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# FAQ's of Donegal Discernment

October 2012

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The Presbytery of  
**DONEGAL**

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# QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED OF DONEGAL PRESBYTERY

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- Online video: Gradye Parsons, “New Form of Government for the PC(USA)”: [www.youtube.com/user/gradyeparsons](http://www.youtube.com/user/gradyeparsons)

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- “Ordered Ministries of the Church, Gifts & Qualifications for Ordained Service”, *Book of Order*, page 25,26
- “Constitutional Questions for Ordination and Installation”, *Book of Order*, page 122.

### Other Ordination Resources

- Written document: “Sanctify Them in Truth”
- Online video: “PC(USA) Ordination Standards”: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuq8t0f4kfw&feature=share&list=PL1E1FB4F0279CB109>

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- Online Journal: Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary “Insights” Spring 2012: [http://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/insights\\_spring\\_2012\\_i](http://issuu.com/austinseminary/docs/insights_spring_2012_i)
- “Why Stay? Why Go?” by Joseph D. Small. Presbyterian Outlook, June 27, 2011. Vol. 193. No. 13.
- “Why Stay?” by Heidi Husted Armstrong. Presbyterian Outlook, June 27, 2011. Vol. 193. No. 13.
- “Making Space for Wholeness” by Sheldon Sorge. Presbyterian Outlook, June 27, 2011. Vol. 193. No. 13.

### Additional Resources– Page 33

- “PC(USA) Building Unity & Community” a Power-Point presentation.
- Online PDF: Comparison Table Current Book of Order (2011-2013) to previous Book of Order (2009-2011): <http://www.pcusa.org/media/uploads/oga/pdf/1-comparison-new-to-current-nov09.pdf>
- “Frequently Asked Questions to Amendment 10-A and ordination standards” from the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
- “FAQs: After the Vote” *The Presbyterian Outlook*, June 27, 2011. Vol. 193. No. 13
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## Introduction

***“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 1:7b)***

The documents before you represent the written response to some of the frequently asked questions voiced to the leadership of Presbytery of Donegal and member churches. They are a collection of materials prepared **by** members of the PC(USA) and do not originate from sources writing **about** the PC(USA). Each item included will properly notate author, work, and publisher. These materials will be reflective of the breadth of the PC(USA) and include the voices of Rev. Dr. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, PC(USA); Cynthia Bolbach, Moderator of the 219<sup>th</sup> GA; and leadership from our PC(USA) seminaries.

In addition to these resourced materials we are offering letters of faith and purpose from the leadership of Donegal Presbytery as well as a statement of accuracy from the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery.

We have attempted to collect materials that will be helpful to many learning styles and walks of life. There are website addresses for those who choose to gather their data from the ease of their personal computers and laptops and there is material included for those who prefer to read from printed documents. This collection is suitable for discussion among church sessions as well as general membership.

***“Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 6:23)***

## After the vote: A word from Bonhoeffer

A LETTER TO THE DONEGAL PRESBYTERY FROM ERIN COX-HOLMES

**T**his past Saturday, March 19, the Presbytery of Donegal had a meeting. At that meeting, we did many things. We worshiped God in song, spirit, and preached Word. We welcomed Scott Szabo into candidacy. We enjoyed a lunch turned out with flair by a cotillion of Central servers. We raised \$700 for the Samate Church. And we voted on Amendment 10-A. Everyone expected the vote in Donegal Presbytery would be very close. And close it was. The Presbytery voted 83 in the affirmative, 80 in the negative, with 1 abstention.

The debate was respectful, the climate of the meeting profoundly prayerful. The vote was a

clear indication that Donegal is divided right down the middle, with people of deep conscience not in agreement on our standards for ordination.

### BLESSED BE THE TIE THAT BINDS

When the vote total was announced, someone asked that we sing "Blessed Be the Tie that Binds." And, out of the stunned silence following the announcement, we did.

*Blessed be the tie that binds  
our hearts in Christian love;  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
is like that to that above.*

As I stood to sing — pastor and midwife, shepherd and mother hen for this presbytery, knowing it was my duty next to step to the mike to frame a prayer for us all — the only thing I could focus on was how little like "kindred minds" the room felt. Here we were, as divided as a people can be. What "tie that binds?" wondered my racing thoughts. In that same flash, I was carried back to my eighth grade chemistry class. Regrettably, I was one of those kids who can only be labeled an obnoxious Bible twerp. And I was a woeful scholar of science. So, on a test on the bindings of molecules — about which I had zero clue — I wrote: "in Christ all things are bound together. Colossians 1:17." When my wise teacher returned the test, the red ink at the top said: Theology: A. Chemistry: F.

Friends, I think we can safely say that our chemistry in this presbytery isn't much, right now. In the flurried run-up to this vote, groups on both sides of the overture planned strategies, and both sides did their level best to get out the vote. The results are within what they call the margin of error. We could have gone either way. We are divided down the middle. I have been spending as much time as possible with pastors, with sessions. Trying to listen, then to listen deeper. What I hear is many of us feel we are anything but kindred minds. I hear many speculating what "they" are thinking, and feeling, and believing. Trust is low. Our chemistry is precarious.

So, it is time to remember: The tie that binds us


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is Christ. It is not up to us to manufacture our unity as the Body of Christ. Theology: A. Even when the Chemistry is an F.

### LIFE TOGETHER

In the past weeks, I have found myself driven back to one of those books that shaped me: "Life Together" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What Bonhoeffer maintains is that our Christian discipleship is measured by life together to which we are called, and whether we like it or not is immaterial. Here are a few key excerpts:

... because God has already laid the only foundation of our fellowship, because God has joined us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. And is not what has been given us enough: brothers and sisters, who will go on living with us through sin and need under the blessing of grace?

Even when sin and misunderstanding burden the communal life, is not the sinning brother or sister still a brother or sister, with whom I, too, stand under the Word of Christ? Will not their sin be a constant occasion for me to give thanks that both of us may live in the forgiving love of God in Christ Jesus? Thus, the very hour of disillusionment with my brother or sister becomes incomparably salutary, because it so thoroughly teaches me that neither of us can ever live by our own words and deeds, but only by the one Word and Deed which really binds us together — the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

If we do not give thanks daily for Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ. This applies in a special way to the complaints often heard from zealous pastors and zealous members about their congregations. A pastor should not complain about her or his congregation

{dare we say a presbytery?}, certainly never to other people, but also not to God. A congregation has not been entrusted to the pastor in order that the pastor should become its accuser before God and people. When a person becomes alienated from a Christian community in which they have been placed and begins to raise complaints about it, they had better examine themselves first to see whether the trouble is not due to a wish dream that should be shattered by God; and if this be the case, let them thank God, for leading them into this predicament.

Various news reporters keep calling to ask how I feel about "the Vote." This is what I say: I believe we are called to witness to our unity in Christ, even when we are divided. The world is waiting to see how these Donegal Presbyterian

I have been spending as much time as possible with pastors, with sessions. Trying to listen, then to listen deeper. What I hear is many of us feel we are anything but kindred minds.

Christians love one another, and how we love God's world.

... In conclusion, I urge all of us to reflect upon the state of our personal "life together" in our congregations and in the presbytery. If you find yourself regarding other persons or groups as "they" — if anger and condemnation have crept into your tone, if you are grieving over the going astray of a fellow disciple — Lent is a very good time to seek God's grace, and to go to those with whom you are disaffected. The presbytery leadership can help broker conversations between groups who would like to talk with others on questions like "How can you think that way?" Now is the right time to seek to walk in charity and grace, forgiving and seeking forgiveness. When our Theology is "A," we can trust the Chemistry to our Lord Jesus Christ.

**ERIN COX-HOLMES** is executive presbyter for the Presbytery of Donegal in western Pennsylvania.

## Why I Stay in PCUSA

By Kristen York Gerling

A member of one of our presbytery discernment teams shared this with me yesterday evening. She said she is “sorry that the things that divide us have become stronger than the things that unite us.” I replied, “I am too. But divided we are.”

Now let me tell you why I stay in the PCUSA and continue in its leadership. It is not because I am a birthright Presbyterian who remembers her baptism as a small child but I am. It is not because I can’t figure a better place to go. I stay because this is where God calls me. So let me list a few reasons for knowing.

- I stay because I know the PCUSA places Jesus Christ first and derives authority from scripture and confessions. I stay because God is worshiped and honored in the PCUSA.
- I stay because of the diversity of thought, of theology, of people and of style and the respect for differences of understanding God’s word to each soul.
- I stay because the PCUSA has committed Christian leadership at all levels – people both volunteers and paid staff that I have known personally and have prayed and worshiped with, who are committed to hearing God and doing God’s will. These same Christians take the slings and arrows shot at them from folks who distrust and condemn them and I stay because I trust this leadership.
- I stay in the PCUSA because this denomination has a commitment to justice, such as support for the oppressed wherever they are, and I appreciate that I belong to a denomination that with a long history of being on the front line for their faith
- I stay because the PCUSA has a willingness to face hard issues such as the conflict between Israel and Palestine or the many years of anger and killing in Ireland and not only face the issues, but also work for peace in so many places around the world.
- I stay in the PCUSA because it has been, and continues to be on the cutting edge of issues that Jesus calls believers to work on such as hunger, poverty, human trafficking
- I stay in the PCUSA because Presbyterian Women (PW) is the best denominational women’s organization in this country and produces a phenomenal Bible study that helps women and men understand God’s plan for humans and themselves. In addition PW has given millions over the years to mission and the denomination -- dollars that support both programming and missionaries and I am proud of that financial support and I believe God is too.
- I stay in the PCUSA because it has provided leadership opportunities for women for many years – opportunities that have allowed me to live out the call Jesus has put on my life. I have had long time support from people who love God – men and women who have shown me Christ and through their love of Christ have blessed my life.
- I stay in the PCUSA for the mission partnerships that are well known around the world and I am proud of them and the continued work the denomination continues to do. The Mission Yearbook for prayer and study guides my devotion time every day as I have set it as one of my

home pages on my computer's browser. I stay because the mission partners I have met around the world appreciate and honor all the work done over the centuries by Presbyterians who do the work because God has called them.

