

**A TIME FOR DISCERNMENT OF THE PROPOSED EXAMINATION FOR MEMBERSHIP POLICY
AT THE PRESBYTERY OF GRAND CANYON
MARCH 28-29, 2008 STATED MEETING**

At the November 3, 2007 Stated Meeting the Presbytery approved the following three part Motion:

(1) To postpone consideration of the Proposed Examination for Membership Policy to the March 28-29, 2008 Stated Presbytery Meeting; (2) that a significant portion of the two-day meeting be set aside for communal discernment on various polity, theological and practical issues raised by the proposed examination for membership policy and (3) that the planning and implementation of that process of discernment be assigned to the Presbytery Council.

This document sets forth the following:

- Background information concerning the Proposed Examination for Membership Policy, recommended by the Committee on Ministry to the presbytery as a First Reading at the September 14-15, 2007 meeting, and for Final Approval at the above November 3, 2007 meeting.
- The plan and process for engaging in “A Time for Discernment of the Proposed Examination for Membership Policy” on Saturday morning March 29, 2008 as reflected on the Agenda included with the Call to the March 28-29, 2008 meeting as an Order of the Day for a two-hour period beginning at 9:55 a.m.
- Recommended resource documents for review by presbyters prior to their attending the March 28-29, 2008 Stated Meeting.

The History – January 20, 2007 through February 11, 2008

- *January 20, 2007 Stated Presbytery Meeting* – The Presbytery received the following Overture from the Session of the Kingman Presbyterian Church as an item of new business which was referred to the Bills and Overtures Committee in accordance with the presbytery bylaws:

The Kingman Overture read as follows:

“In its discernment of the essentials of Reformed polity and for the sake of the peace, unity, and purity of the church, the Presbytery of Grand Canyon adopts the principle that compliance with the standard for ordination adopted by the whole church in the *Book of Order* is an essential of Reformed polity. Therefore, any departure from the standards for ordination expressed in the *Book of Order* will bar a candidate from ordination and/or installation by this governing body. Provisions of the *Book of Order* are signified as being standards by use of the term “shall”, is/are to be, “requirement,” or equivalent expression”.

- *March 16-17, 2007 Stated Presbytery Meeting* – Upon recommendation of the Bills and Overtures Committee the Presbytery approved that the Presbytery consider informally the Overture from the Session of the Kingman Presbyterian Church by engaging in a structured process of Mutual Invitation and Dialogue for at least both the March 16-17, 2007 and June 9, 2007 Stated Meetings. Following dinner on March 16th presbyters gathered in small groups to address by Mutual Invitation the following questions: (1) What passage(s) of Scripture speak to you about this Overture? And (2) What issues in the Overture are of most concern to you?
- *June 9, 2007 Stated Presbytery Meeting* – A two-hour period of time was set aside for “Continuing the Dialogue and Discernment – Overture from the Session of Kingman Presbyterian Church”. The time began with a Plenary Workshop on Communal Discernment conducted by Rev. Vicky Curtiss who served as a member of the Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity and Purity; is an Interim Co-Pastor in Corvallis Oregon; Director of Stirrings, which offers church consultation, spiritual direction and retreats, and previously as General Presbyter of the Presbytery of Western Reserve. There was a time for questions and answers and feedback was provided on the small group discussions at the March meeting. The Presbytery Stated Clerk provided an advice paper on the adoption by the 217th General Assembly of the Amended Recommendation #5 of the Report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. The paper outlined action of the Synod of the Trinity Permanent Judicial Commission in a remedial case filed against the Presbytery of Pittsburgh for adoption of an overture with essentially the same

wording as the overture from the Kingman Presbyterian Church Session. The Synod of the Trinity PJC found that the wording of the Pittsburgh overture constituted an irregularity under the PCUSA Constitution. In light of that decision, the Stated Clerk's advice was that the presbytery should continue in the discernment process, and in addition that the Presbytery give consideration to alternatives rather than move to a direct vote on the wording of the Overture itself.

