

05 ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CHURCH ORDERS AND MINISTRY

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Item 05-01

*On Amending G-14.0513 and G-11.0502f to Clarify Language Regarding Temporary Pastoral Relations—
From the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.*

The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

1. Shall G-14.0513 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“When a church does not have a pastor, or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties, the session should obtain the services of a minister of this denomination in a temporary pastoral relation. When a congregation employs more than one pastor, or a pastor and one or more associate pastors, and there is a vacancy in one of these positions, it may obtain the services of a minister in a temporary pastoral relation. No formal call shall be issued by the congregation and no formal installation shall take place. Temporary pastoral relations are those of stated supply, *associate stated supply*, interim pastor, interim co-pastor, interim associate pastor, ~~temporary pastoral~~ supply, or organizing pastor:

“a. A stated supply is a minister appointed by the presbytery, after consultation with the session, to perform the functions of a pastor in a church which is not seeking an installed pastor *or while the pastor is unable to perform her or his duties*. The relation shall be established only by the presbytery and shall extend for a period not to exceed twelve months at a time. A stated supply shall not be reappointed until the presbytery, through its committee on ministry, has reviewed her or his effectiveness. A stated supply may, with presbytery’s approval, serve as moderator of the session.

“b. *An associate stated supply is a minister appointed by the presbytery, after consultation with the session, to perform functions of an associate pastor in a church which is not seeking an installed associate pastor or while the associate pastor is unable to perform her or his duties. The relation shall be established only by the presbytery and shall extend for a period not to exceed twelve months at a time. An associate stated supply shall not be reappointed until the presbytery, through its committee on ministry, has reviewed her or his effectiveness.*

“~~b. c.~~ *An interim pastor is a minister invited by the session of a church without an installed pastor to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments, and fulfill pastoral duties perform the functions of a pastor for a specified period not to exceed twelve months at a time, while the church is seeking a pastor. An interim co-pastor is a minister invited by the session of a church without an installed co-pastor which had a co-pastor model which was in effect for at least three years and where the congregation desires to continue such model of permanent ministerial relationship, to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments, and fulfill pastoral duties perform the functions of a co-pastor for a specified period not to exceed twelve months at a time, while the church is seeking a co-pastor. The session may not secure or dissolve a relationship with an interim pastor or interim co-pastor without the concurrence of the presbytery through its committee on ministry. A minister may not be called to be the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor of a church served as interim pastor or interim co-pastor.*

“~~e. d.~~ *An interim associate pastor is a minister invited by the session to serve in this position perform the duties of an associate pastor while the church is seeking a new associate pastor or is seeking a pastor to serve as co-pastor in accord with G-6.0202. The session may not secure or dissolve a relationship with an interim associate pastor without the concurrence of the presbytery through its committee on ministry. An interim associate pastor shall serve for a specified period not to exceed twelve months at a time and may not be called to be the next installed pastor, co-pastor, or associate pastor of a church served as interim associate pastor.*

~~d. e.~~ A ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply may be a minister, a candidate, a commissioned lay pastor, or an elder, secured by the session to conduct services when there is no pastor or the pastor is unable to perform pastoral duties. The session shall seek the counsel of presbytery through its committee on ministry before securing a ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply. A ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply may not be called to be a pastor, *co-pastor*, or associate pastor of a church served as ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply, unless six months have elapsed since the end of the ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply relationship, except by a two-thirds vote of presbytery. A presbytery may choose to shorten or cancel the six-month interval if it is determined to be in the best interest of the congregation.

~~e. f.~~ When a church is without a pastor or when the pastor is unable to perform pastoral duties, the session, after obtaining the approval of the presbytery having jurisdiction over the church through its committee on ministry, may secure the services of ~~an inquirer or a candidate~~ to serve as ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply. Appropriate guidance and supervision for such ~~an inquirer or a candidate~~ serving as ~~temporary~~ pastoral supply must be assured by the presbytery having jurisdiction over the church and approved by the ~~inquirer's or candidate's~~ committee on preparation for ministry.

~~f. g.~~ [Text remains unchanged.]”

2. Shall G-11.0502f be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~f.~~ It shall counsel with sessions regarding stated supplies, *associate stated supplies*, interim pastors, interim co-pastors, interim associate pastors, and ~~temporary~~ pastoral supplies when a church is without a pastor *or when the pastor or associate pastor is unable to perform her or his duties*, and it shall provide lists of pastors, commissioned lay pastors, and qualified lay persons who have been trained and commissioned by the presbytery to supply vacant pulpits. Concurrence of the presbytery through its committee on ministry is required when a session invites an interim pastor, interim co-pastor, or interim associate pastor as provided for in G-14.0513b and c. *Approval of the committee on ministry is required when a session invites a pastoral supply as provided in G-14.0513e.*”

Rationale

This overture seeks to clarify and make the language of the *Book of Order* uniform regarding Temporary Pastoral Relations (G-14.0513). There are several reasons for this overture.

1. Standardize the language of pastoral duties. Descriptions of the several temporary relations listed contain different language regarding what duties can be included in the relationship. Changes are in paragraphs a, b, and e.
2. Make it clear when and under what circumstances temporary positions can become installed.
3. Establish an associate stated supply. This addition serves two purposes. First, it allows for the situation where an associate pastor becomes disabled and/or is unable to perform her or his duties. This situation might be handled through a pastoral supply, but in a lengthy disability situation, another solution is needed.

Second, this paragraph allows churches with installed pastors to attempt new models of ministry without the establishment of an installed position, either permanent or designated. This might be a new outreach ministry to an immigrant group, or a temporary staffing for membership growth, or simply a church determining the long-term viability of an associate pastor. The associate stated supply gives the flexibility of a year-to-year contract without the expectation that the ministry will continue (i.e., allowing “failure”) or that the person initially responsible for the ministry will continue if it is decided to establish an installed position. We find no other place in the *Book of Order* that allows this flexibility and creativity without establishment of a permanent, installed position.

4. Change “temporary supply” to “pastoral supply” to eliminate confusion between temporary relation, referring to several temporary situations, and temporary supply, referring to one specific temporary relation. Confu-

sion over the meaning of these terms has been apparent in work with sessions, the presbytery, and the General Assembly.

5. Changes to G-14.0513f and G-11.0502f make these sections consistent with the changes to G-14.0513a–e as proposed.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-01

Advice on Item 05-01—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) to disapprove Item 05-01.

Rationale

1. The overture proposes changes to the *Book of Order* that are unnecessary and do not advance the work of the church. The proposal to create a new position of “associate stated supply” is unnecessary. A stated supply is to be used when a church is not looking for an installed pastor. If a church has decided that it does not wish to look for an associate pastor, it does not need a stated supply. The church has an installed pastor. If it needs another pastor to do part-time or temporary work, that role can be filled by a temporary supply or a part-time associate pastor.

2. The overture also proposes having a stated supply to work in a church when a pastor is unable to perform his/her work. That can be covered by a temporary supply.

3. Even if the term “pastoral supply” were judged to be preferable to the term “temporary supply,” it does not seem to be worthwhile to amend the *Book of Order* to make only that change.

Item 05-02

ACC Request Regarding G-6.0502, Authoritative Interpretation Concerning Persistence in Disapproved Work—From Minister Member, Presbytery of the Cascades.

In response to this request, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) approve the following authoritative interpretation:

“1. In order to presume that an officer has renounced the jurisdiction of this church under G-6.0502, a governing body must follow the following procedure:

“a. The governing body must disapprove the work of the officer (*Wilson v. Presbytery of Donegal, Remedial Case 206-8, Minutes, 1994, Part I, p. 149, 11.091*).

“b. The governing body must notify the officer that it has disapproved his/her work and that he/she is prohibited from engaging in such work as an officer of the church (*Stimage-Norwood v. Presbytery of Southern New England, Remedial Case 214-7, Minutes, 2002, Part I, p. 344*).

“c. If the officer engages in the prohibited work after the notice of disapproval and prohibition, the governing body must consult with the officer and notify him/her of the consequences of his/her action, i.e., that his/her persisting in the work may result in a presumption of renunciation of jurisdiction.

“d. If the officer persists in the prohibited work after such consultation and notice, the governing body may presume that he/she has renounced the jurisdiction of the church. If the governing body so determines, it shall notify the officer of its decision.

“e. The officer has the right to challenge the governing body’s determination and to speak on the floor of the governing body in so doing. He/she also has the right to file a remedial case challenging the governing body’s determination of renunciation (D-6.0100).

“2. The term ‘work disapproved by the governing body’ relates to the exercise of the vocation of a minister of the Word and Sacrament or the official conduct of church business for which a deacon or elder was elected. It does not relate to particular acts of ministry, or to behavior, that might be considered an offense under the *Constitution* (D-2.0203). One can be presumed to have renounced jurisdiction because of persisting in disapproved work following consultation and notice, only if the work is engaged in after the disapproval of the work and if it is persisted in following a warning of the consequences.”

Rationale

Renunciation of jurisdiction, and its consequent loss of standing as a member and officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is one of the most serious actions that can occur under the *Constitution*. Therefore, it is critical that a person be afforded due process and be given every opportunity to be heard before removal from office or membership. If one is going to be presumed to have renounced jurisdiction because of persisting in disapproved work following consultation and notice, that presumption can be made only if the work is engaged in after the disapproval of the work and if it is persisted in following a warning of the consequences. In addition, there must not be confusion between engaging in disapproved work and engaging in behavior, which would more properly be the subject of a disciplinary case.

Letter of Request Received by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

I would like to request an authoritative interpretation from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-13.0103r) of Form of Government G-6.0502, “Persistence in Disapproved Work,” and in particular the issue of presumption of renunciation of jurisdiction.

As you may well be aware, there has been a recent lengthy thread (I think perhaps more than 200 notes) on the Presbynet meeting, “PCUSA POLITY DISCUSISION,” regarding the interpretation and application of the section.

Among the issues in the Presbynet discussion, and in some additional correspondence I’ve had with some of the participants:

- what constitutes adequate “consultation and notice” as it applies to this section;
- similarly, what constitutes due process as it applies to this section;
- what constitutes adequate “a [disapproved] work” as it applies to this section;
- the appropriateness of administrative procedures vis a vis disciplinary procedure, in particular;
 - when the allegations concern matters defined in D-2.0203b as disciplinary offense;
 - when the result is the removal of an officer from membership and ordained office and termination of the exercise of office (G-6.0501);
- the rights of a governing body in exercising its jurisdiction over members within a reasonable period of time;
- whether a presumption of renunciation of jurisdiction is reasonable when the person in question has claimed jurisdiction by appealing a previous decision; and
- whether an instruction from a PJC is an instruction from a governing body.

