

G-6.0106b

Updated April 2009.

The Stated Clerk continues to be asked about the effect of and practice surrounding G-6.0106b. The standards set out in G-6.0106b apply to all sexual behavior outside of marriage, whether that behavior is heterosexual or homosexual. The focus is on practice, not belief.

It is very clear that a person may not be excluded from membership or participation in the worship and program of the congregation, or from ordination to office because of sexual orientation or other class or condition.

The 190th General Assembly (1978) was explicit on this point: “The repentant¹ homosexual person who ... finds God's power to control his or her [sexual] desires ... can certainly be ordained, all other qualifications being met.”² The 210th General Assembly (1998) reaffirmed that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed “... not to exclude anyone categorically in considering those called to ordained service in the church, but to consider the lives and behaviors of candidates as individuals.”³ In 2003, the GA Permanent Judicial Commission reaffirmed that position when it said, “Sexual orientation ... alone is insufficient to make a person ineligible for ordination or installation.”⁴

For the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as a whole, the discussion since the adoption of G-6.0106b in 1997 has considerably increased the awareness of the manner of life expected of deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The adoption of G-6.0106b did not alter the process of examination or the accountability of officers. The evaluation of an individual's practice continues to be the responsibility of the governing body in which that person serves or is being prepared to serve. Each committee, commission, or governing body determines its own process and draws its own conclusions.

This decision may be subject to review by the governing body that has appointed the committee or commission, by a formal process of administrative review (G-9.0408–G-9.0410) or by the filing of a remedial complaint (D-6.0202). In 2006 the General Assembly emphasized this in approving portions of the report from the Peace, Unity and Purity Task Force: “... Whether the examination and the ordination and installation decision comply with the constitution of the PC(USA), and whether the ordaining/installing body has conducted its examination reasonably, responsibly,

¹ The 215th General Assembly (2003) was requested to define “repent” and chose instead to point the Church back to our Confessions. See *Minutes*, 2003, Item 04-07, Overture 03-12.

²UPC *Minutes*, 1978, Part I, p. 264.

³*Minutes*, 1998, Part I, p. 68.

⁴ *Hart, et al. v. Presbytery of Redwoods (Minutes, 2003, Part I, #215-8, p. 277).*

prayerfully, and deliberately in deciding to ordain a candidate for church office is subject to review by higher governing bodies.”⁵

There currently exists across the Church wide disagreement about a number of issues surrounding ordination and installation practice under G-6.0106b. Some of these issues are addressed below.

A. Chastity and Celibacy

There exists a debate about whether the word “chastity” in the text of G-6.0106b is equivalent to the word “celibacy.” There appears to be no consensus in that debate on the clear meaning of either word. The 215th General Assembly (2003) again declined to explicitly define the terms, instead pointing the Church back to our Confessions.⁶ The debate is not determinative to the discussion of the ordination of homosexual persons.

In 1978 the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America adopted a statement now known as an “authoritative interpretation”⁷ which said, “For the church to ordain a self affirming, practicing homosexual person to ministry would be an act in contradiction to its charter and calling in Scripture, setting in motion both within the church and society serious contradictions to the will of Christ.”⁸

In 1979 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted an identical statement. Those statements were reaffirmed by the 198th General Assembly in 1986⁹ and again in 1993 by the 205th General Assembly.¹⁰ In 2001 the 213th General Assembly sent Overture “A”¹¹ to the presbyteries for vote. This proposed amendment would have deleted that prohibition from the 1978 and 1979 statements; the proposed amendment failed.

⁵ *Minutes*, 2006, Part I, pp. 29, 515.

⁶ *Minutes*, 2003, Item 04-07, *Overture 03-12*.

⁷ In 1993 the Advisory Committee on the Constitution reminded the Church that church law is established and interpreted in the following three ways:

- a. Through the *Book of Order* and its established process for amendments (G-18.0301);
- b. Through the written opinions and decisions of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission (G-13.0103r);
- c. Through an interpretation of existing provisions in the *Book of Order* made by the General Assembly. (G-13.0103r and G-13.0112) See *Minutes*, 1993, Part I, 21.049A, p. 322.

⁸ UPC *Minutes* 1978, Part I, p. 264.

⁹ *Minutes*, 1986, Part I, pp. 194–199.

¹⁰ *Minutes*, 1993, Part I, 21.049A, pp. 73, 76, 322.

¹¹ *Minutes*, 2001, Part I, pp. 51–52.

