

## Why the PC(USA) can grow because of marriage equality

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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During this General Assembly, the PC(USA) made some historic moves. One of the main ones was that there was an authoritative interpretation passed so that pastors who serve in states where marriage equality is legal can preside over those ceremonies.

Now, I'm hearing from those who didn't agree with the vote saying that with marriage equality, our decline will be greater than it has been in the past. What odd logic. We were declining for years when we had policies that barred LGBTQ people from being ordained. And now, somehow allowing for same-sex couples to have their union blessed by God in a church means we're going to decline faster? If you're on a road to decline, don't you want to switch directions? Well, that's what we've done.

Of course, in the short run, that will be true. Churches have been poised to leave the denomination if this passes. And, our church has a median age of 61, which means there will be membership loss. But, I want to assure those who are nervous, it's going to be okay.

After serving growing churches, I know that people have been attracted to our church *because* we upheld LGBTQ rights. This is why we can grow, because of this decision:

**Young adults overwhelmingly support LGBTQ rights.** According to [Pew Research](#), about 70% of Millennials support marriage equality. Guess what? The 30% is probably already going to another church. So, it's a good plan to focus on the 70%.

**The old-school evangelical church is declining *because* of their attitudes towards LGBTQ people.** For many years, people have told us evangelical churches were growing because of their doctrinal purity. But, as a refugee from the conservative Southern Baptist Church, I can tell you, homophobia combined with asking women to "graciously submit" and not use birth control pills, is not a strategy that will hold up with . . . almost anyone.

We've watched the exodus of younger generations. We've seen emerging churches mature. We've witnessed a movement of evangelicals embrace a more compassionate faith. Now the Southern Baptists are grieving losses as well. I don't want to sound smug about this. Leaving my Baptist roots was the most painful thing I've ever done and I'm distressed when someone leaves church. I'm just saying that so-called doctrinal purity is *causing* decline in many cases, not stemming it.

**God is love, and we live by the rule of love.** I know that people say that we have lost our way. This vote indicates that we don't believe in Jesus. We don't believe in God. We are bowing and bending to the whims of culture. God will punish us, the Spirit will stop moving among us.

I say we're living by the rule of love. We have witnessed men and women who have been forced to lie about who they are. We have watched spouses being denied access to Intensive Care Units. We have seen the heartbreak—a widow who could not claim her wife's property or a teen who becomes homeless—that religious attitudes can cause. We have seen as people have been denied health care. We have watched lives destroyed because people thought that they had to choose between God or claiming their sexual identity. In all of this, we

want to listen to the words of Jesus who commands us to “love one another.” “They will know we are Christians by our love.” God is love. When we make decisions of this magnitude, love is our rule.

**We have studied the Bible.** When people say that we have gone away from a biblical view of marriage, I wonder if they've ever read the Bible. Polygamy, political alliances, arranged marriages, handmaids, and women who are on the same level as chattel—this is the stuff of biblical marriage. Marriage evolves, and thank God, it has evolved since the days of Hagar.

**Parents want their children to be rooted in a loving community.** If a person is not gay or lesbian, then they usually have someone in their family or circle of friends who is. We don't want our kids growing up in a spiritual environment that teaches discrimination.

**We are planting new churches.** The PC(USA) celebrated planting over 260 new worshiping communities. That, my friends, is how you grow. Not by denying rights to loving couples.