The Presbynet discussion revolved, of course, around the *VanKuiken* case in Cincinnati Presbytery, and I am aware that that case is still before a PJC (that of the Synod of the Covenant, as I understand it), and would likely affect the timing of securing an authoritative interpretation. However, it is possible that the decision of the Synod PJC, and of the General Assembly PJC, if the decision at the synod level is appealed, would not fully address the issues involved in the section.

My main interest in the matter is simply clarifying the polity issues involved, but I also have a personal interest as a member of the Permanent Judicial Commission of the Presbytery of the Cascades and as chair of one of our regional Committees on Ministry.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,
John M. Salmon

Item 05-03

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) do the following:

- 1. Recognize and acknowledge that there is a prevailing myth that the work of supporting and sustaining clergywomen in the ministries of the PC(USA) is completed.**
- 2. Acknowledge the need for ongoing, structured support on the part of all of our 173 presbyteries for all clergywomen.**
- 3. Ask the Office of the Committee on Ministry to review resources currently available to meet the particular needs of clergywomen of all ethnicities in the call process and in pastorates as stated above and to report its findings to ACWC.**
- 4. Request that ACWC make recommendations, following that review, which will contribute to a proactive, health-giving ministry to and relationship with our clergywomen.**

Rationale

This recommendation is in response to the following referral: *2003 Referral: Item 04-01. Report, Clergywomen's Experience in Ministry: Realities and Challenges, Recommendation 2. That the General Assembly Instruct the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns to Research Current Programs and Support for Clergywomen, Particularly Racial Ethnic and Single Clergywomen, and to Bring Recommendations to the 216th General Assembly (2004)—From the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (Minutes, 2003, Part I, pp. 62, 293).*

The ACWC sent a survey to executive presbyters, stated clerks, committees on ministry chairpersons, Presbyterian Women (PW) moderators, and PW enablers in September 2003. That survey showed the following:

- Support and programs for clergywomen are few. They range from formal and structured instituted by presbyteries, to informal meal gatherings and networking at presbytery meetings and other occasions arranged by clergywomen themselves. The structured programs included a monthly meeting of clergywomen in one presbytery and an annual clergywomen breakfast/brunch hosted by PW in another.
- “Top down” or presbytery-sponsored programs and implemented structure were rare. One program for racial ethnic clergywomen was reported; and, none for single clergywomen. Most presbyteries reported that their committees on ministries (COMs) were not actively involved in women's advocacy training. And, education and the programs or structure appears to be a continuation of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity requirements.
- One presbytery had all pastor nominating committees (PNCs) meet with a “clergywomen interpreter” before COM approved the church information form (CIF) for circulation. Another presbytery challenged pastors (especially in the mountain regions) to include at least one woman in the list of supply pastors. One presbytery used an interim placement program to support racial ethnic clergy and clergywomen. Mentors, retreats, justice for women committees, and newsletters were part of the formal structure of support in a few presbyteries.
- Informal support listed in the survey responses included networking on the part of individual clergywomen, Bible studies, and self-arranged clergywomen gatherings. Geography limited interaction in some presbyteries. In some predominately rural presbyteries, support came from ecumenical groups.

The ACWC commends presbyteries that have implemented specific programs of support for clergywomen and especially any that have programs to assist and sustain racial ethnic and single clergywomen.

Item 05-04

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) encourage all committees on ministry to conduct gender and racial ethnic awareness training with its nominating committees for all clergy.

Rationale

This recommendation is in response to the following referral: *2003 Referral: Item 04-01. Report, Clergy-women's Experience in Ministry: Realities and Challenges, Recommendation 9. That the General Assembly Instruct the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns and the Women's Ministries Program Area to Partner with the General Assembly Committee on Representation and the Racial Ethnic Caucuses to Monitor Clergy-women's Call Processes and Equity Issues Related to Terms of Call—From the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (Minutes, 2003, Part I, pp. 62, 293).*

In consultation with the Women's Ministries program area, the General Assembly Committee on Representation, and the Racial Ethnic Caucuses, ACWC reports for all parties that the information on specific calls is private, thus unavailable for comparison purposes.

Item 05-05

On Amending G-6.0106b Regarding Gifts and Requirements for Officers—From the Presbytery of Western New York.

The Presbytery of Western New York respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the *Book of Order*, Section G-6.0106(b), to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-6.0106(b) be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted 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)~~ *a covenanted relationship between two persons where a lifetime commitment is intended*, or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which ~~the confessions call sin~~ *does not conform with this discipline* shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”

Rationale

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, preached a gospel of love toward all the people of the earth (John 3:16); and therefore all people should be equally welcomed in the church, remembering that it is in the spirit of Christ to reach out most of all to those who have been persecuted and shunned by society.

We acknowledge that passages of Scripture have led to the condemnation of sexual intimacy between two people of the same sex; yet after long and intense discussion, prayer, and study of the Scriptures as a whole, we do not believe it was, or is now, Christ’s own desire to condemn sexual intimacy between people of the same sex as inherently bad. Sexual intimacy is a gift of God intended for sealing the most committed relationships that one person can have with another.

Our Lord’s gospel of love was also accompanied by high standards of self-discipline that he set for his followers, even that we should love our enemies.

In accord with our Lord’s teachings, we believe all people should be guided by the same principles of sexual behavior regardless of sexual orientation, summarized as chastity in singleness and fidelity in a covenanted relationship before God with one other person where a lifetime commitment is intended.

We also acknowledge that there continue to be strong differences of opinion among our members and churches over these matters, and that contrary opinions may be held in good faith with the backing of historical precedent; yet we believe Christ wants us to move forward here.

Concurrence to Item 05-05 from the Presbytery of Southern New England.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-05

Advice on Item 05-05—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) that, if it wishes to change the *Constitution* to achieve the objective sought by the Presbytery of Western New York, it may do so

with some revision to the presbytery's proposed language to provide clarity in that language. The following alternative language is offered:

~~“b. Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to *Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture*, (G-14.0405b(6) and *to be instructed and led by-in conformity to the historic confessional standards-confessions* of the church (G-14.0405b(3)). ~~Among these standards is the requirement~~ *Those who are called to office in the church are also required to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.90010 a covenanted relationship between two persons where a lifetime commitment is intended pledged or promised*, 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.”~~~~

Rationale

The Presbytery of Western New York seeks to amend the *Constitution* by deleting a portion of G-6.0106(b) and adding alternate language. Since its initial addition to the Form of Government in 1997, a number of presbyteries have sought the removal or amendment of this paragraph by sending overtures to the General Assembly. Others have requested limits on its application or clarification of its language. Still others have pursued the enforcement of its limitations on those allowed to serve in ordained positions through judicial process.

The proposal by the Presbytery of Western New York, if approved, would broaden the group of members within the church who would be eligible to hold office. If the General Assembly wishes to achieve this result, the language of this particular proposal lacks clarity. As previous overtures have pointed out over the years, certain phrases in G-6.0106(b) may be seen as inconsistent with the language in the church's ordination questions [G-14.0405b(3) and (6)]. Because of the history of G-6.0106(b) and the attempts to amend or delete it, it is crucial that any language used with respect to the subject matter of this provision be clear and consistent.

Finally, if the General Assembly approves this proposal, the final sentence of G-6.0106(b) may be unnecessary since the preceding sentences spell out the requirements for church office. Section G-6.0106b would, even without the last sentence, provide both guidance for ordaining governing bodies and a basis for accountability.

It is noted that any action on Item 05-05 is related to actions taken on Item 05-06 and Item 05-09. Please see Item 04-Info, C. Advisory Committee on the Constitution Agency Summary, 3. Ordination Standards, pages 26–27, for further advice on overtures dealing with ordination standards.

Item 05-06

*On Striking G-6.0106b from the Constitution in Order to Welcome All Persons into the Life of the Church—
From the Presbytery of Baltimore.*

The Presbytery of Baltimore overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-6.0106b be stricken from the *Book of Order*.

Rationale

The peace, unity, and purity of the PC(USA) have been ruptured by the presence of G-6.0106b in our *Book of Order*. Rather than solving the issue of ordination standards, this addition has created a hostile and divisive environment in our church that is contrary to God's reconciling love. Numerous judicial cases have been brought to governing bodies over issues of ordination from individuals who are unaware of the calls and gifts of ministry of those against whom they file complaints. These judicial actions have cost individuals, congregations, and governing bodies untold time and money to defend those who have been accused. There is no longer any possibility of honest and open dialogue on this issue without fear of retribution. Section G-6.0106b does serious harm to our church by forcing the appearance of consensus and depriving the church of the benefit of discussion.

The wisdom expressed in G-6.0106a is sufficient in setting standards for ordination. The strength of the PC(USA) lies in its ability to hold freedom of conscience and church order in tension, and its trust of the governing body closest to those it ordains (G-6.0108b). Sessions and presbyteries have the responsibility to weigh the confessions, to determine which segments reflect essential tenets of the faith, and to judge the gifts and qualifications of those candidates who come before them.

The effects of G-6.0106b are contrary to our constitutional call to "seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons"(G-5.0103). Instead it has the explicit and implicit effect of targeting one category of people, defined as "self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons," and of denying to them the full rights and privileges of active membership within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-5.0202). Through this constitutional ban, G-6.0106b disregards the fact that a pluralism of methods of biblical and theological interpretation currently exists within the PC(USA) concerning homosexuality. Among these methods is the strongly held belief among many conscientious Presbyterians that homosexual practice is not a sin per se and that both heterosexual and homosexual relationships are capable of being either faithful and life-affirming or sinful and destructive. Section G-6.0106b, and its predecessor "definitive guidance" and subsequent affirmations, delineates human sexuality in categories more narrowly defined than the Scriptures seek to claim. For example, while Christians disagree on the interpretation of the limited biblical references to homosexuality, most acknowledge that the Bible is silent on the issue of lifelong, faithful homosexual partnerships. In contrast, the Bible is clear in its themes of covenant: the covenant between God and humanity, and the human covenants made before God. Removal of G-6.0106b from our *Constitution* would allow presbyteries and sessions to follow their understanding of the Holy Spirit's leading in making decisions about candidates for ordination/installation by the application of a common ethic of faithfulness and fidelity within human covenantal relationships. This return to a mutual trust in each ordaining/installing presbytery's or session's ability to make individual judgments concerning the fitness of a candidate for ordination/installation would restore to the presbyteries and sessions their traditional duty and prerogative to approve, ordain, and install persons whom, after due examination, they deem gifted, worthy, and called by God through the voice of the people.

