

PRESBYTERY OF ST. ANDREW

Overture to the 218th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Adopted October 2, 2007

On Amending G-6.0106b and G-6.0108b to clarify the Requirement that Mandatory Provisions of the Book of Order be Enforced by ordaining bodies.

The Presbytery of St. Andrew overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-6.0106b and G-6.0108 be amended as follows: [text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italics]

G-6.0106b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional 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~~ *that does not conform to this standard* shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

G-6.0108b. It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer 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 hold office in that body. 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 governing body in which he or she serves; *however, an ordaining body shall not proceed to enroll as a candidate or ordain and/or install to office any person who is unwilling to abide by all mandatory provisions of the Book of Order.*

Rationale

We are making these recommendations believing that the only appropriate way to amend the constitutional ordination standards should be to amend the standards themselves, referring proposed changes to the presbyteries in the form of a constitutional amendment so that the whole church has the opportunity to participate in the decision through the ratification process. We believe that in doing this, we reaffirm the strength of our polity, our connectedness, and our unity as one Body by encouraging all voices to be heard.

While G-6.0106b has been repeatedly upheld by the church since its inclusion in the *Book of Order*, it has also been exceedingly controversial and confusing. Part of the controversy has surrounded the core issue of the ordination of self-affirming, practicing homosexuals. At the same time, some of the controversy and confusion has resulted from the awkward reference in G-6.0106b to “any . . . practice which the confessions call sin,” which must therefore include the entire lists of sins in, for example, the *Westminster Larger Catechism’s* illustrative examples of sins, including such practices as the undue delay of marriage, and the wearing of immodest apparel.

Another issue related to G-6.0106b and its enforcement is the confusion that it creates about the relationship of G-6.0106b to G-6.0108b. Ordaining bodies have the authority and responsibility to determine the suitability of candidates for office. However, it is unclear whether that authority supercedes the *Book of Order’s* mandatory provisions.

The proposed amendments would clarify the requirement that those who have agreed to “exercise [their] freedom of conscience within certain bounds” (G-6.0108b) must abide by all such mandatory provisions, even while they are free to seek changes to those provisions through the constitutional process for amendment.