

# Local Presbyterians OK gay clergy

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**Wednesday, April 22, 2009**

Local Presbyterians voted overwhelmingly Tuesday night to approve an amendment to their church constitution to allow gay clergy.

The vote, announced just after 8 p.m. at a crowded meeting at National Presbyterian Church in Northwest, was 222-102 with one abstention. The voters represented 34,000 Presbyterians in the District, Northern Virginia and five Maryland counties who belong to the National Capital Presbytery.

"This presbytery has consistently voted along these lines," said the Rev. Tim Cargal, moderator for National Capital. "They wanted to record their support of having this language removed from the Book of Order."

The church's constitution is divided into a Book of Order and a Book of Confessions. The amendment replaces language that requires clergy to maintain "fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness." The new language specifies only that clergy will "declare their fidelity to the standards of the church."

The amendment was passed last summer in San Diego at a General Assembly of the 2.2-million-member Presbyterian Church USA. To become church law, it must be approved by a majority 87 of the denomination's 173 presbyteries, or geographic regions.

Along with National Capital Presbytery and Salem Presbytery in central North Carolina, which also voted for the amendment Tuesday, 67 presbyteries have voted to ratify. Voting results from two other presbyteries San Francisco and Wabash Valley in Indiana which also made their decisions Tuesday, were not known as of Tuesday night.

However, 85 presbyteries have voted against the amendment. If two more vote no, the amendment will fail.

Speakers at the National Capital Presbytery meeting did not seem concerned that their decision could become moot. About 20 percent of the 335 attendees wore rainbow-colored knit scarves to signify their support of the amendment, and the majority of those who spoke up during the four-hour meeting were in favor of the amendment.

Cindy Stauffer, an elder at Bradley Hills Presbyterian in Bethesda, pointed out that her assistant pastor, the Rev. Eric Scott Winnette, had a huge stake in the vote's outcome.

"Scott is gay, and it saddens me to think any gay or lesbian person called to ordination in our church not be embraced in our denomination," she said.

"Do we want to create a denomination our children will want to be a part of?" asked the Rev. Ruth Everhart of Poolesville Presbyterian Church in Maryland. "I have two college-age daughters and they do not get this. They do not have a clue as to what gay people are not good enough to be part of church."

Opponents to changing the amendment's language pointed out that members of the Presbyterian Church USA have been battling over the issue for several decades with little to show for it.

"This issue is the greatest gift we have given to Satan from this church," said Henry Kim, a member of Mount Vernon Presbyterian Church. "We have lost a half-million or more members since I became a Presbyterian; the blood is neck-deep on this issue and absolutely nothing will be resolved by this vote."