Concurrences to Item 05-06 from the Presbyteries of National Capital and Southern New England.

Concurrence to Item 05-06—From the Presbytery of Des Moines (with Additional Rationale).

Rationale

In concurrence with the Presbytery of Baltimore, we agree that “the effects of G-6.0106b are contrary to our constitutional call to seed the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons (G-9.0104). Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal of the Gospel (G-5.0103).”

The Presbytery of Des Moines has historically supported this particular issue.

Referring to the PC(USA) Website, the Presbyterian 101 statement (“A General Guide to the Facts About the PCUSA”) under the heading “Presbyterian are BELIEVERS AND DOERS,” Paragraph 2 appears to be in conflict with G-6.0106b. It states; “WE BELIEVE—in a theology of mission, as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Christ hath commissioned the Church to go into the world and to make disciples of all nations. All believers are therefore under obligation—to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth.” In “Presbyterians are Attuned to the Times (Page 2), “the church” also adapts to newly emerging needs and to changing relationships in a sensitive manner.”

The Theological Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church (Mandate 1b) was established to pursue a process of discernment for the church. “This discernment shall include but not be limited to issues of Christology, biblical authority and interpretations, ordination standards, and power.” It will not report back to the assembly until 2006. It was not formed to make decisions on behalf of the General Assembly and/or the presbyteries. The same General Assembly in 2001 sent a proposed amendment to the Constitution to the presbyteries that would remove G-6.0106b. [Note: Text is an addendum. Please add to Item 05-06 as page 3.]

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-06

Advice on Item 05-06—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) with the following comment:

The Presbytery of Baltimore seeks to amend the *Constitution* by the deletion of G-6.0106b in its entirety. Since its initial addition to the Form of Government in 1996, a number of presbyteries have sought the removal or amendment of this paragraph by sending overtures to the General Assembly. Others have requested limits on its application or clarification of its language. Still others have pursued enforcement of its limitations on those allowed to serve in ordained positions through judicial process.

As this committee advised the 213th General Assembly (2001), the removal of G-6.0106b alone would not alter the church’s position on ordination standards unless the assembly also amends or rescinds its current authoritative interpretation concerning the eligibility of homosexual persons to hold office in the church. This overture does not seek to have the authoritative interpretation set aside.

The rationale’s central argument is the contention that “G-6.0106a is sufficient in setting standards of ordination.” If the assembly wishes to make G-6.0106a the foundational standard for ordination, then this overture would accomplish the stated purpose.

It is noted that any action *on Item 05-06* is related to actions taken on Item 05-05 and Item 05-09. Please see Item 04-Info, C. Advisory Committee on the Constitution Agency Summary, 3. Ordination Standards, pages 26–27, for further advice on overtures dealing with ordination standards.

Item 05-07

On Issuing an Authoritative Interpretation Clarifying Standards for Ordination—From the Presbytery of the Western Reserve.

The Presbytery of the Western Reserve respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to issue the following authoritative interpretation:

In carrying out their responsibilities under the *Constitution* to determine fitness for office, sessions and presbyteries are not bound by statements of the General Assembly and its commissions, regarding ordained service by homosexual persons, that predate the adoption of G-6.0106b.

Rationale

In the decades preceding the adoption of G-6.0106b, General Assemblies and Permanent Judicial Commissions of the PC(USA), the UPCUSA, and the PCUS issued various policy and interpretive statements regarding ordained service by “self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons.” Such statements were largely grounded in the “Policy Statement and Recommendations” issued in 1978 by the 190th General Assembly of the UPCUSA, known as “definitive guidance.”

“Definitive guidance” and the “authoritative interpretations” that followed had the effect of amending our constitutional standards for ordination without the ratification of the presbyteries. This effect has been neither definitive nor authoritative. Rather, these statements have contributed to conflict and confusion in the church, and have undermined respect for the *Constitution*.

The 208th General Assembly (1996) moved to end this conflict and confusion by approving a new provision in the *Constitution*, G-6.0106b, that specifically addresses our standards for the sexual conduct of candidates for ordained office. This provision was ratified by the presbyteries, and actually changed the *Book of Order*. In order to eliminate continuing confusion and conflict, the 216th General Assembly (2004) should make clear that the language of the *Constitution* itself takes precedence over older General Assembly statements interpreting the *Constitution* before it was changed.

Concurrences to Item 05-07 from the Presbyteries of Albany, Long Island, Milwaukee, New York City, and Santa Fe.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-07

Advice on Item 05-07—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) with the following comment:

This overture from the Presbytery of the Western Reserve proposes no amendment to the *Constitution*, but does request that the General Assembly approve an authoritative interpretation that would have the effect of rescinding the currently binding authoritative interpretation of the *Constitution* concerning those who may hold office in the church.

Although the assembly may decide that such a result is to be desired, the language of the overture itself could be misunderstood. The General Assembly does have authority to issue statements interpreting the *Constitution* (G-13.0103r). The statements to which this overture objects predate the approval of G-6.0106b. The removal of these statements would allow the language of the *Constitution* itself to guide the church.

If the assembly believes that this action would help to reduce confusion and conflict in the church, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution proposes the following alternative language as authoritative interpretation:

“Sessions and presbyteries are no longer bound by statements of the General Assembly regarding ordained service by homosexual persons that predate the adoption of G-6.0106b.”

It is noted that any action on Item 05-07 is related to actions taken on Item 05-08 and Item 05-09. Please see Item 04-Info, C. Advisory Committee on the Constitution Agency Summary, 3. Ordination Standards, pages 26–27, for further advice on overtures dealing with ordination standards.

Item 05-08

On Declaring That the Definitive Guidance Statements of 1978 and 1979, and Subsequent General Assembly Statements Shall Be Given No Further Force or Effect—From the Presbytery of Detroit.

The Presbytery of Detroit respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to approve the following:

1. The 216th General Assembly (2004) recognizes that within our denomination, people of good character and principle differ in their understanding of human sexuality, and in those differences we are called to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other (*Book of Order*, G-1.0305).

2. The 216th General Assembly (2004) reminds the church that freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained (*Book of Order*, G-6.0108a).

3. The 216th General Assembly (2004) declares that no further force or effect shall be given to the statement of definitive guidance by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (UPCUSA) that characterizes the practice of homosexuality as sin and instructs that unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the constitutional requirements for ordination.

4. The 216th General Assembly (2004) declares that no further force or effect shall be given to the interpretation of the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) that states “homosexuality falls short of God’s plan.”

5. The 216th General Assembly (2004) declares that subsequent General Assembly statements that affirmed the 1978 and 1979 guidance on homosexuality and ordination shall be given no further force or effect.

Rationale

A great theological divide exists in our denomination on the issue of homosexuality. Over the years, as various proposed amendments were sent to the presbyteries, the votes cast by individual presbyters have indicated that a substantial minority, 40 to 45 percent, affirm an interpretation of Scripture that differs from the guidance of the 1978 and 1979 General Assemblies.

Current constitutional requirements for ordination have been built upon the scriptural interpretations of the 1978 UPCUSA and 1979 PCUS General Assemblies, and subsequent judicial rulings have stated that presbyteries and congregations are obligated to follow those constitutional requirements for ordination. Yet, the scriptural interpretation that is used to bind the conscience of presbyteries and congregations was never sent to the presbyteries for approval.

The preliminary principles of “mutual forbearance” and “God alone is Lord of the conscience” must be given full effect through acknowledging the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) contains theological diversity on the issue of homosexuality. Scriptural interpretation on nonessentials of the Reformed faith is to be entrusted to individuals as they teach and preach, and to ordaining bodies as they seek to discern the call of Christ in those being examined for ordained office.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-08

Advice on Item 05-08—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) with the following comment:

Item 05-08 proposes the removal of currently binding interpretive statements concerning those who may hold office in the church. No amendment to the *Constitution* is proposed and no alternative authoritative interpretation is offered.

In 1978, the former UPCUSA adopted a policy statement that came to be called “Definitive Guidance.” The next year, 1979, the former PCUS adopted a similar statement. Both statements sought to prohibit the ordination of “self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons.” The General Assembly of this church determined in 1985 in a PJC decision (*Union Presbyterian Church of Blasdell, New York vs. The Presbytery of Western New York*) that those earlier statements carried the authority of the present *Constitution*. Thus the earlier Definitive Guidance became an Authoritative Interpretation.

Sources of constitutional authority are

1. the *Constitution* itself and amendments to it adopted by constitutionally mandated process,
2. General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission decisions interpreting the *Constitution*, and
3. actions of the General Assembly deliberately interpreting the *Book of Order* on the advice of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (G-13.0112).

Interpretive decisions by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission and deliberate General Assembly interpretations together are referred to as “authoritative interpretations.”

The deletion or replacement of the 1978 and 1979 interpretations would eliminate currently binding authoritative interpretations interpreting this portion of the *Constitution*.

While it is not fully clear what the precise effect of such action would be, the church would no longer rely upon the 1978 or 1979 policy statements and subsequent authoritative interpretations based upon them when interpreting the *Book of Order*. Ordaining bodies would apply the language of G-6.0106b as they understand it subject only to authoritative interpretations approved since the inclusion of G-6.0106b unless and until new authoritative interpretations of that provision are crafted according to the process set forth in the *Book of Order*.

If the assembly determines that such an action would bring greater clarity and focus to the church, then the overture would accomplish its purpose.

It is noted that any action on Item 05-08 is related to actions taken on Item 05-07 and Item 05-09. Please see Item 04-Info, C. Advisory Committee on the Constitution Agency Summary, 3. Ordination Standards, pages 26–27, for further advice on overtures dealing with ordination standards.

GAC COMMENT ON ITEM 05-08

Comment on Item 05-08—From the General Assembly Council.

