

Brazil, Peru churches end partnerships with PCUSA over same-sex marriage

by [Renee K. Gadoua](#) in the [October 28, 2015](#) issue

Presbyterian churches in Brazil and Peru have broken ties with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a result of the U.S. denomination's decision in March to allow clergy to celebrate same-sex marriages.

The loss of the South American partnerships comes on top of the decision of 50 U.S. congregations to formally split from the 1.8-million-member denomination since the church policy changed, PCUSA officials say.

Mexican Presbyterians stopped partnering with the denomination after it allowed the ordination of noncelibate gay and lesbian people in 2011.

Gradye Parsons, the stated clerk of the General Assembly and the highest elected official in the denomination, said the South American churches hold differing views on inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life of the church.

There is "a continuum of what people think God is calling them to do with LGBT issues," he said. "Some think [LGBT people] should be loved and changed, and some think they should be loved and accepted."

About 94 million Christians belong to international churches founded or co-founded by the PCUSA. The Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil and the Evangelical Presbyterian and Reformed Church of Peru were among the South American churches that partnered with the U.S. denomination. Those also include Presbyterian churches in Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

The denomination's partnership in Brazil dates to the 1970s, and the partnership in Peru began in 2007.

In its letter ending the partnership, the Brazilian church praised the PCUSA for its "notable contribution to the expansion of God's kingdom." It called the U.S. church's stance on LGBT people "against the principle of the authority of Scripture over the life and faith of the Church."

The breaks with international churches mean the denomination can no longer participate in some programs in Brazil and Peru.

Projects in Brazil expected to end by February 2016 include continuing education for pastors and missionaries and participation in a church-planting partnership in Latin America.

Denominational officials hope to continue partnerships that have supported schools in marginal neighborhoods and have helped build water cisterns. The PCUSA will continue its relationship with the United Presbyterian Church of Brazil, as well as a graduate school of religious science and a theological seminary.

U.S. missionaries continue to work in Peru and Brazil, but not with local churches that broke ties with the denomination.

In March, after more than 30 years of debate, a majority of the U.S. church's 171 regional bodies, known as presbyteries, voted to change the wording of the church constitution's definition of marriage from a commitment "between a man and a woman" to "between two people, traditionally a man and a woman."

In June 2014, church elders and ministers voted to allow—but not require—clergy to perform same-sex weddings.

No churches in Africa have yet broken with the denomination, said Hunter Farrell, director of Presbyterian World Mission.

"We've adopted an attitude to listen carefully to the cultural aspects, especially in the colonial world, where societies have suffered under foreign masters," he said. "Our church has tried to give wide berth to practice and belief."

Farrell said the denomination was sorry to see the South American churches break their ties.

"We have sought to engage them in dialogue and explain our motivation and our understanding of homosexuality and marriage and ordination and asked them to help us understand their view," Farrell said. "We're not interested in slamming the door on anyone." —Religion News Service

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