- I stay because the denomination is courageous and has been for many, many years. Courage evidenced for me by the passage of 10A and the adoption of a new form of Government.
- I stay because I cannot imagine being part of any other denomination.

These are a few of the things that keep me in the PCUSA. They are my reasons just as you have your reasons for leaving or staying as the case may be. I won't argue or debate these reasons because they are mine and I own them. I speak for myself. I certainly do not speak for the PCUSA as a whole. I don't presume to know what Jesus would say to you about all these things, but these are the reasons that have come for me after prayer and meditation and soul searching.

So be it.



## Harken to our better angels

BY CYNTHIA BOLBACH

One of the most anxious times in the life of this republic occurred in early 1861: would there be war? If there was war, who would stay with the Union and who would go?

In the midst of overwhelming anxiety and uncertainty, Abraham Lincoln delivered his first Inaugural Address. And this is what he said:

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely as they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

The nation was struggling in 1861, and so was the church. We broke apart over the issue of slavery.

Is history to repeat itself?

It is clear that the passage of Amendment 10-A has strained our passion. What remains to be seen is if it will also break our bonds of affection — the bonds of affection created over the shared life of witness to the Gospel.

Across the church, people are responding to the passage of 10-A in many different ways. Some welcome what they see as an affirmation of justice and equality. Some grieve over what they see as a rejection of scriptural commands. Statements have been issued, blog commentaries have been posted, newspaper ads have been published. Across the PC(USA)'s diverse family of faith, we are discussing, we are praying, we are discerning what this means for our life together.

My prayer for the church is twofold.

First, to those who grieve over the adoption of 10-A, I pray that you do not act precipitously. I pray that you will take the time to live into it, to prayerfully and carefully consider what 10-A means. It sets a strong standard for what we expect of candidates for ordained ministry: a desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ "in all aspects of life," and the ability and commitment "to fulfill all requirements" expressed in the constitutional

questions for ordination and installation. Live with this standard for eight, 10, 12 months. If after that time, you still believe it impacts your ability to proclaim the Gospel with integrity, take action then. But don't act immediately.

Second, I pray that we can be, to each other, the "better angels of our nature." We may disagree on ordination standards. But we are still all members of this family of faith, family members who must respect and appreciate each other as reformed Christians who struggle each day to live out the demands of the Gospel. I know, I trust, persons who do not agree with me on ordination standards; I do not for one minute think that they do not pray to the same God that I do, and I know that it is the same God who listens to each of us.

We must not demonize or denigrate each other's beliefs or values. We, together, are a family that has struggled, and still struggles, with this issue; we, together, are a family that is not of one mind; we, together, are a family that hopes the issue won't destroy our Thanksgiving dinner congeniality but refuses to dodge the issue if it comes up.

We may not agree on ordination. But as members of the family of faith called the PC(USA), we confess together that "Jesus is Lord," and that confession binds us together.

We have our own "mystic chords of memory" that also bind us. We are bound together by our gratitude to those who have gone before us. We are bound together by our common understanding of our Reformed heritage. We are bound together by our belief that we discern Christ's will for us best when we come together, with all of our differences laid out for all of us to see and to appreciate.

The world we live in today needs to hear the Gospel message proclaimed — and there is no better family to proclaim that message than the PC(USA). That must be our focus. Given that focus, Lincoln's words resonate even more strongly:

"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies."

**CYNTHIA BOLBACH** is moderator of the 219th General Assembly of the PC(USA) and a member of First Church in Arlington, Va.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

### CHAPTER ONE

#### THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH<sup>1</sup>

##### F-1.01 GOD'S MISSION

The good news of the Gospel is that the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates, redeems, sustains, rules, and transforms all things and all people. This one living God, the Scriptures say, liberated the people of Israel from oppression and covenanted to be their God. By the power of the Spirit, this one living God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, who came to live in the world, die for the world, and be raised again to new life. The Gospel of Jesus Christ announces the nearness of God's kingdom, bringing good news to all who are impoverished, sight to all who are blind, freedom to all who are oppressed, and proclaiming the Lord's favor upon all creation.

The mission of God in Christ gives shape and substance to the life and work of the Church. In Christ, the Church participates in God's mission for the transformation of creation and humanity by proclaiming to all people the good news of God's love, offering to all people the grace of God at font and table, and calling all people to discipleship in Christ. Human beings have no higher goal in life than to glorify and enjoy God now and forever, living in covenant fellowship with God and participating in God's mission.

##### F-1.02 JESUS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH

###### *F-1.0201 The Authority of Christ*

Almighty God, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, has given to him all power in heaven and on earth, not only in this age but also in the age to come.<sup>a</sup> God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body.<sup>b</sup> The Church's life and mission are a joyful participation in Christ's ongoing life and work.

###### *F-1.0202 Christ Calls and Equips the Church*

Christ calls the Church into being, giving it all that is necessary for its mission in the world, for its sanctification, and for its service to God. Christ is present with the Church in both Spirit and Word. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document and the Form of Government, the capitalized term "Church" refers to the Church Universal, the Church as it is called to be in Christ; except as part of a title (i.e. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)).

## CHAPTER THREE

### COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

#### G-3.01 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF COUNCILS

##### *G-3.0101 Councils as an Expression of Unity of the Church*

The mutual interconnection of the church through its councils is a sign of the unity of the church. Congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), while possessing all the gifts necessary to be the church, are nonetheless not sufficient in themselves to be the church. Rather, they are called to share with others both within and beyond the congregation the task of bearing witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the world. This call to bear witness is the work of all believers. The particular responsibility of the councils of the church is to nurture, guide, and govern those who witness as part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), to the end that such witness strengthens the whole church and gives glory to God.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is governed by councils composed of presbyters elected by the people (F-3.0202). These councils are called the session, the presbytery, the synod, and the General Assembly. All councils of the church are united by the nature of the church and share with one another responsibilities, rights, and powers as provided in this Constitution. The councils are distinct, but have such mutual relations that the act of one of them is the act of the whole church. The jurisdiction of each council is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution, with the acts of each subject to review by the next higher council. Powers not mentioned in this Constitution are reserved to the presbyteries.

Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ. They do so as they

*Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard,*  
responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and  
inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

*Provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received,*  
welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ,  
bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection,  
anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and  
committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry; and

*Nurture a covenant community of disciples of Christ,*  
living in the strength of God's promise, and  
giving itself in service to God's mission.

*G-5.0402 Plan of Union*

A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

**G-5.05 JOINT CONGREGATIONAL WITNESS**

When its strategy for mission requires it, a presbytery may approve the creation of a joint witness between congregations of this denomination and congregations of other Christian churches that recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, accept the authority of Scripture, and observe the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper<sup>b</sup>.

a. Such joint witnesses shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination involved. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the congregational council shall petition the next higher councils or governing bodies to resolve the conflict.

b. Such joint witnesses shall be formed according to a plan approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of each of the congregations at duly called meetings of the congregation, and by the presbytery or comparable council or governing body of each church. No provision of a plan for joint witness shall be construed as modifying or amending the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

c. After consultation with the congregation involved in joint witness and the next higher council or governing body of the other denomination involved, a presbytery may receive a congregation from or transfer a congregation to a denomination with which the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is in full communion or correspondence when it determines that the strategy for mission of that congregation is better served by such a transfer (G-3.0303b).

W-4.4003  
Constitutional  
Questions for  
**Ordination,  
Installation, and  
Commissioning**

Book of Order

The moderator of the **council** of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the-body of membership and to answer the following questions:

a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?<sup>a</sup>

c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?<sup>b</sup>

d. Will you fulfill your **ministry** in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?<sup>c</sup>

f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

h. Will you **pray for and** seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

i. (1) (For **ruling elder**) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in **councils** of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(3) (For **teaching elder**) Will you be a faithful **teaching elder**, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the **councils** of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(4) (For **ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service**) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder in this commission**, serving the people by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith and caring for the people, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(5) (For certified Christian educator) Will you be a faithful certified Christian educator, teaching faith and caring for people, and will you in your ministry try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

W-4.4004  
Ordination or  
Installation of  
**Ruling Elders** or  
Deacons

At the service of ordination or installation of **ruling elders** and deacons:

Questions to  
Congregation

a. The **ruling elders**- and deacons-elect having answered in the affirmative, **a ruling elder** shall stand with them before the congregation and shall ask the congregation to answer the following questions:

(1) Do we, the members of the church, accept (names) \_\_\_\_\_ as **ruling elders** or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?<sup>d</sup>

(2) Do we agree **to pray for them**, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

## The New Form of Government (FOG)

Dr. William J. Netting – Stated Clerk

When I prepared this paper, our nation was preparing to celebrate the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. He was born February 12, 1809. As we remember him, we remember one of his greatest legacies, the Emancipation Proclamation which became law on January 1, 1863. It freed nearly 3.1 million of the 4 million slaves then living in the USA....freeing nearly a whole race of people and giving them opportunities to develop a new way of living. Our new Form of Government is not unlike that great proclamation. It too seeks to free up the way in which we are the Church. When I was a boy, my favorite toy was (you guessed it) Lincoln Logs. They gave me the opportunity to create various shapes that were very much **unlike** those other kids had created, especially those seen in the Lincoln Log advertisements. Perhaps it is no coincidence that log rhymes with FOG (which stands for Form of Government).

