

Why Stay in the PC(USA)?

Twelve Reasons:

3

presbyterians for renewal

Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to be biblically faithful and missionally minded in their service to Jesus Christ.

We Are Not Here By Accident

by Henry Greene, Pastor, Central Presbyterian Church, Merced, CA

I've enjoyed hearing young people use the expression, "That's so random!" I like that response to something said or done which seems off-the-wall, out-of-the-blue, disconnected to anything else. 'Random': purely by chance.

The fact that we, and the congregations we belong to, are part of the PC(USA) may seem "so random." It may seem as if we could just as easily have been anything else—that we, or our parents, or our grandparents, might have been anything else, that the friend who long ago invited us to church might have been other than a PC(USA) member. And if that's so, if it's a random thing that we're here, then we could just as well go someplace else.

But what if it isn't random that we're here? In fact, we Presbyterians, of all Christians, should be quick to affirm the possibility that God has a purpose for us being not only believers in the world but right where we are. As Presbyterians, we value the emphasis of our tradition on the *sovereignty of God* and the *call of God*, don't we? Isn't it possible that God has sovereignly called us into the PC(USA), even though the means seem random to us?

If that is the case, *or if it might be the case*, then we must continually ask the Lord himself where he would have us be. No cause other than the call of Jesus Christ is sufficient for us to go elsewhere. For if, in fact, God has called us to serve where we are, then it is not enough that *we're tired* of long battles. It is not enough that *we're uncomfortable*. It is not even enough that *the denomination is unfaithful*. Faithfulness in this case is about Jesus Christ and where He has called us to serve. Therefore, it's only enough to leave if the Lord gives us permission and leads us elsewhere.

"But," you may say, "I *am* tired and uncomfortable, and the denomination has been unfaithful. Why would God want me to stay?" Of course, only God can fully answer that for you. Let me suggest three possibilities:

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I. Love. God loves the people in the PC(USA), as, indeed, God loves all people everywhere. What is the proper duty of love, even if some are unfaithful? Martin Luther's counsel sounds very contemporary:

Indeed, if there are wicked persons in a church, surely one should hasten to it; in keeping with the example of Paul, one should shout, exhort, entreat, beg, and frighten, and should try everything to make them good. ...What kind of love is it that has decided neither to endure the wicked nor help them? It is madness clothing itself most improperly with the name love.

Again Luther wrote:

For if the bishops or priests or any persons at all are wicked, and if you were aglow with real love, you would not flee. No, even if you were at the ends of the ocean, you would come running to them and weep, warn, reprove.... To be sure we censure, we denounce, we plead, we warn; but we do not on this account split the unity of the spirit, nor do we become puffed up against it, since we know that love rises high above all things, not only above injuries suffered in bodily things but also above all the abominations of sins. A love that is able to bear nothing but the benefits done by another is fictitious.

Yes, later Luther and other Protestants left the Roman Catholic Church. However, as Richard Lovelace has pointed out, that is because they were forced out of the arena in which biblical truth could be declared, sometimes by the threat of death, sometimes by the restraint of mission. And neither of those conditions prevails today.

II. Growth. God might want you and me to stay for the sake of growth. I'm thinking here of our own growth—the growth of us who may be tired and uncomfortable and troubled by the denomination's unfaithfulness. God may intend for us to stay so that we might become more knowledgeable about the Scriptures, clearer thinkers and speakers, more patient, more loving toward our enemies, and even, perhaps, to share “in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Colossians 1:24).

III Renewal. It is by no means clear that God is finished with the PC(USA). God might well want you and me right here to help prepare for, and perhaps participate in, something new and wonderful. Even dry bones can rattle (Ezekiel 37:7) and live in a new Spirit-generated and Spirit-inspired vitality.

And don't forget that in spite of all that is wrong, in PC(USA) congregations around the country people are becoming connected with Jesus Christ! PC(USA) ministries are carrying the love of Christ to people locally and globally.

May we faithfully labor where God has planted us unless God calls us elsewhere. It is not given to us always to know just what God is doing; nevertheless, God is working his purposes out.