

PCUSA changes marriage definition in its constitution

by [Melody Smith](#) in the [April 15, 2015](#) issue

A majority of the 171 presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have approved same-sex marriage, revising the description of marriage in the denomination's constitution.

On March 17, Palisades Presbytery in New Jersey became the 86th presbytery to approve an amendment to the PCUSA's Book of Order.

The new language, which will take effect June 21, reads:

Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being 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.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the PCUSA approved the amendment last summer but required a majority of presbyteries to ratify the provision for it to become part of the church's constitution. PCUSA ministers already could perform same-sex marriages in states where such marriages are legal.

Gradye Parsons, stated clerk of the General Assembly, wrote in a statement that the 2014 assembly "included in those changes clear language that no teaching elder or session can be forced to conduct a same-sex marriage ceremony if they do not believe it is appropriate."

The PCUSA has had more than 37 percent of its members leave since 1992, while another denomination, the conservative Presbyterian Church in America, has seen a 6 percent increase in the past five years, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported.

"I hope that this can be an opportunity for renewal," said Shannon Craigo-Snell, professor of theology at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Kentucky, in the same report. "I hope that . . . some people who have disengaged with various churches, because they've heard only this one issue, because they heard just a denial of various sexual orientations and ways of loving one another, will come back to the church."

—Presbyterian News Service; added sources