Freedom of conscience regarding the interpretation of Scripture is a vital and historic value in our tradition. It must be maintained. Nevertheless the reference in Point 2 to “*freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained*” must be put in the broader context of G-6 in order to be understood properly.

Section G-6.0108 discusses the relationship of conscience in relation to the bounds within which officers serve. Thus officers “shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in *The Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government.” In fulfilling their office, officers may exercise freedom of conscience in respect to interpretation of Scripture “as far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church . . .” (*Book of Order*, G-6.0108a). Thus, freedom of conscience with regard to the interpretation of Scripture is not an absolute right.

Further, freedom of conscience for officers is exercised within definite bounds when a person becomes a candidate or officer in the church. The conscience of the officer or candidate 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” (*Book of Order*, G-6.0108b).

Any appeal to freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture must be made within this broader framework.

Item 05-09

On Amending G-6.0106 and on Approving an Authoritative Interpretation—From the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area.

The Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area respectfully overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to do the following:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

a. Shall G-6.0106b be stricken?

b. Shall G-6.0106a be amended by adding a new sentence to the end of the paragraph to read as follows:

“Their suitability to hold office is determined by the governing body where the examination for ordination or installation takes place, guided by scriptural and constitutional standards, under the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ.”

2. Approve the following authoritative interpretation:

“Interpretive statements concerning ordained service by homosexual persons by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 191st General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and all subsequent denominational affirmations thereof, shall be given no further force or effect; and Section G-6.0106a of the Form of Government, together with the other prerequisites for ordination expressly stated in our *Book of Order*, hereby are affirmed as the sole and exclusive standards for ordination by ordaining bodies acting in prayerful discernment of the leading of Almighty God.”

Rationale

We believe that the presence of G-6.0106b within our *Book of Order* has created a hostile and divisive environment in our church that is contrary to God’s reconciling love and the spirit of our Reformed faith. We are greatly saddened over the increasing number of accusations and judicial cases that have arisen in recent months as a result of this measure. These trials are causing the church to spend inordinate financial and human resources defending an exclusionary policy that is not an essential of the Reformed faith, drawing precious resources away from the primary mission of the church.

The effects of compliance with G-6.0106b run counter to the sentiment of G-5.0103 that “Each member must seek the grace of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all persons.” Failure to do this, it continues, “constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel.” We would honor Christ’s last prayer with his disciples that all may be one (Jn. 17:11) and would heed the admonition of the New Testament writers that we avoid needless controversies lest the body of Christ be divided.

Presbyterians have historically valued the rights of governing bodies to make decisions that affect them the most directly, seeking unity in the essentials of faith but not necessarily in “truths and forms with respect to which [people] of good characters and principles may differ” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0305). Biblical interpretations differ, and the church should therefore leave it to local governing bodies to act out of their own faith as discerned together in prayer when such interpretations over nonessential matters are in conflict.

The confessions of our church are valuable guides in our decisions about ordination and many other issues, but they are always subordinate to Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture (*Book of Order*, G-1.0307 and G-2.0200; *The Book of Confessions*, 3.18–.20, 5.011–.014, 6.010, and 9.03). Our *Constitution* affirms that “God

alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship” (*Book of Order*, G-1.0301; see also G-1.0305 and G-1.0307; *The Book of Confessions*, 5.010–.014, 6.109, 6.174–.175, 7.215, and 8.20–.21).

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,” reflecting that “(1) Sin is forgiven. (2) Reconciliation is accomplished. (3) The dividing walls of hostility are torn down” (*Book of Order*, G-3.0200). This leads to an affirmation of diversity and the welcoming inclusion of all people (*Book of Order*, G-3.0401, G-4.0203, G-4.0401–.0403, G-5.0202, and G-9.0104; *The Book of Confessions*, 9.06–.07, 9.10, 9.19–.20, 9.22, 9.29, 9.31–33, and 9.44).

We understand our polity and system of ordination to mean that leaders are called by God and confirmed by the people, and that all members whose manner of life demonstrates the gospel and who possess the gifts and training for leadership have opportunities to participate in leadership.

In faithfulness to our call to be good stewards of the resources entrusted to us, we would affirm and enable ordained service and outreach by all in whom we discern a call to serve (*Book of Order*, G-1.0306, G-4.0402, G-4.0403, G-6.0102, G-6.0107, G-7.0103, G-10.0102l, G-14.0201, and G-14.0204).

In our continuing struggle on these issues, the Church is called to be open to God’s continuing reformation “according to the Word of God and the call of the Spirit” (*Book of Order*, G-2.0200; see also G-3.0401, G-4.0303, G-10.0102j, and G-18.0101; *The Book of Confessions*, 9.03 and 9.29).

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-09

Advice on Item 05-09—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) with the following comment:

This overture from the Presbytery of the Twin Cities Area takes a broad approach to changing the *Constitution* concerning those eligible to hold church office and governing bodies that determine the suitability of office holders. The assembly is asked to take three actions: to send the two proposed amendments to the Form of Government to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes, and to approve an authoritative interpretation.

The overture’s first request is that G-6.0106b be deleted, contending that the “exclusionary policy” contained in G-6.0106b is “not an essential of the Reformed faith” and that the content of that paragraph is in conflict with other constitutional provisions.

Secondly, an amendment by addition is proposed to G-6.0106a. Our *Constitution* proclaims a hierarchy of authority in matters of faith and practice: the Confessions are subordinate to Scripture and Scripture is subordinate to Jesus Christ. The proposed amendment reflects that hierarchy. The content of the additional language, however, is contained elsewhere in the Form of Government, making this addition unnecessary.

Finally, this overture proposes an authoritative interpretation that would have the effect of setting aside currently binding policy. If approved, the phrase “sole and exclusive” should be deleted because the General Assembly would continue to have power and authority to interpret the *Constitution* (G-13.0103r), potentially affecting standards and practice.

The approval of this overture in its entirety would have the effect of changing the church’s current position on standards for ordination. If the 216th General Assembly (2004) favors this result, the approval of the overture would accomplish its purpose.

It is noted that any action on Item 05-09 is related to actions taken on Item 05-07 and Item 05-08. Please see Item 04-Info, C. Advisory Committee on the Constitution Agency Summary, 3. Ordination Standards, pages 26–27, for further advice on overtures dealing with ordination standards.

Item 05-10

The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-14.0310c be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~“Inquirers or candidates are encouraged to take the Bible Content Examination in their first year of seminary. The other four examinations may be taken by inquirers or candidates after completion of two full years of theological education. Inquirers or candidates shall be eligible to take the other four examinations only after completion of the equivalent of two full years of theological education. These four examinations shall only be taken upon approval by the committee on preparation for ministry of the inquirer’s or candidate’s presbytery.”~~

Rationale

The so-called “Senior” Ordination Exams—four standard examinations in the areas of Biblical Exegesis, Reformed Theology, Worship and Sacraments, and Church Polity—are designed for inquirers and candidates who are in their final year of full-time theological education (or its equivalent). The purpose of the exams is to test for “readiness for ministry,” which includes both academic preparation and the process of integration and application of what one has learned in practical ministry situations.

Some committees on preparation for ministry (CPM) are permitting, even encouraging, inquirers and candidates to take some or all of these four standard examinations before they have completed the equivalent of two full years of theological training. This raises two difficulties with the exams. First, some candidates/inquirers ask to take particular exams after they have just completed a class in the subject. This approach emphasizes the academic nature of the exams to the exclusion of the practical nature (readiness for ministry). Secondly, inquirers and candidates are getting the message that they should take exams “early and often,” so that they will have a better chance of completing the four standard exams by the time they graduate. This sets up a mindset where inquirers/candidates believe they will fail the exams, and this mindset then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. If a person fails an exam or exams because s/he was not fully ready to take it, s/he is like to fail the exam a second time because of fear, nerves, or expectations.

The current wording in the *Book of Order*, G-14.0310c, sentence two, is fuzzy. The word “may” implies that the exams would ordinarily be taken during the final year of theological education, but leaves the door open for CPMs to permit those under their care to take these exams earlier. This is contrary to the spirit in which the exams are prepared and offered. The members of the Executive Committee of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) believe that it is important to clarify the language found in G-14.0310c so that when inquirers/candidates finally take the four standard exams, they will have the learning and experience to give their best efforts, and not be set up for failure.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-10

Advice on Item 05-10—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) to disapprove Item 05-10.

Rationale

With dismay the Advisory Committee on the Constitution observes in this recommendation more material that is more appropriate in a manual rather than in the *Constitution*.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution believes that the current wording of G-14.0310c is sufficient to allow each presbytery's committee on preparation for ministry to exercise appropriate oversight of its inquirers and candidates. Inquirers and candidates are required to receive permission from the committee on the preparation for ministry to gain admission to the examinations. Committees should not grant permission prematurely.

Item 05-11

On Amending G-14.0705c, G-11.0407, W-3.3603, and W-3.3616 Regarding Certified Christian Educators—From the Presbytery of Western North Carolina.

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina overtures the 216th General Assembly (2004) to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

1. Shall G-14.0705c be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“The presbytery shall grant the privilege of the floor to the Certified *Associate* Christian Educator at all its meetings with voice. (G-11.0407) *Certified Christian Educators who have been examined and approved by the presbytery (or through its committee on ministry) shall be members of the presbytery with voice and vote, wherein they serve, but only as long as they are employed by a session or the presbytery (or another governing body or agency).*”

2. Shall G-11.0407 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“The stated clerk shall maintain four rolls, . . . one listing all Certified Christian Educators *who are members of presbytery*, and Certified Associate Christian Educators within the bounds of the presbytery who are entitled to the privilege of the floor with voice at all presbytery meetings . . .”

3. Shall the last paragraph of W-3.3603 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“An elder *or a Certified Christian Educator* may lead the congregation in these professions and affirmations. (W-2.2009; W-2.3011–.3014)”

4. Shall W-3.3616d be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“d. The bread and the cup may be served by ordained officers of the church, *Certified Christian Educators*, or by other church members on invitation of the session or authorizing governing body.”

Rationale

The certified Christian educator has been entrusted by the church with one of its most important tasks—the nurturing of our children, youth, and adults in the faith and service of Jesus Christ.

The education and training of the certified Christian educator approximates that of the minister of Word and Sacrament. Generally, a Master of Arts in Christian Education has been earned, and Certified Christian Educators have passed General Assembly examinations in Biblical Interpretation, Reformed Theology, Human Development, Religious Education and Practice, Polity, Program and Mission of the PCUSA, and Worship and Sacraments. They have also usually been employed by a church for several years.