The Form of Government Task Force was charged by the 217<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 2006 to draft a revised Form of Government. Those on the Task Force asked themselves two questions: One, “Who does God call the Presbyterian Church (USA) to **be?**” (the *calling* of the church)... and the 2<sup>nd</sup> question, “What does God call the Presbyterian Church (USA) to **do?** (the *polity* of the church).

Unfortunately, it seems to me that many in our denomination are more concerned today with the question in Hamlet’s soliloquy: “*To be or not to be—that is the question: Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind... to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles and... by opposing... **end** them*”.) Yes the question for some is “To be...or not to be?” Hamlet suggests the further possibility of “To die, to sleep, perchance to dream.” The Task Force obviously wanted the church to **be** and not to sleep or to die... and so it **dreamed**...and the dream question was “Who does God call the Presbyterian Church (USA) to **be?** (the calling of the church), and the 2<sup>nd</sup> dream question, “What does God call the Presbyterian Church (USA) to **do?** (the polity of the church).

In answer to the first question, the Task Force’s reply is that God has sent the church into the world to bear witness to the activity of God in reconciling and transforming the world...and ultimately in fulfilling (in the world), **the divine creative intent**. In other words, the core of the church’s identity is its “sent-ness,”...its having been called into being as a witness to the work of God. It is not so much that the church *has* a mission, but that the mission-of-Christ creates its own church. To put it still another way, mission is **not** something the church does. Rather... the church is the expression of the mission of God.

In answer to the second question, as to what does God call the church to **do**...its answer is found in the **architecture** of mission...(polity). Polity defines the **shape** and **form** of the church’s witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The Task Force reasoned that this missional polity should exhibit five characteristics: **biblical, historical, contextual, eschatological, and practicable**.

The new Book of Order meets all of these criteria especially in the first section called **The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity**. It includes such statements as “*THE CHURCH SEEKS TO PRESENT THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST LEADING PERSONS TO REPENTANCE, ACCEPTANCE OF **CHRIST ALONE AS SAVIOR AND***

**LORD, AND NEW LEFE AS HIS DISCIPLES.”** (F-1.0302). I would add that I consider these Foundational Principles to be an excellent refining of what we have had in the first four chapters of the Book of Order for nearly 30 years

Now lets move to the G section of the Book of Order. It has to do with the **Form of Government**. As an operating principle in drafting the new Form of Government... the Task Force kept in mind that the Form of Government is a constitutional document...not a manual of operations. (Our nation’s Federal Constitution has been amended 27 times in 225 plus years...whereas our Church’s Constitution has been amended nearly 300 times just since 1983, Why.....well it has been looked at as a manual of operation...rather than principles to guide us).

The new FOG expresses the ideas, visions, and principles that form the architecture of mission. It avoids detailed descriptions of procedure that might hinder rather than help the church. As a result there are numerous places in the Form of Government where the councils of the church are required to provide their own standing-rules or policies. Therefore, the Task Force has prepared guides for Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly that identify policies and procedures this new Form of Government requires us to create. (Time to get out your Lincoln Logs.)

In the new FOG there are six chapters describing the church’s life.

The first three chapters (entitled “**Congregations and Their Membership**”, “**Ordered Ministry-Commissioning & Certification**”, and “**Councils of the Church**”) deal with matters internal to the life of the church. Chapter 4 (“**The Church and Civil Authority**”) and Chapter 5 (“**Ecumenicity and Union**”) deal with the church’s interface with the larger world of civil society and of ecumenical interfaith cooperation. Chapter 6 concludes the constitution with provisions for interpreting and amending both “The Book of Confessions” and the “Book of Order”.

Let’s take a closer look at just one of those chapters...the one entitled “**Congregations and Their Membership**”. This chapter combines the subject matter and much of the language of the old Book’s Chapters 5 & 7, but does so in a way that reminds us that in a missional polity, the basic form of the church is **not** the individual member, but the congregation. It therefore follows that the first chapter of the new Form of Government, should describe the **congregation**...rather than individual members. Also, in a **missional polity**, believers most effectively bear witness to God’s new creation when they are joined together by “proclamation, sacramental practice, and covenanted life.” Consequently, the ministry of individual members can best be understood as part of the **ministry of the congregation**, rather than that of individual members.

This first chapter has 5 parts: a statement on the nature of the congregation (G-1.01); then the role of the presbytery in organizing a congregation (G-1.02); third, a statement on the meaning of membership (G-1.03); 4<sup>th</sup>, the categories of membership (G-1.04)...*by the way, there is no longer the category of inactive member*...and fifth and finally a section on congregational meetings (G-1.05).



Some notes on Chapter 1 that I would draw your attention to are as follows:

In G-1.01, the opening sentence of the new Form of Government goes to the heart of a missional polity. It reads:

*“The congregation is the church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context.” It goes on to say “Every congregation is the basic form of the church but it is not of itself a sufficient form of the church.”*

In other words, it affirms that the church is not in **isolation** from other gatherings of believers called to the same purpose and work.

It says *“that congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church.”*

It echoes, for those who may be considering leaving the denomination.....the words found in the Foundations (F-1.0301a) concerning the **unity** of the church:

*“Unity is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Just as God is one God and Jesus Christ is our one Savior, so the Church is one because it belongs to its one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church seeks to include **all** people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. There is one Church, for there is one Spirit, one hope, ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all’ (Eph. 4:5-6). Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with **all** those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ.”*

(It goes without saying that gives many of us great pain when our unity is broken.)

The second paragraph in Chapter 1 of the Form of Government then describes the work of the particular congregation in terms of the three Reformation Notes and the six Great Ends of the Church. The 3 Notes are: **Proclamation** of the Word, **Administering** the Sacraments, and **Nurturing** Ecclesiastical Discipline (which is how we live in covenant life with God and each other).

And what are the **Great Ends of the Church**? They are:

*Proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind; the shelter, nurture and spiritual fellowship of the children of God; the maintenance of divine worship; the preservation of the truth; the promotion of social righteousness; and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.*

This is our work as a congregation.

Our **theology of membership** is also found in this first chapter. It begins with the affirmation that membership is the result of God's call given to the believer in baptism and answered throughout the life-of-faith. It then explores some of the meanings of Baptism for the baptized...and for the Church as a whole. But the implication of this statement is that the church is not a voluntary society, but a community **chosen** by God.

The next section (G-1.04) eliminates the category of inactive membership. The task force took this step primarily because the notion of **inactivity** seems contrary to God's call to participation in the church. Those who are members of the church are those who are committed to its support and to the disciplines of (worship – study – service and prayer). Persons who are not in any way committed to these disciplines are not meaningfully members of the congregation. As a way of strengthening this understanding of membership, the task force **added** a sentence to the language of the old book. It now reads ***“Active members shall regularly, after prayerful consideration, recommit themselves to the disciplines and responsibilities of membership as outlined in G-1.0304 (which reads as follows):***

*“Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ's mission. A faithful member bears witness to God's love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ's Church. Such involvement includes:*

*proclaiming the good news in word and deed,  
taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,  
lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,  
studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,  
supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time and talents  
demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church,  
responding to God's activity in the world through service to others,  
living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural and social  
relationships of life,  
working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment  
participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and  
reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one's membership,  
and considering ways in which one's participation in the worship  
and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.*

Wouldn't it be great if each of us would renew our vows and covenant of membership by reading those words aloud at least once a year during a worship service? That's what the new sentence in the new FOG description of an “Active Member” calls us to do.

I have pointed out only a few aspects of our new Book of Order. I hope that they will be helpful as you consider what it means to be a part of the denomination that nurtured me and now guides me in my life and work.

Grace be unto you...and may the peace of our one and only Savior, Jesus Christ be with you now and always.

# An investigation of what our constitution now says

BY WINFIELD CASEY JONES

**G**iven the removal from the *Book of Order* of the national ordination standard calling for “living in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness,” what remains? The clear intention of the new amendment’s supporters has been to make possible the ordination of noncelibate gay and lesbian persons. The big question is, how widely has that door been opened?

How are sessions (when examining elders and deacons) and presbyteries (when examining candidates or those transferring from other presbyteries) for the office of minister of Word and Sacrament to determine whether these examinees are qualified for these offices? And, the national fidelity/chastity standard having been done away with, may local governing bodies still make judgments based on an interpretation of Scripture and of our confessions which upholds the necessity of fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness? I believe the short answer is “yes.”

## OUR BOOK OF ORDER

Our Form of Government says at G-6.0106a that those who are called to be officers must be “persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship and love of Jesus Christ as Savior. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgment of a governing body of the church.”

Also, new G-6.0106b says ordination standards reflect the church’s intention to “joyfully submit to the Lordship of Christ in all aspects of life.”

So, according to our *Book of Order*, sessions and presbyteries examining officers need to make decisions about the following constitutional issues which pertain to lifestyle:

- » Does the person’s life demonstrate “dedicated discipleship?” G-6.0106a
- » Is their “manner of life” a “demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and the world?” G-6.0106a
- » Are they submitting “to the Lordship of Christ?” G-6.0106b

There are manifold constitutional resources for affirming that God’s will for the human exercise of God’s gift of sexuality is either fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness. These resources appear in our Book of Confessions as it interprets Holy Scripture.

