



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH OF KINGWOOD

## **Actions of the PCUSA 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

FPCK Analysis of Four Recommendations from GA219

*April & May 2011*



# Four Recommendations from GA219

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- ▶ Proposal to Change Ordination Standards
- ▶ Proposal to Study Change in Christian Marriage Standard
- ▶ Proposal to Change to New Form of Government (nFOG)
- ▶ Proposal to Add Confession of Belhar to the PCUSA *Book of Confessions*

*4 Proposals for Polity Changes Referred by GA219 (July 2010)  
for Consideration by Presbyteries*



# Study Mandate & the DRST

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- ▶ GA219 recommends 4 proposals for church governance changes that would represent fundamental changes to national church polity
- ▶ FPCK's Session is concerned about change in PCUSA direction and possible impacts on our church in Kingwood
- ▶ FPCK appoints Denominational Relations Study Team (DRST)
  - ▶ Analyze 4 issues
  - ▶ Determine if consistent with FPCK Values
  - ▶ Determine possible impacts on FPCK
  - ▶ Conduct congregational awareness meetings
  - ▶ Canvass congregation to determine attitudes toward potential changes
- ▶ DRST members: Doug Arrick, Jannie Bangs, Twyla Demases, Chris Friedersdorf, David Magrill, Jane Quebedeaux, Pat Skoff, Sam Sterrett, Bill Tapley, Ben Trammell



# How are PCUSA Polity Changes Made?

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- ▶ Churches or Presbyteries make overtures to General Assembly
- ▶ Standing or Special Committees study overtures, vote whether to recommend changes to *Book of Order* or *Book of Confessions*
- ▶ General Assembly considers committee recommendations, votes whether to send out to Presbyteries for approval
- ▶ 173 Presbyteries vote on recommended changes
  - ▶ 87 or more votes required for *Book of Order* changes
  - ▶ 116 or more votes required for *Book of Confession* changes



# FPCK Values Statement

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- ▶ Explicit statement of FPCK's shared beliefs and values (did not exist prior to this study)
- ▶ Used to determine if GA219 proposals are consistent with our values
- ▶ Drafted by DRST; debated, edited, and approved by Session on February 28, 2011 (subsequently published in Sunday worship bulletin)
- ▶ Key Points
  - ▶ Restatement of Biblical principles from current creeds & confessions
  - ▶ Affirmation of Authority of Scripture
  - ▶ Affirmation of Reformed system of theology
  - ▶ Affirmation of Presbyterian form of church government
  - ▶ Explicit belief in requirement for repentance of sins (defined by Scripture or the Confessions) as qualification for ordination (elders, deacons, and Ministers of Word and Sacrament)



# Change in Ordination Standards

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- ▶ GA proposes to delete current “fidelity and chastity standard” in the *Book of Order*
- ▶ To be replaced with a fitness-for-ordination review process
- ▶ Presbytery review for Ministers, and Session review for Elders and Deacons
- ▶ Change would allow ordination of practicing homosexual officers if otherwise qualified (as determined by the pertinent reviewing body)
- ▶ FPCK Values Statement explicitly contains the Biblically- and Confessions-based ordination standard (same as current Book of Order provision)
- ▶ Proposed change is contrary to FPCK Values
- ▶ New Covenant Presbytery voted narrowly against (156 against, 144 for, and 3 abstentions on November 13, 2010)



# Change in Christian Marriage Standard

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- ▶ Two reports issued by GA219 for study by churches and Presbyteries prior to next General Assembly (July 2012)
  - ▶ Majority report favors changing Christian Marriage Standard to allow same-sex ceremonies in states where civil law allows
  - ▶ Minority report advocates keeping Christian Marriage Standard as “between one man and one woman”
- ▶ No change was recommended by GA, nor is up for vote by Presbyteries
- ▶ Presume that a recommendation to change will come from next General Assembly in 2012 (Presbytery vote in 2012-2013?)
- ▶ DRST believes the majority report recommending same-sex Christian Marriages is against FPCK Values
  - ▶ Authority of Scriptures
  - ▶ Biblically-based definition of marriage “between one man and one woman”