As a contrasting example, the office of commissioned lay pastor (much needed and much appreciated in our denomination) has been authorized to perform many more functions (G-14.0801), even though commissioned lay pastors have generally had less education, training, and experience.

Since certified Christian educators have usually been intimately involved in teaching church members about the Sacraments, it is fitting that they be able to assist in the celebrations of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

ACC ADVICE ON ITEM 05-11

Advice on Item 05-11—From the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises the 216th General Assembly (2004) to disapprove Item 05-11.

Rationale

The Presbytery of Western North Carolina seeks to amend the *Book of Order* in various places to alter the standing, role, and function of Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators.

The direction and intent of the proposed amendments have been before the General Assembly (and predecessor bodies) for decades (most recently in 1997 and 2002). In 1987, a new section (G-14.0702ff) was added to the Form of Government speaking directly to the role of educators within the church and the protections to be afforded them by the presbytery. However, proposals to grant membership have not been approved either by an assembly, or when submitted to the presbyteries for a vote, by a majority. The reason for maintaining the current practice of restricting vote in presbytery to ministers of Word and Sacrament (who are continuing members) and elders (who are commissioned to presbytery by sessions) rests upon our foundational understanding of governance. Altering such a foundational principle constitutes a radical change in our polity. A decision not to grant membership in presbytery should not be viewed in any way as a denigration of faithfulness, qualifications, or training.

In 2001, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (reiterating its comments to the 212th General Assembly (2000)) spoke to similar proposals:

The church is concerned about the status and honor given to educators within the church. The church should do all it can to reject any second-class status for educators in compensation, contribution, or tenure within the community of faith. However, the parity of ministers of Word and Sacrament along with elders in the governance of the church is a long-standing principle of governance that should not be easily compromised by an ever-increasing number of parallel offices granted vote in governance by virtue of either commission or certification. . . . (*Minutes*, 2001, Part I, p. 211)

For various reasons a presbytery may grant “membership” to an ordained elder “for a term.” However such a provision by rule and for a fixed term of service is different from what is proposed, namely a status of “member” based solely upon a certification process. The effect of this overture, if approved, would create a category of persons entitled to membership by virtue of a certification process outside the discretion of the presbytery. The historic principle of governance asserts that a presbytery has the right to determine its membership.

However, if it is the will of the assembly to radically alter the fundamental understandings we hold about governance in the church, it would be wise to initiate the process of changing those foundational assumptions rather than to continue to create these peripheral rights of membership, which only confuse and confound our historic principles.

The concern of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution for the proposed amendments to the Directory for Worship stem from these fundamental concerns. In the matter of who may propose to the congregation its vows in the sacrament of baptism (W-3.3603); the sacraments traditionally have been entrusted to the ordained officers. To alter this practice would open a whole new understanding of the nature of office in the church.

The proposed amendment to W-3.3616d is unnecessary. The session in its authority to authorize, oversee, and administer the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper may invite “other church members” to participate in the distribution of the elements. Since the provision does not specify “other members of the particular congregation,” one would have to assume that this provision would be required only if the Certified Christian Educator was not a member of any Presbyterian congregation, anywhere. While the possibility may exist, amending the *Constitution* to provide for it seems unwise.

[Note: This copy has been assigned the designation Item 05-12 to replace the void left by moving the original Item 05-12 (as received in the first mailing) to Item 08-12.]

Item 05-12

ACC Request Regarding Interpretation of G-14.0515d, Parish Associates—From Stated Clerk/Co-Executive Presbyter, Presbytery of Whitewater Valley.

In response to this request, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution recommends that the 216th General Assembly (2004) direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed alternative amending language to G-14.0515d to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

~~“d. The agreement between the session, and the parish associate, and the presbytery shall, whenever a pulpit becomes vacant, be terminated upon due notice by the session or the parish associate with the approval of the presbytery terminate when the call to the installed pastor is dissolved or the presbytery acts to dissolve the relationship with the parish associate.”~~

Rationale

The requester relates an experience with a church that did not wish to terminate a relationship with a parish associate when the installed pastor’s call was dissolved and the pulpit became vacant. The relationship of a parish associate with a church is initiated by the installed pastor. The pastor nominates the parish associate to the session. The session in turn requests the presbytery’s COM that the relationship be established. The COM, in turn, recommends approval to the presbytery. The relationship is to be reviewed annually by the COM.

One reason noted by the *Constitution* for the annual review is “to insure ... that installed leadership of the particular church be protected in its effective functioning ...” [G-14.0515c(2)].

The *Constitution* further specifies, “The parish associate shall be responsible to the pastor...” (G-14.515a). When the pastor who initiated the relationship in the first place is no longer on the staff of the particular church in which the parish associate serves, the structure of accountability is removed. Subsequent pastor(s) may or may not wish to continue the relationship, its accompanying supervisory responsibilities, and the specific activities or duties carried out by the parish associate during the leadership of the previous pastor.

The language of the *Constitution* could be clearer concerning the fate of parish associates when pastors retire or move. The alternate language proposed would accomplish that purpose.

Letter of Request Received by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

While recently working with a neighboring Presbytery, I encountered a problem regarding interpretation of a section of the *Book of Order*. I would appreciate a response from the ACC.

G-14.0515 Parish Associate

When the “pastor, as head of staff” leaves a congregation (in which there is a parish associate) and the “pulpit becomes vacant,” is the parish associate relationship automatically dissolved? And if so, how and by whom?

Context for question. The pastor of a church with a Parish Associate (HR MOWS) left to take another Call. The Session challenged the Presbytery’s contention that the Parish Associate relationship no longer existed, citing G-15.0515d “...be terminated upon due notice by the session...” “...with the approval of the presbytery.” Their position is that the language is “permissive” with regards to the session deciding whether to continue the relationship; it is “shall” only if the session terminates the relationship. The presbytery can only act to approve the action of the session.

The plain language of the text is not as plain as it could be. I was able to research such PJC decisions as *Matsuda* which states "...although such a relationship was not possible without an installed pastor." And I am aware that 97-12, which would have made the language clearly permissive, was defeated by the Presbyteries. Such precedents were the basis of my argument that the relationship terminates with the departure of the installed pastor [the position clearly intended by the *Book of Order* and the denomination]—but I was left with the feeling that I could just as forcefully argue that the relationship is not dissolved until the session provides "due notice"—and if they choose not to provide "due notice" the relationship continues because the Presbytery only "approves" the Session action.

Even better than an interpretation, would be a recommendation to change the wording to read something like the following:

~~"The agreement between the session, and the parish associate and the presbytery shall, whenever other pulpit becomes vacant, be terminated upon due notice by the session or the parish associate with the approval of the presbytery terminate when the call to the installed pastor is dissolved or the Committee on Ministry acts to dissolve the relationship."~~

(The last phrase is necessary for those situations where the parish associate relationship needs to be dissolved other than at yearly review or when installed pastor leaves. It clarifies that, like MOWS, the presbytery can, if necessary, unilaterally dissolve the relationship.)

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours In Christ,
Dr. W. Keith Geckelder,
Co-Executive Presbyter/Stated Clerk

Item 05-13

The General Assembly Council requests that the 216th General Assembly (2004) delegate to the General Assembly Council the power to revise all portions of the Church Leadership Connection to bring it into conformity with the *Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Constitution* and civil legal changes after such changes are established.

Rationale

In 1997, the General Assembly approved the new Call System with specific language to be used for the Personnel Information File attestation. In 2002, because of changes in the *Book of Order*, Rules of Discipline, it was necessary to ask the General Assembly to make changes. It is necessary to make further changes to comply with our *Constitution*. This authorization will facilitate necessary changes in a timely fashion.

Item 05-Info

A. *Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates Agency Summary*

During the year 2003, the Office of Examination Services and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) took time to reflect, to evaluate, and to work to improve both communication and process in the area of ordination examinations.

The work that was begun by the joint task force (with representatives from Churchwide Personnel Services, the Committee on Theological Education, and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates) culminated in a report about trends, concerns, and recommendations regarding ordination examinations and the preparation for ministry process in general. The data for the report was collected and processed by Anthony Ruger, research fellow for the Auburn Institute. The report was presented to stated clerks at the Fall Polity Conference, at committee on ministry and committee on preparation for ministry training events, at the meeting of the Committee on Theological Education in November, to members of the Racial/Ethnic Recruitment Task Force, and to other pertinent groups in the PC(USA). The report will be presented to members of the PCCEC as a whole at their annual meeting in April 2004.

The members of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates gathered in April in Jacksonville, Florida, for their annual meeting. The Reverend Dr. James Goodloe IV continues to serve as moderator of the PCCEC. William Campbell (Presbytery of Scioto Valley), Thomas Tickner (Presbytery of Grace), and Paul Hooker (Presbytery of St. Augustine) completed their terms of service. Richard McClain (Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky), Susan Osoinach (Presbytery of Palo Duro), and Christine Fuller (Presbytery of Northumberland) were elected as new members of the PCCEC from three different reading groups. James Watkins (Presbytery of Providence) was elected as a new committee member by the General Assembly, and Stanley Hall was elected by the assembly to serve a second term.

The Bible Content Examination was offered on the first Friday in February. The four standard Ordination Examinations were offered in February and September.

Six hundred ninety-eight individuals took the 2003 Bible Content Examination; 522 of them (74.9 percent) passed the exam.

In February, 436 inquirers and candidates wrote a total of 1,003 Standard Ordination Examinations, as follows:

	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Biblical Exegesis	53.3%	46.7%
Theological Competence	57.6%	42.4%
Worship and Sacraments	61.2%	38.8%
Church Polity	67.5%	32.5%

In September, 540 inquirers and candidates wrote a total of 1,497 Standard Ordination Examinations, as follows:

	% Satisfactory	% Unsatisfactory
Biblical Exegesis	65.0%	35.0%
Theological Competence	60.0%	40.0%
Worship and Sacraments	72.4%	26.6%
Church Polity	68.4%	31.6%
OVERALL	66.7%	33.3%
	(Total of 977 exams)	(Total of 500 exams)

During the year 2003, the Reverend Lesley Davies, executive secretary for the PCCEC, visited students and staff at all PC(USA) seminaries, as well as other seminaries attended by Presbyterian inquirers and candidates.

