

Head of Presbyterian Church to Step Down

Some Presbyterian leaders hope Kirkpatrick's retirement will allow for a change in the liberal direction the church has taken with its acceptance of homosexual ordinations.



At the annual Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA) meeting this summer, the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, head of the denomination, announced he would not seek another term after his third one ends next summer. Since 1996 Kirkpatrick has held the highest position in the PCUSA as the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly. Some conservative leaders in the denomination said that Kirkpatrick's decision to step down is a good change of direction for the "disheartening state" of the nation's largest Presbyterian denomination, which claims 2.3 million members. In recent years Kirkpatrick has been criticized for the PCUSA's rapid membership decline and the liberal direction the denomination has taken with the acceptance of homosexual ordination and disputes over scriptural authority. "The last decade under his leadership has been a difficult and disappointing time for Kirkpatrick, and indeed for Presbyterians as a whole," said James D. Berkley, director of Presbyterian Action at the Institute on Religion and Democracy. Kirkpatrick said he is eager to spend more time with his family, according to an Associated Press report. The PCUSA nominating committee has already begun searching for a new clerk to be elected next year.