

# Questioning Candidates for Ordination and Installation in the New Environment Created by the PUP Report, Part II: The Questions

October 9, 2006

## **Has anything changed as a result of PUP?**

In a recent letter to the Presbyterian Outlook, lawyer and elder Hal Martin of First Church of Escanaba, Michigan, tells of his summer-long reading and rereading of the PUP Report. His conclusion is dismay over the "fear and prevarication" generated by folks like us. Try as he may, he "cannot find the slightest indication of any change in the way things are done by the adoption of the AI [authoritative interpretation]."

Mr. Martin may be right. But there is another side to the coin, so to speak. A pastor wrote in response to that last email I sent that his presbytery recently held a discussion of PUP. A supporter of the PUP Report said that the new authoritative interpretation resulting from PUP Recommendation 5 doesn't change ordination standards, or allow disobedience of the standards. He said that all PUP does is give a "very few" ordaining bodies in "certain sensitive areas" room to ordain people who previously have been barred from ordination by G-6.0106b. The pastor found the speech "the most amazing case of double-speak I've ever witnessed and confirms my suspicion that PUP will actually bring conflict, litigation, division and pollution rather than peace, unity and purity."

The pastor agrees that ordination standards have not changed. But he observes the loophole created by the muddiness of the language. And his firsthand observations are in direct contradiction to elder Martin's theoretical reading of the Report.

## **Ensure a more vigorous examination of candidates**

In my last email to you I mentioned that many sessions and presbyteries are responding to the muddiness of the PUP Report by adopting statements regarding eligibility for ordination and installation by their governing bodies. We in the Coalition are happy to see that happening. It shows a serious level of concern for clarity and intent.

But, more important even than making a statement is proper and effective examination of candidates. The PUP Report stresses the importance of more vigorous examination than we have been used to. The muddiness of the authoritative interpretation of the constitution adopted by the General Assembly makes asking the right questions essential. GAPJC Remedial Case 215-5, [McKittrick v. West End](#), guarantees presbyters the right to ask a candidate any pertinent question. Suppression of questions would render an examination, and any ensuing ordination or installation, irregular and provide a basis for disciplinary action in the church courts.

We urge you to be sure that the examination process of your session and presbytery are sufficient to determine whether a person's answers give assurance of eligibility

for ordination or installation. We suggest that you ask at least the following questions.

***"The Stated Clerk and the General Assembly agree that our current constitutional standards categorically preclude the ordination and/or installation of any person who, without repentance, engages in intimate sexual activity outside the bounds of a marriage of a man and a woman. In light of that understanding of the requirements for ordination are you personally in compliance with the Constitutional boundaries for ordination? And do you intend to continue to be in compliance?\****

***"If ordained, would you advise a session or another ordaining governing body to be in compliance with those standards as long as they are the expressed requirements of the Constitution of the PC (USA)? If part of an examining body, would you vote to ordain/install a candidate not in compliance with the Constitution as thus understood?"***

**\*If these questions are asked of any candidate without additional prior basis, they must be asked of all candidates. The other questions need not be asked of every candidate, but may be.**

In addition, we urge you to read and consider the Essential Tenets paper [<http://www.presbycoalition.org/tenets.pdf>] adopted by San Diego Presbytery. The paper was developed as an aid to effective examinations.

### **How the right questions serve the church well**

Failing to stand and ask the right questions acquiesces to the effort to admit into leadership in our church those who are not spiritually and ethically qualified to serve the Church of Jesus Christ. It is session elders and presbyters who have the responsibility to determine who is and who is not ready to lead God's people. The process is examination. If we fail here—in the opportunity and responsibility of examination—we are responsible for those who lead our denomination. In this we must not shrink back.

So, the first reason to stand and put the questions is to defend the Gospel and preserve the Truth.

The second reason for the right questions is so that the church courts may be brought into play effectively in cases where those who are not eligible are nonetheless ordained or installed. You do not have to be on the winning side in the vote if you have posed the right questions and received the wrong answers. It is then that the provision in the authoritative interpretation comes into play to appeal to the courts of the church. The success of the church court process depends to a great degree on the evidence produced by the examination.

### **Be alert to end runs**

An elder from Cincinnati Presbytery, working with a group of fellow pastors and elders, wrote that she took the recommended questions to her presbytery leadership and told them she would pose the questions to each candidate being presented for examination at the upcoming presbytery meeting. By working with the leadership,

she was successful in getting each question asked and answered with their cooperation.

But her experience has not been without resistance. After that meeting the presbytery assembled a working group charged to agree on the questions that will be asked of candidates.

That means that if you take the initiative to pose the right questions, you may expect an effort to "modify" the questions asked.

### **The situation requires courage, stamina, and follow up**

Don't be deterred by an effort to modify the questions. A person's or a committee's questions do not preclude a presbyter's right to examine. Persevere in getting the right questions asked of the candidate and do not allow yourself to be thwarted. An incomplete examination may be challenged in the courts just as answers to the right questions that reveal unconstitutional practices may be challenged. We want to help you. We're in the process of developing steps to take. Please contact me for assistance.

### **Don't quit without following through on the process**

Please keep in mind that you have the right as a presbyter to challenge in the courts of the church any decision of the body. If your goal is to see the requirements for ordination upheld by the PC(USA), it now becomes your responsibility to stand ready to use the courts in cases where the responses in the examination show the candidate unready or ineligible for ordination or installation.

Martin Luther is attributed with saying:

"If I protest with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on all the battlefield is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that one point."

If we can help you with this process, please contact me. We are working collaboratively with polity experts in the denomination, including experienced former members of the General Assembly's Permanent Judicial Commission. We want to help you accomplish in your own session and presbytery what only you can do. We must not separate this matter of holiness of life from the Gospel itself. Here, in this matter you will face in your session and presbytery, is the little point which the world and the devil are at this moment attacking. Confess Christ!