B. *Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) Agency Summary*

“God has told you what is good. To do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly” (selected from Micah 6:8).

1. Responsibilities

The context of women's advocacy is a human situation where women experience injustice because they are women. Grounded in communal faith in “God [who] liberated the people of Israel from oppression . . . [and] covenanted with Israel . . . that they might do justice”(*Book of Order*, G-3.010b) and motivated by painful recognition of sexism within and without, the church explicitly articulated in the Articles of Agreement its commitment to work against gender-based discrimination. The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) is a contemporary fulfillment of this commitment. Created by the mandate of the 205th General Assembly (1993) at the recommendation of the Report of the Task Force on Shape and Form, ACWC is charged with the responsibility of assisting the church to

give full expression to the rich diversity of its membership as specified in the *Book of Order*, G-4.0403 . . . monitor(ing) and evaluat[ing] policies, procedures, programs, and resources regarding the way in which they impact the status and position of women in the church...and advocat(ing) for full inclusiveness and equity in all areas of the life and work of the church in society [as a whole]. (*Minutes*, 1994, Part I, p. 262)

The ACWC's assigned functions are delineated in the *GAC Manual of Operations* (Appendix I, EV, Section VIII.B.), and they include:

- Preparing policy statements, resolutions, recommendations and reports on women's concerns to the General Assembly;
- Providing advice and counsel to the General Assembly and its committees on overtures, commissioners' resolutions, reports and any other actions before the General Assembly;
- Providing advice to the General Assembly Council on matters of women's concerns including statements concerning pressing issues between meetings of the General Assembly;
- Assisting the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy [ACSWP] in maintaining an up-to-date and accurate compilation of General Assembly policy on women's concerns and providing information as requested;
- Monitoring the implementation of policies and programs for gender justice;
- Providing the Stated Clerk, the Moderator of the General Assembly, and the Executive Director of the General Assembly Council with information as they fulfill their responsibilities to communicate and interpret GA policies on women's concerns;
- Maintaining a strong prophetic witness to the church and society on existing and emerging issues of women's concerns.

The ACWC is a function of the Office of the Deputy Executive Director, General Assembly Council, although its staffing is provided by the Women's Ministries program area, National Ministries Division. The committee has direct access to the General Assembly and the ACWC chair has corresponding member status with the General Assembly Council (GAC) and with the General Assembly. The ACWC has ten members nominated by the General Assembly Nominating Committee and elected by the General Assembly. They are chosen based on their individual qualifications and do not represent any constituencies. Current members are Karen Breckenridge (chair), Sarah A. Colwill, Adeline S. deCastro, Dean E. Foose, Charlene Heaton, Aleida Jernigan, R. Ani Lelea, H. Scott Matheney, and Nancy Neal. In addition, Lillian Oats is a full voting member of the committee, representing Presbyterian Women. Emily Wigger, likewise, is a full voting member, and sits on the committee, by virtue of her position on the General Assembly Council Executive Committee.

In addition, recognizing the complex ways in which gender inequality manifests itself because of class, race, ethnicity, education, age, status in employment, disability, sexual orientation, marital status, and culture, ACWC invites liaisons from other entities of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to sit with the committee at its regularly scheduled meetings. Those entities are the Advocacy Committee on Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC), the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP), the Congregational Ministries Division (CMD), the Presbyterian United Nations Office (PUNO), and the Worldwide Ministries Division (WMD). In turn, liaisons from the

ACWC attend the meetings of the ACSWP, ACREC and the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment (MRTI). In 1999, the ACWC began to work with the Board of Pensions (BOP) and, in 2002, with the Presbyterian Health, Education, & Welfare Association (PHEWA).

2. *Current Work*

During the year 2003, ACWC met three times—January 23–25 in Louisville, Ky., July 24–26 in Sacramento, Calif. (concurrent with the ACSWP and ACREC), and October 16–18 in Chicago, Ill. When choosing these meeting sites, one consideration is the availability of educational opportunities. At the January meeting in Louisville, Ky., the committee heard a presentation from the National Network of Presbyterian College Women (NNPCW) about their history and present work. While in Chicago, we began our time together with Dr. Anna Case-Winters for a lecture and discussion around liberation theology. Also in Chicago the committee received guests from the local presbytery's Justice For Women committee and heard about their work, and visited the mayor's office for a look at their extensive domestic violence hot-line program and the faith community's part in that work.

The following delineates ACWC's work in 2003:

a. *Preparing Statements, Reports, Recommendations, and Advice & Counsel to General Assembly*

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) has a responsibility to prepare statements, reports, recommendations, and advice and counsel to the General Assembly on issues that impact the status and well-being of women. The ACWC fulfilled this responsibility in the following ways:

- Prepared advice and counsel memoranda on overtures and commissioners' resolutions affecting women and their children coming before the General Assembly.
- Continued, in partnership with others, a review of the church's policies on sexual misconduct by the clergy.
- Continued work on an initiative for assisting the church in use of inclusive language.
- Adopted a process for discerning future work for the committee.
- Led the effort to produce a post-abortion pastoral resource.
- Addressed all referrals from previous General Assemblies (individual reports contained in the following section of this document).
- Submitted ACWC's annual report to the 214th General Assembly (2003).

b. *Networking, Monitoring, and Communication*

In addition to the exposure to local advocates in areas where ACWC's regular meetings are held, the very make-up of the ACWC allows for networking, monitoring, and evaluating procedures, policies, and programs among General Assembly entities and program areas. Through staff to the ACWC, networking around public policy issues is carried out through the Public Policy Advocate Team (PPAT) made up of GAC staff, representing several program areas; the Cross-Caucus meetings of the Racial Ethnic Ministries; and through involvement in issue oriented inter-staff meetings and conferences.

In these ways a monitoring of broad concerns related to women of color, immigrant women, working parents (child care) can be affected. Likewise, such issues as domestic violence and other examples of violence against women, sexual misconduct, pay equity, women and health, and many other gender-related concerns can be lifted up and addressed in concert with other program entities of the church, making new partnerships possible.

The ACWC's chair meets regularly with GAC and reports ACWC concerns and actions to them.

Issue reports, approved by past General Assemblies, are made available through the Office of Women's Advocacy in the Women's Ministries program area. These reports serve as a means of communicating with the larger church and are available through the Presbyterian Distribution Service (PDS). Recent reports include:

- *Clergywomen's Experiences in Ministry: Realities and Challenges* (available from the Office of Women's Advocacy) 2003;
- *Sisters of Mercy, Daughters of Grace: Presbyterians and Prostituted Women* (PDS #095814) 2001;
- *Women & AIDS: A Global Crisis* (PDS #72 710 01 003) 2001;
- *Prostitution in the United States* (PDS #72 710 99 009) 1999;
- *Report on the Girl Child* (PDS #72710 98 003) 1997;
- *The Plight of Women and Children Forced into International Prostitution* (PDS #72 710 98 004) 1997;
- *The Military and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Women* (PDS #72 710 98 007) 1997;
- *The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, China* (PDS #72710 98 005) 1996.

C. Task Force on Clergy Recruitment and Retention Report from the Board of Pensions

1. Keeping Our Promises

In the spring of 2003, the Board of Directors of the Board of Pensions commissioned a task force of its clergy-directors to review literature, statistical studies, and other materials with respect to the recruitment and retention of clergy for the pastoral ministry, specifically ministry in and with the local congregation. Based on their review, the task force was asked to make findings and recommendations to the board of directors of suggested actions for the Board of Pensions. Our concern was grounded in the observation that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has suffered a decline both in membership and in the number of clergy with appropriate skills to answer the varied, and sometimes specialized needs, called for by the congregations. While we acknowledge that leadership in healthy congregations is expressed in many ways, we observe that more often than not, the pastor's leadership acts as a catalyst for the culture of faith, excitement, and community that draws people to our congregations. We, along with other General Assembly agencies, are dedicated to helping build church leadership, especially pastoral leadership, for now and for the future.

One conclusion is certain: Every Presbyterian, every church, every session, every middle governing body, and every General Assembly agency has both a role and a responsibility to sustain our ministers of the Word and Sacrament in their work and provide for ongoing support and growth.

This responsibility is made clear in our *Constitution* by questions posed to the members of the church.

We Presbyterians make promises to our clergy at the time of their installation. These promises result from our affirmative answers to the questions posed in section G-14.0510(a)(3) of our *Book of Order*:

Do we promise:

- To pay him or her fairly and provide for his or her welfare as he or she works among us?
- To stand by him or her in trouble and share his or her joys?

- To listen to the word he or she preaches, welcome his or her pastoral care, and honor his or her authority as he or she seeks to honor and obey Jesus Christ our Lord?

Initially, we identified several issues:

- What might the Board of Pensions do, within its mission, to help keep our part of those promises?
- What might we undertake to help attract to the ministry younger, talented persons who can give many years of service to the church?
- How might we help to retain qualified persons in parish ministry?
- In what tangible ways might intentional and attentive listening serve to encourage and enable a vital support network within the connectional framework of the denomination?
- How might we support our clergy so that they can provide the sort of strong, vibrant, spiritual leadership that inspires us and helps each of us to achieve and sustain the spiritual growth and contentment for which we hunger?

The work of the task force resulted in the following report to our board of directors.

The findings of our task force deserve the attention of all of us. While some findings may be addressed in part by the Board of Pensions, some require prayerful consideration and attention by others in the Presbyterian community. There is no simple answer, procedure, or program that results in a single solution.

In fact, there may be many solutions: some crafted to meet local or regional needs, others crafted at the national level. Much time and considerable resources, both human and financial, are required. We strongly believe that our denomination's combined efforts will be worthwhile. We further believe our ministers deserve our best efforts. The directors of the Board of Pensions urge us all to reflect upon the simple yet profound promises we have made to our ministers at the time of installation and to search for new ways to continue to keep them.

The Board of Pensions has committed itself to design, develop, and raise funds for some new programs that would address these issues. However, before we could begin the design phase, we needed to have a better definition of the problems we seek to ameliorate.

The Board of Directors of the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) believes that the report of our task force is a valuable and helpful step forward in defining the problems and respectfully refers the following report to the 216th General Assembly (2004) for its thoughtful consideration.

