

**THE PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMISSION
OF THE SYNOD OF THE PACIFIC
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.)**

Eric Parnell, Bruce McIntosh, Cordelia)	
Shieh, Margaret Gelini, Greg Roth, Marsha)	
Roth, Randy Young, and the Session of)	
Walnut Creek Presbyterian Church,)	FINAL DECISION AND ORDER
)	
Complainants,)	Remedial Case 09-04
v.)	
)	
The Presbytery of San Francisco,)	
)	
Respondent.)	
)	

ARRIVAL STATEMENT

This remedial case came before the Synod Permanent Judicial Commission (this Commission or SPJC) filed by the Complainants Eric Parnell *et al.* (Parnell *et al.*), regarding action taken by the Presbytery of San Francisco at its meeting on November 10, 2009.

JURISDICTIONAL STATEMENT

The preliminary questions posed in D-8.0301 were all answered in the affirmative.

HISTORY

This case concerns the action of the Presbytery of San Francisco (Presbytery) with regard to a candidate for the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, Lisa Larges (Candidate). The Candidate was first under care in the Twin Cities Area Presbytery and since April 1997 has been under care of the Presbytery of San Francisco. In April 2004, during a final assessment with the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM), the Candidate affirmed a relationship not in compliance with G-6.0106b. The CPM did not advance the Candidate at that time.

On Dec. 5, 2007, the CPM of the Presbytery of San Francisco conducted a final assessment. At that time the candidate presented a Statement of Departure with regards to G-6.0106b.

On January 15, 2008, following presentation and discussion of the Candidate's departure, Presbytery voted 167-151 to certify the candidate as ready for examination with a departure.

Following the filing of a remedial complaint and trial before the Synod of the Pacific PJC (SPJC) on March 20, 2009, an appeal was heard by the General Assembly PJC (GAPJC) (Mary Holder Naegeli *et al.* v. Presbytery of San Francisco, *Minutes*, 2010, p. pending). On October 30, 2009, the GAPJC affirmed in the Naegeli case the ruling of the SPJC that a departure shall be considered only within the context of a full examination for ordination (G-14.0482) and not in a two-step process.

At its stated meeting on November 10, 2009, the Presbytery of San Francisco took two actions with regard to the Candidate.

By a written ballot vote of 157 to 147, the Presbytery voted to validate the Candidate's call as coordinator of the organization That All May Freely Serve (TAMFS), pending her ordination as Minister of Word and Sacrament.

The Candidate then appeared before the Presbytery, presented her Statement of Faith and her Statement of Departure, and was examined. During her examination, the Candidate verbally affirmed what she had written in her Statement of Departure [Attachment 1]. At the close of the examination and in consideration of her Statements of Faith and Departure, the Presbytery voted by a written ballot vote of 156 to 138 to sustain the trials of ordination for the Candidate and proceed to ordination as Minister of Word and Sacrament.

Before the meeting was adjourned a protest was filed together with a request for a Stay of Enforcement. On December 21, 2009, Complainants filed a remedial complaint against the Presbytery for its action approving the Candidate for ordination with a departure from G-6.0106b. A Decision and Order on Preliminary Questions signed by the Moderator and Clerk of the SPJC was filed January 11, 2010, accepting the case for trial. On the same date, a Stay of Enforcement was entered, pursuant to the request of more than one-third of the commissioners in attendance at the Presbytery (D-6.0103a (1)).

The trial in the case was properly noticed on April 7, 2010, and set for September 23, 2010. Following submission of trial briefs, Complainant requested permission to present new witnesses in rebuttal at the close of Respondent's case. The request was denied by a majority vote of the SPJC. Subsequently, on September 21, 2010, Complainant filed a Reply to Respondent's Trial Brief, to which Respondent objected. The SPJC voted to allow the Reply Brief and authorized the Respondent to file a supplemental brief at, or before commencement of trial. The SPJC received this brief on September 23, prior to commencement of trial.

The SPJC denied the request of additional parties to be added to the list of complainants as "joinders." The *Book of Order* makes no provision for "joinders." All who have standing to file a complaint must do so within forty-five days of the alleged irregularity.

