



Questions and Answers about the Session's Decision to Expand Marriage and Allow Same-Sex Weddings: Summary from Sunday, May 10, 2015

Why did we have to make this decision now?

Session had the option of making 'no decision' and chose not to. Here are several reasons why I am glad we made that choice.

1. Last June (2014), our denomination voted to allow congregations and ministers (in states where it is legal) to make their own determination about whether or not perform weddings for same-sex couples. In October 2014, same-sex marriage was ruled legal in Colorado and counties began issuing licenses for such. Rather than wait to address this until people asked, we decided to be proactive and determine our policies now.
2. A decision to postpone a vote would have the practical impact of a "no" to same-sex weddings. If we want to say "no" we should simply say that. I couldn't vote for either approach because from my perspective that means taking something away from our members that rightly belongs to them. Same-sex marriage is legal in our state, allowed by our denomination, and appropriate to my understanding of marriage. To defer or deny the possibility of it for our own members and their families, would in effect, create two classes of members. I could not vote for creating a situation where some members of our church family are treated one way and others were treated another. I am glad that we decided to treat all of our members the same. If you are family, you are family.
3. While it may be years before a same-sex wedding may occur, there is another aspect that is immediate. As of today, we are able to talk to our gay and lesbian members (and their families) and say, "Your church is here for you" without having to cross our fingers behind our back. We don't have to say, "You can worship here, serve here, give to the budget and take part in our programs, but when the times come to get married, you can't be married in your own church." Even if a person never decides to hold a wedding here, we get to give the same clear and consistent message to all our members.

Why are we limiting the use of our sanctuary to only members?

We discussed amending our policy to make the same rules for anyone in our community who wanted to get married at New Hope. In the end, we voted that down in deference to those who objected to any same-sex weddings taking place in our sanctuary. By confining its use to members only, the eventuality of such a service would be limited those within our own congregational family.

Why didn't we just vote to let the Pastors make the determination?

Essentially, that is what we did. Session expanded the language of marriage so that the pastors could make their own determination about whether or not to perform same-sex weddings for our members. If they had not amended the language, then the pastors would not have that option. Erik has stated that he would not perform a same-sex wedding, as he does not believe it reflects God's best intention for humanity as attested in scripture. I have

indicated that I would be willing to do so. The amended language allows us both to make our own determination about what is appropriate or not.

Why did we include the language “loving and committed” relationship in our policy?

I'm glad it was in there (for full policy, see back page). I think it reflects the language of what makes a marriage “Christian” and “Holy”. People were getting married long before the Bible was written. The Old Testament teaching point to making marriage “holy” (as an offering to God) by making it a Covenant relationship that reflects the covenant love and commitment of God. In the New Testament, a marriage is “Christian” in that the couple commits to submitting to one another as to Christ, with the love that Christ has for the Church.

Why can't we call it something besides a 'marriage'?

We (pastors) are not authorized to execute a 'Civil Union.' If a ceremony is performed by a minister, it is a marriage. Because of my views on what makes a marriage 'Holy' and 'Christian' (see above), I would not be in favor of merely conducting a civil ceremony, even if I could.

What does this policy mean for funerals?

Both the Session and congregation were clear on this. We affirmed our commitment to be welcoming and available to all our community when it came to hosting funerals, welcoming people into membership and the life of the congregation, baptizing children and offering Deacon assistance.

Why is this a big issue? God created us equally. Who are we to judge?

I think this is less about judgment and more about boundaries. Not judging others is commanded by Jesus and is the right approach for individuals. Churches shouldn't be judgmental, either, but that is different from determining our “boundaries”. All churches have boundaries- and they should. These define the conditions in which we will pursue our mission. I sense a broad commitment to the mission of New Hope and I hear very few people being judgmental. The conflict arises because we disagree on how wide the boundaries should be as we pursue that mission. Just because people disagree with the Session on this doesn't make them judgmental. It means they think the current boundaries should stay where they are.

What is the message this will send to our children?

