

## **Presentation on Amendment B made at the Presbytery of the James by Rev. Sue Cyre**

*In the Presbytery of the James four speakers (2 pro and 2 con) were given 10 min each to speak to Amendment B. Later in the agenda the presbytery debated and voted NO to Amendment B. This is one of the presentations given against the amendment.*

Thank you for the privilege of sharing with you today. I will give three important reasons why we should vote NO to Amendment B that would replace the “fidelity and chastity” paragraph in the Book of Order at G-6.0106b.

In this vote, we’re talking about real people experiencing real pain. We’re talking about family members, church members and neighbors.

The debate about who should be ordained is not about hurting and excluding people. It is about the meaning of the Gospel. It is about the way we love and care for one another as part of the Body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul gives a long list of sins that includes: idolaters, adulterers, drunkards, slanderers, sexual offenders, thieves, greedy...” and then Paul says, “That is what some of you were.”

The people Paul was writing to in Corinth were friends whose faces he knew. They were people who had been engaging in all those behaviors—including sexual relationships outside of marriage. Then Paul says, “but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God.”

Mark Brewer is senior pastor of Bel Air Presbyterian Church that has a vital ministry to over 150 men and women in homosexual relationships. Mark says he cannot tell those men and women that their behavior is OK, because to do so would imply that he loves them more than God does. Mark, like Paul, cannot bless what God seeks to redeem.

Real love, holds out the truth of the Gospel that forgives, restores, and transforms.

**Reason 1 to vote against Amendment B.** Amendment B removes the clear standard, “to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.”

If the clear standard of fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness is removed there will be no explicit ordination standard concerning marriage and sexual relationships. It will open the door to the ordination of people engaging in any sexual relationship outside the bonds of marriage, including homosexual relationships. The clear specific standard now in the Book of Order would be replaced with no standard.

Scripture from Genesis to Revelation limits sexual expression to the marriage of a man and woman. Any sexual relationship outside of marriage, whatever form that takes—heterosexual or homosexual-- is always, consistently forbidden by Scripture. The church throughout time and in every place has given witness to this truth.

The current standard does not single out a group of people. It is a standard that rightly applies to all church officers to live either in fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness.

Some have said that the current standard raises sexual relationships to a super-sin. That isn't true. The paragraph just before G-6.0106b in the Book of Order, G-6.0106a says “those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel...”

That paragraph says that all areas of a candidate's life should be examined. The next paragraph that includes the specific standard regarding sexuality and marriage was added to the Book of Order in response to specific questions raised by a minority of presbyteries repeatedly.

In 1976 a presbytery asked the GA whether a person who was a practicing homosexual was eligible for ordination. The GA set up a task force that reported back in 1978. The 1978 GA passed what it called, “Definitive Guidance” for the church saying, “homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity.”

After repeated questions, discussions, overtures to GAs, the 1993 GA made that Definitive Guidance an “Authoritative Interpretation” of our Constitution.

In 1994 a minority opinion of the GA court, the GA-PJC—said that the church could not expect the court to continue to rule on the basis of the Authoritative Interpretation without explicit language being put in the Book of Order. Thus, in 1996 the GA approved the new section in the Book of Order—G-6.0106b. It was ratified by the presbyteries the following year.

In 1997 and 2001, overtures were sent up and approved by the GA to remove G-6.0106b. A majority of presbyteries both times voted to preserve the original language and by increasingly larger margins.

This ongoing debate gives the impression of singling out homosexual behavior as some sort of “super sin.” It is not. The on-going debate is a response to repeated questions raised repeatedly on whether the church can ordain practicing unrepentant homosexual persons. It is a small minority that continues to raise the question.

The language in the current standard focuses on Scripture’s teaching on marriage and sexuality and applies to us all. If the standard is removed, every presbytery will exercise a local option on who may be ordained. Court cases will increase.

Our connectionalism as a denomination will be severed and walls will be set up on who can and cannot move between presbyteries.

**A second reason to vote NO to Amendment B** is that it creates a hierarchy in which Scripture is made subordinate to Jesus Christ. The rationale of amendment B that is included with the amendment sent down by GA says, “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 hierarchy envisioned by Amendment B elevates the will of Christ above Scripture. It suggests that the will of Christ may be in conflict with Scripture. But, Reformed faith allows for no such hierarchy or conflict between Scripture and Christ’s will.

Scripture itself teaches that it reveals Christ to us. Luke reports on the road to Emmaus, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.”

The amendment implies that it parallels the ordination questions, but it does not. The ordination questions are not presented as a hierarchy of authority but as a series of questions.

There is no acceptance in Scripture of sexual practice outside the bonds of marriage so this amendment creates a Jesus separate from Scripture who can then affirm what Scripture prohibits.

**The third reason to vote NO to Amendment B** is that it calls for governing bodies to “establish the candidate’s sincerity.” It is not sincerity that makes a person fit for ordination.

The current language recognizes that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is only the repentant who are qualified to serve the church. That is the power of the Gospel. And it is expressed in the last sentence of the current standard at G-6.0106b.

The current G-6.0106b upholds fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness... Amendment B offers no standard.

The current G-6.0106b upholds Scripture and calls us to live in obedience to the Word of God. Amendment B creates a hierarchy where Christ’s will is determined by local presbyteries ...and may be in contradiction with the clear word of Scripture.

The current G-6.0106b calls leaders to repent, the amendment calls for leaders to be sincere.

I urge you to vote NO to Amendment B. We can’t assume that we love people more than God does, by affirming behavior that God wants to redeem.