## PORTIONS OF PART I OF OUR CONSTITUTION (BOOK OF CONFESSIONS) WITH ITALICS ADDED FOR EMPHASIS.

Q. 108. What does the seventh commandment teach us?

A. That all unchastity is condemned by God, and that we should therefore detest it from the heart, and live chaste and disciplined lives, *whether in holy wedlock or in single life*. B.C. 4.108 (Heidelberg Confession)

## Marriage

For marriage (which is the medicine of incontinency, and continency itself) was instituted by the Lord God himself, who blessed it most bountifully, and *willed man and woman to cleave one to the other inseparably*, and to live together in complete love and concord (Matt. 19:4 ff). Whereupon we know that the apostle said: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled” (Heb. 13:4). B.C. 5.246 (2nd Helvetic)

## Of Marriage and Divorce

Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, *into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter*, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other’s infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life. B.C. 6.131 (Westminster)

*Marriage is a union between one man and one woman*, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live ... Marriage is designed for the mutual help of husband and wife(,) for the safeguarding, undergirding, and development of

their moral and spiritual character (and) for the propagation of children and the rearing of them in the discipline. B.C.6. 133, 6.134

## RECONCILIATION IN SOCIETY

The Confession of 1967 states:

*"The relationship between man and woman exemplifies in a basic way God's ordering of the interpersonal life for which he created mankind. Anarchy in sexual relationships is a symptom of man's alienation from God, his neighbor, and himself. Man's perennial confusion about the meaning of sex has been aggravated in our day by the availability of new means for birth control and the treatment of infection, by the pressures of urbanization, by the exploitation of sexual symbols in mass communication, and by world overpopulation. The church, as the household of God, is called to lead men out of this alienation into the responsible freedom of the new life in Christ. Reconciled to God, each person has joy in and respect for his own humanity and that of other persons; a man and woman are enabled to marry, to commit themselves to a mutually shared life, and to respond to each other in sensitive and lifelong concern; parents receive the grace to care for children in love and to nurture their individuality. The church comes under the judgment of God and invites rejection by man when it fails to lead men and women into the full meaning of life together, or withholds the compassion of Christ from those caught in the moral confusion of our time." B.C. 9.47*

Clearly, the confessional statements above, in their interpretation of Holy Scripture, contain more than ample reason for any governing body, in good conscience, to conclude that fidelity in marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness is God's command and therefore necessary for church officers in order that they exhibit "dedicated discipleship" (G-6.0106a), in order that they display a "manner of life" which is a "demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and the world" (G-6.0106a) and in order that that they show they are "submitting to the Lordship of Christ." (G-6.0106b)

On top of all of that, B.C. 7.249 (the Larger Catechism) says that the seventh com-

mandment (against adultery) applies to "fornication," and "sodomy and unnatural affections." The reference to sodomy" and unnatural affections" contains a Scripture footnote referencing Romans 1:26-27. The references to sodomy and to Romans 1:26-27 are part of a much larger and broader confessional argument (about which all governing bodies must now make their own decision) that God in Scripture commands either marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.

In fact, even after the passage of Amendment 10-A, those favoring the ordination/installation of sexually active GLBT persons have a much harder confessional case to make than those who oppose such ordinations. It would take a whole new effort to change those constitutional standards in our confessions requiring a two-thirds vote of the presbyteries to amend or add to them.

Lacking such an amendment to the Book of Confessions, advocates of GLBT ordination "as a right" are on very weak ground, since the overwhelming weight of our confessions affirms that sex outside of marriage between a man and a woman is sinful and therefore supports governing bodies denying ordination to those involved in same-gender sex on the basis of G-6.0106a and (new) G.6.0106b.

It can be reasonably argued that these confessional statements (along with the Scriptures they quote and reference) taken together make a case against same-gender sex in Part I of our Constitution. At the same time it must be said that no hint of an argument for same-gender sex is present in our confessions.

Conclusion: When one compares all the confessional statements listed in this whole document, it is clear that sessions and presbyteries have strong grounds when examining candidates for office to conclude that same-gender sex or lack of fidelity in marriage by an examinee does not exhibit "dedicated discipleship," display a "manner of life" which is a "demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and the world" or indicate that the person is "submitting to the Lordship of Christ."

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## CHAPTER TWO

### ORDERED MINISTRY, COMMISSIONING, AND CERTIFICATION

#### G-2.01 ORDERED MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH

##### *G-2.0101 Christ's Ministry*

The Church's ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church. Christ alone rules, calls, teaches, and uses the Church as he wills, exercising his authority by the ministry of women and men for the establishment and extension of God's new creation. Christ's ministry is the foundation and standard for all ministry, the pattern of the one who came "not to be served but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ.

##### *G-2.0102 Ordered Ministries*

The Church's ordered ministries described in the New Testament and maintained by this church are deacons<sup>a</sup> and presbyters (teaching elders<sup>b</sup> and ruling elders<sup>c</sup>). Ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish. The existence of these ordered ministries in no way diminishes the importance of the commitment of all members to the total ministry of the church.

The government of this church is representative<sup>d</sup>, and the right of God's people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any ordered ministry in a congregation or council of the church except by election of that body.

Ordination to the ministry of teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon is unique to that order of ministry.

##### *G-2.0103 Call to Ordered Ministry*

The call to ordered ministry in the Church is the act of the triune God. This call is evidenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit in the individual conscience, the approval of a community of God's people, and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church.

##### *G-2.0104 Gifts and Qualifications*

a. To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, 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. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.

**b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.**

*G-2.0105 Freedom of Conscience*

It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve it in ordered ministries shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in this Constitution. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained. It is to be recognized, however, that in entering the ordered ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the council in which he or she is a member.<sup>1</sup>

**G-2.02 DEACONS: THE MINISTRY OF COMPASSION AND SERVICE**

*G-2.0201 Deacon Defined*

The ministry of deacon as set forth in Scripture<sup>e</sup> is one of compassion, witness, and service, sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress<sup>f</sup>. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Very early in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, even before the General Assembly was established, the plan of reunion of the Synod of New York and Philadelphia contained the following sentences: 'That when any matter is determined by a majority vote, every member shall either actively concur with or passively submit to such determination; or if his conscience permit him to do neither, he shall, after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate, peaceably withdraw from our communion without attempting to make any schism. Provided always that this shall be understood to extend only to such determination as the body shall judge indispensable in doctrine or Presbyterian government.' (Hist. Dig. (P) p. 1310.) (Plan of Union of 1758, par. II.)

W-4.4003  
Constitutional  
Questions for  
**Ordination,  
Installation, and  
Commissioning**

Book of Order

The moderator of the **council** of those to be ordained, installed, or commissioned shall ask them to stand before the-body of membership and to answer the following questions:

a. Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

b. Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?<sup>a</sup>

c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?<sup>b</sup>

d. Will you fulfill your **ministry** in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?

e. Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God's Word and Spirit?<sup>c</sup>

f. Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world?

g. Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church?

h. Will you **pray for and** seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love?

i. (1) (For **ruling elder**) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in **councils** of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(2) (For deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people's help to the friendless and those in need, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(3) (For **teaching elder**) Will you be a faithful **teaching elder**, proclaiming the good news in Word and Sacrament, teaching faith and caring for people? Will you be active in government and discipline, serving in the **councils** of the church; and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(4) (For **ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service**) Will you be a faithful **ruling elder in this commission**, serving the people by proclaiming the good news, teaching faith and caring for the people, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

(5) (For certified Christian educator) Will you be a faithful certified Christian educator, teaching faith and caring for people, and will you in your ministry try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

W-4.4004  
Ordination or  
Installation of  
**Ruling Elders** or  
Deacons

At the service of ordination or installation of **ruling elders** and deacons:

Questions to  
Congregation

a. The **ruling elders**- and deacons-elect having answered in the affirmative, **a ruling elder** shall stand with them before the congregation and shall ask the congregation to answer the following questions:

(1) Do we, the members of the church, accept (names) \_\_\_\_\_ as **ruling elders** or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?<sup>d</sup>

(2) Do we agree **to pray for them**, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?



**“Sanctify Them in the Truth”  
Office of Theology and Worship, General Assembly Mission Council  
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), August 2011**

The passage of amendment 10-A to amend G-6.0106b of the Form of Government has changed the ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The change removes the language of

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. (G-6.0106b)

and replaces it with

Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.2). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (F-4.4003). Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates. (G-2.010b)

There are many and widespread reactions to this change. Some are rejoicing; others lament. As we work through the many emotional, political, and relational issues raised, we would be well served to consider the theological and ecclesial issues by the passage of this new statement on the gifts and requirements for ordained service.

\* \* \* \* \*

In John 17 Jesus prayed for his disciples that God would ~~–~~sanctify them in the truth.” Just as Jesus was set apart by God for the sake of the world, so Jesus’ followers were to be set apart, made holy, by the truth of the revelation of Jesus Christ. As Christ was set apart for God’s mission in the world, so we are set apart to work for the fulfillment of Christ’s mission in the world. This is the vocation of all Christians and the vocation of the church.

That all Christians are to be set apart in the truth is an important foundation for questions around ordination standards and sets the context for considering what it means for us ~~–to~~ submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life,” particularly in the context of ordination to ministry.

In services of ordination, the congregation stands and candidates for ordination and/or installation gather around the baptismal font, and the minister says:

Ordination calls the whole church to renewed commitment,

and reminds us all to bear gladly the yoke of Christ  
given in the covenant of Baptism.  
Let us, therefore, reaffirm our baptismal vows,  
renouncing all that opposes God and God's rule  
and affirming the faith of the holy catholic church.<sup>1</sup>

These words provide signposts that can guide us in understanding ordination.

**God's act in the church.** The setting for the liturgy of ordination—at the baptismal font—clearly demonstrates that ordination represents the action of the triune God through the church of Jesus Christ. We are baptized in the name of the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God claims us as beloved children and calls us to live faithfully as Christ's disciples. For some, this discipleship will take the form of ordered ministry in the church. As the PC(USA) Form of Government states, “The call to ordered ministry in the Church is the act of the triune God. This call is evidenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit in the individual conscience, the approval of a community of God's people, and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church” (G-2.0103).

