

Presbytery of Hudson River
12 April 2016
Stony Point Center

A Healing Overture for the Admission of, and Apology for Harms Done to the LGBTQ/Q Members of the Presbyterian Church(USA), Family and Friends

The Sessions of South Presbyterian Church in Greenburgh (Dobbs Ferry NY) and All Souls Parish (Port Chester NY) call for the Presbytery of The Hudson River to overture the 222nd General Assembly (2016) to affirm and witness these truths:

- a. we come to understand forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation by God's actions through Jesus Christ's teachings and the Risen Christ in our midst;
- b. we are reconciled to God and one another by the forgiveness of our acts of sinfulness, through the Christ who is our peace and who breaks down the walls of hostility and division;
- c. further, we understand that ours is a faith and ministry of forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation that requires admission of the harms we have done to one another; and
- d. that the fullness of our new life in Christ calls for a unity of Spirit, a sharing of gifts, and a valuing of all parts of the Body of Christ in the spirit of true forgiveness.

And we confess that our actions have fallen short of these truths in the marginalization of our sisters and brothers who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning (LGBTQ/Q), admitting:

- e. that harms have been done to this community by the denomination's participation in the creation of barriers to God's call to our sisters and brothers, based on sexual identity, sexual orientation and gender identity;
- f. that charges have been instigated with the intention of preventing qualified individuals called by God to serve based on sexual identity and orientation;
- g. that the Constitution of the PC(USA) has been erroneously used to support these charges, resulting in the use of the denomination's court system, in effect, being co-opted to discipline others for who they are; and
- h. that the denomination has participated in or been silent about challenging the destruction of the careers of faithful servants who identified as LGBTQ/Q.

Therefore, we direct that the Presbyterian Church (USA) affirm, confess and

apologize:

- i. admitting that it has been wrong in the way it has treated the LGBTQ/Q Community in the PC(USA);
- j. apologizing for the teachings and actions that have created marginalization of our sisters and brothers, adding to the erroneous belief that people who identify as LGBTQ/Q should be considered unworthy to serve fully or be honored as family within and without the church;
- k. acknowledging that during this struggle we have often treated one another in ways that did not reflect the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst; including those in opposition to one another, as well as those within their own communities;
- l. stating publicly that the PC(USA), as a denomination, makes this pronouncement as an act of forgiveness, healing, mercy and reconciliation; and
- m. that this admission and apology lifts up the constitutional changes that have been duly implemented to dismantle the lines that have divided us from one another and the ways in which we have been called to serve, including but not limited to Amendment 10-A; the Authoritative Interpretation on Marriage, and Amendment 14F.

Rationale:

1. System change comes slowly. Institutional change comes slowly. Until the harm is recognized, acknowledged and repented for, only incremental change can happen. In its constitution, PCUSA is now more open, though given the tiny fraction of installed, openly Queer Ministers, there remains a long way to go. The system continues to be one that keeps many oppressed and is oppressive. Systemic, institutional change is needed, and this overture strengthens the foundation for that.
2. The admissions of harms done to one another, the petition of each other for forgiveness, and the public witness of the humility by the church as an institution is required to open our doors - as fully as our hearts and intentions have always called us to do.

The last forty years of opening those doors to our sisters and brothers who identify as LGBTQ/Q has not been our only struggle, nor has it been the only place where lives have been harmed in our efforts to change. It is, however, a place where we can bring our experience, strength and hope in an even greater response that we hope this will initiate, and in which way we encourage others to respond.

We acknowledge that there are many communities and groups who have felt the sting and harms of the church as an institution, an institution in some ways holding on to practices and teachings that separated us, rather than brought us together.

We acknowledge, too, the power and privilege that has not always been exerted in the best interests of those with no power or privilege, and we hope that this “Healing Overture” will begin broad movement to become a reconciling church in ways that “clean our slate” of harms and injustices for all the world to see.