The presbytery, in other action at this meeting upon recommendation of the Presbytery Council, approved an amended motion in response to the Overture from the Session of Kingman Presbyterian Church and as the Presbytery continued discernment in the matter of Ordination Standards and Presbytery Membership. The action requested that at the September 14-15, 2007 meeting the Committee on Ministry (1) to provide a summary of current policies and practices in the examination of both Candidates for Ministry and those already ordained seeking presbytery membership and (2) recommend changes designed to assist the presbytery in its responsibility to conduct examinations fairly and responsibly.

- *September 14-15, 2007 Stated Presbytery Meeting* – In response to the requests of the Committee on Ministry at the June 9, 2007 presbytery meeting the Committee submitted papers C-5; C-6 and C-7 in the Call to the meeting.
 - C-5 provided the background of the work of COM in response to the requests.
 - C-6 was a summary of the constitutional responsibilities of the presbytery and current practices of the Committee on Ministry (COM), the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) and the presbytery itself, with regard to the examination of those persons preparing for ordination to the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, those persons preparing to become Commissioned Lay Pastors, and those persons who are already ordained Ministers who are seeking membership in Grand Canyon Presbytery. This document was intended for information purposes only.
 - C-7 was a proposal for some revisions to the current practices. All items which represented a change in, or addition to, current practice were presented in **bold type**. In reviewing current practice COM found that there were a number of areas regarding the examination of candidates for membership in this presbytery which could be improved upon.
 - In presenting Paper C-7 “Proposed Examination for Membership Policy” COM indicated: “It is now believed likely that if the wording of the Kingman Session Overture were to be adopted by the presbytery that it would ultimately be found to be an “irregularity” under the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* according to findings of similar court (i.e. Synod PJC) decisions. Therefore COM recommended C-7 for a first reading at the September 14-15, 2007 Presbytery Meeting with proposed adoption at the November 3, 2007 Presbytery Meeting. If Document C-7 is approved by the Presbytery, the COM would then move that the Overture from the Session of Kingman Presbyterian Church be answered by the approval of Document C-7 and that it be considered responsive to the concerns raised by the Kingman Session Overture.
- *November 3, 2007 Stated Presbytery Meeting* – COM introduced the Proposed Examination for Membership Policy for a Second Reading and Approval. During the opportunity for questions for clarification the question was raised regarding line 26: “...those seeking membership shall be specifically asked whether they agree with the faith and the polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as expressed in the Scriptures, the *Book of Confessions*, **or** the *Book of Order*.” The question was if the document should read “...the *Book of Confessions*, **and** the *Book of Order*.” Another person noted that line 76 has the same wording and asked if that line should also be amended with changing “or” to “and”. Members of the task group agreed to the change in wording.

Following additional time for questions for clarification, C-7 was moved for approval. Subsequently a motion to postpone to the March 28-29, 2008 Stated Meeting was made. After several attempts to amend the motion failed, the Presbytery approved the motion to postpone as reflected at the beginning of this document.

- *February 11, 2008 Ruling of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* – The GAPJC in Remedial Case 218-10 Bush, et al v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh found that the resolution adopted

by the Presbytery of Pittsburgh on October 12, 2006 was unconstitutional and in error and ORDERED that the resolution was VOID. Parts 1 and 2 of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh resolution contained essentially the same language as the Overture to the presbytery from the Session of Kingman Presbyterian Church. The GAPJC ruled in two other remedial cases on these matters as well; GAPJC 2008, 218-09, Buescher, et al v. Presbytery of Olympia and GAPJC 2008, 218-15, Session of First Presbyterian Church et al v. Presbytery of Washington. In the above three cases the GAPJC found: 1. Authoritative Interpretations may not change an ordination standard; 2. Governing bodies may not restate, augment, diminish or define ordination standards; 3. Governing bodies may not waive the G-6.0106b ordination standard; 4. A candidate's actions must conform to the ordination standards; 5. "The ordaining body must examine the candidate individually".¹

A Time for Discernment of the Proposed Examination for Membership Policy – March 29, 2008