**A common calling.** Ordination is also a *call* to the *whole* church. While particular candidates gather at the font, the *entire congregation* stands to reaffirm the covenant of Baptism. As at Mount Sinai the people of Israel were called to be “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6), all baptized Christians are called to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Peter 2:9). This is the source of the Reformed understanding of the “priesthood of all believers.” Although there are varieties of gifts, services, and activities (1 Corinthians 12:4–6) given by the Spirit, *all* of the members of Christ's body are called to take part in Christ's mission and ministry.

Therefore, when we affirm God's call to particular forms of ministry for particular persons, we also *reaffirm* our *common calling*, expressed in the baptismal vows that follow:

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God,  
do you turn from the ways of sin  
and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ  
and accept him as your Lord and Savior,  
trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple,  
obeying his Word and showing his love?<sup>2</sup>

Although the call to ordained ministry focuses serious attention and reflection on those who have been chosen to lead the church as elders, deacons, or pastors, it by no means excuses the *whole people of God* from the call to a new way of life, “*holy and acceptable to God*” (Romans 12:1), redeemed by Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. That is why all who are present—not just the

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<sup>1</sup> Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Occasional Services* (Geneva Press, 1999), pp. 20 and 54. This statement is found in the liturgy for ordaining and installing deacons and elders as well as the service for ordaining and installing ministers of Word and Sacrament.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

candidates for ordination and/or installation—reaffirm these vows. Again, as the *Book of Order* asserts:

The basic form of ministry is the ministry of the whole people of God, from whose midst some are called to ordered ministries, to fulfill particular functions. Members and those in ordered ministries serve together under the mandate of Christ. (G-2.0101)

**The yoke of Christ.** A metaphor for this mandate of Christ is the symbol of the yoke. A yoke is a wooden beam laid across the necks of a pair of oxen, so that they may work together in bearing a load or pulling a plow. As such, it is a sign of hard work and humble service.

Jesus says, —Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take *my* yoke upon you [italics added], and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28–30). Jesus invites those who would follow him to —lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely” (Hebrews 12:1). He then drafts us into the service of the gospel, promising that we labor not by our own power, but that his Spirit will sustain and support us in ministry. With this confidence, we may indeed —submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

But Jesus also says, —If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). This statement points to the very real cost of Christian discipleship and of the call to ministry in Christ’s name. Taking up the yoke of Christ means taking up the cross of Christ—dying to self and living for Christ, in the service of his gospel. Still, we take up this calling not by our own strength, but by the grace of God alone. As Paul wrote, —It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20) and —I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

**Ordination as gift.** Note that the —yoke of Christ” is *given* in the covenant of Baptism—poured out in the church for the sake of the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ordination is a *gift* from God. Elsewhere, the ordination liturgy says, —Ordination is Christ’s gift to the church, assuring that his ministry continues among us.”<sup>3</sup> As the *Book of Order* confirms, —The Church’s ministry is a gift from Jesus Christ to the whole Church” (G-2.0101).

Ordination to ministry (as a deacon, elder, or pastor) is not a *right* to which each person is entitled—except insofar as all the baptized are called to ministry in Christ’s name. Candidates for ordination are called through the voice of the church, as the people of God discover a particular person’s spiritual gifts and seek to discern how God might be calling that person to Christian service. In seeking the will of God and the mind of Christ, councils of the church must sometimes conclude that a person is not well suited to the requirements and responsibilities of ordained service.

Neither is ordination to ministry a *reward* for righteous living. Ordination is not something we merit by an exemplary character or earn by good works. We are all sinners, utterly dependent on God’s mercy, worked in our lives through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Those who are called to ordained ministry should seek to demonstrate a life that is marked by ongoing repentance, conversion, and reliance on the grace of God.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

**Renunciation of evil.** The liturgy of ordination and/or installation includes the call to *renounce* ~~all~~ that opposes God and God's rule." Saying ~~yes~~ to God and ~~yes~~ to Christ's call to serve also means saying "no" to anything that is contrary to God's will and Christ's way. (See Matthew 5:37 and James 5:12.) As the church prepares to ordain or install candidates for ministry, we renew our commitment to ~~turn from~~ the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world."<sup>4</sup>

Those who take up the charge ~~to~~ submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life" are called to a new allegiance, a new way of life. In Christ, we are ~~no~~ longer strangers and aliens, but . . . citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19–20). This new allegiance to God's rule inevitably brings us into conflict with the powers and principalities of the world. Thus Paul wrote, ~~Do~~ not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

At times our allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus Christ may even lead us to oppose or resist evil, injustice, and oppression within the structures of the institutional church. Our common calling is to help the church be faithful to the kingdom that Christ brings. As the Westminster Confession states, ~~All~~ synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred; therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith or practice, but to be used as a help in both" (6.175; see also F-3.0102). Above all, those who are called to bear the yoke of Christ must remember that ~~God~~ alone is Lord of the conscience" (F-3.0101) and Christ alone is head of the church (F-1.02).

**Affirmation of faith.** Having turned from evil, we turn to Christ, ~~affirming~~ the faith of the holy catholic church."<sup>5</sup> In the liturgy for Baptism—and in associated rites such as ordination and installation—the ~~faith~~ of the holy catholic church" is represented by the use of the Apostles' Creed, an ancient baptismal statement of faith.

In its creeds, confessions, and catechisms, ~~the~~ church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, [and] what it resolves to do" (F-2.01). The church's confessional statements are to serve to forge our convictions, shape our actions, and guide us in the understanding of Scripture. They are standards of faith and life, ~~subordinate~~ to the Scriptures, [but] nonetheless, standards" (F-2.02).

In the context of the liturgy for ordination and/or installation, the reaffirmation of the ~~faith~~ of the holy catholic church" underscores the fact that those who are called to ministry are ~~subject~~ to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him" (F-2.02). Accordingly, as councils of the church seek to discern and assess the gifts of particular persons for ministry, they ~~shall~~ be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates" (G-2.010b).

Let us all strive to recover the original purpose of the church's councils as settings of mutual responsibility and accountability in which faithful discourse deepens the church's beliefs and focuses the church's mission.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 20 and 54.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

# WHY STAY? WHY GO?

BY JOSEPH D. SMALL

**W**hy ask the questions? Because more than 100 congregations have left the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the past six years, with more likely to follow. The PC(USA) is now living through one of three formal schisms it has experienced in the past 75 years — those that saw congregations depart for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the 1930s, the Presbyterian Church in America in the 1960s and 1970s and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in the 1980s and again since 2005. Sexuality wars have been the precipitating reason in the current round of departures, but our battles over ordination and marriage are not the only cause.

A decade ago, the “Task Force on the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church” was delegated to deal with evident unrest in the church around christology, biblical authority and interpretation, ordination standards, and power. The 2006 report of the task force was admirable in many respects, yet it failed to settle any of the unrest. Its sections on christology and the Bible were unremarkable, setting forth broad generalities as indications of widespread agreement in the church. Its work on ordination standards focused on the possibility of ordaining gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, and so only led to another round of political battles. And, tellingly, the task force neglected to deal with power at all. Because theological diversity was assumed to be the desirable norm within agreed-upon generalities, the task force report failed to address deeper theological difficulties in the church, including disputes about christology, Scripture, ordination and power.

We Presbyterians are not alone in ecclesial disagreement, discord and division. The Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church and even the Southern Baptist Convention also experience conflict and schism. Lutheran theologian David Yeago describes the ELCA as living in a state of “impaired communion” — diminished, weakened, and damaged ecclesial relationships. “Impaired communion” has also characterized Presbyterian life for decades. We have retained formal structures of communion while emptying them of meaningful connections. We have shed mutual responsibility and mutual accountability for the

shape of our faith and life. Amid impaired communion, appeals for unity based on our presumed need for one another have little effect. We haven’t needed one another for a long time. In the midst of impaired communion, appeals for unity on the basis of our presumed need for one another have little effect. We haven’t needed one another for a long time.

And yet we have to acknowledge that the biblical and theological presumption is the unity of the church. Paul’s letters consistently urge unity in the face of all-too-apparent conflict and division. Philippians 2:1-11, with its direct appeal to Christ, is only one instance of the biblical trajectory that both recognizes the reality of discord and urges us to “live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:15-18). John Calvin, no stranger to deep disagreements in the church, nonetheless wrote to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, “This other thing also is to be ranked among the chief evils of our time, viz., that the Churches are so divided, that human fellowship is scarcely now in any repute among us ... So much does this concern me that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross ten seas, if need were, on account of it.” In our own time, Lukas Vischer reminds us that “The reasons that compelled the first generations to struggle for community are still valid today . . . that with his reconciling work in Christ God has laid the foundation for a community in love, and that obedience to God involves giving visible expression to this unity.”

Ecumenism — the search for the visible unity of Christ’s church — is not restricted to relationships among denominations. Perhaps the most pressing ecumenical challenge today is the search for unity *within* denominations. Reformation era division of the church and the ensuing proliferation of denominations do not provide justification for further splits in any existing denomination. The chief ecumenical task before the PC(USA) now is to pray and study and work for our own visible unity.

