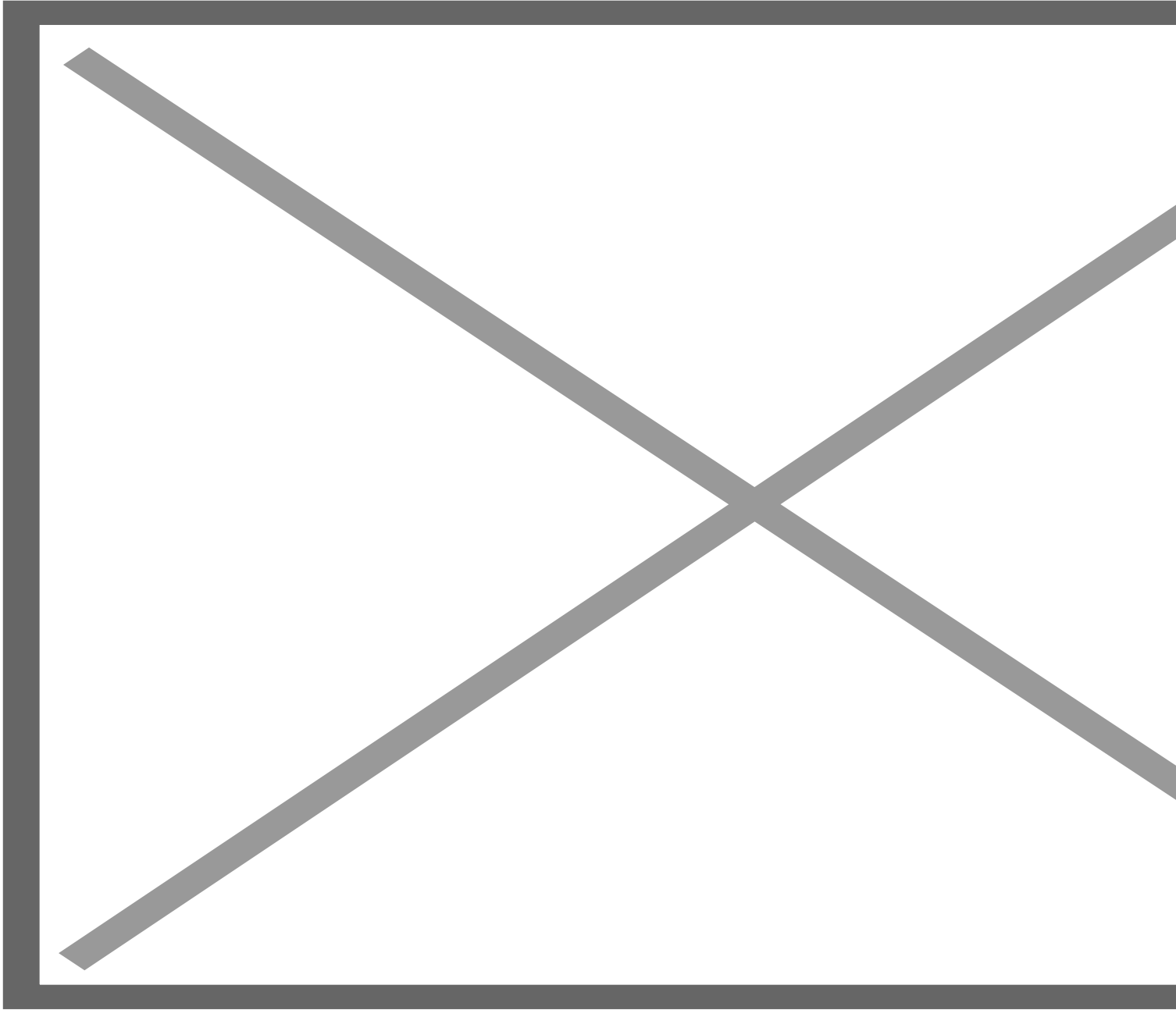


As polyamory gains visibility, monogamy faces a vote in the PCUSA

by [Kathryn Post](#)

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(Photo by La Fabbrica Dei Sogni/Unsplash/Creative Commons)

A proposal that would require ordained clergy to be monogamous is on the docket at the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s general assembly this summer.

The [overture](#), CON-10, has generated strong reactions online but has not yet earned broad support from PCUSA groups. A separate [proposal](#), highlighting the denomination's commitment to the inclusion of different familial realities, asks for theological studies on gender and sexuality, life-giving relationships, and the Christian vocation of family. Together, these overtures show that as polyamory gains visibility in broader culture, it may have policy implications, especially in theologically progressive Christian denominations.

"I think it is the next big conversation that most mainline denominations will have," said Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava, director of engagement for the LGBTQ-affirming nonprofit [More Light Presbyterians](#).

