

# Morgan Hill Presbyterian Church

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Mark Inouye  
Pastor

Dear Friends of Morgan Hill Presbyterian Church,

Sometimes we are hit with challenges that impact us whether we like it or not. I'm writing today about such a thing that has happened in regards to our denomination – the Presbyterian Church (USA). Many of you have or will hear about in the coming days *the passing of what is called "Amendment 10-A"* – an amendment to our denomination's national constitution that was approved by a majority of PCUSA presbyteries this past Tuesday.

Amendment 10-A represents *a significant shift in the PCUSA's standards regarding who can be ordained* as ministers, elders or deacons. Our current Book of Order states that *"those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture....among these standards is the requirement to either live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness (G-6.0106b)."* Amendment 10-A replaces this with the following language: *"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 key here is not what the amendment says, but what it doesn't say.* While *"submitting joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ"* is an obvious expectation for ministry, it is ambiguous about issues related to sexuality. For decades until now, the PCUSA has maintained a clear and unambiguous ordination standard regarding sexuality, and has voted repeatedly to maintain that standard. By eliminating the clarity of the previous language, this new statement will likely open the door in some places for the ordination of those whose lifestyles would formerly have been prohibited under the previous language, including sexually active single adults, and self-affirming, practicing LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender) persons.

*Why did the denomination change this standard this year* after decades of it being upheld? There are three main reasons. Some pastors and elders, mirroring the culture, have changed their perspective on this issue. Others have grown weary of the recurrent debates and have failed to engage in the amendment process and have not voted. Finally, a number of congregations have left the PCUSA and their absence has affected the votes in certain presbyteries.

How does this affect us? Nationally, we are about to face a change in the PCUSA. What has been a clear national standard will now become an ambiguous local decision. Each Presbytery and each congregation will be left to make their own decisions about how they will define and enact this new language, with no overarching standard.

Our church has responded to the issue of human sexuality by clarifying our positions in these ways:

In 2001 we became part of the *Confessing Church Movement*, where we declared our commitment to these three things that were already in our Book of Order: 1) Jesus Christ alone is Lord and the way of salvation; 2) The Scripture is God's revealed Word and the

Church's only infallible rule of faith and life; and 3) God's people are called to holiness in all aspects of life, including honoring the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman – the only relationship within which sexual activity is appropriate.

Several years ago our session also voted to become a **Network Church** (not to be confused with *The Covenant Network* – a leader in the pro-gay ordination cause) which means: 1) We commit ourselves to uphold God's desire for our sexuality, including the belief that God gave us sex as a gift, to be expressed only in a marriage relationship; 2) We uphold God's plan for marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman; and 3) We recognize the brokenness of our world regarding sexuality, and commit to be a church where struggling people can experience the grace, love, and healing that only God can bring.

Regarding to Amendment 10-A and our community here at MHPC, I want to say four things clearly that our Session has heard me say as your pastor and which they support:

1. Both ***myself and the church remain committed*** to uphold 1) as the sacredness of marriage between a man and a woman; 2) the necessity of fidelity within marriage and chastity within singleness as a standard for ordination to the office of pastor, elder, or deacon; 3) the same standard for our staff members. In doing so, we stand in solidarity with centuries of biblical interpretation and with overwhelming majority of the global church.
2. The present actions of the PCUSA, most people believe, ***do not require a change in our selection of leadership here at MHPC*** – we believe we can continue to uphold the standards of ordination we have had in the past if we so choose.
3. ***The Session is thoughtfully and prayerfully considering how to best move forward*** in the midst of this new reality we face. We are following carefully what other likeminded churches and groups are doing. One such group is the Fellowship PC(USA), initiated by seven of the largest churches in the denomination. This group is taking the lead in the helping provide new ideas and energy concerning what might be next for churches like ours. I was recently asked to become part of their advisory board, and will be meeting in June with them to prayerfully consider the options. They are also hosting a conference in August in which some 1500-2000 likeminded people are expected to attend. Both an elder from our church and I will be attending. We are also in the process of forming a task force of elders to begin to help us think through any next steps.
4. Finally, while I do not agree with the change in ordination standards, ***I do believe it is important for us to treat others with whom we disagree with grace and humility.*** We want to not only stand for what we believe is true, but do so in a way that honors Jesus.

***I covet your prayers for our church and for our denomination.*** For even within our own congregation, we will likely not all see these issues the same way. I trust that we can be respectful of each other during this period and seek together God's desires for this congregation. Know that the session is doing the same.

Please do not hesitate to call or email me if you have any questions or concerns.

Peace,

Mark Inouye  
Pastor  
Morgan Hill Presbyterian Church