



May 2011

To congregations of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

*May grace, mercy, and peace be yours in abundance (Jude 1:2).*

The debate about ordination standards has been a Presbyterian family struggle for much of the last three decades. We have sought to find that place where every congregation and every member, deacon, elder, and minister of the Word and Sacrament can share their gifts in ministry while, at the same time, the integrity of every congregation, member, deacon, elder, and minister is respected.

This year, the conversation has focused on Amendment 10-A that was passed by the 219th General Assembly (2010) and sent to presbyteries for approval. While we wait for official tallies, it appears that 87 presbyteries will approve 10-A during the week of May 9, which is the majority required for approval.

If this becomes official, the new language outlining the gifts and requirements for ordained service will say 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.*

This decision begins with an unequivocal affirmation that ordained office will continue to be rooted in each deacon, elder, and minister's "joyful submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life."

This action also has important effects on our life together as a church, namely:

- in keeping with our historic principles of church order, each session and presbytery will continue to determine the suitability of individuals seeking ordination within its bounds.
- persons in a same-gender relationship may be considered for ordination and/or installation as deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament within the PC(USA); and
- all other churchwide standards for ordination remain unchanged.

Reactions to this change will span a wide spectrum. Some will rejoice, while others will weep. Those who rejoice will see the change as an action, long in coming, that makes the PC(USA) an inclusive church that recognizes and receives the gifts for ministry of all those who feel called to ordained office. Those who weep will consider this change one that compromises biblical authority and acquiesces to present culture. The feelings on both sides run deep.

However, as Presbyterians, we believe that the only way we will find God's will for the church is by seeking it together – worshiping, praying, thinking, and serving alongside one another. We are neighbors and colleagues, friends and family. Most importantly, we are all children of God, saved and taught by Jesus Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

We hold to the strong affirmation that all of us are bound together as the church through Jesus Christ our Lord. "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all," Paul wrote to the Ephesians (4:5-6).

It is Jesus Christ who calls individuals to ordained ministries, and all those who are called to ordained office continue to acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all and Head of the church. It is this same Jesus Christ who is the foundation of our faith and to whom we cling.

No doubt, there will be several news stories and other reports about this change in the days ahead. A number of resources, including frequently asked questions and liturgical resources, are available for you at <http://oga.pcusa.org>. In addition, for those who wish to comment on or inquire further about 10-A, please contact [ga.amendments@pcusa.org](mailto:ga.amendments@pcusa.org) or call (888) 728-7228, ext. 8202.

We invite you to join us in prayer:

***Almighty God, we give thanks for a rich heritage of faithful witnesses to the gospel throughout the ages. We offer gratitude not only for those who have gone before us, but for General Assembly commissioners and presbyters across the church who have sought diligently to discern the mind of Christ for the church in every time and place, and especially in this present time.***

***May your Spirit of peace be present with us in difficult decisions, especially where relationships are strained and the future is unclear. Open our ears and our hearts to listen to and hear those with whom we differ. Most of all, we give thanks for Jesus Christ, our risen Savior and Lord, who called the Church into being and who continues to call us to follow his example of loving our neighbor and working for the reconciliation of the world. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.***



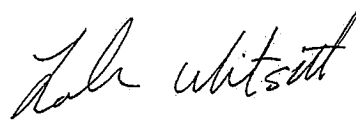
Gradye Parsons  
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly



Cynthia Bolbach  
Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)



Linda Valentine  
Executive Director  
General Assembly Mission Council



Landon Whitsitt  
Vice Moderator, 219th General Assembly (2010)

**Frequently Asked Questions**  
**Amendment 10-A and ordination standards**  
**Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

**What has happened?**

In July 2010, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a proposed amendment (10-A) to the *Book of Order*, part of the PC(USA) Constitution, regarding ordination standards. As with all constitutional changes, Amendment 10-A required ratification by a majority (87) of the PC(USA)'s 173 presbyteries (regional bodies) for it to become part of the *Book of Order*. While the Office of the General Assembly awaits official tallies, it appears that the minimum number of 87 presbyteries will be reached the week of May 9.

**What will change?**

The following provision that is currently in the *Book of Order* (G-6.0106b) will be changed:

*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.*

The new language (Amendment 10-A) will read:

*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.*

**What does this mean?**

- Ordaining bodies continue to retain the right and responsibility to determine their own memberships. A congregation continues to elect their deacons and elders and the session examines them for suitability of office. Likewise, presbyteries examine individuals for suitability to be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament.
- A person in a same-gender relationship can be considered for ordination as deacon, elder, or Minister of the Word and Sacrament.
- All other churchwide standards for ordination remain unchanged. (There was never a prohibition against a person being ordained based on sexual orientation, as long as that person was celibate.)