At various times in the history of our denomination, different groups of Presbyterians have been alienated from prevailing beliefs and practices in the church. How might those who now are angry or threatened or grieving or dismayed by current realities in the PC(USA) respond to what they view

as the church's departure from norms of faith and life? Some consider following other congregations that have left from the denomination. Yet the witness of Scripture and the history of the whole church (including the Reformation era) confirm that division in the church is a grave matter that should never occur hastily or easily. Although there may be times when withdrawal and separation are inevitable, they can only be a last resort, not a first instinct. *Every* effort must be made to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is not a mere sociological phenomenon, a human construct with no more claim on our loyalty than our current brand of laundry detergent. Even in a voluntaristic church culture, Presbyterian congregations are not local franchises with the option of disaffiliation from the parent company. Furthermore, there is no refuge to be found in a popularized invisible/visible church distinction that rationalizes withdrawal from the actual church by appealing to the "spiritual unity" of all Christians in the invisible church. Platonic notions of an ideal church that no one can see, accompanied by abandonment of the pale shadow of church that we can see, has no place in Scripture. Calvin notes that the New Testament sometimes speaks of "church" as all the elect who are in God's presence and sometimes as a particular gathering of persons who profess Christ. But he goes on to say, "Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter." Communion with the actual church, with quite visible people and communities, cannot be dismissed as inconsequential by claiming that alienated, separated and fragmented communities are nonetheless "all one in Christ."

Differences within the PC(USA) are real, however, and the problem remains. While the imperative to unity comes to actual congregations and ministers, many of them maintain that ecclesiastical unity without unity in faith, hope and love is an empty fiction. It is difficult to "be united in the same mind and the same purpose" (1 Cor. 1:10) in a denomination that celebrates diversity while proliferating rival constituency groups, dueling overtures, constitutional rules and regulations, authoritative interpretations, permanent judicial commission rulings and property disputes.

Unfortunately, the PC(USA) has dealt with divisive matters by reducing complex differences to "two sides of the issue," voting, producing winners and losers, and deluding itself that "the church has

decided." The church — the whole church — does not resolve deep conflicts by tallying votes (whether in 1997 or 2011). What may work in politics does not work well in the church, where matters of faith and faithfulness are in dispute. And *especially* when matters of faith and faithfulness are in dispute, the church's legislative "winners" should not attempt to coerce acquiescence, and "losers" should not forsake those with whom they disagree. The gospel calls us to something other than capitulation or exodus as conditions for unity. Those who think of leaving (as well as those who would be happy enough to see them go), and those who require acquiescence (as well as those who discount the convictions of others), are called to explore together the promise of the gospel.

Given the reality of the church's politicized life, there are no easy ways forward; the difficult task before us all is to discover ways that estranged elements in the church can live together with integrity. Perhaps we can discover what "the ministry of reconciliation" means within the church, within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), among us! The Confession of 1967, built around 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, makes an audacious claim: "The new life takes shape in a community in which people know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no one has any ground on which to stand, except God's grace" (9.22). This is what the gospel calls all of us to do.

If we have the will to live out an internal ministry of reconciliation, we can begin by developing creative, faithful models of relationship among groups that hold conflicting views concerning the state of the church's faith and life. Possibilities range from non-geographic presbyteries through theological and missional "orders" to disciplined communities of prayer and study. The *whole* church must work together to develop patterns of relationship that enable *all* to live with integrity in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). A churchwide consensus must be forged that will create free spaces for living out diverse theological, ethical and missional convictions. Only when such arrangements are in place can the long-avoided work of honest, sustained conversation about the shape of Christian faith and faithfulness begin.

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# WHY STAY?

BY HEIDI HUSTED ARMSTRONG

*I ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

**M**y ordination as a pastor in 1983 coincided with the reunion of the northern and southern streams of the Presbyterian Church. Some might say I'm a little worse for wear, but clearly for the new denomination it's been all downhill from there. During the entire 28 years (so far) of my ministry, the PC(USA) has hemorrhaged, losing over 2 million members. By one estimate, in the last five years the decline has accelerated with the wholesale departure of 500 congregations fed up with the direction of the church.

However, even though my sympathies lie with those who are passionate about living in obedience to Scripture, pursuing holiness and preserving the purity of the church, I am not persuaded that leaving is warranted. I cringe at the rhetoric today that is often prideful, judgmental and fearful, voiced across the theological spectrum by many I consider friends. I long to see in others and myself more evidence of a Christ-like humility, patience, forbearance and love in the body of Christ.

And so, with some fear and trepidation, I humbly submit to the increasing number of congregations now poised on the brink of departure the following rationale for "Why Stay?"

## BIBLICAL PLEA FOR UNITY

With thousands of denominations in the world today (one statistic puts it at 38,000), you get the sense that the instruction in Ephesians 4:3 to maintain unity has not been an ecclesiastical forte. Leaving? Everybody's doing it — and has been doing it for a long time! A congregation may tend to think, "What's one more?" And, besides, when threatened with what is believed to be unorthodox or even heretical teaching, are we not obligated to separate at any cost?

Along these lines I have been influenced greatly by the church historian Richard Lovelace, and

especially urge your reading of Chapter 10 on "unitive evangelicalism" in his "Dynamics of Spiritual Life." A conservative evangelical devoted to church renewal, Lovelace persuasively argues that the Biblical warrant for schism is slim to none. Even in the classic separatist text, 2 Corinthians 6:14ff, Lovelace argues, "Paul is exhorting Christians to separate from pagan idolatry, not from the church, as Charles Hodge points out."

Lovelace admits staying together isn't easy. He knows from personal experience that those who commit to unity and continue to relate to different others will likely suffer from the wearying effects of cognitive dissonance. But this is much preferred over developing a "spiritual pride, leading to the 'Donatist heresy' — the [heretical] belief that Christians should separate from others because of their weak faith or imperfect practice."

Jesus' parable in Matthew 13:24-30 about the wheat and weeds makes it clear it's not so cut and dried, arguing for a greater tolerance of ambiguity and even error and against a too-rigorous separation. That Jesus did not sanction yanking out the diabolical when it mixes in the kingdom cautions against being overly discouraged when opposition to the gospel comes even from within, or having too great expectations for a totally pure body, or promoting a too-exclusivist church.

The critical question is: Are any of us as biblical as we'd like to think we are, or hope to be? The honest truth is, with any of us in it, the church is a mixed bag — always has been, always will be. It is naïve to presume the Presbyterian Church, much less the larger church, has ever been theologically pure and conflict-free. Indeed, it took four centuries alone to nail down Christology. Why are we so done with human sexuality after 30 years?

In a flawed human church (the only kind we've got), we must continue the best we can right where we are. To give up on loving the unlovely and unlovable; to write off those we deem weak, needy and disagreeable among us; to refuse to listen, even "to hear the overtones of God's voice in the words of our adversaries"; and to privilege purity of the church over purity of heart, is to fall far short of the perfection we claim to protect.

To abandon an impure church in order to seek some refuge of peace and purity, some perfect

haven (what Bonhoeffer called a “wishdream”) in order to pursue “really effective ministry,” may be no less worthy of repentance than the homosexual practice those who depart oppose. Thank God we have an Equal Opportunity Savior!

### HISTORICAL RESULTS OF SCHISM

But (if you are still reading) if the biblical plea for unity does not persuade you to stay, perhaps considering the historical results of schism will.

If one of the biggest evidences of the truth of the gospel is a unified church (in John 17:21 Jesus prayed for us to be one “so that the world may believe that you have sent me”), then one of the biggest victims of schism is credible witness to Jesus Christ. When the church splits, our witness to Christ takes the hit.

But the church continues to suffer, too. Again I am leaning heavily on Lovelace here, who, after spending decades combing through centuries of church history, is convinced “that splinter groups remain weakened fragments.” Furthermore, “Ungracious separation” (about the only kind there is) not only “splinters the church, [but also] does not advance missions as some have claimed.”

Simply put, schismatics rarely prosper. When you leave your patch of brown grass for greener pastures, often what you end up with is another patch of brown grass. Sweet-talking schism promises renewed health and vitality, but seldom delivers. More often than not diminished spiritual power and gospel influence results not only for those who are left, but even for those who leave. Before long, as Lovelace puts it, the newly — and briefly! — “purified church inevitably develops again the old leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the result is another partially apostate body with a faithful remnant.” What you have left, you become a part of again.

While it’s true that no schism delivers all that it promises, resulting in permanent and pervasive reformation, it is also true that no denomination is beyond recovering its orthodoxy, and we should be careful of getting “locked into the assumption that apostasy is always terminal.”

### PREVAILING CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Finally, please consider that the current practice of wanting to increasingly relate only to like-minded persons is not biblical behavior, but the result of a prevailing cultural influence.

Bill Bishop, in his book, “The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart,” documents how over the last 40 years

birds of a social-economic-political and religious feather have been increasingly flocking together. The more we hang out with people who look, think, act and believe like us, well — the more we hang out with people who look, think, act and believe like us. When people marinate almost exclusively with others of like mind, experience and even prejudice, the less cross-fertilization of thoughts and ideas there is, and the more extreme, rigid, antagonistic and polarized people become — including theologically. What we end up with are people who are “allergic to difference of opinion ... blind to compromise ... and conflict averse.”

But part of what sets the church of Jesus Christ apart is a call to be agents of reconciliation, breaking down barriers and dismantling walls of hostility between disparate groups. Our life together is not diminished by conversation, but enriched. The church is not the big sort; rather, through Christ, it is the big mix, marked by the grace, generosity, friendship and radical hospitality — truly counter-cultural practices.

That’s why my heart sank, when in response to the recent letter from former GA moderators urging the church to “move forward in unity,” one evangelical pastor wrote, “Sorry, not a chance” and championed a retreat into like-mindedness.

I was equally saddened when a progressive pastor suggested the former GA moderators didn’t need to “beg” conservatives to stay, that we should be careful of making an idol out of unity, remain self-differentiated and just let them go — like it’s no big deal.

I believe both responses are influenced by the prevailing cultural norm of clustering in increasingly like-minded enclaves, a kind of big Presbyterian sort — the answer to which is: We need to get out more! Because it isn’t just former GA moderators pleading for unity, or patience, or gentleness, or humility. It’s Ephesians 4:1-3.