The Presbytery Council was tasked with developing the Communal Discernment process for the postponed consideration of the proposed policy. On behalf of the Council, the Council's Agenda Planning Committee [Chair of Council, Presbytery Moderator, Moderator-elect, Chair of the Theology and Worship Committee, Executive Presbyter and the Stated Clerk] invited Rev. Mac Schafer, maker of the Motion to Postpone; Rev. Jim Noble, convener of the COM Task Group that developed the proposed policy; and Rev. Shelly Moe, COM Chair to participate in helping to develop the process. The key steps in a Communal Discernment Process include: Establishing a Common Starting Point; Gathering and Sharing Information, Exploring Options, Choosing Direction; Attempting to Reach Consensus and Resting with the Decision [even if Consensus is not reached]. Consensus for purposes of discernment does not mean that the outcome is a unanimous vote, that the result is everyone's first choice, or that everyone agrees one-hundred percent. It does mean that the views of all participants are encouraged and heard, all participants share in the final decision, those who disagree are willing to support it, and all agree to be responsible for implementing the decision.

The Communal Discernment Process that has been developed includes a two-hour block of time scheduled as an Order of the Day for 9:55 a.m. on Saturday March 29, 2008, the second day of the presbytery meeting. Key components of the time include:

- A history of the presbytery's consideration of the Overture from the Session of Kingman Presbyterian Church;
- Definition and Clarification of Terms – Scruples, Essential Tenets, Freedom of Conscience
- Questions to be addressed include –
 - Do our current examination policies and practices fulfill the requirements of the PCUSA Constitution?
 - Is there something missing from our current policies and practices?
- Panel Discussion on "What are the implications for our Presbytery if the proposed Examination for Membership is approved?" The following presbyters have been invited and have agreed to serve on the panel: Rev. Al Gephart (Pastor - University PC), Rev. Darren Hawkins (Pastor -Sierra Vista PC), Rev. Alice Nord (Interim Associate Pastor – Faith PC), and Rev. W. Gale Watkins (Pastor – Westminster PC).
- Plenary time for questions, answers and comments;
- A review of options under *Roberts Rules of Order* and possible actions available to the presbytery;
- Plenary time for exploring options, choosing direction and reaching consensus.

The tentative agenda included with the Call to the March 28-29, 2008 Stated Meeting reflects the above components.

¹ The five numbered statements along with an explanation of each are found in Advisory Opinion note 21 "Ordination Standards and Examination Essentials, Reformed Faith and Polity" issued by the Office of Constitutional Services of the Office of the General Assembly PCUSA.

Definition of Terms and Recommended Resources for Review

The definition/clarification of the terms Scruples, Essential Tenets and Freedom of Conscience begins on page 4 of this document.

In addition those resource documents for presbyters to review and study before the meeting are outlined below.

Resource Documents for Presbyters Review Prior to the Communal Discernment on March 29th

- C-6, “Summary of the Constitutional Responsibilities of the Presbytery of Grand Canyon and the Presbytery’s Current Policies, Practices and Procedures in the Examination of Both Candidates for Minister of Word and Sacrament and Those Already Ordained Who are Transferring to the Presbytery”
- C-7, “Proposed Examination for Membership Policy Presbytery of Grand Canyon” as amended at the November 3, 2007 Stated Meeting of Presbytery
- C-8, GAPJC 2008, 218-10, Bush, et al v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh
- C-9, Advisory Opinion note 21”Ordination Standards and Examination Essentials, Reformed Faith and Polity” issued by the Office of Constitutional Services of the Office of the General Assembly PCUSA.

The following additional documents may be downloaded from the PCUSA website; links will be provided on the presbytery website for ease in downloading. Those who do not have internet access but who wish to read these additional documents may contact their church for assistance in printing out a copy.

