

AN OVERTURE TO THE 218TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA)

on Deleting G-6.0106b and Substituting a new Paragraph in its place; on Amending G-14.0240 and G-14.0450; and on Providing a new Authoritative Interpretation

The Presbytery of Boston respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send to the Presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes the following proposed amendments to the Form of Government:

- a. To delete the current text of G-6.0106b,

~~b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.²²~~

and to substitute the following:

b. Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the Constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.

- b. To amend G-14.0240 by insertion:

When persons have been elected to the office of elder or deacon, the session shall confer with them as to their willingness to undertake the office. The session shall provide for a period of study and preparation, after which the session shall examine the officers-elect as to their personal faith; knowledge of the doctrine, government, and discipline contained in the Constitution of the church; ~~and~~ the duties of the office; **and readiness to assent to the Constitutional questions for ordination and installation.** If the examination is approved, the session shall appoint a day for the service of ordination and installation (see W-4.4000). If the examination is not approved for one or more elected officers, the session shall report its action to the congregation's nominating committee, which shall bring nomination(s) to a meeting of the congregation for any office(s) not filled.

- c. To amend G-14.0450 by insertion of a new paragraph b and by renumbering current paragraphs b through d:

In the final year of theological education or when a candidate has satisfied all of the requirements of this section, and before the candidate has received a call, the committee on preparation for ministry of the candidate's presbytery shall conduct a final assessment of the candidate's readiness to begin ordained ministry. A summary of this assessment shall be reported to the presbytery and shall be transmitted to a calling presbytery when requested. The committee on preparation for ministry shall report to the presbytery when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. This consultation shall focus on the outcomes of inquiry and candidacy and shall include each of the following requirements of certification:

- a. demonstration of readiness to begin ministry of the Word and Sacrament as required to fulfill the candidacy phase of preparation;
- b. **demonstration of readiness to assent to the Constitutional questions for ordination and installation;**
- ~~b.~~
- c. presentation of a transcript showing satisfactory grades at a regionally accredited college or university, together with a diploma;
- ~~c.~~
- d. presentation of a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, the transcript showing satisfactory grades, and presentation of a plan to complete the theological degree including Hebrew and Greek and exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek texts;
- ~~d.~~
- e. presentation of satisfactory grades together with the examination papers in the five areas covered by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.

and,

2. Provide the following Authoritative Interpretation:

Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.

Rationale:

The opening paragraphs of the Form of Government are a powerful statement of the fundamental Christian and Reformed affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. In support of this primary affirmation, Chapter 1 of the Form of Government calls Christians to attend to the Scriptures, insofar as they set forth “Christ’s will for the Church,” and Chapter 2 identifies the church’s Confessions as its guides, subordinate to the authority of Jesus Christ and to the witness of Scripture. Our church thus has bound itself to a hierarchy of authority in which we are to obey Jesus Christ its Head, and, additionally, to heed first the Scriptures and then the Confessions, to the extent that they accurately bear witness to Christ’s will. This fundamental hierarchy of authority is accurately and eloquently reflected in the first three of the Constitutional Questions, the assent to which is required of each candidate for ordination and/or installation.

Although the hierarchy of the church’s authority is clear, it is subverted by the current language of G-6.0106b, which substitutes for our obedience to Christ two concepts which are foreign to Reformed understanding: “obedience” to Scripture and “conformity” to the Confessions. The proposed amendment would remove this paragraph and substitute new language which (1) reflects the church’s understanding of where its authority is to be found, and (2) reaffirms the church’s reliance on the examination of candidates by its governing bodies as the principal means by which to insure the commitment of its ordained officers to the duties of faith. The amendment additionally would insert appropriate language to ensure that each such examination will include discussion of the Constitutional Questions and the governing body’s determination of the candidate’s readiness to accept their principles and live by them to the extent any of us is able.

In order to be able to rely on Jesus Christ as its Head and as its chief guide in all of life, the church must shed any subordinate source of authority which would bind its ability to follow where he leads. The overture therefore also calls for the rescission of past interpretive statements which have had the effect of limiting Christ’s freedom to use his servants as he would choose.