The SPJC examined the contents of "Envelope C," the record provided by the Presbytery of confidential materials from the Candidate's CPM file. This was done in accordance with the

GAPJC ruling in the Naegeli case. The SPJC voted to include the contents of “Envelope C” in the trial record. Both parties were admonished to respect the confidential nature of the file. They were also asked to provide notice to the SPJC of any intent to use or refer to materials from “Envelope C” during the trial so that its confidential character could be protected.

At the commencement of trial, the SPJC voted to exclude the use by observers of all electronic devices, cameras, recording devices, and cell phones during the trial. For the sake of order and decorum, departing observers were not allowed re-entry to the trial room except during periodic recesses in the proceedings.

APPEARANCES

Complainants were represented by Bruce McIntosh and Mary Naegeli. Respondents were represented by Committee of Counsel: Doug Nave, Pamela Byers, and Robin Crawford.

SPECIFICATIONS OF ERROR

Specification of Error No. 1. The Presbytery erred when it voted to approve the ordination of candidate Lisa Larges, because her refusal to abide by the constitutional requirement of G-6.0106b was equivalent to answering “No” to the fifth constitutional question for ordination, “Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline?” (W-4.4003e), thus rendering her ineligible.

This specification of error is not sustained.

The Knox Authoritative Interpretation (GA, *Minutes*, 2008, 42, 43, 379, Item 05-12), has interpreted the Constitution to apply the requirements of G-6.0108 equally to all ordination standards. This implies the potential for a scruple on any ordination standard. In such a case, a qualified “yes” would necessarily be an acceptable answer to an ordination question.

Specification of Error No. 2. The Presbytery erred when it found that the Candidate’s departure from G-6.0106b, a church-wide requirement for ordination, was not a serious departure from Reformed faith or polity.

This specification of error is not sustained.

As the most recent interpretation of a provision of the *Book of Order* (G-13.0103r), the Knox AI makes clear that the Candidate was within her rights to state a departure from any ordination standard:

“the requirements of G-6.0108 apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A)” (Knox AI).

Furthermore, recent Authoritative Interpretations from both the General Assembly and the GAPJC reinforce the language of G-6.0108b that the decision whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity “ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves (G-1.0301; G-1.0302).” For example, the GAPJC ruled in Bush that

(t)he ordaining body must examine the candidate individually. The examining body is best suited to make decisions about the candidate’s fitness for office, and factual determinations by examining bodies are entitled to deference by higher governing bodies in any review process (Randall Bush *et al.* v. Presbytery of Pittsburgh, *Minutes*, 2008, p. 319).

Similarly, the Knox AI affirmed that

G-6.0108 requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief and practice that a candidate may declare during examination (Knox AI).

In the absence of a preponderance of evidence showing that Presbytery erred in its decision to accept the candidate’s departure, this SPJC accepts the Presbytery’s decision that the candidate’s departure did not constitute a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity.

The Presbytery has a long-standing relationship with the Candidate. Given the candidate’s stated intention to declare a departure, the Presbytery developed a discernment and ordination process in accordance with the 2006 PUP AI (GA, *Minutes*, 2006, 28-29, 523, Item 06-1) and the 2008 Knox AI. This SPJC finds that the Presbytery conducted a reasonable, responsible, prayerful and deliberate examination of the candidate (PUP and Knox). The Presbytery acted in compliance with the Knox AI as it confined its consideration to the Candidate and her departure. As an individual, case-by-case examination, it did not attempt to declare a greater policy or proscriptive proclamation.

Specification of Error No. 3. The Presbytery erred when it granted to the candidate a departure from G-6.0106b, a mandatory church-wide ordination standard, because such an act obstructs the constitutional governance of the church.

This specification of error is not sustained.

This SPJC accepts the Presbytery’s decision that the candidate’s departure did not constitute a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity. Therefore, the Presbytery’s decision to accept the candidate’s departure does not obstruct the constitutional governance of the church. (See also rationale for Specification of Error No. 2.)

Specification of Error No. 4. The Presbytery erred when it granted to the candidate a departure from G-6.0106b, a mandatory church-wide standard, because departures can only be granted with regard to the interpretation of Scripture, not conduct.

This specification of error is not sustained.

The presumption contained within the specification of error regarding the premise that departures can only be granted with regard to Scripture and not conduct (under G-60108) is directly contradicted by the Knox AI. Because the specification is not sustained by virtue of the erroneous premise, it is unnecessary to address in this specification of error whether or not the Knox AI may be applied to G-6.0106b.

