

December 2, 2008

## Are We Singling Out Sex?

**Dear Friend,**

Voting on the new Amendment B is well underway. So far, the votes are overwhelmingly in favor of retaining the current G-6.0106b -- the "fidelity and chastity" standard in the Book of Order.

Four presbyteries are scheduled to vote in December, three of them today. We are reporting the [results](#) on our website as we learn the outcomes. (Please help us by sending the results for your presbytery.)

### **Is G-6.0106b too narrowly focused?**

One of the arguments presented by those who want to remove this ordination standard is that it focuses narrowly on sexuality, rather than examining a person's whole manner of life, including such things as prayer, Scripture reading, and discipleship.

Examination of candidates for ministry should not omit concern for the candidate's spiritual life and practice. But there is a reason why sexuality has become a prominent matter in our time.

### **The question that first raised the issue**

It is important to remember how the current G-6.0106b became part of the Book of Order, and why it is focused on limiting sexual expression to the marriage of a man and a woman.

The current vote has its roots in an overture from the Presbytery of New York City in 1976. The presbytery asked the General Assembly whether the church could ordain a candidate who is both well qualified and "an avowed homosexual." That question began what has become a decades-long effort to change what had been the historical understanding and practice of the Church.

### **The question is answered with "Definitive Guidance" and "Authoritative Interpretation"**

The 1976 General Assembly approved a task force to study the matter and report back to the 1978 GA. At that assembly, a minority report written by Dr. Thomas Gillespie and others argued that homosexual practice is contrary to the will of God. The GA overwhelmingly adopted the minority report as the church's Definitive Guidance on the question of homosexual ordination. In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Definitive Guidance as Authoritative Interpretation (AI) of the Constitution.

In a 1994 dissenting opinion, a minority of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission ([Hope v. Central](#)) expressed agreement with a prior minority opinion that "denial to a church

member of access to a congregational office violated G-5.0202 [a section on the rights of membership] and that the Book of Order could not be amended by a 'definitive guidance.'" It added, "If the General Assembly wishes to change the constitutional law of the Church, it must do so in accordance with the Book of Order through established process for amendments."

In other words, they argued that an explicitly stated standard in the Book of Order was needed to guide the court's decisions.

### **The church responds by placing an explicit standard in the Book of Order**

In 1996, the GA voted to amend the Book of Order by adding G-6.0106b ("Fidelity and Chastity.") The new paragraph received a majority vote of the presbyteries required to ratify it. The sexual standard of fidelity and chastity was added to the constitution precisely because the question of homosexual practice and ordination had been raised, and because there was a movement within the church to change what had been the historically accepted understanding and practice of the Church.

An effort to change the standard and the practice on this matter continues within the church. The presbyteries, with increasing emphasis, have voted to uphold the biblical and historical behavioral standard of the Church.

It is a necessary humility for the church always to be open to correction where it errs. It is a necessary faithfulness for the church to recognize pressures to capitulate to the ideologies of the society in which it ministers, and both to resist those pressures and to proclaim the Gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ in response to them.

### **Resources available**

The Coalition has a wide range of resources, including more on the history pertinent to G-6.0106b, on [our website](#). You will find a resource packet there that can be downloaded or mailed to you in hard copy. The packet has been made available through the efforts and generosity of Theology Matters.

If you would like to talk with someone about the vote coming up in your presbytery, please contact the Rev. Sue Cyre at [scyre@swva.net](mailto:scyre@swva.net) (540-898-4244), or me (my contact information is below).

Praying that God will equip you perfectly to give witness to his truth in your presbytery's vote,

Terry Schlossberg  
Campaign to Defeat Amendment B

(703) 680-4571 or [terry@presbycoalition.org](mailto:terry@presbycoalition.org)