

## News from the 219th GA: Civil union and marriage issues

### What did the Assembly do? What has changed?

The General Assembly approved both the final report and the minority report of the Special Committee to Study Issues of Civil Union and Christian Marriage and ordered they be sent out for study by the wider church. The vote was 439 in favor, 208 against, with 6 abstentions. By this action (sending both reports for study) the Assembly maintained the definition of marriage as between “a man and a woman.” With the action to send the reports for study, no change has occurred, or is pending

### What does it mean?

The special committee report provides descriptive material on the historical and theological aspects of marriage, as well as a look at current laws on same-gender partnerships and their children, and the place of same-gender covenanted relationships in the Christian community. They commend to the church their covenant, “Those Whom God Has Joined, Let No One Separate” as a guide for Presbyterians to come together to discuss difficult issues when there is disagreement. The minority report, also approved for study by the Assembly, concludes that Scripture is clear that marriage is between a man and a woman only and does not support any kind of sexual behavior outside heterosexual marriage. The minority report also contains a covenant for the wider church to use

### What's next?

The special committee report and the minority report will be prepared for distribution as one document to the wider church. By sending both reports to the wider church, it is the hope of the Assembly that Presbyterians will find helpful background information on civil unions and marriage, as well as material to help individuals and groups remain together as they work through these difficult issues.

### Where can I learn more?

- Read the [Majority Report](#) and the [Minority Report](#) on line.



**Emerging leaders:** The face of church leadership is changing. As our nation and church become more diverse, leaders are arising in unexpected places, bringing gifts from a variety of racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. *Presbyterians Today* enlisted the help of Bruce Reyes-Chow & Byron Wade, outgoing moderator and vice moderator of the GA, and others with extensive connections around the church in order to find some of the emerging leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). One of them is in our midst:

### Neal D. Presa: At home in the global church

A glance at 33-year-old Neal Presa's résumé could make a person twice his age feel like an under-achiever. This young pastor of Middlesex (N.J.) Presbyterian Church holds three master's degrees (two from Presbyterian seminaries) and a Ph.D. in liturgical studies, awarded in May. He has served on an array of church-related boards, committees, commissions and councils. He's made friends at the Vatican, and has been a delegate to major Reformed church gatherings. What inspires him the most, Presa says, is his involvement in the worldwide church: “I'm really excited about the ecumenical movement.” And he's well positioned to pursue what he sees as his calling: “to work at all levels for the visible unity and full communion of all parts of the body of Christ.”

Presa already has exercised leadership at the highest levels of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): as vice chair of the General Assembly Mission Council (2003–04), commissioner to the General Assembly (2006) and chair of a special committee that brought recommendations to this year's Assembly on retranslating the Heidelberg Catechism. But Presa's life is more than all church, all the time. When he travels he packs running shoes so he can work out on a treadmill between meetings. In addition to preparing sermons and leading new-member classes for his small congregation, he joins his wife, Grace, in chauffeuring their sons Daniel, 7, and Andrew, 5, to Cub Scouts, tennis lessons and other sports activities. Born to Filipino parents in Guam, Presa was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church and grew up in a United Church of Christ congregation in California, where his family moved when he was 3. He became Presbyterian in the mid-1990s, when his congregation split and one group of members joined the PC(USA). Presa immediately felt at home. He loved Presbyterian polity and the emphasis on the confessions. “Something clicked,” he says. “I was always Presbyterian but I didn't know it.”

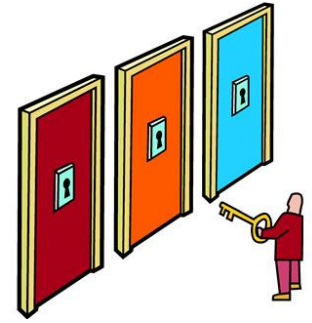
Now he hopes to help bring greater unity to the church he loves. “We have a compelling story to tell,” he insists. By moving beyond arguments and factions, the church can “bear witness to Christ's profound love for the world.”

## Sorting & Allocating

Sorting and allocating aren't just for medical folks doing triage.

We all do it constantly.

- Cell phone rings, I look at caller ID, and make a quick decision whether to interrupt my lunch meeting to pick up. Rule of thumb: any call that could be a family emergency gets answered; others wait until meeting is over.
- Visitor comes to the Sunday evening ministry that I coordinate. I go over immediately, even if it means excusing myself from a conversation with a regular.
- When I'm out on errands with my wife, I focus on her. While she tries on dresses, I haul out my iPhone and check messages.
- At work, I keep my e-mail and social media accounts open at all times. If something looks urgent, I respond right away. Others can wait. I reply to every e-mail and personal message within 24 hours.



You get the idea. It's not about being a slave to the noise. It's about sorting and allocating. Some things matter more than others. Some situations require immediate response. Jesus stopped immediately when Bartimaeus cried out for mercy, but took his time dealing with obtuse disciples.

Sorting and allocating are an imperfect science. What matters to you might not matter as much to me. But you matter to me, so I need to decide whether to deal with your question, concern or need right away. Parents of teenagers learn to hear the question within the question at midnight. It's the same process in ministry.

It's important that I make my choices. I might choose wrong and am accountable. But I can't cede my right to choose. The fact that you can make noise doesn't require me to turn your direction. I need to sort and allocate. Only I can do that for myself.

It's important that I explain my choosing process, so that I don't hurt people by not jumping instantly when they call. I must be honest and, to the extent possible, transparent. We shouldn't play games with our attention, the way teenagers do.

We are blessed with tools that make sorting and allocating possible. Years ago, if the phone rang, everything stopped -- and it might be just a telemarketer! Now we have caller ID on phones, text-messaging, social media integrators like Tweet-Deck and HootSuite, e-mail sorting tools -- not to mention Off buttons.

Dealing with people, of course, remains as challenging as ever. The noisy and demanding don't yield to hints or Off buttons. The passive aggressive continually hope that you will hear what they deeply mean, rather than what they dare to say. Bullies, attention-grabbers, scene-stealers, one-uppers -- they're all out there, waiting to pounce.

The key is for you to decide who will get your time, attention and care. Yes, you will choose wrong from time to time. But you will never make right choices if you just bounce from one noise to another.

*(The above article was written by the Rev. Tom Ehrich, founder of the Church Wellness Project.)*

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