

The National Capital Presbytery respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to do the following:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

To delete the current text of G-6.0106b,

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 standard 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.

and to add the following,

Those who are called to ordained service in the church are to lead lives of obedience to Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Scriptures, and interpreted by the Confessions of the church. Their suitability for the offices to which they have been elected is determined by the governing bodies where the examinations for ordination and/or installation take place, subject to review by the next higher governing body. By their assent to the Constitutional questions for ordination or installation, officers declare their fidelity to the standards of the church.

2. Provide the following authoritative interpretation: Interpretative 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

Our fellowship in Christ includes bisexual, gay, lesbian, straight and transgendered persons, and, by the grace of God, we are all capable of living honorable, faithful Christian lives filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus we believe it is time to remove categorical barriers constraining lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered church members from ordained service as deacons, elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). We believe this because of scripture, not in spite of it; because of our confessions, not in spite of them; because of our polity, not in spite of it; because of who we are, not in spite of who we are, for we are all beloved children of God.

I. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD

“*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*” This is the greatest commandment. And a second is like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt.

22:37-40). “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord:* (Rom 8:38-39).

As our most recent confession reminds us, “In sovereign love God *created the world good and makes everyone equally in God’s image*, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community” (A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.3).

Contrary to the spirit of scripture and this confessional standard, our current ordination policy contradicts the foundational principle of Jesus’ teaching – that God is love. From the Genesis account of Abraham and Sara welcoming strangers to dinner (Gen. 18), to the numerous stories of the early New Testament churches creating an environment of hospitality, reconciliation and generosity (Rom 13 and 14, 1st Cor. 13, Eph.2, Col. 3, Heb. 13), the story of our faith is the story of God’s love and of God’s insistence that people of faith practice that love. In times of controversy, individual passages of scripture should be interpreted in light of the broad story of scripture, and all of scripture should be interpreted in accord with Jesus’ rule of love (“Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture”) adopted by 123rd General Assembly (1983). There are no exceptions to this expectation and yet our ordination policies expressed in and through G-6.0106b do not communicate the message of God’s love and they rest on a few verses whose meaning is the subject of extensive debate.

Thus we invite the church to proclaim *that nothing in our polity shall separate any of us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, nor shall it deny any who are called, gifted and qualified the opportunity to serve as disciples of Christ in ordained office in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*.

II. THERE IS ONE BAPTISM

“*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all*” (Eph. 4:4-5). “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, *we who are many are one body*, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

As our most recent confession reminds us, the Spirit “justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and *binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the Church.*” That same Spirit “claims us in the waters of baptism, feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation, and *calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.*” (A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4).

Contrary to the spirit of scripture and this confessional standard, our current ordination policy divides the body of Christ, sets neighbor against neighbor and leads us to violate the image of

God in others and in ourselves. Our current ordination policy is inconsistent with our church's understanding that baptism "is a sign and symbol of inclusion in God's grace and covenant" that transcends "barriers of race, gender, status and age," and in which "we die to what separates us from God," (W-2.3000); moreover, in communion "we manifest the reality of the covenant of grace in reconciling and being reconciled" (W-4.4004).

Further, our current policy continues to relegate lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered members of the church to second-class status, dishonoring their relationships and placing on them a burden of celibacy that is not required of other members. By demanding a standard of heterosexual marriage or chastity in singleness, the current policy places all members in the position of "boasting of the merits of his own works, or ... in works of supererogation ... [a] damnable idolatry" (Scots Conf. C-3.15).

Thus we invite the church to proclaim *that we are bound to one another and to God in the sign and seal of the sacraments, and that our polity should reflect the truth that is incarnate in Jesus Christ: that all who trust in him are reconciled to God and are part of the ministry of reconciliation according to their gifts and particular calling.*

III. IT IS GOD WHO CALLS

"You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. But remember the root command: Love one another" (John 15:16-17), The Message). "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).

As our most recent confession reminds us, the Spirit "*calls women and men to all ministries of the Church*" (A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4). As the Confession of 1967 reminds us, "every church order must be open to such reformation as may be required to make it a more effective instrument of the mission of reconciliation" (9.40).

Contrary to the spirit of scripture and these confessional standards, our current ordination policy contradicts the basic principle of the church which holds all men and women who are church members responsible for answering God's call to special ministries as elders, deacons or ministers of Word and Sacrament (G-6.0101a). Current policy contradicts the church's understanding of membership and takes away from some members their entitlement to "all the rights and privileges of the church ... including the right to hold office: (G-5.0202). Embedded in this principle is the understanding that those "who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world" (G-6.0106a). Current policy discounts the Constitutional questions asked of candidates. These questions focus broadly on the faith and manner of life expected of church officers without prurient concern with human sexuality.

