

A Different Look at the changes in G-6.0106b

New G-6.0106b

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

Former 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 shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

What changes with the new G-6.0106b

A. The removal of the standards around relational fidelity, "*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*" With this change the authority on "fidelity and chastity" moves from the governance section of our constitution the "Form of Government", to the theological section of our constitution, "Book of Confessions."

Specifically

The Church's ordination standards continue to be drawn from Scripture and both the Book of Order and the Book of Confessions. As we move into a new phase of 'joyfully submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ,' we will continue to rely on those standards. There are many sins that are condemned and living joyfully means recognizing actions as sinful and truly repenting and turning from our sins. These standards require no less from those who seek ordination and who continue to serve the church as ordained officers.

B. New language states "*Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.*" Some have felt that moving from "obedience" to "guidelines" is a weakening of the language. However "*SHALL be guided by scripture and the confessions*" is mandatory language. The following are a few locations for: fidelity and chastity ethics.

The Heidelberg Catechism holds these standards:

Q. 87. Can those who do not turn to God from their ungrateful, impenitent life be saved?

A. Certainly not! Scripture says, “Surely you know that the unjust will never come into possession of the kingdom of God. Make no mistake: no fornicator or idolater, none who are guilty either of adultery or of homosexual perversion, no thieves or grabbers or drunkards or slanderers or swindlers, will possess the kingdom of God.”

Also of note:

Q. 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

A. In this way: Christ commanded that those who bear the Christian name in an unchristian way either in doctrine or in life should be given brotherly admonition. If they do not give up their errors or evil ways, notification is given to the church or to those ordained for this by the church.

Then, if they do not change after this warning, they are forbidden to partake of the holy sacraments and are thus excluded from the communion of the church and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ. However, if they promise and show real amendment, they are received again as members of Christ and of the church.

Thus, in looking to individuals who “*submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life,*” presbyteries & congregations should examine each candidate on views of the authority of scripture, views about Jesus, & how they interpret passages such as Romans 1. Each might also be asked about Qs 85 & 87 in the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Westminster Confession sets forth these standards:

6.109-10

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

3. They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty; which is, that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

6.131 Of Marriage and Divorce (UPCUSA)

1. Christian marriage is an institution ordained of God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, established and sanctified for the happiness and welfare of mankind, into which spiritual and physical union one man and one woman enter, cherishing a mutual esteem and love, bearing with each other's infirmities and weaknesses, comforting each other in trouble, providing in honesty and industry for each other and for their household, praying for each other, and living together the length of their days as heirs of the grace of life.

6.132 ...so remarriage after a divorce granted on grounds explicitly stated in Scripture or implicit in the gospel of Christ may be sanctioned in keeping with his redemptive gospel, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifest.

6.133 Of Marriage and Divorce (PCUS)

1. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, designed of God to last so long as they both shall live.

6.138 The remarriage of divorced persons may be sanctioned by the church, in keeping with the redemptive gospel of Christ, when sufficient penitence for sin and failure is evident, and a firm purpose of and endeavor after Christian marriage is manifested.

Thus, in looking to individuals who “*submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life,*” presbyteries & congregations should examine each candidate on views of the authority of scripture, views about Jesus, & how they interpret passages such as Romans 1. Each might also be asked about Westminster 6.109 and 6.131.

So that is the first change: Ordaining bodies will need to become more aware of the theology of the church. In order to be ordained GLBT people, even those in committed sexual relationships, who answer the ordinations questions candidates, elders, deacons and ministers will need to falsely agree when answering the ordination questions.

C. The OGA FAQ 10-A sheet. included the statement that "A person in a same-gender relationship can [now] be considered for ordination as deacon, elder of Minister of Word and Sacrament". If this conclusion comes directly from the deletion of the old G-6.0106b, then does it follow that the following persons can also be considered:

1. Persons in ANY marriage relationship that are unfaithful, have mistresses, visit prostitutes or engage in sexual affairs?
2. Any person who is unchaste in singleness?

Well of course not. Nowhere in the Constitution of the PCUSA does it say that GLBT people may be ordained. As Westminster Confession states: *They who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty; which is, that, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.*

D. The controlling phrase in the old G-6 "*any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained...*" is removed. Broadly this removes a theological/ethical requirement that was in the "form of government" and moves the controlling theology/ethic into the Part 1 of the constitution: The Book of Confessions.

The Book of Confessions holds the agreed upon theology of the PCUSA. It was created with a 2/3rds majority vote and requires a 2/3rds majority vote of two-General Assemblies and 2/3rds vote of the presbyteries, to change.

The confessions are the standards of the church. They are not guidelines, they are standards and may not be "*ignored or dismissed.*"

G-2.0200 These confessional statements are subordinate standards in the church, a 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. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed.

The controlling phrase in the Old G_6.0106b is what is known as a subscriptionist hermeneutic "*any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained...*"

With that sentence removed, in the new language the controlling question in G-6.0106b is whether the candidate is both committed and able to fulfill all the constitutional questions for office. These include specific references to Christ, the Trinity, and scripture (among other matters). Being guided by the confessions generally.

With this in mind, W-4.4003c. and d. are pertinent:

c. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God?

d. *Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?*

The constitutional question W-4.4003

e. *"Will you be governed by our church's polity, and will you abide by its discipline?"*

requires all officers to conform their behavior to mandatory provisions of the Confessions and Book of Order. They can disagree in belief with a provision, but must govern their behavior accordingly.

E. New Language now includes *"The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation"*

The language of the new G-6.0106b provides broad latitude to examining bodies in determining a candidate's "suitability" for the ordained ministry. A presbytery has the responsibility to make inquiry, guided by scripture and the confessions, to be confident that a candidate satisfies their understanding of what "suitability" means. In this regard, the AIs issued in PJC cases that pertain to the propriety of inquiry into sexual behavior also must be reevaluated.

While "scrupling" might no longer be a required element of an examination, it is always a safe question to ask a candidate if there are aspects of our theology and polity as contained in the Constitution of the Church with which they are in disagreement in belief or nonconformity in practice. *"...ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements."* Moreover, if a governing body has adopted specific behavioral or ethical standards for its officers (which may, if they choose, include a fidelity and chastity provision) there is nothing that prohibits them from asking individual candidates if they are able to live in conformity with those standards. This is explicitly affirmed in the Bush PJC decision from 2008.

The new G-6.0106b would require, however, that an examining body provide each candidate the opportunity to state his or her departure and make a defense of it, and be evaluated on an individual basis.

So, in summary,

1. The scriptural authority and confessional standards still remain.
2. New latitude is given to examining bodies in consideration of individual candidates.
3. No new language regarding Gay or Lesbian persons is added to the constitution. Nor does the constitution allow or mandate ordination.
4. "Scrupling" may no longer be required under the Constitution, but an examining body may still inquire concerning reservations, scruples, and based upon responses, decide accordingly.
5. Governing bodies may adopt and enforce behavioral standards
6. Must evaluate candidates on a case-by-case basis.