

Proposed Amendments to the Constitution

Amendments to the *Book of Confessions*
and the *Book of Order*

**Approved by the 221st General Assembly (2014) and
recommended to the presbyteries for their vote.**



Including: Note from the Stated Clerk, a list of the amendments with advice from the ACC, and an index.

NOTE FROM THE STATED CLERK

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved and recommended to the presbyteries, for their affirmative or negative votes, the addition of Confession of Belhar to the *Book of Confessions*. If approved by a two-thirds majority of presbyteries and enacted by the 222nd General Assembly (2016), the Confession of Belhar will be added to the *Book of Confessions*.

The General Assembly also approved and recommended to the presbyteries, for their affirmative or negative votes, proposed changes in the language of the *Book of Order* that, if approved, will amend the Constitution.

Please note that with each proposed amendment, reference is made to an item number that indicates the General Assembly committee report and action related to each proposed amendment. These item numbers also indicate where to find other background information from various entities that was available electronically to the General Assembly commissioners. This information may be accessed through PC Biz at <http://www.pc-biz.org>. The item number references will also be found in the *Minutes of the 221st General Assembly (2014)*, which are expected to be available to the presbyteries by the time they consider the amendments. The full advice of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) and other advisory entities can be found immediately following the item in the *Minutes* for which the advice is given.

Unless otherwise indicated, new language to be added to the *Book of Order* is in italics and any language to be stricken will have a line through it. In providing rationale and advice for each item, direct quotations from the various groups that presented or commented on these items before the General Assembly is used whenever possible.

It is recommended that presbyters, in preparation for voting on the proposed amendments, review all the information for each proposed amendment, found on PC-Biz (www.pc-biz.org). Click on the “Committees” tab, then click on a specific committee by using the first two numbers of the item number associated with each proposed amendment. From the list of committee business, click on the specific item you wish to review.

Presbyteries must report to the Office of the General Assembly a separate vote on each proposed amendment. A presbytery may vote on the amendments in a consent agenda or omnibus motion, as long as each proposed amendment is identified separately. Presbyteries are required to report their votes by June 21, 2015. However, in order to make the changes and publish the 2015–16 *Book of Order* in a timely manner, receipt of votes prior to this deadline would be appreciated (by May 15, 2015, if possible).

Thank you for your time and careful attention as you prepare to vote on these proposed amendments.

Gradye Parsons
Stated Clerk of the General Assembly

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**14-1 Confession of Belhar
On Amending the *Book of Confessions* (Item 13-01)**

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall the Confession of Belhar be included in the *Book of Confessions*?

[Explanatory notes: (a) Text for the Confession of Belhar can be found on page 1 (b) Biblical citations should be listed in the margins by the relevant text as is shown, and (c) While not of constitutional character, whenever the Confession of Belhar is printed in the *Book of Confessions*, it should be accompanied by the original Accompanying Letter from Belhar to explain the context of the confession. This letter is on page 4]

Background and Rationale

The 220th General Assembly (2012) approved the action to begin the process of amending the *Book of Confessions* to include the Confession of Belhar, as provided in G-6.03, and approved the authorization of a budget for education across the church about the confession, in addition to its committee budget for direct expenses (*Minutes*, 2012, Part I, p. 1527). ...

The committee held one face-to-face meeting in October 2012, and monthly conference calls between December 2012 and January 2014. Much of the committee's work was focused on developing educational resources for churchwide use. These can be accessed through the committee's website, www.pcusa.org/belhar. They consulted with several different constituency groups within the PC(USA) as well as consulting with ecumenical partners in the U.S. and South Africa. They gave significant consideration to the implications of the Confession of Belhar for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at this moment in the church's history. The sub-themes of Justice, Unity, and Reconciliation framed their approach to the Confession of Belhar and the development of interpretative materials.

The Special Committee on the Confession of Belhar reached a unanimous decision to recommend inclusion of the Confession of Belhar into the *Book of Confessions*.

