

RESPONSES IN THE MUTUAL INVITATION SMALL GROUPS
A Summary of the Responses as Recorded by the Recorders
Mutual Invitation Small Groups – March 16-17, 2007 Presbytery Stated Meeting

What passage(s) of Scripture speak to you about this Overture?

Old Testament

- What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)
- God’s Word is a light to my path (Psalm 119:105); we cannot pick and choose, nor can we beat each other with our favorite texts; the Word is the “spinal cord” of the church.
- Psalm 23: If the church cannot be a safe space, what can be?
- The Ten Commandments
- The children of Israel wandered 40 years because they did not obey God’s word and trust that it was the best (Exodus)
- Stay faithful to what we are called to be (Numbers?)
- Psalm 119
- The story of the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad (Numbers 27:1–11)
- We need to listen to God (Proverbs)
- You shall not lie with a male as with a woman (Leviticus 18:22)

Gospels & Acts

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27).
- Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31).
- If you can believe, say this and the mountain will be removed and tossed into the sea (Matthew 17:20).
- Do not judge, so that you may not be judged (Matthew 7:1).
- Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).
- I must be about my Father’s business (Luke 2:49, KJV).
- You did not choose me but I chose you (John 15:16).
- Anyone who comes to me I will never drive away (John 6:37).
- Love one another (John 13:34, 15:12, 15:17)
- Jesus didn’t say anything about homosexuality, but he did tell us to love one another.
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–35)
- Peter’s dreams before meeting Cornelius (Acts 10)
- Do you love me? (John 21:15–17)
- For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:16)
- Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? (Matthew 7:3)
- Jesus has limits, as shown in the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3–11)

- Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's. (Matthew 22:21)
- Jesus came and died for us.
- The openness of Jesus in calling his disciples
- Jesus' admonition of following rules over following the teachings
- Inclusivity over exclusivity—Christ's example
- Judging by sight (Matthew 11)
- You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27–28)
- But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first. (Mark 10:31)

Epistles

- There is nothing that can separate us from the Christ (Romans 8:38–39).
- The greatest of all things is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).
- Condemnation of homosexuality in Romans 1.
- All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).
- It is good for the church to have standards for its leaders (1 Timothy).
- Let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no (James 5:12).
- The Lord disciplines those whom he loves (Hebrews 12:6).
- We are all children of God (Romans 8)
- If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8).
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will (Hebrews 2:4).
- All of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).
- All things should be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)
- We're called to be ambassadors of love
- Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12–27)
- Apostle Paul, man of God, condemned elements of Greek society according to God-given standards.
- There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)
- No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. (2 Timothy 2:4)
- Biblical standards for deacons and elders (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus)
- We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Ephesians 4:14–15).
- Unity of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1–16)
- The Epistle of James
- Spiritual gifts are given to whomever God chooses (1 Corinthians 12)

General

- Passages about fear
- Christ died for all.
- Passages about love
- God has the authority.
- Repent
- God loves all of us
- God loves us all, no matter what. We are saved through grace alone. Grace abounds.
- Accept people as they are
- Being in the world, but not of the world.
- Adaptability of God's word/message to changing times
- God's love encompasses all.
- God's pure love and acceptance of the big tent; all God's children
- The dead bones of Ezekiel 37 vs. the living spirit in Christ
- Bible preaches that life is a family oriented thing and that man and woman should be married for the purpose of raising children.

What issues in the Overture are of most concern to you?

Confusion

- The Book of Order includes lots of “shalls” and also a lot of “shoulds,” but there are no essentials listed. We’re arguing about the wrong things.
- Recommendation 5 of the PUP report is not clear; the overture attempts to clarify what standards and essentials are.
- Fear—We might do something in violation of the Book of Order.
- Clarification—Where are we at as a church?
- Legalistic—The amount of time spent defining what is essential
- We would be setting a precedent of naming what is essential.
- Not clearly written
- The overture is confusing.
- Does not present new material
- Is this really essential to the polity of the church?
- What they are saying behind these words
- I’ve read it, and I didn’t get it. We argue about issues that don’t make a difference to people in the pew. Another issue: “the essentials of Reformed polity.” We’ve always refused to spell out what the essential are. I can always say to confirmands that the real core is confessing Jesus Christ as your Lord and savior. And so many people are learning and can’t commit to “polity” as new Christians. It sounds like “this is the ONE WAY.” With this, we can’t change. That will keep people out of our church.
- Confusing
- Does the Constitution permit these essentials?
- Make up your mind. Make a decision.
- Nervous about lifting up certain essentials

