Dear Members and Friends

In June 2014, the 221st General Assembly (GA) took two significant actions on the teaching and practice of marriage. First, the GA approved an Authoritative Interpretation (AI) allowing pastors to conduct same-sex weddings in states where it is legal, and Church Sessions to approve the use of church property for such ceremonies. This AI is in effect now, and there is no further vote needed on this matter. Second, the GA approved a proposed amendment to the Directory of Worship in the Book of Order which would replace the current language (“marriage is between one man and one woman”) with a description of marriage as "a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman." On March 17, 2015 the amendment approved by a majority of the denomination’s 171 presbyteries.

Neither document requires any pastor to officiate or any session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service with which they disagree. It remains up to each pastor and each session to determine what is, and is not, appropriate for their context or congregation. The 221st GA, in adopting an Authoritative Interpretation that exceeds the bounds of what it normally is designed to do, i.e. clarify an ambiguity within the Constitution, has effectively wholesale changed the constitution outside the bounds of the normal process. In doing so the GA has performed and end-run around the normal process of amending our Constitution (the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions). Many commissioners at GA lodged formal dissent and filed letters of protest in accordance with the GA rules, but those will not change the Constitution in many places and the second action, amending the Directory of Worship in the Book of Order, will not resolve all of those contradictions. These two actions have created much stress within the denomination between those who hold unwaveringly to a biblical interpretation of marriage and those who have, through the GA, overturned the biblical understanding. Some will resolve to depart the PCUSA while others may not.

The Session’s response to these matters is simple: We will stand firm upon the biblical definition of marriage, as being between one man and one woman. At (NAME OF Church), we will continue to teach a biblical view of marriage between one man and one woman. To become an officer in our church: Elder/ Deacon, or Pastor, one must agree to live within our traditional, historical sexual ethic, and will not perform same-sex marriages nor allow such marriages to be performed in this church. That said, we hold fast to Christ’s teachings that all who sincerely seek a relationship with Jesus Christ are welcome in this particular church and are free to participate within the fellowship of believers even though they may not agree with this interpretation.

As the people of God, we are committed to following Jesus, taking part in his redemptive mission to the world, and believe we are sent out to join Him in His mission in Globe and beyond. Our essential identity is found in Jesus Christ. We are a congregation that seeks to be constantly led by the Holy Spirit under the authority of the Bible, which is the authoritative Word of God and the all-sufficient rule for faith and life. We believe we are called to be witnesses for the Gospel message in every time and place.

(NAME of Church) is a diverse congregation, living in times when the greater body of Christ is also quite diverse. May we re-commit to one another and to Almighty God that we will seek to embody the grace and love of our Savior across all differences.

May God bless us as we seek to serve Him for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

Respectfully, (NAME OF CHURCH) Session