

F – February 13, 2010

**On Amending G-6.0106b** – from Second Presbyterian Church, Saint Louis.

**The session of Second Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, recommends** that the Presbytery of the Giddings Lovejoy respectfully overture the 219<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (2010) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes: To delete the current text of G-6.0106b, and to substitute the following:

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.

***Rationale***

The integrity of the church demands that those who serve in ordained office meet high standards – always seeking to live according to the life and teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. As we affirm in the words of the Theological Declaration of Barmen:

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death. (8.12)

And yet no person follows perfectly; each of us is entirely dependent for our salvation, and for our growth in faith and obedience, on the grace of Christ:

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:22b-26)

The Office of Theology and Worship in a publication on *Ordination and Authority* correctly points out that the vows of ordination create a hierarchy of authority: obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, guided by the confessions, governed by the church's polity, within a collegial ministry. This demands that the ultimate authority in call is Jesus Christ, and we further recognize that a call to ministry is never the result of our perfection but of Christ's ability to make us useful, even in our imperfection.

The current text of G-6.0106b was added to the *Book of Order* in an attempt to bring closure to the issue of the ordination of persons in same-sex relationships; instead, it has brought continual contention to the Presbyterian Church (USA). It purports to apply even-handedly to all

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candidates, but is overwhelmingly used only to exclude gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons – many of whom exhibit abundant gifts and strong calls to ministry. With its reference to “any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin,” it has rarely or never been honestly applied to any candidate ordained or installed since its adoption.

The PCUSA has no consensus in the interpretation of Scripture on issues of same-sex practice. When convictions about important issues are so different, and so firmly-held, our long-standing Presbyterian commitment to freedom of conscience and mutual forbearance is vital to maintaining our fellowship:

That, while under the conviction of the above principle we think it necessary to make effectual provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other. (G-1.0305)

The proposed amendment would maintain high standards for ordination and installation by renewed focus on the questions candidates must answer, but without imposing a single, highly contested interpretation of Scripture on the whole church.