In 2008 the General Assembly approved an authoritative interpretation saying that the 1978 and 1979 statements were no longer in effect.¹² This new constitutional ruling means that authoritative interpretations based on a number of GAPJC decisions are also no longer in effect.¹³ The same assembly sent a constitutional amendment to the presbyteries that, if passed, would change the wording of G-6.0106b.¹⁴

B. Examination of Candidates

If an ordaining or installing "...governing body has reasonable cause for inquiry based on its knowledge of the life and character of the candidate, it has the positive obligation to make due inquiry and uphold all the standards for ordination and installation."¹⁵

Information of possible ineligibility for ordination/installation may come from a variety of sources. If it comes from the candidate, "...self-acknowledgement must be plain, palpable, and obvious."¹⁶ That information can come from words spoken or written or behavior exhibited. If the candidate responds affirmatively to the ordination questions and if the governing body has "...no reasonable cause to believe otherwise, based on its knowledge of their lives and characters, ... no additional inquiry" is merited.¹⁷ "To single out a category of persons above and beyond other persons as more likely to sin violates the doctrine of total depravity."¹⁸ In 2003 the Permanent Judicial Commission made it clear that "... if a person does not self-acknowledge a practice that the confessions call sin, then a governing body has a positive obligation to make further inquiry only if it has direct and specific knowledge that said person is in violation of the ordination and

¹²*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 42, 43, 371. "Interpretive statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 119th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect."

¹³ The affected cases are: *Union Presbyterian Church of Blasdell v. Presbytery of Western New York*, (1985, Part I, p. 121); *LeTourneau v. Presbytery of Twin Cities* (1993, 163, 11.044); *Sallade, et al. v. Presbytery of Genesee Valley* (1993, 166, 11.045); *Hope Presbyterian Church v. Central Presbyterian Church* (1994, 142, 11.086).

¹⁴ G-6.0106b ~~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.~~ Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, striving to follow where he leads through the witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate's sincere efforts to adhere to these standards.

¹⁵*Wier v. 2nd Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 341).*

¹⁶ *Wier v. 2nd Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 341).*

¹⁷ *Wier v. 2nd Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 341).*

¹⁸*Wier v. 2nd Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale (Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 341).*

installation standards of the Constitution A hunch, gossip, or stereotype is not a sufficient ground to compel the governing body to make further inquiry.”¹⁹

Section G-6.0106b applies just as surely to heterosexual persons engaging in sexual behavior with someone not their spouse, to habitual gossips, to persons cheating on income taxes, to spouse or child abusers. If an ordaining/installing governing body has knowledge of such clear violations of the Scriptures and Confessions, such candidates may likewise not be ordained nor installed. The 218th General Assembly also approved (Item 05-12) a new Authoritative Interpretation of G-6.0108:

...the requirements of G-6.0108 ... apply equally to all ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Section 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 or practice that a candidate may declare during examination. However, the examining body is not required to accept a departure from standards and cannot excuse a candidate's inability to perform the constitutional functions unique to his or her office (such as administration of the sacraments).²⁰

A governing body that applies the terms of G-6.0106b solely to sexually active homosexual candidates commits the sin of homophobia.²¹

C. Responsibility of Governing Bodies

In 2006 the 217th General Assembly adopted an Authoritative Interpretation containing this statement:

e. All parties should endeavor to outdo one another in honoring one another's decisions, according the presumption of wisdom to ordaining/installing bodies in examining candidates and to the General Assembly, with presbyteries' approval, in setting standards.²²

When a higher governing body learns of a situation where it appears that a lower governing body may have acted outside the confines of our constitutional standards, it has the responsibility to "... work pastorally with the lower governing body to assist it in fulfilling its obligation to comply with the Constitution."

The higher governing body needs to express "... its concern over the stated intention of the Session [lower governing body] not to comply with G-6.0106b, and warn it of the spiritual effects and disciplinary consequences of non-compliance."²³ "Under the radical principles [G-1.0400], a presbytery (or any governing body) is not free to exercise its own judgment contrary to our constitutional standards or the lawful injunctions of higher

¹⁹ Hart, et al. v. Presbytery of Redwoods (Minutes, 2003, Part I, #215-8, p. 277).

²⁰ *Minutes*, 2008, Part I, pp. 42, 43, 379, Item 05-12.

²¹ See UPC *Minutes*, 1978, Part I, p. 263: "There can be no place within the Christian faith for the response to homosexual persons of mingled contempt, hatred, and fear that is called homophobia."

²² *Minutes*, 2006, Part I, pp. 29, 515.

²³ *Londonderry v. Presbytery of Northern New England* (Minutes, 2001, Part I, p. 581).

governing bodies without jeopardizing the entire fabric of our Presbyterian System.”²⁴ If a higher governing body has reason to believe that these standards are not being honored, it has the responsibility and authority to undertake administrative review (G-9.0408) and, should it discover that such an irregular ordination/installation²⁵ has taken place, it may declare it to be irregular and may direct corrective action. (G-9.0410) Such ordinations may not be “annulled.”²⁶

Deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament may be rebuked, temporarily excluded from office, or even removed from membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through prosecution for an offense under the Rules of Discipline.

An ordaining/installing governing body may be corrected in its understanding of the provisions of the Constitution and obligations to apply those provisions. It may be instructed to take remedial action. It may even be replaced, with the higher governing body assuming original jurisdiction.

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²⁴*Sallade v. Presbytery of Genesee Valley (Minutes, 1993, Part I, p. 168).*

²⁵ A higher governing body may review whether an installation was irregular. *McKittrick v. Session of West End Presbyterian Church (Minutes, 2003, Part I, #215-5, pp. 272–74).*

²⁶*Wier v. 2nd Presbyterian Church, Ft. Lauderdale (Minutes, 1999, Part I, p. 832).*