Earldean V.S. Robbins, Chair, The Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

2. Report and Recommendations to the Board of Directors of the Board of Pensions, March 6, 2004

The Task Force affirms the good and dedicated work of thousands of women and men who have answered the call to serve as ordained ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The church gives thanks for their faithfulness, commitment, sacrifice, and leadership. So many serve the church faithfully and well. So many witness to the love and justice of Jesus Christ as they live out their calling in congregations small and large, urban and rural. We rejoice in the unity among us and give thanks to God for their witness of Christian discipleship.

The task force, inspired by our fellow servants, offers its findings on clergy recruitment and retention to support the efforts of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to build and strengthen pastoral leadership.

a. The Charge to the Task Force on Clergy Recruitment and Retention

The task force was established by the Earldean V.S. Robbins, chair of the board of directors of the Board of Pensions, in February 2003. The Reverend Dr. Arthur E. Sundstrom, first vice chair of the board, was asked to

moderate the task force and all other clergy directors, including co-opted and a candidate for ministry, were invited to participate.

The charge to the task force focused on the recruitment and retention of ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The task force was directed to review literature, studies, and anecdotal information on this topic; summarize its findings; and recommend to the board of directors what, if any, responses the Board of Pensions, within its mission, could make to the issues raised by the research. Early on, the task force realized that some of the matters surrounding recruitment and retention issues were beyond the mission of the Board of Pensions, but should be raised so that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at large would have the opportunity to learn from the findings and make any responses it feels appropriate and necessary.

b. *Composition and Meetings of Task Force*

The following members of the Board of Directors of the Board of Pensions of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) participated in the task force: the Reverend Dr. Jefferson K. Aiken Jr.; the Reverend Gerald (Dan) Clark Jr.; the Reverend Dr. Stephen E. Gorman; the Reverend Dr. Isaiah Jones (co-opted); the Reverend Dr. Daniel P. Junkin; the Reverend Adele Langworthy (board, Class 2003); Adan A. Mairena (candidate for ministry); the Reverend Dr. Arthur E. Sundstrom, task force chair and first vice chair, board of directors; the Reverend John P. Wilson; the Reverend Dr. Jeffrey D. Yergler; the Reverend Dr. Richard E. Young. Ex officio: Earledean V.S. Robbins, board chair.

The following staff representatives of the Board of Pensions participated in the task force: Robert W. Maggs Jr., president; the Reverend Dr. William R. Forbes, vice president, Church Relations and corporate secretary; Francis E. Maloney, executive vice president; the Reverend Alexander S. McLachlan, special assistant to the president; the Reverend Peter C.S. Sime, director of assistance and retirement housing.

The task force held five meetings: April 3, 2003, Dallas, Tex.; July 10, 2003, Philadelphia, Pa.; October 22, 2003, Santa Fe, N.M.; January 12, 2004, Houston, Tex.; March 4, 2004, Philadelphia, Pa.

c. *Materials Considered by the Task Force*

The conclusions of the task force are based on the excellent work product of many institutions and authors. We sincerely appreciate the thoughtful and prayerful work of the people who contributed their time and effort in the preparation of the materials we used. A complete bibliography is listed at the end of the report.

The Board of Pensions data refers only to the number of ordained clergy who are members of the Plan. This total is 9,760. The Comparative Statistics published by Research Services lists the number of active ministers as 13,845 and this number is used by other sources. The difference is 4,085 persons who are engaged in many different forms of ministry and hold membership in a presbytery but are not currently members in the Plan.

d. *Focus Areas*

The research reviewed by the task force very consistently identified the following focus areas:

- stress management,
- conflict resolution,
- organizational development,
- personal health management,
- managing church finances,
- shepherding congregations,

- supporting fellow workers/staff relationships,
- understanding and reconciling family choices and exigencies,
- matching qualifications and needs within the call process,
- mentoring programs by pastors for pastors,
- support for innovative presbytery programs to provide for the shepherding and sustaining of small churches.

e. *Findings*

(1) *Recruitment*

Is there a clergy shortage? There is no simple answer. There is no shortage in the absolute number of ministers to serve in current church vacancies; however, there is a shortage of pastors. The Office of General Assembly reports that there are currently 11,097 congregations and 13,845 active ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Of course, many of these ministers are serving in specialized ministries, teaching, etc. But as the statistics illustrate, there are far more ordained ministers than total number of churches, and multiple times the number of vacant churches.

However, these statistics do not take into account the reality of a shortage of clergy willing or able to serve in available congregational settings. The reasons are many, including the fact that there are fewer pastors whose job qualifications, personal needs, or professional experiences match the requirements for current vacancies. This is sometimes attributable to the skill level or personal circumstances of the candidate, the match of the candidate's experience to the particular job qualifications desired, or the adequacy of the terms of call offered for an available position. In addition to normal turnover, vacancies may arise or remain unfilled because of the culture, the location, the work environment, or the resources of the congregation itself. Small rural and urban, immigrant and racial ethnic congregations may face a greater challenge in filling a vacancy.

Additional issues also greatly impact a pastor's decision to serve a church including the availability of work for a spouse (clergy couples serving churches and dual-career couples in which the spouse is involved in a secular occupation). This is an important issue for both the financial support of the family as well as personal satisfaction and degree of professional achievement of the spouse.

Further exacerbating the problem is declining membership and a resultant decline in resources. Many of our "vacant" churches have insufficient membership to sustain a full-time (and in many instances even a part-time) pastor. As of 2002, almost five thousand of our churches have a membership of 100 or fewer members. Using the definitions provided by our denominational Research Services unit, that means that 45 percent of all congregations in our denomination "qualified as very small."¹ The size of the congregation links directly to the congregation's ability to call and support a pastor. In 2002, the median total contributions from living donors to these very small churches was \$34,020. While some of these churches may have revenue sources in addition to annual contributions by the congregation, this level of revenue makes it extremely difficult to financially support a pastor.² In addition, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) should continue to explore new ways to minister to communities that cannot afford an installed pastor.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) must come to terms with the reality of the inability of a large percentage of our congregations to call a pastor and then recalculate the number of true vacancies in the denomination. When examined through this lens it becomes clear that the issue of a "clergy shortage" could be framed as a membership shortage.³

The statistics concerning the number of clergy vis-à-vis the number of churches that can sustain a pastor show that, in purely numeric terms, there is no clergy shortage nor will there be one in the foreseeable future.⁴ How-

ever, these statistics should not suggest to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at large that there is no need to recruit women and men for the ministry of the Word and Sacrament. The church, now as always, is in need of gifted and capable persons to serve congregations as pastors. It is the task of current leaders of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including pastors, youth workers, sessions, professors, and chaplains, to identify persons who should be invited to explore God's call upon their lives. We should always be aware of women and men who may be exploring other career possibilities and invite them to consider the ministry as a vocation. We commend the Presbyterian Pastoral Leadership Search Effort (PLSE) for its leadership in this area and urge wide support and participation in its efforts.

(2) *Retention*

The second major focus of the task force's work is the matter of retention. Could and should the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) do more to retain persons in the pastoral ministry? In our view, the answer to both questions is "yes." The primary consideration for such an affirmative answer is that it is incumbent upon all of us to assure strong, experienced pastoral leadership for current members as well as for future generations. The statistical data of the Board of Pensions shows that a small, but significant, number of clergy are leaving the Plan within seven years of ordination. This is true of both first and second career clergy. This number seems to be increasing. Between 1990–1996, the average number leaving each year in this category was sixty-eight. Beginning in 2000, the average number has increased to ninety-six annually. This number becomes more significant when one considers the average age of the 9,760 ordained clergy in the Plan is 50.5 and that 2,905 of them (approximately 30 percent) are between ages 55–65 and can be expected to retire within the next ten to fifteen years. The research of Lucy Rupe shows that during the last twenty years the rate of retirement has averaged 360 per year and during last ten years the number of ordinations has been between 330–400.

Our research revealed many reasons people choose to leave the parish ministry. Some choices are based on personal and other non-job related considerations. Some choices may reflect weaknesses in our denominational gatekeeping and call processes. Some choices may reflect simple program omissions because we have relied too much on on-the-job learning for our clergy.

Historically, we have tended to blame our seminaries for any practical pastoral deficiencies. It is not clear, however, that such blame is properly placed. It is clear that blame alone does not serve to correct the deficiencies. We must all accept responsibility to help clergy be adequately prepared for the rigors and challenges of parish life.⁵

Our research identified a number of factors that contribute to retention problems. The most significant and often reported include stress, conflict, and burnout.

(a) *Stress*

While "stress" is experienced in many professions, studies have identified particular situations that specifically impact pastors' feelings about their work. The leading "stressors" are:

- Inadequate skills in managing what are perceived to be unrealistic expectations of the congregation.
- Unrealistic expectations of pastors entering a new call, especially their first call.
- Feeling lonely or isolated.
- Inability to spend adequate time with family or loved ones.
- Insufficient terms of call, or to state it more bluntly, inadequate cash salaries, housing allowance, travel allowances, and continuing education allowances. In short, the entire compensation package.⁶

Both the Board of Pensions and the church at large should be particularly concerned about stress issues. If efforts to reduce or eliminate stress are successful, there would be less need for medical and psychological assis-

tance, thus reducing medical claims. Reducing stress improves the health of our pastors, enables them to do the work they are called to do in more satisfying and productive ways, and thus reducing the cost to the church: a “win-win” situation for all.

(b) *Conflict*

Like stress, conflict is common in the modern workplace; but unlike typical workplaces, the key leader, in this case the pastor, is expected to understand and manage conflict while sometimes being the very source of conflict. While conflict in human communities will never be fully eliminated, identifying the sources of conflict enables adequate responses to be developed. Among the prime causes of conflict that pastors identify are:

- Conflict within the local church. Due to differences in leadership styles, worship practices, management issues, etc., significant disagreement leading to conflict between pastor and member may arise.⁷
- Conflict with denominational officials (executive presbyters, committee on ministry personnel, etc.). This conflict leads to a feeling of not being supported by those outside the local congregation, exacerbating issues of loneliness and stress.
- Conflict with head of staff or with other members of staff.
- Doctrinal conflict, which causes significant tension within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at large, is reported by pastors to be a very minor issue in their local congregation.⁸

(c) *Burnout*

While the definition of burnout is imprecise and used to mean different things by different people, this term appeared in several studies and in each was considered to be a factor that negatively impacts a pastor’s work. For the purposes of this study, burnout included:

- A spiritual life/practice that is neither rich nor renewing.
- Being bored or feeling constrained by the current position.
- Feeling drained by the demands made by parishioners.⁹
- Inadequate on-going support mechanisms for pastors.¹⁰
- Receiving little satisfaction in the role/status of pastor.

