

## Three Possible Reasons to Vote Against the Proposed Marriage Amendments

### **1. Affirmation of RCA polity and the work of the Spirit:**

Throughout its history, the RCA has relied on the work of the Spirit and on our durable polity to see us through disagreements about a variety of social issues. Our polity assigns authority to the classis in resolving disagreements in an orderly way that affirms God's sovereignty and sustains loving and collegial relationships in Christ. It is inconsistent with our form of governance to assign authority to the General Synod (or to a Bishop, or to individual congregations) to determine or "assure" enforcement of the BCO or General Synod statements. Further, to deviate from our polity and seek to legislate a particular position on same-gender marriage would set a dangerous future precedent for a range of topics over which faithful people in the RCA may differ.

Specific to these proposed amendments, a marriage liturgy does not *constitute* the church as the sacraments do, and elevating it to a constitutional level could lead to a host of inconsistencies. Further, the BCO already describes an orderly process by which a minister or a consistory may be charged or disciplined, based on a violation of the Constitution or of Holy Scripture. To that point, since a range of understandings among office-bearers and assemblies continues to exist as to whether or not same-gender marriage is a violation of Scripture, it would seem that the Spirit is still speaking, as our confessional standards affirm. To amend our constitution to reflect one particular biblical interpretation sets a precedent that would seem to deny that the Spirit is still at work.

### **2. Affirmation of grace-filled relationships in the RCA:**

Because of our relatively small size and our history of bonding fellowship, many have likened the RCA to a family, and lament the breakdown of trusting relationships. We are a community bound together by the Spirit and by our confessional standards. Our polity helps us to live out that community in an orderly way, but traditionally, the RCA has relied on relationships, rather than simply adding new rules, to work out our differences and to carry out our mission. This reliance does not exclude the necessity of discipline in the church, but discipline rests on grace-filled relationships among members and assemblies. As various working groups on homosexuality and the work of the recent Special Council affirmed, discipline may not be the best way for us to address our divisions over the inclusion of LGBTQ people in the life and ministry of the RCA. Our history shows that discipline, once it becomes a matter of charges and complaints, is painful, disheartening work which more often leads to irreconcilable divisions rather than restoration. Ratifying the marriage amendments will only add to a climate of mistrust, accusations, and punitive measures within and between classes, and the future health of the RCA will suffer as a result.

### **3. Affirmation of Christian marriage for all God's Creation:**

God is the loving Creator of all of life. Homosexual orientation is an unalterable biological variant that exists in God's created order (normal, though not the norm). It is not a choice, not a sin to be homosexual. God's design for all humanity is a beloved community that mirrors God's inclusive love, fully revealed in Jesus Christ. As such, God desires covenant relationships based on mutual love, honor and faithfulness; this holds true for those who are biologically attracted to the opposite sex or to their own. The standard is covenant, not sexual or gender identity. If a couple meets that standard and wants to commit to the sacred call to live it out in Christian marriage that is something not only to be affirmed, but celebrated, blessed and consecrated. RCA pastors and consistories already have certain guidelines and policies in place regarding requests for marriage in their church; those standards should be applied to all couples, without exception, who seek to be married in that church. Prohibition of marriage solely on the basis of sexual or gender identity is a misguided denial of God's gift of love for all God's creation.