

A Bitterless Breakup

As the nation's largest Presbyterian denomination considers allowing non-celibate gay clergy, three conservative churches in Indiana amiably announced their departure.

✖ **Feb. 23, 2009** – Three Indiana churches belonging to the Presbyterian Church (USA) will break away from the national church on April 15.

The leadership from Covenant Presbyterian Church of West Lafayette, First Presbyterian Church of Frankfort and First Presbyterian Church of Nappanee requested the split based on theological differences regarding scriptural interpretation.

“There was also disagreement over what it meant to be faithful to Jesus’ teaching in certain areas of ethics, such as in the area of sexuality,” said David Henderson, senior pastor of Covenant Presbyterian. “[But] we’ve tried to figure out how to love those with whom we disagree.”

Another leader said when Christians don’t agree, Christ gave them principles to follow. “Honesty, humility, thinking more highly of others than of ourselves – these are some of our guiding principles, and abiding by them has allowed us to genuinely love one another through this process,” said Thomas Jameson, senior pastor at First Presbyterian Church in Frankfort.

All three congregations were granted dismissal last Tuesday and are now aligned with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), a denomination with less than 5 percent membership than PCUSA. The three churches will change their names and pay a total of \$975,000 to the Wabash Valley Presbytery, which will then transfer ownership of each church’s property.

In the past two years, more than forty congregations have left the PC(USA) and affiliated with the EPC for reasons similar to

those cited by the three congregations.

According to a statement on Covenant's Web site, at the Wabash Valley Presbytery meeting 115 delegates approved the agreement of dismissal, while two delegates voted against it.

Meanwhile, a group of mainline Presbyterians from Arkansas have endorsed a PCUSA constitutional amendment allowing non-celibate homosexuals to serve as ordained ministers, elders and deacons.

On Saturday, the Presbytery of Arkansas voted 116-64 for the amendment, which the national church's General Assembly approved last June, reported the Associated Press (AP).

The measure allowing for gay clergy goes into effect if a majority of PCUSA's 173 presbyteries approve it, according to the AP.

The amendment calls for eliminating language that asks clergy to "live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness" and replace it with a requirement for clergy to "pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ."

In the Indiana schism, Henderson said he was pleased throughout the separation process to see Christ-likeness displayed and not bitterness. "Too many people have the idea that God is an angry God, and that Christians are angry people. We wanted to show otherwise," he said. "Whenever God reveals His nature in the scriptures, He always uses words like gracious, merciful, loving, slow to anger. Well, those are the words we wanted to be used of us when we got done with this process. We want to reflect the One we follow.

"We were determined to let love have the last word, not disagreement or frustration or hurt," he said. "And I think it has."

