

Seminary presidents back PCUSA report: Report calls for ordaining institutions to decide regarding gay ministers

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The presidents of all 12 Presbyterian seminaries have endorsed the recent report of the PCUSA theological task force that unanimously recommended that ordaining institutions in the church decide whether and when to approve of openly gay ministers.

In a letter dated November 1 and signed by presidents of ten PCUSA theological schools and two seminaries in covenant with the denomination, they expressed their “collective hope” that the General Assembly next summer will “receive the report favorably.” They said they considered the task force report “a positive contribution toward a constructive and faithful future.”

The special panel’s report urged the denomination to keep its ban on noncelibate gay clergy but said that Presbyterian tradition also allows congregations to determine when such standards may be bypassed. The congregations and presbyteries conceivably could determine that a clergy candidate’s sexual orientation and activity is a “nonessential factor” in his or her acceptability, the report concluded. The report was greeted with less enthusiasm, however, by two major advocacy groups this month, according to the Presbyterian News Service.

The board of directors of the Convent Network of Presbyterians, meeting in Memphis, defended its neutral stance on the task force report, terming it “not justice but progress” toward the group’s nine-year-old goal of full inclusion of gay and lesbian members in the church.

In Orlando, the Presbyterian Coalition—an umbrella organization of groups that oppose gay ordination—condemned the report. It called the recommendations

“unconstitutional” and accused the task force of attempting an “end run” around the ban on ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians.