

**Commentary and Recommendations
on Proposed Amendments and Ecumenical Statements
Sent Down from the 218th General Assembly for Votes in the Presbyteries**

from the Joint Renewal Team

08-A Vows of Membership

This amendment specifies that after the session has received persons as members, the new members “shall be presented to and welcomed by the congregation during a service of worship where they shall make a public profession of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, as do confirmants.”

Pro: The amendment’s required process is similar to what many congregations are already doing. The amendment would create uniformity in congregational practice. The profession of faith that is required is the same as the profession of faith that was made before the session when the individuals were accepted as members. This amendment attempts to address the scandal of a Texas congregation that accepted a prominent unbeliever as a member.

Con: The amendment adds to the complexity of rules in the *Book of Order*.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-B Ordained Officers

This amendment would remove the “fidelity and chastity” sexual behavior standard for church officers. It would also remove the requirement for officers to “lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church” and would replace the current standards with vague, meaningless wording. The rationale provided with the amendment confusingly states, “Our church thus has bound itself to a hierarchy of authority in which we are to obey Jesus Christ its Head, and, additionally, to heed first the Scriptures and then the confessions, to the extent that they accurately bear witness to Christ’s will.”

Pro: People favoring this amendment believe persons who are sexually active—either heterosexually or homosexually—outside the bond of marriage between a man and a woman may be ordained without regard to that behavior.

Con: This amendment’s perspective grossly misrepresents Presbyterian beliefs. The Protestant Reformation proclaimed “*sola scriptura*,” a proclamation that Scripture is our ultimate authority and that the way we know the will of Jesus Christ is through Scripture. It is crucial that we uphold the current requirement for officers to “lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church,” because one cannot obey Jesus Christ while opposing Scripture. The amendment’s vague descriptions are far inferior to the present wording’s clear prescriptions. (For further analysis, see <http://www.presbycoalition.org/resourcesforvote.cfm>.)

Recommendation: vote NO

08-C Replacing “Sympathy” with “Compassion”

This amendment would replace the word “sympathy” with the word “compassion” in several places in the *Book of Order*.

Pro: Some people find the word “compassion” to be more precise and descriptive than the currently used word “sympathy,” which may sound condescending.

Con: The rationale states that use of the word “sympathy” dates back to at least 1911 and is the direct transliteration of the Greek word used in 1 Peter 3:8 and Hebrews 4:15.

Recommendation: no recommendation

08-D General Assembly Council Name Change

This amendment would change the name of the “General Assembly Council” to “General Assembly Mission Council.”

Pro: The General Assembly Council (GAC) requested this name change and states that the revised name is more descriptive of the GAC’s work.

Con: Those familiar with the workings of our denomination are familiar with the term “General Assembly Council” (GAC) and its responsibilities. To change the name accomplishes little benefit and inserts confusion.

Recommendation: no recommendation

08-E Nongeographic Presbyteries

This amendment consists of two unrelated parts. The first part of the amendment (amending the chapter describing the presbytery) decreases the ordinary number of ministers and churches with sessions needed to form any presbytery (geographic or nongeographic) from 12 to 10. The current wording in the *Book of Order* (which would not be changed

by this amendment) already states “In an isolated area, upon recommendation of the synod, the General Assembly may permit a presbytery to be organized with fewer than these minimums, provided that there shall be at least five ministers in each presbytery.” (G-11.0102)

The other part of the amendment, (amending the chapter describing the synod), would allow a church in one synod, with the consent of the General Assembly as well as the other parties involved, to join a nongeographic presbytery in another synod. The amendment states that the nongeographic presbytery “should” be formed on the basis of language and there “should” be an end date added at the formation of each nongeographic presbytery.

Note: Unrelated provisions have been combined in a single amendment. Amendments cannot be altered after they are adopted by the General Assembly. However, such combining should be discouraged; presbyteries need to maintain their authority to approve or disapprove each amendment on its own merits.

Pro: Requiring only 10 ministers and churches with sessions to form a presbytery would allow more presbyteries to be created. Currently it is possible, with General Assembly approval, to have a presbytery consisting of as few as five ministers, and the amendment would not change this. Language-based presbyteries are seen as an effective means of enabling immigrant groups to be incorporated into the denomination in a way that is welcoming for persons whose first language is not English. It does seem reasonable that a church should be allowed to be a part of a nongeographic presbytery in another synod.

Con: No drawbacks are evident.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-F Presbytery Membership of Certified Christian Educators

The privilege of the floor with voice (or voice and vote if elders) is currently given to “certified Christian educators.” (G-14.0730c) Use of lower-case letters when specifying “certified Christian educators” means this phrase is interpreted to be a general one which includes Certified Associate Christian Educators as well as Certified Christian Educators. This amendment limits these privileges of voice (or voice and vote if elders) to be “during the term of service in an educational ministry under the jurisdiction of the presbytery.” The amendment also states that the presbytery “may grant” these privileges (voice or voice and vote if elders) rather than having these privileges automatically bestowed, as the current wording does. Without this amendment Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators have a right to voice (or voice and vote if elders) in presbytery without the presbytery acting to grant the privileges, and the privileges continue even after their employment ends.

Pro: Presbyteries are historically composed of ministers of the Word and Sacrament and elders. Lately the floor has been opened for the privilege of voice (or voice and vote if elders) for certified Christian educators as a third category. This privilege is controversial and at the least ought to be carefully defined and limited. The Advisory Committee on the Constitution notes that “it is an aberration in our polity that a person is granted the privilege of the floor, or, in the case of elders, full membership privileges without the approval of the body in which those privileges will be exercised...” This amendment reasonably gives the presbytery the authority to grant voice (or voice and vote if elders) to certified Christian educators during a time of appropriate employment and terminates these privileges when the educator’s employment ends.

Con: Some Presbyterians believe certified Christian educators should have presbytery voice (or voice and vote if elders) apart from service within the church, and that these privileges should be automatically bestowed, rather than granted by the presbytery.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-G Synod Membership on Permanent Committees

This amendment consists of three unrelated provisions.

(1) Currently each synod nominates its own representatives to permanent committees of the General Assembly, in a process coordinated by the General Assembly Nominating Committee. The amendment deletes that provision.

(2) Currently the *Book of Order* does not specify the size of the GA Committee on Representation. The amendment requires membership equal to the number of synods, with one member residing in each synod. The current G-9.0105 (Governing Bodies) specifies requirements for committees on representation based on race, gender, age, and disabilities, but does not have requirements based on the percentages of ministers and non-ministers. The amendment adds new requirements that the GA Committee on Representation consist of 1/3 ministers (both women and men), 1/3 laymen and 1/3 laywomen.

(3) The third provision of the amendment requires that the General Assembly Council (GAC) include “members from each of the synods of the church.”

Pro: Paragraph G-13.0107 of the BOO was modified by the 2006 GA and produced unintended consequences. Item (1) in this amendment corrects those unintended consequences by allowing the GA Nominating Committee (GANC) to nominate for all GA level positions with advice from synods where applicable. Many GA level committees do not have 16 members and it would therefore be a difficult recording task to know which synod was due to nominate for a particular position (there are more than 500 national-level positions). The other alternative would be to increase all national-level committees to 16 members. This

would add substantial cost to the national budget. In addition, there would be no way for the GANC to maintain diversity requirements if the synods made nominations to committees. Finally, there is no standard way that synods make nominations, in contrast to the more open GANC process.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-H Five Ordination Examinations

Currently the *Book of Order* states, “The other four examinations may be taken by inquirers or candidates after completion of two full years of theological education. These four examinations shall only be taken upon approval by the committee on preparation for ministry of the inquirer’s or candidate’s presbytery.” (G-14.0431)

This amendment replaces that wording with, “The other four examinations shall ordinarily be taken by inquirers or candidates only after completion of two full years of theological education, or its equivalent, and shall be taken only upon approval by the committee on preparation for ministry of the inquirer’s or candidate’s presbytery, which shall first attest that the inquirer or candidate has completed adequate academic preparation in each examination area and adequate supervised experience in the practice of pastoral ministry.”

Note: The denominational on-line resource containing the amendments lists the second exam “Open Book Bible Exegesis” in italics, as if it were an addition. That exam is not an addition contained in the amendment. All five exams are already listed in the *Book of Order*.

Pro: The intent of the amendment is to ensure that those taking the exams are fully prepared to be successful and thereby to decrease the number of persons who do poorly on the tests.

Con: This amendment unnecessarily limits the flexibility of the CPM. Since CPM may already impose whatever restrictions it chooses to use as prerequisites to taking exams, the amendment places an inappropriate burden on the CPM by requiring CPM to “attest to” adequate academic preparation and supervised experience in pastoral ministry. Micro-managing the decision-making process of CPM is not a helpful way to improve exam performance. Criteria should be left to the discretion of each CPM, as is the case now.

Recommendation: vote NO

08-I Certified Christian Educators

In this proposed amendment, the term “certified Christian educator” is replaced with “Certified Christian Educator.” The rationale explains that with the current lower-case letters, the term is a general one that, by an authoritative interpretation of the 218th GA (2008) includes “Certified Associate Christian Educators.” The term “Certified Christian Educator” is a specific title. The amendment provides a more narrow interpretation of who is eligible for voice (or voice and vote if an elder) in presbytery by allowing those privileges only for Certified Christian Educators.