Specification of Error No. 5. The Presbytery erred when it granted to the candidate a departure from G-6.0106b, a mandatory church-wide ordination standard, because it exceeds the bounds of freedom of conscience for one who seeks to hold office in the PC(USA).

This specification of error is not sustained.

“The requirements of G-6.0108 apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Knox AI).

The Knox AI makes clear it is not beyond the bounds of freedom of conscience in G-6.0108 to declare a departure from ordination standards. The Presbytery of San Francisco found that the Candidate’s departure was within the bounds of G-6.0108 and the SPJC found no evidence that the Presbytery’s decision was in error.

COMMENT

This Commission believes its Decision and Order reflects the discussion and disagreement occurring within the PC(USA) surrounding the issue of ordination standards. The intersections of the Constitution, legal precedents and authoritative bodies outline a complicated map by which this Commission and other regulatory authorities are asked to navigate. Given the importance of these issues to the instant parties, this Commission and the larger church body, we look forward to the GAPJC’s guidance and direction. This Commission joins with the parties of Bierschwale II in imploring the GAPJC to rule on the continued authority of Bush v. Presbytery of Pittsburg (*Minutes* 218-10, p.319) in light of the 2008 Authoritative Interpretation on G-6.0108b.

This Commission would also suggest that the season is ripe with opportunity for discussion and action to clarify the manner in which the Constitution is changed and interpreted.

DECISION AND ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that the decision of the Presbytery to ordain the Candidate, with a departure, is affirmed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that, by unanimous vote and in anticipation of an appeal being filed in this case, this Commission does hereby file a Stay of Enforcement in continuation of the Stay filed originally by the Presbytery of San Francisco (D-6.0103a(2)). This stay will expire in 45 days of the receipt of this decision by the parties, if no appeal is filed, or upon the receipt of the decision of the GAPJC if appealed.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery of San Francisco report this Decision to the Presbytery at its first meeting, that the Presbytery enter the full Decision upon its minutes, and that an excerpt from those minutes showing entry of the Decision be sent to the Stated Clerk of the Synod. (D-7.0701)

Dissenting Opinion of Donald Baird, Melvin Khachigian, Jean McClean, and Kenneth M. Robbins for Specifications of Error Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 5

Specification of Error No. 1. The Presbytery erred when it voted to approve the ordination of candidate Lisa Larges, because her refusal to abide by the constitutional requirement of G-6.0106b was equivalent to answering “No” to the fifth constitutional question for ordination, “Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline?” (W-4.4003e), thus rendering her ineligible.

This specification of error is sustained.

When the Candidate responded to the fifth constitutional question for ordination, “I will abide by the Church’s discipline and polity except for G-6.0106b as stated in the departure I have declared” she declared her unwillingness to comply with such a requirement. The word “except” is to separate one from a conclusion. “Except” comes from the Latin *exceptare*, meaning “to take out,” or “leave out” and means “to exclude.” By these definitions from Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, it is the Candidate’s intention to exclude or leave out her compliance with G-6.0106b. This is, in fact, to answer “No” to the fifth constitutional question. Such exclusion is in direct contradiction to the fifth constitutional question, the only ordination question “required” by the Constitution. One cannot say “except” without saying “No” at the same time.

Specification of Error No. 2. The Presbytery erred when it found that the Candidate’s departure from G-6.0106b, a church-wide requirement for ordination, was not a serious departure from Reformed faith or polity.

This specification of error is sustained.

The Candidate's departure from G-6.0106b is a serious departure from both Reformed Faith and polity. See rationale for Specification of Error No. 3.

Specification of Error No. 3. The Presbytery erred when it granted to the candidate a departure from G-6.0106b, a mandatory church-wide ordination standard, because such an act obstructs the constitutional governance of the church.

This specification of error is sustained.

Rationale for specifications of errors 2 and 3.