In addition, current policy and practice regarding G-6.0106b limit the right of congregations to elect their own officers (G-6.0107) and limit their freedom of conscience in interpreting Scripture and the call of God (G-6.0108) by focusing inordinate attention on matters about which there remains great disagreement throughout the church.

Thus, contrary to the spirit of scripture and our confessional standards, our current ordination policy contradicts the Great Commission of Christ and the Great Ends of the Church by:

- constraining the church’s proclamation of the good news;
- denying, nurture and spiritual fellowship to an entire category of God’s children;
- placing a stumbling block before many who are gifted and called to lead and preserve divine worship;
- undermining the truth that is incarnate in Jesus Christ, that all who trust in him are reconciled to God and called to be part of the ministry of reconciliation;
- standing in the way of the church’s promotion of social righteousness and justice for the marginalized and outcast of our culture;
- preempting the possibility that God is calling us to exhibit the Kingdom of God in a new way to the world in our time.

This commission and these purposes constitute a rule of our faith, and thus should guide our interpretation of scripture and the confessions (“Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture”).

Thus we invite the church to proclaim *that church polity exists to serve the Great Commission and the Great Ends of the Church and should reflect that commission and those ends.*

IV. THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, *in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

As the Confession of 1967 reminds us that “This community, *the church universal*, is entrusted with God’s message of reconciliation and shares his labor of healing the enmities which separate men from God and from each other” (9.31).

Contrary to the spirit of scripture and this confessional standard, our current ordination policy stands as a barrier to reconciliation, contradicts the value scripture places on inclusive welcome (Acts 8:26f, 10:28 and 11:17), and conflict with numerous parts of The Book of Order that underscore the church’s call to reconciliation, hospitality, openness and inclusiveness (G-3.0401, G-4.0100 - G-4.0304) and the rights granted to members (G-5.0102 and G-5.0103, G-6.0107 and G.6-0108). In addition, a faithful member accepts Christ’s call to participate in the governing responsibilities of the church (G-5.0102e), while current ordination policies deny some faithful members the opportunity to serve and thus the opportunity to accept fully the privileges and responsibilities of membership that is “a commitment to Jesus Christ that binds the individual to fulfillment of the obligations of membership” (G-5.0501).

Current policies have not been a source of peace or unity in the church. They have not kept those who advocated for the policies from schism. They have not silenced those who opposed them. The Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church, after earnest study and prayer, was not able to come to a resolution on current policies. For the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, who calls us to the ministry of reconciliation, we invite the church into a season of reconciliation and hospitality to those gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons who have felt abused, neglected and locked out of the fellowship of reconciliation by our current policies.

Thus we invite the church to proclaim *that our polity will reflect a church as welcoming as God’s grace, as loving as God’s heart, and as reconciling as God’s word.*

V. OUR COMMON HUMANITY, OUR COMMON FAITH

“For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:22-23). *“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”* (Rom. 5:1-5).

As our most recent confession reminds us, “we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator ... we violate the image of God in others and ourselves.” But, as our most recent confession affirms, “God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation” (A Brief Statement of Faith, 10.3). Further, as the Confession of 1967 reminds us, “The *new life [in Christ] takes shape in a community in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are.* They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no man has any ground on which to stand, except God’s grace” (9.22).

Contrary to the spirit of scripture and this confessional standard, our current ordination policy denies both our common humanity and the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work in new and surprising ways among us for reconciliation, and contradicts the Reformation understanding of

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God's grace in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul understood our common sinfulness; nevertheless, Paul, in following Jesus, said we are justified by faith. Indeed, Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide us in faith, and promised that the Spirit that will be with us always. We are called to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit continually doing new things among us. We are charged with interpreting scripture according to the movement of the Spirit and to what Calvin called the "inner testimony of the Holy Spirit." The founders of our Reformed Tradition and their heirs have continually been open to the moving of the spirit in leading the church in new directions. As we are reformed and renewed according to the movement of the Spirit, even in our brokenness, Jesus Christ remains our peace, our unity, and our purity. Our peace, unity and purity come through faith, through obedience to Jesus Christ, through our willingness to follow him and respond to his call when we hear it. In times of controversy, we recognize that Jesus Christ is the center of scripture and we interpret scripture accordingly.

Thus we invite the church to proclaim *that God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of human life, and that the church best participates in this work when its polity reflects the unmerited grace and reconciling love made known to us in Jesus Christ, who calls each of us to this ministry of grace and reconciliation.*