The board and staff of More Light Presbyterians released a [statement](#) last month, saying the proposal on monogamy targets queer communities.

"It centers a single model of relationship as the only faithful expression of Christian life, ignoring both the breadth of biblical witness and the lived realities of many faithful people," the statement says. "Scripture speaks richly about covenant, mutuality, justice, and love but does not prescribe one uniform relational structure across all contexts."

For More Light Presbyterians, the proposal on monogamy hits close to home. Aguilar Rubalcava said in an interview that at speaking engagements, she routinely encounters polyamorous Presbyterians hungry for support. Kate Davoli, who serves as co-moderator on the board of More Light Presbyterians, said they were [dismissed](#) from the denomination's ordination process for being openly polyamorous. (The Pittsburgh Presbytery said Davoli was "advised to withdraw from the ordination process due to current PCUSA polity requirements.")

Currently, the PCUSA's governing documents don't include the word "polyamory," which involves emotionally intimate, often sexual relationships with multiple people. In 2011, the PCUSA [removed language](#) from its Book of Order requiring ordained clergy to live in "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness," allowing LGBTQ individuals to seek ordination in the denomination. [The Book of Order](#) currently defines marriage as "a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives."

CON-10 would explicitly require ordained ministers in the PCUSA to engage only in monogamous sexual relationships. It argues that polyamory or polygamy "can create power imbalances, emotional harm, and spiritual confusion, particularly for women, children, and historically marginalized persons." To pass, it would need to be approved by the denomination's delegates at the general assembly (the PCUSA's highest council) which will meet June 29-July 2 in Milwaukee. It would then need to be ratified by over half of the more than 160 presbyteries, or regional governing bodies.

But the overture seems unlikely to pass. To date, only the presbytery that submitted the overture on monogamy, the Presbytery of Sierra Blanca in New Mexico, has endorsed it. Three advisory committees have recommended voting against the proposal, saying it attempts to legislate individuals' intimate lives, imposes a too-narrow definition of family, and contains confusing language. Yet another committee said the overture doesn't follow the protocol for amending the denomination's constitution.

Three committees have recommended approving a separate overture, titled "Beyond Changing Families: Flourishing Relationships and Belonging," which calls in part for developing a theological framework that examines relational ethics.

Davoli, who serves as a ruling elder in their congregation, noted that grassroots conversations involving polyamory, especially about how to responsibly minister to nonmonogamous congregants, have been happening in the PCUSA for years. Davoli added that polyamory may be more common than people realize; a national

Kinsey Institute [study](#) published in 2021 found that about 1 in 9 single adults had been in a polyamorous relationship.

As polyamory gains exposure, other mainline denominations have begun to confront their stance on it. At least three Episcopal priests have renounced their ordination vows due to tensions between their church roles and family structures, and in 2024 the Episcopal Church considered, but did not advance, a resolution intending to study diverse family structures. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada [voted](#) in 2023 to create national resources to support conversations that include “ethical non-monogamous relationships.”

Still, many Christians across the theological spectrum see their beliefs as incompatible with polyamory. While the PCUSA’s overture on monogamy hasn’t won broad support, Matthew Vines, author of *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* and founder of the LGBTQ Christian group [the Reformation Project](#), said in an interview that, given the other concerns about the PCUSA overture, it isn’t “a particularly accurate barometer” of the level of support for nonmonogamy in the denomination.

Vines, who describes himself as a theologically conservative Christian, was raised in but no longer belongs to the PCUSA. His organization [promotes](#) the idea that the Bible supports the full inclusion of LGBTQ Christians in the church, as well as “monogamous, covenantal same-sex relationships.” Vines views monogamy as reflective of monotheism and God’s covenant relationship with God’s people, as a stabilizing force in church communities and broader society. He believes linking polyamory to the movement for LGBTQ inclusion could undermine hard-won acceptance of LGBTQ Christians.

“To the extent that you may see some movement toward greater acceptance of polyamory in mainline denominations, I do think it is a time-limited endeavor, and also an endeavor that will be limited by how quickly the more moderate to conservative elements of the affirming coalition tune in and say, ‘This is never what we signed up for,’” said Vines.

Christian advocates for polyamory often point to the range of relationship models in the Bible—though many contrast polygamy, which often has hierarchical implications, with modern forms of polyamory—and emphasize the importance of safe, consensual relationships with clear boundaries. Last month, More Light Presbyterians hosted a “Faithful Polyamory 101” [training](#) that framed the Trinity as modeling the kind of mutual, overflowing love that can be reflected in polyamory.

“The ability to love our neighbor sometimes includes . . . a deep intimate affection that is beyond just one other person, and that actually does help us follow the one commandment to love one another faithfully,” Davoli said.

The general assembly will respond to the overtures on monogamy and the proposed study of relationships by the conclusion of its meeting on July 2. —Religion News Service