- GAPJC 2008, 218-09, Buescher, et al v. Presbytery of Olympia available at <http://www.pcusa.org/gapjc/decisions/pjc21809.pdf>
- GAPJC 2008, 218-15, Session of First Presbyterian Church et al v. Presbytery of Washington may be accessed at <http://www.pcusa.org/gapjc/decisions/pjc21815withconcurrences.pdf>

Definition and Clarification of Terms

Scruple

From the “Act Preliminary to the Adopting Act of 1729” (as quoted by the Presbyterian Historical Society Web site, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/subscription/adoptingact.html>, viewed February 24, 2008):

And in case any Minister of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any **scruple** with respect to any article or articles of said Confession or Catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod, who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds and to ministerial communion if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government. But if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge such Ministers or candidates erroneous in essential and necessary articles of faith, the Synod or Presbytery shall declare them incapable of Communion with them.

This language was clarified by the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) of the PCUS in 1983 in a case named *Hambrick vs. PJC, Synod of NC* (as quoted by the Office of the General Assembly in Constitutional Musing # 11: Examining Officers, <http://www.pcusa.org/constitutionalservices/musings/note11.pdf>, viewed on February 24, 2008):

The Commission recognizes **the right of individuals to hold views contrary to the Constitution** of the PCUS but, for the sake of order, actions contrary to the Constitution are not sanctioned. The record of Mr. Mark's examination by Presbytery is rather ambiguous on the point of whether in fact he would or would not participate in the ordination of duly-elected church officers who are female. This question should be put to the candidate in a straightforward manner and should be answered in the same fashion. If the answer is in the

affirmative, Presbyterian would be justified in receiving the candidate even though he retains scruples in his views on these matters.

Essential Tenet

From *We Believe Adult Quarterly Bible Study*, Spring 2008, page 12, found at <http://www.pcusa.org/webelieve/pdf/wbaduspr08.pdf>, viewed on February 24, 2008:

In 1910, the General Assembly specified five essential tenets, or fundamentals, derived from the Westminster Confession of Faith to which ministers must subscribe. These included the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Jesus, the substitutionary atonement, Jesus' bodily resurrection, and the authenticity of Jesus' miracles. In 1927, after much heated controversy, the General Assembly determined, in effect, to rely on the Holy Spirit rather than on a written formulation to direct the consciences of ordained clergy and to maintain the purity of the faith.

In the Rationale to its authoritative interpretation regarding G-6.0108, the 217th General Assembly (2006) stated:

Essentials, by the terms of G-6.0108b (third sentence), are those matters of faith and polity that the officer-elect's governing body discerns are indispensable for ordained service. Essential doctrines are those that are required for a person's beliefs to fall within the bounds of Reformed understandings of Christian faith. Essentials of polity are those that are required for a person's ordained service to fall within the bounds of Reformed understandings of church governance. Essential practices are those that are required for a person's life to fall within the bounds of Reformed understandings of Christian discipleship (*Minutes of the 217th General Assembly*, pp. 515-516, <http://www.pcusa.org/ogaresources/journal2006.pdf>, viewed on February 24, 2008).

Relationship between the *Book of Order*, the *Book of Confessions*, and the Bible

The *Book of Order* (G-2.0100) states:

a. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) states its faith and bears witness to God's grace in Jesus Christ in the creeds and confessions in the *Book of Confessions*. In these confessional statements the church declares to its members and to the world who and what it is, what it believes, what it resolves to do.

The *Book of Order* continues in G-2.0200:

These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, as the Scriptures bear witness to him. While confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. . . . Yet the church, in obedience to Jesus Christ, is open to the reform of its standards of doctrine as well as of governance. The church affirms "Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda," that is, "The church reformed, always reforming," according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit.

Freedom of Conscience

6.109 of the Westminster Confession of Faith states, "God alone is Lord of the conscience..." This statement was initially adopted by the Scottish General Assembly along with the rest of the Confession in 1647, and was reaffirmed in 1729 when the Confession was adopted by the newly organized Presbyterian synod in the colonies (*Book of Confessions*, Westminster Standards: Historical Note). The statement was affirmed once again when it was included in the Historic Principles of Church Order, prefixed to the Form of Government adopted in 1788 by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia (footnote to G-1.0300, *Book of Order*).