

Discerning Same-Sex Marriage in the PC(USA)

What is “theology”?

Faith seeking understanding;
it is thinking
about important questions
from the perspective of
Christian faith

– (from Dan Migliore,
Faith Seeking Understanding)

A thoughtful task
undertaken by people
in relationship of faith in God,
in which we seek to understand
more fully
who and how God is with us
and who and how we are
in light of God’s presence,
drawing on scripture,
the church’s heritage,
experiences of people of faith,
and disciplined ways of thinking,
to shape our understanding and
thus guide our lives of faith

– Pamela Mitchell Legg

Scripture

- We believe that the Scriptures are the unique and authoritative witness of the Triune God, fully and finally revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- The Scriptures are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ and bear witness to him. The Scriptures are not to be worshipped but are a “lense” in which we come to know God more fully and God’s actions with humanity in the world.
- The Scriptures are living and active. They are the only rule of life and faith. The Holy Spirit is at work when we read them and hear them proclaimed. God is actively engaging us and calling us to do something.

Biblical Interpretation

- The authority of Scripture is not an issue for us – we all believe it's authoritative.
- The issue is how we understand and interpret it. For instance, the Pharisees had one way of interpreting it, the Jewish elite in Jerusalem another, and Jesus still had another. They all read the same Scriptures.
- Our interpretation will shape the ways in which we practice our faith.

Reading Scripture

- As we read Scripture we inherently read through our own lenses. Our backgrounds and worldviews shape how we understand and read Scripture. I call this our personal bias. It's hard to simply read objectively.
- Eisegesis vs. Exegesis – Imposing your interpretation onto the text vs. drawing out the meaning from a text.
- Genre – Bible has different genres. *Narrative, Poetry, Proverbs, History, Prophecy, Apocalyptic, Law, and Epistles.*
- How do we read it? Do we read it literally, metaphorically, or mythically?

The Body of Christ

- While we acknowledge personal study as important to the faith and life of a believer, we are also called into community to discern God's words together.
- Therefore, we discern this matter together as a larger body – as officers of the church that have been elected to serve. We do this in humility, and with the help and grace of God.

Wesleyan Quadrilateral:

A Way of Understanding Theological Method

SCRIPTURE What texts? How interpreted?	TRADITION What pieces from heritage? How interpreted?
REASON Way you process knowledge from other three sources How you think and argue	EXPERIENCE In/of life with God Corporate What kinds of experience?

Theological Method questions: Where do you begin, to “do theology”? How do you use that resource? From that starting point, where and how do you move around within the quadrilateral, and use those resources?

How to Proceed

- As we begin this journey of discernment I'm challenging you to do two things:
- **First, to be as objective as possible.** Recognize where you stand today on this issue and let go of it. Depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead you in this process and be open to the Spirit's guidance.
- **Secondly, to begin the process of discernment with Scripture** – not experience, reason, or tradition.

Ground Rules

- **Language** – Do not use labels in reference to one another. (Conservative/Liberal, Left/Right) We are not seeking polarization, but unity. We are “Christian”... that’s all.
“One Lord, One faith, One baptism!” Eph. 4:5
- **Dialogue** – Listen to one another – do not formulate rebuttals when someone is speaking. Be respectful and do not get angry, make personal attacks, or point fingers.

Our Calling

- As Officers of the church, we are called to set examples for the rest of the congregation. The manner in which we embody Christ's call to love and care for one another, will set the tone for the larger congregation in relation to this particular issue.
- Regardless of the Session's decision on this matter, it is important that we remain united as leaders of the church and acknowledge the sovereignty of God and that this one particular issue is not what defines us as a congregation and as a denomination.