

GO FIGURE

JACK MARCUM



GRAPHIC BY JEFFREY LAWRENCE

Homosexuality and ordination

Results from a late 2008 survey provide a recent snapshot of Presbyterian opinion on homosexuality and ordination:

- **Most members (53 percent) and elders (59 percent) oppose** allowing the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians to the ministry, while 35 percent and 30 percent, respectively, would allow it.*
- **Half of ministers favor such ordinations**, with 42 percent opposed.
- **Opposition is slightly less for ordination to the office of elder**, with 44 percent of members and half of elders against it, and 45 percent and 40 percent, respectively, supportive.
- **Among ministers, a small majority (53 percent) would allow ordination to the office of elder**, with 40 percent opposed.
- **For the office of deacon, only minorities of laity are opposed to ordination** (members, 43 percent; elders, 48 percent), with about as many in favor (46 percent; 41 percent).
- **By 54 percent to 38 percent, ministers favor permitting ordination** of sexually active gays and lesbians to the office of deacon.

*In this and all other comparisons, the rest are "not sure."

What the results show

In 1997 a provision was added to the church's constitution limiting ordination to those who "... live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness." Given the survey results, it's not surprising that an effort to delete this provision failed in presbytery voting earlier this year. Overall, more Presbyterians oppose than favor allowing ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians.

Responses by age group, however, suggest the opinion gap may narrow in future years. While 30 percent of both members and elders aged 60 or older would permit ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians as ministers, 44 percent of those younger than 40 would do so. Among ministers, the corresponding numbers are 53 percent and 55 percent.

It remains to be seen whether the next generation of Presbyterians will be as open to ordaining gays and lesbians as younger Presbyterians are today. While American society seems to be liberalizing on gay issues, there is nothing inevitable about this trend, as the 2008 vote to ban same-sex marriage in California made clear.

Presbyterians have been divided on the topic of homosexuality and ordination for more than 30 years, and I would not be surprised to see us remain so many years hence. □

OTHER FINDINGS www.pcusa.org/research