

Good mooring,

I was one of 57 commissioners assigned to Committee 12 dealing with “civil union and marriage”. We were very fortunate to have excellent committee leadership; the process went smoothly throughout our time together. It included orientation, prayer, open hearings, debate on the proposals, and final action for recommendation to the plenary session.

Our charge was to consider the Final Report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage and a minority report from three members of that committee. Interestingly, that committee’s mandate included a directive that the PC (USA) constitutional definition of Christian marriage not be changed by the action of the committee. The final report simply proposes an approach to resources and dialogue in sessions, presbyteries and synods. Unfortunately, I think it was misinterpreted to be taking a position in support of redefinition. The minority report was clearly an attempt to reinforce the current constitutional definition. In the end our committee proposed approval of the final report and that the minority report proposal be answered by that action.

We then considered three groups of overtures.

The first group of three overtures proposed, in different ways, reaffirming of the current definition of marriage. The committee voted to propose that GA **disapprove** of those overtures.

The second group of five overtures proposed amending the Directory of Worship to replace the “woman and a man” wording with “two people”. Our committee voted to **recommend approval** by the Assembly.

The third group of three overtures proposed relief for ministers of Word and Sacrament and sessions caught between civil law and the constraints of the current definition of marriage in some states. It proposed pastoral discretion when ministers are asked to officiate at ceremonies for couples who have obtained a civil marriage license, and that sessions be permitted to use church property for such services; always reserving the right of pastors to refuse to officiate at any marriage deemed unwise or a violation of conscience. The committee **proposed approval by the General Assembly**.

When the final and minority reports were considered by the larger body, a decision was made to “receive” both rather than to approve or disapprove either report. By sending both reports to the wider church, it is the hope of the Assembly that Presbyterian will find helpful background information on civil unions and marriage, as well as material to help individuals and groups remain together as they work through these difficult issues.

Next came consideration of the three groups of overtures. The group proposing reaffirmation of the current definition of marriage was disapproved by the Assembly as recommended by our committee.

Then a parliamentary move was made by one commissioner to answer all remaining proposals by the action taken on the final and minority reports. That motion was approved by only 24 votes and had the unfortunate effect of robbing the Assembly of the opportunity to debate the issues at hand.

Not surprisingly, the final result is “no change”. No change in the constitution, no change in the seriousness of the issues facing pastors and sessions, no change in the rights of those who feel excluded. The issues will continue to challenge the denomination.

As with all our reports, more information is available at www.pcusa.org. I encourage you to learn more by visiting the site.

Thank you.
Mike Orr