(d) *Summary*

While additional items could be identified as special issues and concerns of parish clergy, the three most often reported are stress, conflict, and burnout. The issue of stress must be addressed by both comprehensive, at-large strategies and individual responses shaped by particular situations. In the matter of conflict, inadequate training in practical matters of church life and administration are often identified as a cause. Burnout could be attributed to lack of skills or knowledge in self-care and the external pressures noted. Important external pressures are unrealistic demands as perceived by the pastor and the feeling of loneliness or isolation that many experience.

f. *The Interests of the Board of Pensions*

Our recommendations address two questions:

- What are the interests of the Board of Pensions in this subject matter?
- What programs, within its mission, should the Board of Pensions consider in the near term to help address these findings?

The mission of the Board of Pensions is to provide benefits and financial assistance to Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) workers and their families. To support this mission, the Board of Pensions designs and administers benefits, assistance, and related programs and receives, invests, and disburses moneys for those programs.

To the extent that Benefits Plan members, and especially ministers of the Word and Sacrament, suffer mental and physical health problems because of working conditions, costs are increased for healthcare, death, and disability benefits. This reality impacts the entire Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) because congregations share in the funding of the Benefits Plan. Further, the responsibilities assigned to the Board of Pensions by the General Assembly specifically include designing and administering a program of financial assistance to help meet needs that are beyond the scope of the Benefits Plan.

Currently, the board only offers education programs for clergy related to financial and retirement planning. The task force recommends that, as funds become available, the board of directors consider new programs beyond financial and retirement planning as it seeks to fulfill the mission of the board in the 21st century.

g. Recommendations to the Directors of the Board of Pensions

(1) Program for Continuing Education for Pastoral Leadership

The task force recognizes that our seminaries, colleges, and several of our ministry units provide various forms of continuing education for pastors, church workers, and church members. These efforts continue to enrich the church and its membership in incalculable ways. However, we recommend that the board sponsor a multi-faceted program for continuing education specifically designed for professional skill building for pastoral leaders. Every profession finds that continuing education works to the advantage of the professionals and those whom they serve; most professions mandate such education. This program, for which funding must be found, would be a central resource for pastors to learn some of those skills that are frequently learned only on the job. The courses would be designed by the board in cooperation with other segments of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including our seminaries and colleges, synods, presbyteries, and other ministry units as appropriate. The programs featured would be constructed to help pastors deal with those situations that are often the source of retention issues for them or their sessions. Opportunities for growth in practical and professional skills would also be a key component of a continuing education effort.

One of the great advantages of current board assistance programs is the active participation of presbyteries and employing organizations in both the selection of recipients and the sharing of the costs of the assistance provided. We recommend that this model should be used in the administration of the program for continuing education for pastoral leadership. In this way, the decision-making process is inherently a local one.

(2) Wellness Initiatives

Various studies¹¹ noted that many pastors are not caring for their physical health as well as they should. The board should continue to provide information, programs, and other responses that will encourage and enable ministers to move toward better health practices and conditions. Additionally, programs and incentives should be designed to respond to particular situations. Responses would vary depending on individual needs, location, availability of services, etc.

(3) Information Technology

In today's fast-paced, highly technological society, the pastor finds himself or herself even more isolated if he or she does not have access to computers and the Internet. The feeling of isolation can be intense for those pastors serving in less densely populated areas of the country.

Even though there are a great number of continuing education events throughout the country, transportation and cost both pose problems for many of our rural pastors. The board, in conjunction with presbyteries and local congregations, should assist churches with the cost of adding computer capability and training as well as aiding in the connection to the Internet where feasible. To further help the congregations and pastors, the board in partnership with other General Assembly agencies should raise funds and develop the highest quality user-friendly Web site that would allow pastors throughout the denomination to access information from the denomination as well as other sources. This Web site would facilitate the access to the information from the Board concerning benefits as well as other pertinent information from agencies of the denomination. Another opportunity for the use of the

Web would be the dissemination of educational information concerning many of the previously mentioned topics by on-line seminars that could be accessed in the local church.

h. *Concerns Suggested for Consideration of Others Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*

The task force recognizes that many sessions, presbyteries, synods, General Assembly entities, seminaries, and other organizations are studying and addressing ways to help attract and retain persons in the parish ministry. We respectfully refer them to the excellent work done by those on whom we relied during the course of our work. Subjects deserving of a new look and a special focus include the following:

(1) *More Carefully Discern the Suitability of Individuals for the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament*

This includes revisiting the considerations, processes, and standards used during the inquiry and candidacy process. “Gatekeeping” occurs at many points in Presbyterian processes from inquiry to call. Each of these points is a focus of special responsibilities for participating governing bodies. Some inquirers and candidates are entering ministry who do not seem to have the gifts for ministry as evidenced by difficulties in their personal lives due to their work and the difficulties and conflict that arise in the churches they serve. The relatively short time they serve the church in active ordained ministry is another indicator of the lack of thoroughness in exploring the call during the time of discernment. It seems that at no point in the process were they constructively counseled toward serving the church other than as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. It appears that sessions, committees on preparation for ministry, presbyteries, and seminaries sometimes passed them through the process, each hoping that some other group would exercise theological and pastoral gatekeeping. The result of our collective failure is that, at times, inadequately trained and equipped, and emotionally unsuitable ministers are serving or have served, and sometimes damaged, churches.

(2) *Review the Inquiry and Candidacy Process*

We further recommend that one particular requirement of the inquiry and candidacy process be reviewed: the two-year under care provision. Some persons do not begin the process until their senior year in seminary, which means they are ineligible to receive a call for two years after graduation from seminary. In the meantime, they must work to provide for themselves and their families and often begin another career path. For many reasons, they do not want to abandon that other career when they become eligible to receive a call. Due to this requirement, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may be losing many fine pastors who would otherwise enter congregational service.

(3) *Examine the Vacancy Process*

How do we best match qualifications and a call? How can a church realistically plan for succession of clergy within our polity? The question has to be asked if it is in the best interests of the congregation to have a vacancy that, from start to finish, can take a year to eighteen months and, in some cases, even longer. Many of our lay people find the process irritating, time consuming, frustrating, and at total variance with good personnel practices.

(4) *Emphasize Continuing Education*

While the *Book of Order* requires that at least two-weeks study leave be granted annually, it does not require that such time be used. Additionally, in most parish settings, there is little, if any, consultation between the pastor and the session, or the pastor and the presbytery, as to what subjects or skill development the pastor should pursue using the study leave granted by the church. Consultation could help identify skills that would enhance ministry in that particular setting resulting in less conflict and more satisfaction by both the pastor and the congregation.

Taking the issue of continuing education even more seriously, consideration should be given to mandating continuing education for all pastors. This is common practice in the helping professions (for example, physicians, nurses, practicing psychologists, social workers). Specifying which areas of continuing education are required may be left for pastors and governing bodies to decide.

(5) Review the Process to Call an Individual

The task force raises these questions for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at large to consider:

- Should some of our processes be examined to encourage creativity and flexibility in matching clergy to vacancies?
- Should the church examine and rationalize the relative complexity of the process leading toward ordination for the minister of the Word and Sacrament with the relative simplicity of the process of commissioning lay pastors?

(6) Define Compensation for Pastors

This includes a look not only at “minimum” terms of call, but “adequate” terms of call. There can be much discussion as to what “adequate” may mean, but the answers to a few questions may provide some indication: What financial resources are required for a pastor (and family) to live in the same style as does the average member of the congregation he or she serves? Does the adequacy of compensation take into account any debt that the pastor may have incurred while preparing for the ordained ministry? Do allowances for professional expenses actually cover the expense or is the pastor expected to cover the actual expense from his or her salary? We urge each presbytery to define “adequate terms of call” and work toward ensuring that all pastors receive such compensation.

(7) Examine Support For Pastors

This includes an examination of resources and professional relationships that encourage and support our pastors by reducing stress, conflict, and burnout. In some presbyteries, the executive presbyter can serve this function well; in others, for a host of reasons, it may be wiser for another presbytery staff member or a contracted professional counselor to serve in this capacity.

i. The Board in Partnership with Others

The task force notes that the Board of Pensions cannot and should not be the sole sponsor of the many opportunities available to our church community to support our pastors as they work among us. We are aware of many innovative programs now under development in several of our seminaries, the ground-breaking work being undertaken by some General Assembly agencies, and the generosity of several foundations that provide for funding for new initiatives. We are also aware that many presbyteries and even local churches seek new ways to assist their pastors in their efforts to be faithful servants. But the task force has come to understand that the need is great and seems to be growing. Many opportunities and needs can be addressed by sessions, presbyteries, synods, and the General Assembly and all of its entities.

The Board of Pensions is keenly aware that declining membership is a phenomenon affecting all mainline denominations. We are also aware that there are many cultural, sociological, and demographic reasons contributing to this decline; however, our premise is that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), in essence, has a “personnel problem” that, if left unaddressed, will soon become another contributing factor to the decline in membership. We believe the data we reviewed supports our premise. We believe we should each do our best, within our respective roles and responsibilities, to stand by our promises to our pastors, and help build the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) leadership for the future.

Certainly the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is far more than the women and men who have been called to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament, but as both Scriptures declare and history confirms, without a committed, well-educated, trained, and supported leadership, neither the church of Jesus Christ nor its members will ever grow into the fullness and faithfulness God intends. Men and women continue to respond to the Call of Christ. The church must ensure they are equipped and supported in their mission.

j. *Acknowledgements*

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A study of active clergy between the ages of 26–65 in eight age classifications.

A study of ministers with seven years or less of active service who left the Benefits Plan between 1996–2002 and who did not retire.

(3) *Telephone Interviews*

In addition, the task force conducted telephone interviews with persons who had recently left the active pastoral ministry to gain “first person” information concerning their decisions to enter and then leave active ministry. The methodology adopted by the task force was that the directors would personally call randomly selected clergy from each of the following cohorts:

- Those ordained at under age thirty who left active service within ten years.
- Those ordained at over age forty who left active service within ten years.

- Those who left active service within seven years of ordination from any category.
- Those who served for at least twenty years and left active service within ten years of retirement.

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