Reformed Faith finds its ultimate authority in Scripture. All of the witnesses at the trial (Dr. John Thompson, Dr. Robert Gagnon, Dr. Dale Brunner, Dr. Jack Rogers and Dr. Mark Achtemeier) concurred that Scripture is the highest authority in the church in the plain meaning of its language. They differed in what that meaning is and how it is to be applied. From the testimony heard we conclude that the preponderance and emphasis of scripture supports the conclusion that the unanimous witness of both Old and New Testament is that fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness are Reformed mandates to be applied to those called to leadership in the Church. "Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable..." [I Timothy 3:2]. Many other texts, Old and New Testaments, confirm this conclusion, such as Genesis 2:24, Genesis 18:20ff, Mark 10:10, Romans 1:26-31, I Corinthians 6:9-10, Jude 7, to mention only a few. No texts suggest that fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness are in violation of Scripture or that infidelity in marriage or sexual activity in singleness are consistent and supported in Scripture.

For the Candidate to separate her actions from Biblical truth is a serious departure from Reformed faith. "That truth is in order to goodness; and the great touchstone of truth, its tendency to promote holiness, according to our Savior's rule, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' And that no opinion can be either more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are. On the contrary, we are persuaded that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise, it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it" (G-1.0304). This is one of the "historic principles of Church order...basic to our Presbyterian concept and system of church government" (G-1.0304).

With respect to polity, this case depends on the answer to the question of how G-6.0108, as interpreted by the PUP AI, informs or interacts with the requirements for ordination set forth in G-6.0106b.

Prior to enactment of the PUP AI, section G-6.0108 spoke for itself requiring generally that officers of the church adhere to the "essentials of The Reformed faith and polity as expressed in the *Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government."

Exceptions to that adherence, which we refer to as departures, are recognized with three caveats (G-6.0108a):

- a) The departure may not be serious
- b) It may not infringe on the rights and views of others
- c) It may not obstruct the constitutional governance of the church.

The section also adds a further constraint limiting the exercise of conscience by requiring that it be “captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church” (G-6.0108b). We find that the “standards of the Church” expressed in G-6.0108b must include the “historic confessional standards of the church” expressed in G-6.0106b.

Following the adoption of the PUP AI in 2006, a process was established to deal with the limited departures recognized in G-6.0108. Simply put, ordaining bodies were required to determine:

- a) Whether any candidate for ordination and/or installation has departed from scriptural and constitutional standards; and
- b) Whether any departure constitutes a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity.

In this case, the facts are clear and undisputed. The Candidate for ordination to the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament appeared upon the floor of the Presbytery of San Francisco, and during her ordination examination, declared a departure pursuant to G-6.0108 using the process described in the PUP AI, specifically in section c(2).

In her Statement of Departure, the Candidate declared that she was bound by her conscience to reject the authority of G-6.0106b, with respect to 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.” She expressly declared, “By my conscience, faith, and theology, I cannot and will not accept the terms of this standard”(Attachment 1).

Each party to this matter urges divergent scriptural and constitutional interpretations but neither party contests the operative facts of this case. In a like manner, neither party asserts any deficiency in the process of the presbytery in arriving at its decision in this matter.

We are therefore squarely faced with the determination as a matter of law or polity whether the departure of the Candidate was a serious failure to adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith as expressed in the constitution.

We find that it was.

When it comes to the living of one’s life there may be considerable divergence of opinion of what it means to live one’s life “in obedience to scripture and conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.” We may not have, nor may it be desirable to have, an exhaustive list of what those standards are. But we know one of them. The second sentence of G-6.0106b emphatically declares that it is the “*requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman or chastity in singleness*” [italics added]. The

language of the Constitution specifically and explicitly declares that requirement to be among the historic confessional standards of the church.

The candidate in this case may be honest and sincere in rejecting the authority of this provision of the *Book of Order* but she has rejected it nevertheless. Nothing within the language of G-6.0106b would suggest that any part of it is optional. Indeed, it is characterized as a church-wide constitutional requirement to ordination.

Nothing in G-6.0108 changes that. Indeed, sub-paragraph (a) of that section prevents any departure from the standards of the church if the departure obstructs the constitutional governance of the church. There is likely no greater obstruction to the governance of the church than a refusal by candidates for ordination, the future leaders of the church, to be bound by sections of the constitution which require adherence. To grant a departure from adherence to G-6.0106b, in the case at hand, would further obstruct the constitutional government of the church because it would have the effect of an intentional non-enforcement of a mandatory provision of the constitution.