So I urge you to stay ... and pray. Pray for a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. Pray for the ability to trust Jesus Christ who is the head of the body. Pray for the capacity to speak the truth in love. Pray for courage to listen and understand what the different other is saying. Pray to be on fire with love not only for the likeminded but even your “enemy.” Please stay, and keep working for the peace, unity and purity of the church.

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# Making space for wholeness

BY SHELDON SORGE

**T**his essay is written for those who profess a will to stay together as a church family. Granted, this is a deep challenge — indeed, staying together as the church has always been difficult. Still we seek to remain together, believing that in Christ we have been united — not by voluntary association, not by political or social or economic expediency, but by God's sovereign act. As Westminster puts it, "By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers being vitally united to Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church, which is his body." (Book of Confessions 6.054) Without equating the church's life to marriage, we take with utmost seriousness Jesus' words, "What God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:9)

We recognize that this union known as Christ's church is not ours to preserve, but rather to receive as a gift. Yet, as with marriage, there are behaviors that can interfere with its welfare. As a pastor who has counseled many couples in marital distress, I have discovered that one of the most damaging things to a marriage's welfare is when either party begins talking about the possibility of divorce, even as a distant option. Talking about it gives it a life of its own. One of the conditions for a durable union is mutual commitment to directing our conversation toward strengthening our life together, rather than contemplating conditions for dissolution.

Yet we cannot be in healthy relationship when we simply ignore difficulties that crop up between us. There is no room for burying our heads in the sand or sweeping our dirt under the rug when we disagree. We address our struggles head-on, not with threats to shape up or else, but with an unswerving commitment to work together through whatever we must. As happens in every healthy family, sometimes we finally agree to disagree, and move forward together with that understanding.

I spent a number of years in a community — let's call it "Duality" — that was often stymied in its ability to move forward in public policy issues. Our population was virtually equally divided between people of European and people of African descent, and nearly every election and policy decision ended up being about race. Meanwhile, our presbytery was similarly split nearly 50/50 between conservatives and progressives. Floor examina-

tions often became contentious — candidates were asked questions loaded with freight from internecine presbytery battles, only to discover that their unguarded answers raised havoc. In a way, it recalled Paul's examination by the Sanhedrin, where his statement about the resurrection caused the house to erupt in mayhem.

The next place I lived — we'll call it "Singularity" — had an African-American population of less than 2 percent. Minority concerns were virtually invisible to public servants. Not only were local congregations impoverished by the lack of racial and ethnic diversity in their midst, but many of them resented having to account for this uniformity in their annual statistical reports.

Neither of these places evinced wholeness; neither demonstrated the *shalom* of God's design for human community. One was too conflicted, the other too settled. As a denomination that has been split nearly evenly over ordination standards for many years, we Presbyterians have found *shalom* equally elusive. Just as in Duality, a single issue whose fault line runs down our very center all too easily colors every aspect of our life together as the PC(USA).

While the nature of the challenges changed dramatically when I moved from Duality to Singularity, I found both equally wanting. I discovered that Singularity could be as contentious as Duality, only over smaller questions. Meanwhile, despite its advantage of having a broader population at the table, Duality found it almost impossible to move forward without the major divide at the center shaping every proposed solution — whether or not it was really material to the question at hand.

## ACCEPTING, AND HONORING, OUR DIFFERENCES

Biblical ecclesiology is irreducibly shaped by core commitments both to unity and to plurality. Either without the other is an inadequate basis for a community that embodies God's *shalom*. The Hebrew people faced this challenge whether they were slaves in Egypt, conquerors in Canaan, in monarchical ascendancy or in exiled captivity. In each situation they were called to be God's holy people, set apart from other peoples in singular devotion to YHWH.

Yet they were called also to welcome the stranger, embrace the sojourner and bless the peoples that had carried them away from home as captives.

Christian ecclesiology is likewise informed both by notes of purity and streams of confluence. We are called to be one holy people, set apart from the world by singular devotion to the Lord Jesus – yet at the same time we are a body of diverse members in which none can say of another, “I have no need of you.” The images of the body with its many members and of the vine with branches both underscore that our unity in Christ plays out in a diversity of members.

In his classic “Life Together,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns those who struggle to be alone to resist the urge always to be with others, and those who struggle with being in community to take heed not to stay alone. Similarly, those in the church who think they can live without others must beware setting themselves apart, while those whose lives are wrapped up in ecclesial institutions need to acknowledge and nurture life beyond those institutions.

Some among us have suggested that our core organizational nexus, the presbytery, might better be constituted by theological affinity than by geography. Especially in an age of instant long-range electronic communications, relationships can be built and sustained across great distances. Many church leaders have deeper life-giving relationships with colleagues who live far away than they do with some of their neighbors. Meanwhile, others among us have considered our current pattern of organization around geography non-negotiable. They contend that differences of perspective need not drive neighbors to different affiliations; rather, they rightly remind us, we are most likely to be challenged to grow when we nurture covenantal relationships with folks who see things differently from us.

Might there be ways for us to remain in substantive relationship with our nearest neighbors, while moving more freight to relationships with those who share our perspective on the nature of the life and mission to which our Lord calls us? Consider one possibility: What about designing an examination process for candidates that would enable us to drill down more effectively to issues that really matter for particular ministry settings? Perhaps a team of sympathetically-minded folk would be advantageously positioned to examine candidates thoroughly for positions in congregations that maintain convictions about issues that are contested across the wider church spectrum.

A committee on ministry might appoint multiple examinations teams, each constituted according to a particular set of theological affinities. In some localities, that might mean better exams for candidates who went to a seminary other than those on the majority's preferred list. Instead of focusing on the choice of seminary, examiners could focus on the much more important questions of whether the candidate manifests the gifts, character, convictions and temperament necessary for effective ministry in a particular setting.

One of our cherished principles is freedom of conscience in Scriptural interpretation. It is not a boundless freedom, but if we are to stay together as a broad spectrum church, our life together needs to be marked more by generosity than by restrictiveness. Where significant differences persist within our fellowship, such generosity is especially incumbent upon the majority. When real devotion to the Lord and careful study of Scripture lead us to different understandings of God's Word, proper humility requires that we honor the other's integrity and think the best of them, rather than rushing to judgment or exclusion. Wholeness in our fellowship requires that our members feel freedom to follow their conscience on matters of biblical understanding regarding some issues upon which we are not all agreed.

This point is especially significant for our life together as the majority has recently tilted on ordination standards. Those who are newly in the minority need assurance that they will be neither required to ordain against their conscience nor blocked from ordaining according to their conscience. There is real and understandable fear that the new majority will soon rule that justice trumps freedom of conscience in regard to local ordination practices. Assurance of continued freedom for those in the minority to live and do ministry in good conscience is a necessary condition for us to maintain continued fellowship in genuine *shalom*.

Love does not insist on having its own way, according to Paul. James reminds us that godly wisdom is marked by teachability. In our life together, let us embody these apostolic virtues of love and humility so that, rather than being consumed with prosecuting internal struggles, we can pour our best energies into the apostolic task of bringing Jesus Christ to a world that desperately needs to encounter the good news of the gospel.

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**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**Amendment 10-A and ordination standards**  
**Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

**What has happened?**

In July 2010, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a proposed amendment (10-A) to the *Book of Order*, part of the PC(USA) Constitution, regarding ordination standards. As with all constitutional changes, Amendment 10-A required ratification by a majority (87) of the PC(USA)'s 173 presbyteries (regional bodies) for it to become part of the *Book of Order*. While the Office of the General Assembly awaits official tallies, it appears that the minimum number of 87 presbyteries will be reached the week of May 9.

**What will change?**

The following provision that is currently in the *Book of Order* (G-6.0106b) will be changed:

*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.*

The new language (Amendment 10-A) will read:

*Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G- 14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.*

**What does this mean?**

- Ordaining bodies continue to retain the right and responsibility to determine their own memberships. A congregation continues to elect their deacons and elders and the session examines them for suitability of office. Likewise, presbyteries examine individuals for suitability to be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
- A person in a same-gender relationship can be considered for ordination as deacon, elder, or Minister of the Word and Sacrament.
- All other churchwide standards for ordination remain unchanged. (There was never a prohibition against a person being ordained based on sexual orientation, as long as that person was celibate.)

**What's next?**

Amendment 10-A will take effect on July 10, 2011 (one year after the adjournment of the last assembly). Already, the change has energized many conversations at all levels across the PC(USA) about how we can best enable the gifts of those called to service in Christ's church and have mutual respect for each other's integrity. In addition, sessions and presbyteries will review their processes for examination.

**For more detailed information and additional resources:** <http://oga.pcusa.org>

Includes links to:      Pastoral letter to congregations of the PC(USA) – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Liturgical resources – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Advisory Opinion #24 – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Various video podcasts – including one in Spanish and one in Korean

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):  
Building Unity and Community



Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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- Reformed theology
- Polity
- Mission & support



*A church for us all*

## Theology of Unity & Oneness

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Conflict/division disrupt Christ's desire for our oneness.