Note: It is unusual that both this amendment and amendment 08-F propose changes in G-14.0730c. An “Editor’s Note” provided with the proposed amendments indicates that the wording will be merged if both amendments are approved.

Pro: This amendment appropriately limits eligibility for voice (or voice and vote if an elder) in presbytery to those holding the specific title Certified Christian Educator (rather than also including other Christian educators, such as Certified Associate Christian Educators). Since presbyteries are historically composed of ministers and elders, it is appropriate that presbytery privileges be extended to educators in a more discerning manner.

Con: Those who believe Certified Associate Christian Educators should have a presbytery status similar to ministers and elder commissioners would oppose this change.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-J Alternative Forms of Resolution

The stated purpose of this amendment is to remove ambiguities in the language, particularly the currently-used term “parties” in disciplinary proceedings. The suggested language defines and limits who the “parties” are. The primary issue is that “all parties” in the current language could be interpreted to include the accuser as a “party,” giving the accuser veto authority over an Alternate Form of Resolution.

Comment: This amendment came from the ACC in response to a request for clarification. It makes explicit what is already common practice.

Recommendation: no recommendation

08-K Ecumenical Statement with the Roman Catholic Church

This statement is titled “Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism.”

Presbyterian understanding of baptism: The Westminster Confession distinguishes the “universal” church from the “visible” Church as follows: “The catholic or *universal church*, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; . . .” (6.140) “The *visible Church*,

which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; . . .” (6.141)

Presbyterians believe that in baptism an individual is admitted “into the *visible Church*” (6.154, emphasis added) and that “Although it be a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, *or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated*” (6.158, emphasis added). The Westminster Confession also states, “. . . by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost *to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto*, according to the counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time” (6.159, emphasis added).

The statement’s wording on baptism: The proposed agreement states that by Baptism “a person is *truly incorporated into the body of Christ*,” “*incorporation into the universal church by baptism* is brought about by celebrating the sacrament . . .” and “those who are baptized are *decisively incorporated into the Body of Christ*” (emphasis added).

Pro: This statement represents the product of hard work by the participants and is the best wording acceptable to the group.

Con: This statement attempts to describe baptism by means of wording sufficiently ambiguous to allow both Presbyterians and Roman Catholics to agree with the wording while not agreeing on the meaning of the sacrament. Presbyterians already recognize baptism in the Roman Catholic Church to be valid Christian baptism.

Recommendation: no recommendation

08-L Ecumenical Statement with the Episcopal Church

The first sentence of the agreement states, “We acknowledge one another’s churches as *churches belonging to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church*” (emphasis added).

Presbyterians believe “The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof; . . .” (6.140).

Item 8 states, “We encourage diocesan bishops and presbyteries to provide regular occasion for planning, discussing, resourcing for missional, educational, and liturgical life together. In addition, to explore possibilities for new church development and redevelopment together.”

Pro: This wording represents the best compromise that could be achieved and does not necessarily require significant new commitments on our part.

Con: The statement is vague and lacking in substance. It could encumber governing bodies with another layer of bureaucratic entanglement.

Recommendation: no recommendation

08-M Ecumenical Statement with the Korean Presbyterian Church in America

This statement asks us to adopt a Covenant Relationship Agreement with the Korean Presbyterian Church in America.

Pro: Our denomination has close theological ties with the Korean Presbyterian Church and we have a long history of missionary work in Korea. The commitments in the agreement seem reasonable and appropriate.

Con: No drawbacks are evident.

Recommendation: vote YES

08-N Ecumenical Statement with the Moravian Church

This item is the adoption of a “Covenant Partnership Agreement” with the Moravian Church. The section describing “The Moravian Church” includes the statement, “There are differing convictions among Moravians regarding sexual orientation, but the Unity Synod . . . has stated that the issue of human sexuality ‘does not rise to the level of the Lordship of Christ’ . . .” The first page of the proposal states that “[o]ne of the gifts that Moravians bring to the table of conversation is the concept of bishop as a pastor to pastors. . . .”

Pro: The statement is the result of a series of discussions and represents the best wording that could be achieved by the parties involved.

Con: This statement is vague in ways that might later be used to influence controversies in our denomination. Some suggestions in the agreement are so easily accomplished that they hardly require such a formal agreement, while others indicate formidable bureaucratic entanglements, such as “giv[ing] advice and counsel regarding the ongoing work and decision-making in the churches.”

Recommendation: no recommendation