We find that any refusal to be bound in one's action by the provisions of G-6.0106b is, by the very nature of its specificity:

- 1) A failure to adhere to essentials of Reformed polity barring the candidate from ordination (PUP AI c(2)); and
- 2) A serious obstruction of the constitutional governance of the church (G-6.0108); and
- 3) A refusal to be bound by the requirement to lead one's life in conformity to the historic standards of the church (G-6.0106b).

G-6.0106b uses very strong and restrictive language in its expectations regarding the compliance of candidates for ordination regarding fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness, "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" (G-6.0106b) [emphasis added]. The words "requirement" and "shall not" are words meant to totally restrict a particular activity and are not open to amendment except by following the proscribed process of changing the *Book of Order*. The Knox AI concludes, "Section G-60108 requires examining bodies to give prayerful and careful consideration, on an individual, case-by-case basis, to any departure from an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice that a candidate may declare during examination." This AI appears, on its face, to be in direct contradiction to the clear wording of the Constitution (G-6.0106b). G-6.0106b and the Knox AI cannot both be honored in this case. Either "fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness" are specifically "required" of those being ordained or they are activities that can be "departed from" with a presbytery's concurrence.

Principles of polity would dictate that a constitution cannot be self contradictory, for example, veto its own content. It may not be necessary to construe the Knox AI to be always in contradiction to the constitution. As we have indicated above, neither the PUP AI in section c2 nor G-6.0108b authorize a departure from what is defined as the historical standards of the church. We know that at least one of these standards is the requirement set forth in G-6.0106b. Therefore, no departure with respect to G-6.0106b could be authorized, even under the Knox AI.

Within the *Book of Order* is found clear and mandatory language proscribing a “requirement” for ordination. Some of the references in the *Book of Order* are: “permissible but not required,” some are “commended,” some are “strongly commended” and some are “mandated.” (Preface to the *Book of Order*). That which is “mandated,” i.e. uses words such as “shall” and “is to be/are to be,” cannot be “un-mandated” by an Authoritative Interpretation, nor can it be ignored by a judicatory such as a presbytery. G-6.0106b is clearly mandatory language and expected to be applied to the whole church. To give authority to any single judicatory, whether a Session or a General Assembly, is to undermine the very principles of Presbyterian polity, vis á vie. “The particular churches of the Presbyterian Church (USA) wherever they are, taken collectively, constitute one church” (G-4.0300). To have mandatory language, such as that in G-6.0106b, excused by a presbytery is to obstruct the constitutional governance of the church and render the Constitution of the Church helpless and un-defendable.

Specification of Error No. 5. The Presbytery erred when it granted to the candidate a departure from G-6.0106b, a mandatory church-wide ordination standard, because it exceeds the bounds of freedom of conscience for one who seeks to hold office in the PC(USA).

This specification of error is sustained.

Section G-6.0108b says in pertinent part, with reference to those seeking ordination, that “one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body,” as we have demonstrated above. There are some standards of the church which are also referred to as “historic confessional standards” (G-6.0106b). Because those particular confessional standards may not be waived, to suggest that one rejects such historical standards based on conscience, exceeds the bounds of conscience as described in G-6.0106b.

ABSENCES

Joan Fong, Commissioner from the Presbytery of San Francisco, was recused and took no part in the deliberations of this case. At the time of this hearing, there was not a Commissioner from the Presbytery of Redwoods.

**COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY
Presbytery of San Francisco
November 10, 2009**

**Lisa Larges' Statement of Departure from G-6.0106b
and Affirmation of Essentials of Faith and Polity**

"The Church of Jesus Christ is the provisional demonstration of what God intends for all of humanity. The Church is called to be a sign in and for the world of the new reality which God has made available to people in Jesus Christ. The new reality revealed in Jesus Christ is the new humanity, a new creation, a new beginning for human life in the world: Sin is forgiven. Reconciliation is accomplished. The dividing walls of hostility are torn down. The Church is the body of Christ, both in its corporate life and in the lives of its individual members, and is called to give shape and substance to this truth." G-3.0200
Inclusive

In gratitude for the Church and its particular expression as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), for the ways in which it has taught me of the love of God, of the work of salvation in Jesus Christ and of the demands on our lives to love and serve one another and this sweet world; for all that the church has meant in my life, and in hope for all that the church can and must be in a world desperate to know of God's love, grace, and mercy: therefore, out of gratitude, love and hope for the church, I am compelled by my conscience and charged by my faith to firmly, clearly, and in every way declare that the provisions at G-6.0106b are a mar upon the church and a stumbling block to its mission. As a matter of faith, conscience and integrity I can neither actively concur nor passively submit to this provision, and as a candidate for Minister of Word and Sacrament I submit to the Presbytery of San Francisco through its Committee on Ministry this statement of departure.

