



# South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church

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Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' " - Matthew 22:37-40

Dear SMPC Family,

As a session, we have a duty to foster and strengthen the faith and life of our congregation through our leadership and service. As we serve in this capacity, it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves what God wants us to accomplish as a session and how God is calling us to lead the congregation.

In 2014, the 221st General Assembly of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church USA, received a majority vote from the presbyteries to amend the Book of Order, our governing guidelines, to say "marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives." This amendment gave pastors discretion in officiating weddings for committed couples whether they were man and woman or of the same sex, and also provided local church sessions with the flexibility to host weddings ceremonies without gender restrictions.

In the last few years, the session at SMPC has spent a substantial amount of time considering our current wedding policy. We have read and discussed books, we have studied scripture, we have discussed the potential changes on multiple occasions, and we have prayed about this matter individually and collectively. The session has put much time and thought into discerning the way that God is leading our congregation.

SMPC has always prided itself on being a welcoming congregation. The Christian faith, guided by the teachings and example of our Lord, Jesus Christ, is founded on the principle of the inclusion of all people. We are all children of God and as such we strive to be a community that embraces all members of our church family. Our congregation is strengthened by the differences among us and we want every member to know they are valued and loved.

At the conclusion of our studies and discussions, the session has felt called to change the current wedding policy to be a more inclusive policy, removing gender specific language, and to match the guidelines of our congregation as a whole. This change to the policy is an important step to make every member of our church feel welcome and accepted.

As our congregation continues to move forward, let us recall Jesus' commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself," which is second only to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you mind." With this guidance in mind, the session has voted to make these appropriate changes in order to welcome and include all our congregants as well as our neighbors.

Yours in Christ,

Mary Elledge

Clerk of Session, South Mecklenburg Presbyterian Church