

## **Intro to AI Overture at the Presbytery of the Western Reserve – TDK (4 minutes)**

This Overture asks the GA to issue an authoritative interpretation, AI for short, that clarifies that officiating at a same-sex marriage is a legitimate pastoral decision, and not an offense that should subject a minister to discipline.

The *Book of Order* (6.02) gives the General Assembly the right and responsibility to provide authoritative interpretation. When there is disagreement or lack of clarity about what a provision of the *Book of Order* means, it is common for the GA to be asked to render an AI. In fact, the first PCUSA rule about blessing same-sex relationships was an AI by the 1991 GA, which acknowledged: “There is no mention in the Book of Order of same-sex union ceremonies” – issued at a time when there *was* no legal same-sex *marriage*. See the Overture rationale for much of the history of how we got into the situation we’re in, where pastors who want to minister to same-sex couples are *required* to discriminate against them.

This Overture is about ministry.

It is about the freedom of ministers to follow their own best judgment as they exercise *pastoral care*, without being constrained by a restriction created by the GA Permanent Judicial Commission.

It is about *evangelism*. When couples who seek the support of the faith community for their solemn commitments must be turned away from the church, it calls into question the love of Jesus Christ for those couples, in their eyes and in the eyes of their families and friends and all who observe the church being legalistic instead of loving. It is clear in the gospels that Jesus challenged interpretations of the law that resulted in subordinating people to legalism.

This Overture is about the church, and how we relate to one another when we disagree. Some of us read Scripture to prohibit same-sex relationships; others of us have come to a different conclusion from

Scripture. This AI acknowledges disagreement and allows freedom of conscience for all – as is true now, no minister could be compelled to perform a marriage service he or she believes to be unwise or wrong.

Part of the rationale from a similar overture from New Castle Presbytery:

There now are 12 states and the District of Columbia where same-gender marriage is legal... [To illustrate how fast things are changing, there are now 17 states, plus 2 more where court decisions have declared discrimination unconstitutional. Back to quoting:]

The legalization of same-gender marriage in an increasing number of jurisdictions puts Presbyterian pastors and Sessions in a bind. Clearly, many local ~~Presbyterian~~ congregations have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members. Pastors probably feel it most because of their natural instinct to minister to their flock. They may be distraught when a same-gender couple, who are church members, come to them and ask the pastor to officiate at their legal wedding. Session elders feel it because loyal and legitimate church members only wish to be married in their own church, but cannot under the 1991 [AI] ~~Authoritative Interpretation~~...

This overture does not affect the definition of marriage found in the Directory for Worship.

On the other hand, retention of [the 1991 AI] ~~this Authoritative Interpretation~~ invites defiance by our teaching elders. Any such defiance invites complaints under the Rules of Discipline. ~~At one level,~~ adjudicating such complaints is a waste of time and resources for the presbytery. ~~Worse,~~ it risks a plethora of presbytery-level PJC decisions that will waste the time and money of synods and the General Assembly.

The church needs to continue the conversation about marriage, and perhaps will decide to amend the Directory for Worship, sooner or later. But this overture addresses the immediate pastoral crisis that many of our colleagues are facing, because an AI goes into effect immediately when issued. I urge you to vote in favor.