Insofar as *"The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned,"*¹ I offer the following rationale which has led me to conclude that:

- a. the standards set forth at G-6.0106b do not express essentials of Reformed faith and polity
- b. further, the standards expressed at G-6.0106b are indeed contrary to essentials of Reformed faith and polity and therefore
- c. to actively concur or passively submit to the standards expressed at G-6.0106b would require that I should elevate a flawed standard above standards of faith and polity which I understand to be essential.

Rationale

1. Jesus Christ alone is the authority to which all other authorities are subordinate. This faith claim is essential to our faith and polity and the joy and substance of our witness. The preliminary principles that head our "Form of Government" assert:

"All power in heaven and earth is given to Jesus Christ by Almighty God, who raised Christ from the dead and set him above all rule and authority, all power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. God has put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and has made Christ Head of the Church, which is his body." G-1.0100a

¹ See at G-6.0108b

And

“In affirming with the earliest Christians that Jesus is Lord, the Church confesses that he is its hope and that the Church, as Christ’s body, is bound to his authority and thus free to live in the lively, joyous reality of the grace of God.”

G-1.0100d.

By this essential of our faith and polity, officers in this communion promise to “...*trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church.*”² All other vows upheld by officers in this church flow from this first declaration of obedience to Christ.

Yet the provision at G-6.0106b sets a contrary standard: “*Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture ...*” Our tradition upholds the promise that Scripture is the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word and author and perfecter of our faith. To lead a life “*in obedience to Scripture*” sets the authority of Scripture above the authority of Christ and returns us to life under the law. This misstatement of our theological understanding of Christ’s preeminence is my primary scruple regarding this provision, and the errors found in the remainder of the section at G-6.0106b arise, I believe, from this initial misconception.

2. The provision further states that “*all who are called to office in the church shall live a life ... in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church.*”

Our Constitution defines the functions of the Confessions at G-2.0100b:

“These statements identify the church as a community of people known by its convictions as well as by its actions. They guide the church in its study and interpretation of the Scriptures; they summarize the essence of Christian tradition; they direct the church in maintaining sound doctrines; they equip the church for its work of proclamation.”

In the requirement that officers of the church be conformed to the historic Confessional standards of the church, the provision at G-6.0106b misstates the proper use and function of the Confessions. Scripture calls us to be imitators of Christ. To conform our lives to a lesser standard trespasses on both the authority of Christ and Scripture.

The fourth question put to all officers of the church expresses the right ordering of authority within the Reformed tradition: “*Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?*”³

3. The text of G-6.0106b continues by singling out one particular derived standard from the historic confessional standards, namely, “*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.*”

By my conscience, faith and theology I cannot and will not accept the terms of this standard.

- It deliberately and intentionally denies the dignity and lived experience of same gender loving people.

² See at W-4.4003a

³ W-4.4003d

- In so doing it raises one category of persons, heterosexual persons, above all others and thereby makes an idol of heterosexuality.
- Its formulation is based on a certain interpretation of Scripture to the exclusion of other interpretations, which are as sound, held by faithful Christians within our church. ⁴
- It imposes a false and impossible choice upon same gender loving persons by not recognizing faithful covenanted relationships between two persons of the same gender.
- It puts the church and its officers in an untenable position by failing to acknowledge the expanded definition of legal marriage as a “*contract between two persons*,” as held at this writing, in the jurisdictions of six U.S. states.
- By elevating this standard above any others it has caused our church to be mired in inappropriate and scandalous inquiries into the sexual acts of persons seeking Ordained office.
- It removes sex from the context of intimacy and covenantal relationship and denies the fullness and richness of committed loving relationships between persons of the same gender.
- It denies the full humanity of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender persons by focusing solely and exclusively on one part of their lives.
- It distracts the church from seeking a deeper understanding of sexual ethics, so that sexual misconduct by officers of this church continues at an alarming rate.
- It puts upon the door of the church an “*Unwelcome*” sign for all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons and their families.
- It props up and provides religious cover for acts of violence committed against gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.
- It has caused schism within our church by driving out gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons who cannot fellowship within a church which regards them categorically as inferior.
- It is a scandal to the Gospel and destroys the peace, unity and purity of the church.

