

## INFORMATION DOCUMENT

### Summary of the Plenary Session at the November 8, 2008 Stated Presbytery Meeting On Listening and Discernment

The Agenda Planning Committee of the Presbytery Council recommended that there be time set aside during a plenary session of the November 8, 2008 Stated Meeting for listening and discernment on Proposed Amendment 08-B Ordained Officers. As a result, 45 minutes were allocated during the afternoon for presbyters who wished to do so to respond to the following two-part questions. Responses were to be directed to the Moderator and there was to be no debate about anyone's comments. This was an opportunity to mutually share responses to the plenary listening/discernment questions.

#### **Plenary Listening/Discernment Questions:**

As you read the current text of G-6.0106b and as you read the proposed text of G-6.0106b,

1. What would be changed in the life of a local congregation, and what would be changed in the life of the presbytery if the proposed text were to be adopted?
2. What would be unchanged in the life of a local congregation, and what would be unchanged in the life of the presbytery if the proposed text were to be adopted?

#### **Current "G-6.0106 b.**

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

#### **Proposed G-6.0106 b.**

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

The time of sharing began at 3:07 PM.

- What would be changed is that there would be a sense that there's a disconnect between faith as they understand it and there would probably be some movement in our church to seek some non-geographic presbytery. In this presbytery we might become more Pentecostal – and by that I mean we might have a tendency toward heresy – the change would mean that we are to separate Scripture from Jesus Christ and put Scripture in a subordinate position. This would be a break

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from our historic understanding of Reformed Theology and the Confessions and our call for church officers to live lives in obedience to Scripture.

- What would change would be that we would be able to tell visitors and potential members that the PC(USA) does not discriminate against them, if they have the gifts for leadership and service in the church they can be ordained on the basis of their ability to follow Jesus Christ, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures. The presbytery would become a more inclusive body, able to live up to the commitment of inclusivity that is expressed in our *Book of Order*. The presbytery would reach out to those who are absent now. Earlier today someone spoke about the absence of young people coming to our churches. The 20 to 30 people I know want nothing to do with the Presbyterian Church.
- Nothing would change. The wording of the proposed amendment would not change their inability to answer the questions in the affirmative and nothing would change.
- Unfortunately, inclusivity is not the option. Either one group gets let in and one group gets let out. It's framed in justice and discrimination. If the proposed amendment passes, then it would not be too far afterwards that it would be more difficult to establish any real standards. In Reformed Theology we are to know the Savior by the Holy Spirit's witness to us through the Scriptures. The change would mean that instead of an ordination standard that places officers under the authority of Scripture, Scripture is just a witness to be "understood." The change places the emphasis on the candidate's "sincere efforts," so it's the sincerity of their efforts that matters. Since every candidate is sincere in their desire, this would make it almost impossible for someone not to be qualified. My fear is that the issue of homosexuality is the sole issue that is being considered in this proposed amendment and yet this addresses far more than that.
- There would be significant change in the local congregation. My mother is a member of Historic First Church, she says that if this passes, she will no longer be a member. She feels that it is worth leaving if she feels a violation of the Church's order is committed. I live in Ajo and have been a pastor at the smallest and proudest congregation in the town. We are the only congregation in Ajo in that period of time that has remained stable. There have been an 8 percent turnover in population. Other churches have been through major upheavals. Some have come to our church. We have had consistency in the teaching of the Gospels.

As for change in the Presbytery – where we're located, the next Presbyterian church is 70 miles away. We are trying to survive on our own and this change would undermine us.

- I believe that what would change would be the ability and the honor for all people that are gifted to say that they receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior,

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understanding that for ordination they'd need to answer all the Constitutional questions, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. The new wording follows what we need to do.

- Nothing would change much at Memorial. We will no longer have to ask our 75-year-old members if they are living together. At the presbytery, nothing would change, CPM will still be required to bring forth candidates who are qualified for the ministry and who show their fidelity to Jesus Christ.
- Things have already changed. They changed with PUP. The members at Desert Hills have been examining our own hearts and what we believe and we are very much afraid that our beliefs may not be in line with the changes happening within the PC(USA).
- I find it hard to embrace an idea where every individual is not embraced. The proposed change reaches out to everyone, it's what we should do.
- The change is already happening. Never before have we seen so many people leaving church because of this one issue. Other Korean churches have made statements against what is being proposed. Our faith is not about honoring men. The Church is there to honor God. We wish to make the statement that making this change would be detrimental; it would compromise the Scriptures that we uphold. It is impacting our church tremendously at this point. Some church members have been waiting to see how this vote turns out.
- This proposal is a violent departure from New Testament Scripture. There would be a mass exodus from the Presbyterian denomination.
- One of the churches I previously served has since closed church because of lack of inclusiveness, which is the real issue behind this language. It is my belief that had this amendment passed years ago, and the debate about it occurred earlier, that that church might be still be alive.
- Speaking as a gay woman, what will happen at my church? I don't know. Few people there know who I am and what I am. I know there are people who welcome me and are happy I am there. I may be the only gay person there. Or at least, if there are others, they are afraid to say anything. There is so much pain out there. Good people are being hurt. It is time for this to pass. By the way, earlier today Roger Davis spoke of being born during the great depression. Well, Roger, I was born *before* the great depression!
- Could we take time for a moment of prayer? I think we need a time for silence and prayer.
- I've served 3 Morelight churches. That experience provides an inclusive kind of community that is alive and very much committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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The heterosexual members of those congregations were very accepting. I am a supporter of the inclusivity of the church, which I believe is Presbyterian. I don't know what will change.

- Homosexuality is a sin... The Scriptures are very clear on this. To approve this proposed amendment would be a departure from our historic Reformed and Confessional teaching and practice. We cannot accept the ordination of those who engage in sin without repentance.
- I am a member of Celebration of Life. When we joined this church we had never really thought about what it meant to be part of a Morelight church. It has been an amazing experience which has deepened our faith and touched us deeply. We are a part of a very caring community. If the proposed amendment were not to pass, I feel that it might break the spirit of our congregation.
- I want to change what I said before. I think there would be change if this amendment passes. And the change would be that it would alleviate us from being liars. We are all sinners.
- I served at a UCC church for a time and I have to say that during that time I felt that a huge weight had been lifted off of my shoulders because they have already dealt with this issue.
- The proposed change establishes no definite constitutional ordination requirement. It doesn't say what obedience to Jesus Christ is. It diminishes the role that is given to the historical witness of the Confessions. The word "fidelity" is used in both the current and proposed amendment. The current G-6-0106b requires fidelity in marriage. The proposed amendment states that answering the ordination questions in the affirmative means fidelity to the standards of the church. But it does not specify what standard or standards require fidelity. Although the initial focus is on the fact that the proposed amendment will provide opportunity for the ordination of homosexuals, there are so many other ramifications. The revised wording is full of vagueness and will create a great deal of confusion. No specific standard would exist. What are the standards of the church?
- We can continue to be the PC(USA) and be an inclusive church just the way it is. (He shared the story of his brother dying in the hospital and his being there to comfort him.) We are there to be supportive in the community and show Christ's love.
- I believe the future holds more of the same. Since 1973 I've heard this from both sides. There has been pain from both sides. You can look at Scripture and find support for both positions. It is not just an urge to inclusiveness. It is important to honor a sense of call. We can talk about the issues but how do you get past this? No matter what we decide, it won't go away.