

**10-A. Gifts and Requirements**  
**On Amending G-6.0106b (Item 06-09)**

The 219th General Assembly (2010) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

**Shall G-6.0106b be amended by striking the current text and inserting new text in its place as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added is shown as italic.]**

**~~“b. 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. 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.”~~**

**Background and Rationale**

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve proposed this amendment to G-6.0106b; three other presbyteries concurred with this overture. The General Assembly Church Orders and Ministry Committee (06), after reviewing more than a dozen overtures related to this subject, sent this recommendation to the General Assembly, which approved this amendment. The presbytery’s rationale included these words:

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 ... trust and obey in life and in death’ (*The Book of Confessions*, 8.11).

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. (Rom. 3:22b–26)

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 (U.S.A.). It purports to apply even-handedly to all candidates, but is overwhelmingly used only to exclude gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered 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 PC(USA) 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. (*Book of Order*, 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. (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 454–455)

### **Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution**

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) advised the 219th General Assembly (2010) that the “... proposed language is clear and not inconsistent with any other provision of the *Book of Order*” (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 456). Their advice also included this rationale:

... This overture seeks to restore the ordination practice and principles affirmed in the Adopting Act of 1729, the paradigm through which the tension between the differing points of view and the unity of the church have been maintained through much of our denomination’s history. Examining bodies are required not only to examine “... *each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office*” but are also required to judge the candidate’s “... *ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003)*” (Item 06-09, emphasis added). These questions require that the candidate affirm the authority of scripture, adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as contained in our confessions, and submit to the polity and discipline of the church. Moreover, the overture specifically states, consistent with the Adopting Act, that the examining bodies “... *shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates...*” (Item 06-09, emphasis added). (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, p. 456)

*Editor’s Note: If the new Form of Government is approved by a majority of the presbyteries and Amendment 10-A is also approved by a majority of the presbyteries, the new language of G-6.0106b will become the language in the new Form of Government at G-2.0104b.*

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The vote of the Church Order and Ministry Committee on the proposed amendment was 36/16/1. The 219th General Assembly (2010), after considering and defeating a substitute motion, approved the committee’s recommendation by a vote of 373/323/4. (*Minutes*, 2010, Part I, pp. 33–34, 47, 454–456) For the full report, go to <http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=2309>.