In my own life, while I affirm the moral values of fidelity and chastity, I will not and can not claim chastity in singleness unless and until fidelity between two persons of the same gender within a covenantal relationship is recognized.

I will not submit in any way to a reduction of who I am as a Lesbian to language about “*practice*,” nor will I participate in perpetrating such a false and demeaning dichotomy upon any other member of this church.

⁴ “The interpretation of Scripture, we confess, does not belong to any private or public person, nor yet to any Kirk for pre-eminence or precedence, personal or local, which it has above others, but pertains to the Spirit of God by whom the Scriptures were written. When controversy arises about the right understanding of any passage or sentence of Scripture, or for the reformation of any abuse within the Kirk of God, we ought not so much to ask what men have said or done before us, as what the Holy Spirit uniformly speaks within the body of the Scriptures and what Christ Jesus himself did and commanded. ... We dare not receive or admit any interpretation which is contrary to any principle point of our faith, or to any other plain text of the Scripture, or to the rule of love.”
Book of Confessions 3.18

4. The text of G-6.0106b concludes with this mandate: “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.”

It is an essential of Reformed faith that sin is a condition of our being and not a bill of particulars. There is no assertion more foundational to our Reformed understanding of Scripture than that God, who alone knows our hearts, is alone our judge. The examination of one’s conscience and contrition for particular sins arises out of gratitude for God’s astounding and unending grace. While, under the authority of Scripture, we are accountable to one another for guidance and admonition, there is, nonetheless, no test of righteousness that might in any way impinge on the humble, simple, and direct acceptance of the gift of God’s incontrovertible, unsurpassable and all-sufficient grace through Jesus the Christ. This concluding sentence at G-6.0106b reflects an incomplete and misleading formulation of the understanding of sin and repentance within our tradition, and leads back to a kind of “*works righteousness*.”

Conclusion

I affirm with joy the standards as expressed at G-6.0106a and believe them to be a sufficient expression of both the gifts and the requirements for officers of the church.

I can and I will affirm with joy all the questions for ordination found at W-4.4003.

I believe that as a candidate called to serve in this Church as Minister of Word and Sacrament, nothing in my faith or in my manner of life departs from the essentials of Reformed faith and polity.

Finally insofar as “*the decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity ... ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves*”⁵ I hereby submit this statement and seek with you the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

Lisa Larges, December 2007, Revised, September, 2009

⁵ See at G-6.0108b

DATE

Dated this 25th day of September, 2010

Signed _____

Ruth Goldthwaite, Moderator
Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

James Bennett, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

CERTIFICATES

We certify that the foregoing is a full and correct copy of the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in Remedial Case No. 09-04, Parnell *et al.*, Complainants, v. The Presbytery of San Francisco, Respondent, made and announced at Oakland, CA, on September 25, 2010.

Ruth Goldthwaite, Moderator
Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

James Bennett, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

I certify that I did transmit a certified copy of the foregoing to the following persons by certified mail, return receipt requested, directing Wendy G. Warner to deposit it in the United States mail at Modesto, CA, on September 27, 2010.

The Rev. Mary Holder Naegeli
535 Wimbledon Road
Walnut Creek, California 94598

The Rev. Katherine Runyeon, Clerk
The Presbytery of San Francisco
2024 Durant Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704-1587

The Rev. Wendy Warner
Stated Clerk
Synod of the Pacific
200 Kentucky St, Suite B
Petaluma, CA 94952-3825

The Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

I further certify that I did transmit a certified copy of the foregoing to the Stated Clerk of the Synod of the Pacific by delivering it in person to Wendy G. Warner on September 25, 2010.

James Bennett, Clerk
Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific

I certify that I received a certified copy of the foregoing, that it is a full and correct copy of the decision of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Synod of the Pacific, made on September 25, 2010, in Remedial Case No. 09-04, Parnell *et al.*, Complainants, v. The Presbytery of San Francisco, Respondent.

Dated at Oakland, CA on September 25, 2010.

Wendy G. Warner, Stated Clerk
Synod of the Pacific