Issues of judging

- Do I as a person have a right to make the decision against ordination of someone?
- Correlation with ordination of women.
- Who are we as a denomination to say that God cannot call that person?
- Who are we pleasing? God or ourselves?
- I don’t want to see standards of behavior as part of ordaining people.
- How do we judge, or do we want to?
- Problems with the wording. Ordination holds us to a higher standard.
- What about the judgment of our peers?
- What is acceptable? How do we define “acceptable”?
- Wording is too strong.
- To bar somebody is wrong.
- Are we becoming Pharisaic?
- Who will police this?
- Whose sin is worse than another’s sin?
- Leaders must be held to a higher standard. If our church is going to grow, and be strong and healthy, the pastor must be Biblically strong and Biblically exemplary.

- It's like what happens in our schools: Here's a test you have to pass. If we pursue this in a legalistic way, we'll end up pursuing everything in a legalistic way. Pretty soon, we'll be arguing about every jot and tittle.
- I work in the world, but am not of the world. Co-worker, male, is going to be the bride in a wedding. I wanted to bring the Bible out and being old-fashioned, I can't see that everything is okay, "feels good, do it." This issue is not acknowledged very much in our denomination. Unless we put a stop to the issue, it'll keep coming back. No means no. It has been voted upon. Unity is good. Peace is good. But out of the three, purity is what we need to work for. We should follow the Bible.
- What is seen, what is not seen. Troubled by the fact that our rules have to be about outward appearances and outwardly obvious sin: gay people. Drunks, etc. All are sinners, but some sins are not as outward and obvious. What about the little old lady who hates her sister? We may not be able to figure that out, but it's obvious if someone is drunk, or walks in with another man on his arm. Unfortunately, it seems that judging on the basis of outward sinfulness is part of our human condition.
- How the overture will be implemented—questions used by the examining committees
- The Christian world or western civilization is being ripped by secular standards. We should not be judgmental, but need to remain strict on leadership.
- I have a rigid attitude, but if I am vain about being righteous, I can't accept the sinner.
- Does anybody know God's will? This overture believes to know God's will and limit God's will for all time as a tenet of polity.
- Who knows God's will? Does anybody?

Theological concerns

- Scripture is the Word, not the words, of God.
- We must follow Jesus. Some say they are Christians but don't seem to love Jesus.
- We must give all up to the Lord.
- The sin of hatred is one of the most serious sins that are committed.
- This overture might give the impression that one group of people is better than another group.
- Be patient and seek the hand of God.
- With all the noise, it is hard to hear God.
- What are Christ's teachings? Seek God's guidance.
- We have denied our mission to the world.
- Love your neighbor, not choose your neighbor.
- We as a church and society have tended to make this into an issue of homosexual vs. heterosexual. Reading in Acts, those early Christians separated themselves from cultural behavior around them. This is a behavior issue, an issue of being more inclusive of other while we live to high standards.

Issues of sexuality

- Issue of whether we should ordain homosexuals.
- How can I say what "their" relationship with God is?
- Are we opening the door to gay marriages, etc.?
- Would we be promoting homosexuality as a trait we want in a pastor?

- There are heterosexual pastors who have done great damage, too.
- God created something; it is not a choice. Science can prove it is not a choice. Maybe God expected to them to be the best.
- There are a lot of bisexual people.
- Why are we talking about this again?
- Don't know, but 29 years of discussion has been too long
- I believe we have to make changes, but we can't get rid of Biblical standards. You can be welcoming, loving, etc., but if someone asks you if homosexuality is wrong, I don't want my pastor telling them it's okay. We can't use a diluted gospel.
- I didn't know my church had an issue with this until we went to General Assembly. I saw the rainbow flag and was very disturbed. I'm not saying homosexuals can't come—you're welcome, we love you—but there are certain things I've taught my grandchildren. I love you, I welcome you, but the Law is the Law. It's not our law, it's in the Bible. Jesus made such a sacrifice for us and here we are arguing about things that should be set.
- I could never live the lesbian lifestyle—it's against God's word—but I must love people. It's hard. I have co-officiated at gay weddings. It's very difficult for families. People of that persuasion have it hard, because they want to be in leadership.
- Will lead to homosexual elders, deacons, ministers
- I've known both good heterosexuals and good homosexuals.
- I am concerned with and don't want homosexuals leading Boy Scouts or other groups. Christ chose his leadership very carefully.
- The overture also applies to heterosexuals so we need to realize that this is not a one-sided issue.