--1 Cor. 12:12-27; John 17:20-21

--Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:3

Our church is called to be a community of love:

--forgiveness

--reconciliation

--dividing walls of hostility are torn down

There's room for all of us in the PC(USA):

--encouraging unity in diversity



## Theology of Unity & Oneness: Polity

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Marks of the Church (F-1.0302)

*"There is one Church ... one Spirit, one hope, one Lord...."*

*(Eph. 4:5-6)*

The Unity of the Church (F-1.0302a)

- Joined with all whom Christ calls into relationship
- Praying & being priests for one another
- Sharing our gifts, seeking to include all in Christian community
- PC(USA) is committed to reducing the obscurity of our unity caused by division

## The Lordship of Jesus Christ

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Jesus Christ in the confessions & Reformed tradition:

- Fully human, fully God (Brief Statement of Faith)
- Lord & Savior (Brief Statement of Faith)
- Son of God (Apostles' Creed), Word of God (Barmen Declaration)
- Mediator (Scots Confession), Reconciler (Confession of 1967)
- Prophet, Priest & King (Calvin, Heidelberg, Shorter & Larger Catechism)

*"Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" (W-4.4003b)*

## Jesus Christ is Head of the Church (F-1.02)

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### **Jesus Christ:**

- set above all rule & authority
- calls & equips the church
- gives the church its *faith & life, unity & mission, order & discipline*

Scriptures teaches us Christ's will.

In Christ's name, the church is sent to bear witness to the good news of reconciliation.

## Authority of Scripture & PC(USA)

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### **The Bible:**

- God's Word to us
- Unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ
- Inspired by the Holy Spirit



*"Scripture teaches us Christ's will for the Church, which is to be obeyed. In the worship and service of God and the government of the church, matters are to be ordered according to the Word by reason and sound judgment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (F-1.0203).*

*"Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God's Word to you?" (W-4.4003b)*

## Interpretation of Scripture & PC(USA)

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### *Literary and historical understanding...*

**"As God has spoken the divine word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that God will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world in every form of human culture." (C'67, 9.29)**

## Scripture and PC(USA)

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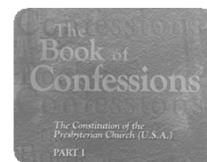
- Scripture is central and the authoritative & unique witness to Jesus Christ.
- Interpretations may vary greatly.
- There is room for differing views, dialogue, discussion, and discernment.

## The Confessions & PC(USA)

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### *The confessions*

- The church declares who & what it is, what it believes, what it resolves to do
- Identify the church as a community known by its convictions as well as actions
- Guide church in study & interpretation of Scripture, summarize Reformed Christian tradition, direct church in maintaining sound doctrine, equip church in work of proclamation



(F-2.01)



## The Confessions & PC(USA)

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The confessions as they relate to ordination, installation and commissioning:

*“Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?” (W-4.4003c)*

## The Form of Government

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With greater freedom and flexibility, the new Form of Government encourages congregations and councils to focus on God’s mission and how they can faithfully participate in this mission. In offering a structure that is more horizontal than hierarchical, the Form of Government encourages the church to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to be Christ’s body and live out its calling as a community of faith, hope, love, and witness.



THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT  
&  
THE FOUNDATIONS OF  
PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

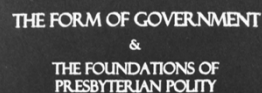
## FOG: A Change in Mindset

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- Can we learn to approach our polity not as a set of rules but as a description of our common life?
- Can we change the pattern of creating a rule to address every uncertainty, and learn to apply the broad principles of our polity with creativity and flexibility?
- Can we be a people of the middle way, finding the balance between freedom and flexibility and accountability and responsibility so as to live together in healthy community?

## FOG: Some Foundational Principles

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THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT  
&  
THE FOUNDATIONS OF  
PRESBYTERIAN POLITY

- God's mission
- Jesus Christ is Head of the Church
- Living into our calling as a community of faith, hope, love and witness
- Open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- The confessions
- Historic Principles of Order & Government

## Ordination Standards

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### **Main Polity Provisions:**

- G-2.0102 Ordered ministries
- G-2.0103 Call to ordered ministry
- G-2.0104 Gifts & qualifications
- W-4.4003 Constitutional questions
- F-1.04 Guidance of the Holy Spirit

## The Call to Ordered Ministry

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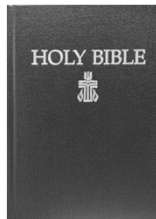
“The call to ordered ministry in the Church is the act of the triune God. This call is evidenced by the movement of the Holy Spirit in the individual conscience, the approval of a community of God’s people, and the concurring judgment of a council of the Church.”

G-2.0103

## A Story on Call

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1 Samuel 3:1-10



Describe your sense of call?

## Ordered Ministries

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“The government of this church is representative, and the right of God’s people to elect presbyters and deacons is inalienable. Therefore, no person can be placed in any ordered ministry in a congregation or council of the church except by election of that body.”

G-2.0102

## Gifts and Qualifications

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To those called to exercise special functions in the church—deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders—God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, 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. They must have the approval of God's people and the concurring judgment of a council of the church.

G-2.0104a

## Gifts and Qualifications

---

Standards for ordained service reflect ***the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life***. The council responsible for ordination and/or installation ***shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry***. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation. Councils ***shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates***.

G-2.0104b

## Constitutional Questions—W-4.4003

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In accordance with Reformed theological standards, those ordained to ordered ministries must:

- trust and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- accept the Scriptures to be the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ;
- adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of the church as reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do.

## Love Amidst Disagreement: Room for All

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“The polity of the Presbyterian Church presupposes the fellowship of women, men and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.” (G-1.0102)

## PC(USA) Mission, Worship & Youth Support

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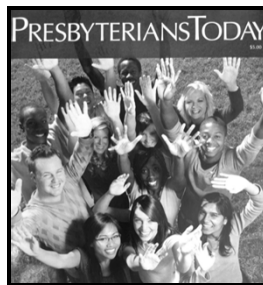
- Special programs
- Mission-related resources
- Worship resources
- Statistical support
- Curriculum development
- Devotional materials
- Camps & conferences
- Licensing hymns



## Resources and Publications

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- Sunday school and Vacation Bible School curricula
- PC(USA) shirts, posters, videos and other items
- Bible studies
- Pastoral care
- Bulletin inserts
- Preaching
- Study papers
- Brochures
  - Children in the Sanctuary Study Guide
  - God's Family at the Table, A Guide for Parents



## PC(USA) Seminaries

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Austin Presbyterian Theo. Sem. – Austin, TX  
Columbia Theo. Sem. – Decatur, GA  
Johnson C. Smith Theo. Sem. – Atlanta, GA  
Louisville Presbyterian Theo. Sem. – Louisville, KY  
McCormick Theo. Sem. – Chicago, IL  
Pittsburgh Theo. Sem. – Pittsburgh, PA  
Princeton Theo. Sem. – Princeton, NJ  
San Francisco Theo. Sem. – San Anselmo, CA  
Union Pres. Sem. – Richmond, VA  
University of Dubuque Theo. Sem. – Dubuque, IA

## Mission & Ministries Worldwide

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1,001 new worshipping  
communities & NCDs

Presbyterian Disaster  
Assistance

Presbyterian mission  
partnerships & mission  
co-workers

Young Adult Volunteers

Rural ministry

Young Women's  
Leader development

Evangelism along the  
border

Mission in Latin  
America and Africa



## Why I am Presbyterian: Some Voices

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Scripture is central, interpretation varies greatly

Grace, not works, is emphasized

Democratic & representative governance

Dissent & debate allowed

Theology is applied to the public arena

The life of the mind is important to faith

Unity in diversity

Many worship styles

Progressive and conservative seminaries

Worldwide mission and established relationships

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.):  
Building Unity and Community



# FAQs: After the vote

IN FOCUS

PREPARED BY SEVERAL PRESBYTERY EXECUTIVES FROM AROUND THE PC(USA)

**Q: What does the change in ordination standards mean?**

A: The ordination standards have changed from “living in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness” to “joyfully submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.” This removes a national standard categorically prohibiting the ordination of persons in sexual relationships outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

**Q: What does the change in ordination standards represent?**

A: The Presbyterian Church (USA) has shifted the authority for applying its ordination standards from the national level to the local presbytery and session level. This represents a de-centralization of the church and puts more discernment in the hands of people at the local level.

**Q: May congregations now ordain people who are gay or lesbian?**

A: The previous standards were never based on a person's orientation, but on their behavior. The new standards do not list specific behaviors that automatically exclude someone for consideration for ordination. Each examining body is responsible to look at all possible factors to determine if someone is being called into ordained ministry.

**Q: Specifically, what was changed?**

A: The primary change is the removal of language requiring those ordained “to live either in fidelity in the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness.” It also adds language referring to obedience to Christ, and indicates that fidelity to church standards is judged case by case by the examining body.

**Q: What practical changes will we see?**

A: If ministers who are serving in one area move to another location, they shall be examined by that ordaining body before being able to take up their office, since each presbytery determines its own membership. That presbytery may choose to apply ordination standards differently from the officer's previous body.

**Q: Is the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians mandated?**

A: No.

**Q: Will a congregation be required to change anything?**

A: A congregation cannot be forced to ordain or receive pastors or elders or deacons of whom they do not approve. The congregation retains the right to determine who will serve as officers.

**Q: May congregations and presbyteries continue to consider sexual activity outside marriage between a man and a woman as impermissible for its officers?**

A: Yes, as long as the expectation is applied on a case by case basis. The authority for ordaining elders and deacons is vested in the local congregation, and the authority to ordain ministers is in the presbytery. The new language calls the ordaining body to be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying ordination standards to individual candidates.

**Q: May a congregation or presbytery now ordain or install a sexually active homosexual?**

A: Yes, if after a thorough examination, the congregation or presbytery believes the person is called by God to serve as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, elder or deacon, and is living in accord with the church's ordination standards, Confessions, and Scripture.

**Q: Does the new language give candidates who are sexually active outside the covenant of marriage between a woman and a man the “right” to be ordained?**

A: Nobody has a “right” to be ordained. Ordination is based on God's call as confirmed by the ordaining body.

**Q: May questions about a candidate's sexuality be asked or are such questions forbidden?**

A: Assessing the correspondence between each candidate's responses and the actual ordination standards rests in the governing body doing the examination. ●