**What's next?**

Amendment 10-A will take effect on July 10, 2011 (one year after the adjournment of the last assembly). Already, the change has energized many conversations at all levels across the PC(USA) about how we can best enable the gifts of those called to service in Christ's church and have mutual respect for each other's integrity. In addition, sessions and presbyteries will review their processes for examination.

**For more detailed information and additional resources:** <http://oga.pcusa.org>

Includes links to:      Pastoral letter to congregations of the PC(USA) – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Liturgical resources – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Advisory Opinion #24 – also in Spanish and Korean  
                                 Various video podcasts – including one in Spanish and one in Korean

## LITURGICAL RESOURCES

*To be considered for use after the passage of Amendment 10-A*

### SENTENCES OF SCRIPTURE

As many of you as were baptized into Christ  
have clothed yourselves with Christ.

*Galatians 3:27*

**There is one body and one Spirit,  
just as we were called to the one hope of our calling,  
one Lord, one faith, one baptism,  
one God and Father of all,  
who is above all and through all and in all.**

*Ephesians 4:4-6*

### STATEMENT ON THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

We are called by God  
to be the Church of Jesus Christ,  
a sign in the world today  
of the new life that God intends for all.  
In our life together  
we are to display the new reality  
that sin is forgiven,  
reconciliation accomplished,  
and the dividing walls of hostility torn down.

*Based on Book of Order  
G-3.0200 - .0401*

As the living body of Christ,  
the church is called  
to proclaim the good news of salvation,  
to present the claims of the gospel on people's lives,  
and to demonstrate Christ's love in service to the world.  
We are called to undertake this mission  
even at the risk of life,  
trusting God in all things.  
In faith we embrace  
a new openness to what God is doing in our time,  
a renewed obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and a new joy in our common worship and work.

Today we reclaim our historic calling  
and remember the great ends of the church:

**The proclamation of the gospel  
for the salvation of humankind;  
the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship  
of the children of God;  
the maintenance of divine worship;**

*Book of Order  
G-1.0200*

**the preservation of the truth;  
the promotion of social righteousness;  
and the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven  
to the world.**

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Occasional Services* (Geneva Press, 1999) 92.

### **PRAYERS**

*This prayer might be included among the Prayers of the People or used at a session meeting.  
It would be especially appropriate for an elder to lead the prayer.*

Gracious God,  
pour out your Spirit of power and truth  
upon the whole church  
that we may be for you a holy people,  
baptized to serve you in the world.  
Sustain this congregation in ministry.  
Ground us in the gospel,  
secure our hope in Jesus Christ,  
strengthen our service to the outcast,  
and increase our love for one another.  
Show us the transforming power  
of your grace in our life together,  
that we may be servants of the gospel,  
offering a compelling witness in the world  
to the good news of Christ Jesus our Lord.  
**Amen.**

From the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) *Book of Occasional Services* (Geneva Press, 1999) 30.

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)**

Merciful God,  
through your Spirit of grace and power  
you have called us together as the body of Christ.  
Yet we have fallen short of demonstrating our visible oneness in Christ.  
We have damaged your church, created factions,  
and caused harm by stereotyping and demeaning one another.

Forgive us, Lord.  
In this time of change within the church,  
draw us closer to you and to one another.  
Help us to look beyond our differences  
to see our common calling in and through you  
to proclaim the gospel in word and deed  
to a world in desperate need.  
We pray in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

## A BIDDING PRAYER

Eternal and almighty God,  
we give thanks for your Son, Jesus Christ,  
our Lord and Savior.  
You raised him from the grave  
to reign in glory with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever.

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ around the world,  
and especially for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).  
May all that we do and all that we say  
give glory to the risen Christ.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for congregations engaged in faithful service and ministry.  
Give them joy and gladness  
as they love the world you so love.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for Christians who serve in a multitude of ways,  
that they may live out their callings with inspiration and purpose.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for those called and set apart for special service to your church,  
that they may discern the leading of your Spirit  
and guide your people with wisdom and humility.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for all members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in this season.  
May those who have opposed this change, and those who welcome it,  
set aside disagreements to remember that you have called us together  
for salvation and service.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

We pray for our church as we face the future together,  
that even in days of uncertainty, we might boldly proclaim  
that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Now to the One who by the power at work within us  
is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine,  
**to God be glory in the church  
and in Christ Jesus to all generations,  
forever and ever. Amen.**