

General Assemblies' "authoritative interpretations" of our ordination standards have been deeply divisive.

"Amendment B" (G-6.0106b) was adopted with only 51% of presbyters voting in favor, and 49% opposed.

General Assembly has had overtures to make our ordination standards more inclusive in 20 of the last 25 years.

Our permanent judicial commissions have seen endless litigation to enforce and extend our ordination policies.

Twenty-nine presbyteries have sent 35 overtures to this General Assembly seeking reform.

*Such inconclusive debate and close voting demonstrates that we are attempting to legislate about something that is best left a matter of individual conscience.*



## **Freedom of conscience is key:**

“It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve in it as officers shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity. . . . So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, *freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained.*”

*Book of Order, G-6.0108a*  
(emphasis added)

## **Freedom requires forbearance:**

“There are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.”

*Historic Principles of Church Order,*  
*Book of Order, G-1.0305*

“Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you. . . . Has Christ been divided?”

1 Corinthians 1:10-13



Over half of the Bible faculty in our Presbyterian seminaries believe the few texts cited to "prove" that homosexuality is sin may be understood in different ways:

*What is at issue in Genesis 19 (the story of Sodom)?*

**Aggression:** Attempted gang rape.

**Arrogance,** inhospitality, injustice, oppression and idolatry: The sins of Sodom cited elsewhere in the Bible.

**Angels:** Confusion of the distinction between humanity and divinity (the sin of the Gnostics in Jude and 2 Peter).

*What do Leviticus 18 and 20 address?*

**One God:** Condemnation of male temple prostitution and idolatry.

**One order:** "Purity" rules prohibiting, e.g., blending of fabrics, plant or animal cross-breeding, many foods, consumption of meat with dairy, and sexual relations with a menstruant (rules superceded by the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

**One People:** Reaction against possible assimilation into foreign culture, through rejection of common sexual and other practices (a division of Israel "set apart" erased in the New Testament).

*What is at issue in 1 Corinthians 1 and 1 Timothy 1?*

**Etymology:** Paul uses unusual Greek words that translators interpret many different ways, from child molesting to prostitution, but that are *not* the words commonly used for homosexuality at that time.

**Exploitation:** Paul condemns the pederasty and sexual use of slaves then common.

*What is Paul addressing in Romans 1?*

**Result:** Homosexuality not as sin, but as a feature of fallen Creation, like modesty in nakedness, pain in childbirth, and work in agriculture.

**Reversal:** Persons' acting against their natural orientation — whether heterosexual, as in Paul's example, or homosexual — which Paul analogizes to turning away from God.

**Rhetoric:** The Jewish view of Gentile society as "unclean," which Paul cites to win over his listeners before "turning the tables" and pointing out that Jews are self-condemned.

**Our Confessions are likewise open to various understandings.**

**And traditional readings may be reconsidered: We have reformed our understandings about, e.g., the silencing and subordination of women, slavery and segregation, interracial marriage, and remarriage after divorce.**

*What is clear?*

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."* (Matthew 28:18-20)

*"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you."* (Romans 15:7)

**Many faithful Presbyterians believe that we err if we obscure Christ's welcome in judging others on non-essentials.**

Scripture and our confessions may be understood in different ways.

**Faithful Presbyterians of good conscience are not of one mind.**

**We owe each other the duty of mutual forbearance in matters of conscience.**

**Let's trust our local governing bodies to discern candidates' fitness for office.**

**Let's take the middle way — neither requiring nor prohibiting ordained service by gay and lesbian Presbyterians.**

*Perhaps we should simply say what Jesus said about homosexuality:*

*Nothing.*

*Overture Advocates:*

Susan Andrews, National Capitol; Mike Brown, Northern New England; Dick Carlson, Mid-Kentucky; Phil Courtney, Cayuga-Syracuse; Rod Frohman, Genesee Valley; Barbara Hager, Southern New England; Lee Hancock, Hudson River; Tim Hart-Andersen, Twin Cities Area; Eleanor Hopke, Northern New England; Joan Huff, San Francisco; Bill Humphreys, Milwaukee; Ray Kersting, Santa Fe; Kim Smith King, Twin Cities Area; Tricia Dykers Koenig, Western Reserve; Jay McKell, Heartland; Laurie McNeill, Long Island; Doug Nave, New York City; Scott Opsahl, Newton; Mark Palermo, Chicago; Paul Rack, Elizabeth; Nancy Ramsay, Mid-Kentucky; Arnold Rots, Boston; Cass Shaw, Albany; Susan Poole Solomon, Utica; Phil Sorensen, Baltimore; Susan Thomas, Detroit; Jon Walton, New Castle; Bill Weisenbach, Hudson River; Carlos Wilton, Monmouth.