# New Form of Government (nFOG)

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- ▶ GA219 proposes to eliminate current *Book of Order* in its entirety, replace with new slimmed-down and re-written *Book of Order*; goal – “*to make the church more missional*”
- ▶ Potential impacts
  - ▶ Eliminates well-understood procedures; replaces with Presbytery-specific Administrative Operations Manual
  - ▶ Negates some authoritative interpretations on controversial issues; opens settled issues to re-litigation, more fundamental changes
  - ▶ Can create Presbytery-to-Presbytery differences
  - ▶ Allows further theological drift
  - ▶ Doesn't obviously make church more missional
- ▶ DRST does not believe this change is in FPCK's best interest
- ▶ New Covenant Presbytery voted overwhelmingly against change (186 against, 44 for, and no abstentions on Feb 5, 2011)



# Confession of Belhar

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- ▶ Belhar drafted in 1986 by Dutch Reformed Mission Church in response to racial segregation by Apartheid (South Africa)
- ▶ Condemns racial segregation and strongly advocates unity
- ▶ GA recommends adding to *Book of Confessions* as a sign of support for sister denominations already adopting Belhar
- ▶ DRST conclusions
  - ▶ No new material not already covered in current *Book of Confessions*; no new Christology
  - ▶ *Confession of 1967* covers the issue of racial segregation better
  - ▶ No need to add Belhar to PCUSA's constitution
- ▶ **New Covenant Presbytery will vote on Belhar on June 11, 2011**



# Congregational Survey

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- ▶ Do you agree with the recommended changes to PCUSA polity?
  - ▶ Change in Ordination Standards
    - ▶ Strongly Agree – Somewhat Agree – Undecided – Somewhat Disagree – Strongly Disagree
  - ▶ Change in Marriage Standards
    - ▶ Strongly Agree – Somewhat Agree – Undecided – Somewhat Disagree – Strongly Disagree
  - ▶ Change to New Form of Government
    - ▶ Strongly Agree – Somewhat Agree – Undecided – Somewhat Disagree – Strongly Disagree
  - ▶ Addition of Confession of Belhar to *Book of Confessions*
    - ▶ Strongly Agree – Somewhat Agree – Undecided – Somewhat Disagree – Strongly Disagree
  
- ▶ Comments



# Current Status of Presbytery Votes

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	For	Against
Ordination Standards Change <small>(87 votes to pass)</small>	72	54
New Form of Government <small>(87 votes to pass)</small>	68	57
Belhar Confession <small>(116 votes to pass)</small>	62	38
Marriage Standards	<i>No Vote – Out for Study before GA 220 (July 2012)</i>	
<small>Vote count updated as of April 15, 2011</small>		

Note: current voting results can be obtained from the PCUSA General Assembly website at <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/votes.pdf>



# Handout Materials from DRST

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- ▶ Presentation Handouts
- ▶ FPCK Values Statement
- ▶ Two-page summary of 4 GA issues
- ▶ DRST Issues Analysis book (in-detail analysis)



## Next Steps

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- ▶ DRST will conclude meetings and report survey results and comments to Session by end of May.
- ▶ Session will commence a process in June to evaluate how to respond to these pending changes in PCUSA
- ▶ Possible options on how FPCK could respond:
  - ▶ Accept changes if/when they occur as new PCUSA polity
  - ▶ “Hide in place” and ignore PCUSA changes that are contradictory to FPCK values
  - ▶ Commence a discernment and departure process to leave PCUSA and join another Presbyterian denomination
  - ▶ Work within PCUSA to establish a conservative safe haven of like-minded churches (the Tall Steeples initiative)
- ▶ Session will publish more information over the Summer