

## Why I'm Staying in the Presbyterian Church (USA)

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When I became a Presbyterian pastor, I responded affirmatively to the vow every Presbyterian officer (deacon, ruling elder, teaching elder) is required to answer: *Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?* I still affirm that vow, and will do so until I die. Yet many of my friends and colleagues are disavowing the Presbyterian Church (USA). You will have to ask them why they are leaving; I want to tell you why I'm staying.

I chose to be a Presbyterian because the PC(USA) believes in, and proclaims, the saving acts of the Triune God. The first paragraph in the Book of Order (part of our Constitution) states, *The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. By the power of the Holy Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life.* I testify to the triune God's saving grace in my own life, and I choose to stay in a denomination that gladly and faithfully proclaims this Good News.

I will stay in the Presbyterian Church (USA) because it stands under the authority of the Bible. *The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written.* (The Confession of 1967) Do all Presbyterians interpret the Bible in exactly the same way? Of course not, any more than any family agrees on every issue in culture, politics, or international affairs. Absolute uniformity of belief is the mark of cults, not of churches. The bedrock of the Presbyterian Church does not consist of one's position on homosexuality, abortion, or capital punishment, but in one's confession that *Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior.*

I will stay in the PC(USA) because it is avowedly missional. The second paragraph in the Book of Order reads, *In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ.* I start every morning with *The Presbyterian Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study.* The *Yearbook* contains inspiring examples of outreach by PC(USA) churches and mission co-workers all over the world. As I pray for the people involved in each day's featured mission, I thank God for my partnership with two million Presbyterians, here and abroad.

I will stay in the PC(USA) because, though imperfect, we strive always to hear the voice of the Spirit under the Word. I have lived long enough to know that no human institution, least of all the church, is perfect. One need only read 1 Corinthians to know how sinful a church can be, yet in spite of the Corinthians' woefully inadequate faith, Paul did not hesitate to address them as *those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to*

*be saints.* Those who leave us in search of a perfect fellowship are, I fear, deluding themselves. Billy Graham was right when he said that if you are seeking to join the perfect Christian church, the moment you join it, it will be imperfect. Moreover, church splits tend to result in ever more splits, as the history of the church will amply demonstrate. Will it happen to those who are leaving us to form a new denomination? Not right away perhaps, but at some future time someone may find fault and provoke yet another division in the Body of Christ.

Finally, I choose to remain in the PC(USA) in answer to our Lord's prayer in John 17: 20-21: *I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* How many have turned away from Christ because of our manifold divisions? I choose not to perpetuate those divisions in order not to damage further our witness to the world. Rather, as a faithful member of the Presbyterian Church (USA), I will reach out in love and cooperation to all who believe in the one whom God sent, Jesus Christ our Lord, including those who are leaving our denomination. I will miss them when they leave, but I will not join them. In obedience to our Lord's prayer for unity, I choose to stay in the Presbyterian Church (USA).