

A HISTORY OF MORE LIGHT PRESBYTERIANS AND SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1974: The Reverend David Sindt, a Commissioner to the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (“northern” denomination) representing the Presbytery of Chicago stood on his chair on the floor of the General Assembly and held a hastily scribbled sign over his head: “Is anyone else out there gay?” Thus began the More Light movement in the Presbyterian Church.

1978: The General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) (“northern” denomination) issued an authoritative statement:

- “We conclude that homosexuality is not God’s wish for humanity... Even where the homosexual orientation has not been consciously chosen, it is neither a gift from God nor a state [nor/or] a condition like race; it is a result of our living in a fallen world... [thus] unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination.” But also...
- “There is no legal, social or moral justification for denying homosexual persons access to the basic requirements of human social existence.”

1979: The Presbyterian Church (US) (“southern” denomination) adopted a similar statement.

1983: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was formed by the reunion of the northern and southern denominations.

1996: In response to proposed legislation from the PC(USA) national governing body designed to explicitly exclude gay or lesbian candidates from ordination, Second embarked on a time of “discernment” which included an invitation for a panel to share their personal stories to members of the congregation.

1997: The proposed, restrictive changes to the ordination standards in the PC(USA) Constitution were ratified by the required number of Presbyteries. The Presbytery of Middle Tennessee was the only southern presbytery to vote against ratification, largely due to Second’s leadership.

2003: With the inspiration and encouragement of Second’s Associate Pastor Stacy Rector, a steering committee with volunteers from seven local Presbyterian congregations initiated More Light Presbyterians in Middle Tennessee. In September, Second’s sanctuary burned and was a complete loss. The two events are unrelated.

2005: Second elected and ordained for the first time two openly gay members of the congregation to the office of ruling elder—despite the lack of change to the constitutional ordination standards.

2006: After years of discussion and discernment, Second’s session voted unanimously to do 3 things in a single motion: 1) Officially affiliate with the national MLP organization, 2) Pay the annual dues to the national MLP organization in support of its mission and 3) designate one Sunday each year as “More Light Sunday” to recognize and celebrate Second’s commitment to the full inclusion of God’s LGBTQ beloved in the life, work and ministry of the church and in society.

2008: The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) rescinded its 1979 statement on homosexuality.

2009: Second and the local More Light chapter hosted the More Light Presbyterians national conference with nearly 200 in attendance from across the country.

2011: On July 10, after two previous failed attempts at ratification, new constitutional ordination standards that no longer explicitly barred LGBTQ persons from ordained office took effect. On that day, Second celebrated More Light Sunday.

2014: The General Assembly issued an official statement clearing Presbyterian pastors from the threat of ecclesial judicial action for performing same-sex marriages in states where such marriages were civilly legal.

2015: In March, a new definition of marriage was ratified by the required number of Presbyteries to become part of the PC(USA) constitution, no longer restricting the definition of marriage to be between a man and a woman. That definition reads in part:

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the wellbeing of the entire human family. 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. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

In June 2015, the United States Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional for same-sex couples to be denied the right of civil marriage.

Today we celebrate More Light Sunday and recognize Second's commitment to working toward the full inclusion of God's LGBTQ beloved in the life, work, and ministry of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and in society.

—Trice Gibbons