The core message is “Jesus is Lord.” Jesus tells us the whole of God's intent is found in the commands to love God and love our neighbors. Everything else is meant as guidance for how we follow the great commandments. The fact that we do not agree on all the different ways to live out those commandments doesn't dilute the central message. We already worship and serve with people who have different views on abortion, the death penalty, divorce, etc. When we love those who do not agree with us for the sake of committing our lives to serving Christ together, we are sending a powerful message- for our children and our community.

What can we do for those who disagree with this new policy?

I think there are three things to keep in mind.

1. Don't try to argue anyone out of their deeply held values. It doesn't work, nor should it. It is enough to simply be clear about what you believe and why.

2. We differ on our viewpoints for this issue, but we agree on so much more. Our mission remains the same as does our desire to serve Christ faithfully. The things we hold in common are far greater than the matters where we differ.
3. While it is natural to withdraw when we do not like what is happening, it is also harmful. Which of our ministries that we love and cheer for, will be helped by people not giving or participating? Which of our Missions that make a difference in our world will be hurt because we do? If the intent is to alter our life-changing missions and ministries, then withdrawing support and participation makes sense. If it is to signal a protest to the new policy, then it doesn't. The policy (where we differ) won't be affected, but all the ways lives are touched for the cause of Christ (where we agree), will be.

What Were the Results from the Congregational Surveys?

People were asked to offer their opinions and insights through an on-line survey and Congregational Conversations, and many did! More than a third of the congregation answered the online survey. About a fourth of the congregation filled out surveys at the end of each Congregational Conversation. The questions were the same. Here is a summary:

Question	Online	Congregational Conversations
Which statement best expresses your opinion about same-gender weddings held at New Hope		
I am very much against it	33%	29%
I am not for it, but I would allow it.	15%	15%
I am in favor of it	47%	50%
I am unsure at this time	3%	6%
I don't have an opinion	2%	-
Just your best guess, do you think that allowing two people of the same gender to legally marry in our church will expand and extend the mission of New Hope?		
It will expand and extend our mission	42%	37%
It will have no effect	5%	12%
It will hinder our mission	31%	22%
Unsure	22%	29%
Which statement best expresses your personal opinion on the issue of same-gender marriage?		
I am in favor of same gender couples being allowed to marry just like heterosexual couples	49%	47%
I think same-gender couples should be allowed to join in a Civil Union. But not get "married."	32%	32%
I think same gender couples should be allowed to get married, but not in the church.	5%	13%
I am against same-gender couples being allowed to get married or join in a Civil Union.	9%	4%
I am unsure	4%	3%
I have no opinion	1%	1%

Wedding Policy for New Hope Presbyterian Church

At the Saturday, May 9, 2015 meeting, Session amended our wedding policies to the following:

A wedding is a celebration of God's gift of marriage for the well-being of the entire human family, and an expression of Christian discipleship. To that end...

Weddings will only be performed at New Hope that are

- a. Approved by a Pastor (Teaching Elder)*
- b. Between two adults in a loving, committed relationship*
- c. Where at least one person is a member (or child of a member) of New Hope.*

What Changed?

- Language that stipulated that weddings be limited to *a man and a woman* was replaced by, *between two adults in a loving, committed relationship.*
- Language was changed to limit those who may get married at New Hope to someone who is a member *(or child of a member) of New Hope.*
- Provisions for allowing the use of New Hope by other churches was deleted. Only members of New Hope (or their children) will be allowed to hold weddings at New Hope.

How Was This Decision Made?

In June 2014, the General Assembly of the PCUSA voted to allow congregations and ministers, in states where it is legal, to decide for themselves whether or not they would conduct weddings for same-sex couples. In October, the State of Colorado legalized same-sex marriages. The issue of whether or not same-sex weddings would be performed at New Hope became both pertinent and pressing.

Session determined to embark on a year-long process of study, discussion and discernment, informed by input from our members. We were heartened by the respectful, caring and loving tone of our congregational conversations. Session was not unanimous in its opinion; multiple viewpoints were expressed. Ultimately this policy was passed on a 9-5 vote.