

More than the Ratification of 10-A
by Rev. Ray Bagnuolo
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The continuing struggle for the full welcoming of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) faithful into the work and worship of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has become a cycle unto itself. The wheel of change continues to spin, with arguments for and against full inclusion. Messages often blur as the motion of the debate goes around the center upon which it turns.

Any movement relies upon a working structure, whether in the laws of motion or the polity of a church. However, in the PC(USA) a breakdown appears to have occurred, in which parts of its design have become litmus tests of its members' faithfulness. As a result, the center and central mission of the PC(USA) has come under question based on how welcoming we will be depending upon a vote for or against this amendment. The *answer* is once more perceived to be wrapped up in a decision on ratification of Amendment 10-A, currently before the presbyteries. Simply, the answer to the question of our faithfulness cannot be scripted by any amendment. The ratification of 10-A can only bear witness to the deep faithfulness that long preceded any debate, overture, or constitution, for that matter. The ratification will bear witness to how we choose to love one another, reflecting how we see God's love for us. This is about much more than the ratification of 10-A.

Surely, study, examination, and review are important to the foundations and direction of the PC(USA), those it serves, and the world in which it witnesses. Problematic is that in any community of faith such methods only go so far. They cannot travel to the fullness of the heart or its design by God, let alone define God's intentions. No one can. The mystery of God's presence in the heart is limited in human understanding. Rather, God offers us an invitation to the mystery and wonder of giving of one's self, one's community, one's world unto the care of God through the longings and listening of the heart, as well as the study and examinations of the mind. In short, a response to God as Love calls us to love and welcome others – including every baptized brother and sister into the full work and worship of the PC(USA). To do otherwise is to ignore the heart and the mystery God has given us; a heart yearning for us to trust more than to study. Any study that points otherwise must be flawed.

Perhaps, this time, there will be enough constitutional arguments and shifting within the PC(USA) for the ratification of Amendment 10-A, making this church a prophetic witness and model for others to follow. Certainly, thoughtful individuals who are expert, scholarly, and faithful in the ways of the PC(USA), its Constitution, and its traditions have provided ample paths to making such a choice.

Whatever the exchange, no argument or position can claim God or Love for itself, alone. Further, no argument can claim God or Love to exclude what God has created. Lastly, what no argument can claim is that God as Love would ever accept or tolerate the violence that is inherent in any decision toward marginalization and oppression of those

God has created and those God continues to call. We avoid the discussion of violence, perhaps because given the choice in such terms would easily end the separation we now practice. None of us wishes to be complicit in hate crimes or their foment, and yet, our language of distance, amplified by being a “church,” indeed has impact that causes others harm.

When all debate is exhausted and biblical scholars have made their considerable contributions, the last question to answer in choosing whether to ratify Amendment 10-A will be “How do we Love?” Or, perhaps, “How do we welcome others to God?”

The choice in favor of Amendment 10-A is a choice of Love. There are enough arguments to provide ongoing debate, even suggesting a pause. That will always be so, until our faithfulness goes beyond the debate, into the Love that precedes all – all. These guiding questions for final consideration in voting for ratification are suggested:

- a) Can we be faithful by excluding our baptized sisters and brothers who are LGBT from the full work and worship of the PC(USA)? Is ours a God who excludes those God has created?
- b) Can we be faithful to the teachings of Jesus and the Church by fostering a climate of violence towards our LGBT sisters and brothers, affirming others’ hatred and homophobia with our decisions to marginalize?
- c) Can we be a faithful reflection of God as Love by using our Constitution or fears to create a class of people less welcome or worthy than others?

Were that this was simply a matter of making a decision about loving one another as God loves us. It may be that such love is still growing in us, but with a decision to ratify Amendment 10-A, it may be much closer than we think in leading us to the family and witness we are meant to be.

Ray Bagnuolo is an openly gay minister of Word and Sacrament. He currently serves Jan Hus Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House and its inner city ministry in NYC. He was one of the few openly gay Candidates for minister of Word and Sacrament examined and cleared to seek a call since the passage of G-6.0106b, refusing to abide by the G-6.0106b as a matter of conscience during his examination in 2005. Ray also serves on the Board of More Light Presbyterians.