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Presbyterians Join Protestant Movement to Accept Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Ministers

In Minneapolis, Minn., May 10, 2011, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) crossed an historic threshold as Presbyterians in the Twin Cities area voted to eliminate all official barriers to the ordination of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people as ministers and lay leaders in their 2.4 million member denomination. With their vote the Twin Cities Presbyterians were the 87th Presbytery (a regional governing body) to vote yes, giving the denomination the majority of votes needed to approve the landmark change. Presbyterians join a growing Protestant movement of Lutherans, Episcopalians, and United Church of Christ members who have eliminated official barriers to leadership by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

Coincidentally, the process began in Minneapolis in July of 2010 when the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) met at its biennial General Assembly to vote on church policy. Since this was a constitutional amendment, a ratification process began to garner the required majority of the 173 regional presbyteries. Three other times General Assembly leaders voted to eliminate the rules that blocked gay clergy. This time, after decades of work for justice, a majority of regional Presbyteries ratified the policy change.

"While it has taken longer for our Church to get to this amazing moment of entering into a new era of equality, this voting process has given us the opportunity to affirm that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are part of God's good creation and can be called by God to serve the church. The thousands of conversations, prayers and the sharing of hopes and dreams are all part of building a Church that reflects God's heart," said Dr. Michael Adee, Executive Director of More Light Presbyterians.

"Passage of this amendment restores our long-standing Presbyterian emphasis upon faith and character regarding ordination. Now, faithful and qualified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Presbyterians can openly serve the church with energy, intelligence, imagination and love," said the Rev. Dr. Janet Edwards, Co-Moderator of More Light Presbyterians. "After

such a momentous decision, it is also our tradition to lift each other up in prayer and a generous spirit, regardless of how we voted."

"Passing this amendment makes clear the good news that the Presbyterian Church welcomes and values every person – because Jesus does. Its passage removes an enormous stumbling block for many who would otherwise be drawn to following Jesus," said the Rev. Mary Lynn Tobin, Co-Moderator, Covenant Network of Presbyterians. "While this action does not oblige any Presbyterian to change their understanding of scripture, we rejoice that our church will now be able to receive the service of all whom God calls," added the Rev. David Van Dyke, Co-Moderator, Covenant Network of Presbyterians.

"We stand looking at a new day in the Presbyterian Church that so many have been waiting for," said the Rev. Mieke Vandersall, Minister Director of Presbyterian Welcome. "I have experienced first hand the abundant gifts that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Presbyterians are longing to give in ordained leadership and I could not be more grateful that now they can share those gifts with our denomination."

"With this vote, our church is demonstrating that we are choosing to reach out to a new generation," said Lisa Larges, Minister Coordinator for That All May Freely Serve. "Young people can now be proud of their church. We're showing that we are serious about caring for people and sharing the Gospel."

"Thanks be to God that this day has come!" said Sylvia Thorson-Smith, from Presbyterian Voices for Justice. "We rejoice that God's justice-loving Spirit has blown like a mighty wind through our church after long decades of struggle. For years we have wept for the many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Presbyterians who have left our church because their calls were denied. But today, we shed tears of jubilation that our church has finally said YES to their full participation. May God bless the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and all people of faith with wisdom, grace, and love as we go forward into this liberating future."

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More Light Presbyterians: A national network of congregations & people seeking the full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Covenant Network of Presbyterians: Toward a Church as Generous and Just as God's Grace.

Presbyterian Welcome: Working for a Church where God's call to service is affirmed in all persons.

Presbyterian Voices for Justice: Proclaiming God's extravagant love and justice in church and society.

That All May Freely Serve: Advocating for an inclusive church that honors diversity and welcomes Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender persons as full members.