Further, we believe that such a church is the fullest faithful representation of the Church of Jesus Christ that practices the teachings of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

We also wish to make it clear that we do not see the struggle of the LGBTQ/Q community in our church as exceptional to the struggle of others who have sought justice and welcoming in the denomination. It is where we begin, hoping that this will create an invitation and a process for others to follow, bringing forward their overtures. We hope others will summon the church to acknowledge harms that need to be spoken in their communities, so that we can be the inclusive and welcoming Kin[g]dom on God on earth, beyond anything we have yet to see. We support the efforts of others to follow this process in bringing such actions forward to their presbyteries and the General Assembly.

(NOTE: See Attachment 1 from the Presbytery of Yukon and its statement of repentance to the community of Gambell, Alaska as a precedent, upon which parts of this overture have been based.)

We believe there will be no chance for healing and reconciliation until the PC(USA) admits its mistakes and makes a statement of apology. LGBTQ/Q people of faith have been wounded in and by churches where they are not seen as loving human beings, persons who long to receive and to give love freely, persons who seek spiritual connection, persons who yearn for family relationship, persons who ache to experience authentic community as full-bodied and gloriously vulnerable human beings, gifted and graced and created in the image of God, on purpose as they are. Rather, they have been seen as their sexuality, as a group. This overture sends a message that such harm done is confessed and repented by the Presbyterian Church USA and that all LGBTQ/Q persons are invited to be, not tolerated, but affirmed and celebrated, fully human, altogether welcomed into the full life of the church for we believe queer

presence is essential for the Body of Christ to be whole.

3. There are many faithful sisters and brothers who have been estranged by the church because of its teachings, practices, and disciplinary actions towards ministers and others who identify as LGBTQ/Q. A statement such as the one suggested would have the affect of validating our legislative actions with our commitment to changing what has been exclusionary and wrong.
4. As one of the most constitutionally inclusive mainline denominations in the world, our witness has an impact beyond any borders we might imagine. Our voice of hope, love, joy, peace, justice and welcoming—the Good News—leads the way for global change and a beginning to the end to the violence of marginalization and discrimination around the world.

Calling the church to admit harms done and apologize to those it has wronged has an impact beyond the LGBTQ/Q community. All Gospel and Justice/Love ministry is about our relationship with each other in this world. An honest statement of apology and determination to herald the changes we have been called to make lifts up the entire denomination in a way that reaffirms who and whose we are.

5. The theme of the 222nd General Assembly is *The Hope in Our Calling* - Ephesians 1:18. May it be so!



An Apology from the Presbytery of Yukon

Offered to the Community of Gambell

We affirm and witness to these truths:

*We come to understand what true reconciliation is
by God's actions through Christ,*

*Who reconciled us to himself by the forgiveness of sin, through Christ,
who became our peace,
who made two become one,
and who breaks down walls of hostility.*

*Further we understand that
God gave us this same ministry of reconciliation and are Christ's ambassadors.
It is the calling of the church in this and every age
to give shape and substance to this ministry of reconciliation.*

*Our new life in Christ is to be characterized by
peace, reconciliation, a unity of Spirit, a sharing of gifts,
a valuing of all parts of the Body of Christ and
a striving for the full household of God being built together in Christ.*

*Yet, we confess that our actions have fallen short of these truths.
We have participated and even instigated barriers, separation and
a devaluing of brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*Specifically, through our schools and ministry we have
failed to truly understand what the people of Gambell would have wished us to know,
and we have acted in ways that
contributed to the loss of the St. Lawrence Island Yupik language,
caused confusion about proper use of Native drums and other cultural objects, and
caused confusion for some about how to understand their identity in this world.*

*For all of this we repent,
And for any other ways in which our cultural insensitivity has caused harm
We ask the forgiveness of God through our Lord, Jesus Christ,
And we also ask the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters in Gambell.*

Signed this 10th day of March, 2012,`

Presbytery Moderator

Leadership Team Moderator

Executive Presbyter

Native American Consulting Team Moderator

PC(USA) GAMC Representative

Sister Church: Jewel Lake Parish Representative