Issues of change & Book of Order

- The overture is trying to lock in ordination requirements when history has shown us the need to change (e.g., the ordination of women).
- The overture could lead to a more literal interpretation of language.
- The overture might really limit those who could be ordained, e.g. Native Americans.
- This action opens a door to allow us to interpret the Book of Order as individuals want to.
- If we aren't going to follow the Book of Order precisely, then change it if we don't agree that it should be strictly interpreted.
- If people don't follow the Book of Order, things fail.
- If we don't follow the Book of Order on this, what else will we set aside?
- We have a tradition of not changing, so overture is not necessary.
- There have been changes in the Book of Confessions.
- Times have changes since Biblical times.
- Resistance to change
- If it does only support the Book of Order, then why is it necessary?
- Leaving ordination decisions to presbyteries will create chaos and disorder
- Each presbytery can make the right decision about ordination; don't need hard and fast rules; too many rules have gotten us into trouble in the past.
- We are reforming because we are open to the Spirit of God.
- The intense disagreement about this issue that causes dissension

- We're ready to stop and say "This is what the General Assembly has approved," rather than trying to placate some people's feelings. There are two percent of the society leading the battle to change our whole way of doing things. They're pushing the issue. This overture says, "Enough is enough." It's not just homosexuality. Lots of other issues, where ordained Presbyterians have gone against essential tenets with impunity, rendering the Book of Order useless. Either we have order and law, or we do not. If presbyteries decide, then we have no order.
- There are central issues—Jesus Christ and the Trinity—and there are peripheral issues. I don't think this is central, but it's not in orbit, either. Decentralization through local option won't work.
- Rigidify the ordination process
- Redundancy of use of word "shall" tied in with concern of unnecessary restatement of a standard that is there and also known as *The Book of Order*.
- The constitution is upheld, but published earlier than the overture for discussion
- It is the same requirements we have always used.
- Abide by the Book of Order with no changes.
- Clear and consistent over time—Passing this would do it.
- If we're not changing anything in the Book of Order, then why have the order not to change and that the Book of Order is not clear.

Issues of unity & divisiveness

- The pain and division over an issue that is so great to so many people.
- We're a connectional church and we need a common ground to be able to move about from place to place.
- Presbyteries already have the power to okay.
- Members can make good decisions.
- This overture keeps the conflict brewing—can't please everyone.
- It is divisive
- Local decisions reflect the community
- Concerned about the connective feature
- Likes the central decision making
- Change can be good or bad. It can cure you or accelerate your demise. Acceptance and Christian love are not an issue. We love our brothers. Advocacy and leadership are the issues. Someone in front of a congregation with a Bible in his hand is a leader and an example. Are you willing to take the churches away from the people who paid for them and built them?
- Session vs. session
- Will this push us into arguments?
- Word "bar" is inflammatory—concern for need of stability of ordination standards
- Can session think for itself? People are smarter than we think they are.
- Trust becomes an issue.
- PUP does not change ordination standards. Not everything is good. We need to follow an orderly fashion.
- Lack of trust
- Change things as a family; don't leave.
- Christian bigotry.

- It is not exclusive.
- If a church deviates, who would enforce it? When would this occur?
- Divides people.
- The overture response to a change in the Book of Order, and fears that the Book of Order will be compromised. We need to get on with things and become a compelling strength in the world.

Source of the overture & polity issues

- The overture allows us to put a complicated issue into dialogue.
- This is a nuanced question, and is not getting a hearing.
- The overture lacks authenticity; it is off of a Web site with an agenda.
- The overture was prepared by the Presbyterian Coalition.
- Those submitting overture are afraid church might be ordaining the wrong people.
- Hidden agendas are harmful.
- Offensive delivery by the overture advocate
- No concern except that there were not more live overtures that affirm that all the essential/tenets are to be upheld
- It won't pass on the floor.
- This overture is about power.
- I have faith in the Presbyterian way.
- We already have the tools to deal with these situations.
- Diversity is to be celebrated, inclusivity over exclusivity.
- No concerns with overture—it simply reaffirms what G.A. said
- Voted against PUP—no problem with this overture
- Concern that vote will come not sooner, but later and this will drag out the process.
- Some people are brought up being selfish about this concern.
- Presbytery should be allowed to decide.
- Don't ask; don't tell—local option.
- Opposition to change comes from the older generation; when it passes on, things will be more open to change.
- We commissioned PUP to be a Task Force for five years, who were of all walks and races in the Church. Yet even before the first PUP report was out, there was opposition. We need to trust that God was in the process!