The Confession of Belhar

Revelation 21:6–7 **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

Matthew 28:19–20 **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

We believe

Ephesians 2:13–20 • that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another;

Ephesians 4:11–16,
Psalm 133 • that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought; one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain;

John 17:20–23 • that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted;

- John 13:34
 - Colossians 3:12–16
 - Philippians 2:1–5
 - 1 Corinthians 1:10–13
 - Ephesians 4:1–6
 - 1 Corinthians 10:16–17
 - Ephesians 3:18–20
 - Galatians 6:2
 - 2 Corinthians 1:3–4
 - 1 Corinthians 12:24b–28, Ephesians 3:14–20
 - 1 Corinthians 12:4–11,
Romans 12:3–8
 - Galatians 3:27–29
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways;
 - * in that we love one another;
 - * that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another;
 - * that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another;
 - * that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind;
 - * have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope;
 - * together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;
 - * together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;
 - * together know and bear one another’s burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ;
 - * that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another;
 - * that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity;
 - that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God;
 - that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

We believe

- 2 Corinthians 5:17–21
 - that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ;
- Matthew 5:9, 13–16;
2 Peter 3:13;
Revelation 21:1–5
 - that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells;
 - that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God’s life-giving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world;
- Romans 6:12–14,
Colossians 1:11–14
 - that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
 - that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.
- James 2:8–9
 - that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

Therefore, we reject any doctrine which, in such a situation sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

We believe

- Isaiah 42:1–7
 - that God has revealed God’s self as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- Luke 6:20–26
 - that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- Luke 4:16–19
 - that God calls the church to follow God in this; for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- Luke 7:22
 - that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- Psalms 146
 - that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps the orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- James 1:27
 - that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- Micah 6:8
 - that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right;
- Amos 5:14–15, 23–24
 - that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;

- Psalm 82:1–5 • that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged;
- Leviticus 19:15 • that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

- Acts 5:29–32; 1 Peter 3:15–18 **We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence.

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory forever and ever.

Accompanying Letter to the Confession of Belhar

This letter was a statement made upon the adoption of the Belhar Confession by the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.
2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any ideologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.

3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honor, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soulsearching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.
4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

The vote of the Assembly Committee on Theological Issues and Institutions and CE (13) to approve the proposed amendment was 46/6/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 551/87/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 24, 947ff.)

For the full report of Item 13-01 go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4695&promoID=327>

**14-A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction
On Amending G-2.0509 (Item 06-05)**

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0509 of the Form of Government be amended by adding the following new paragraph at the end of that section? [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“Whenever a former teaching elder has renounced jurisdiction in the midst of a disciplinary proceeding as the accused, that former teaching elder shall not be permitted to perform any work, paid or volunteer, in any congregation or entity under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).”

Background and Rationale

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of Western Reserve as Item 06-05 (*Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 27, 72, 73, 360). Presbyteries of Greater Atlanta and Santa Barbara concurred, with Greater Atlanta also proposing a similar overture (Item 06-03), which was answered by the action taken on this item. The Presbytery of Western Reserve provided the following rationale:

As stated in the Rules of Church Discipline, Preamble, “the purpose of discipline is to honor God by making clear the significance of membership in the body of Christ” (*Book of Order*, D-1.0101, Church Discipline). The principles also state in D-1.0102: “The power that Jesus Christ has vested in his Church ... is one for building up the body of Christ, not for destroying it.”

When a teaching elder renounces the jurisdiction of the church in the midst of formal judicial process, there is no resolution for either party, particularly for the complainant. Because there has been no acquittal or determination of guilt, the teaching elder has, by virtue of renunciation, removed himself/herself from leadership and office within the church. It could be argued that the church remains vulnerable due to lack of information regarding the circumstances and facts uncovered in the investigative process that might have come to light in the judicial proceeding. Renunciation to stop judicial process should not be an alternative vehicle to continue to work or volunteer in the church when facts and circumstances have not come to light.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution (ACC) advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to disapprove Item 06-05 providing the following advice:

This proposed amendment appears to be punitive toward individuals who have renounced the jurisdiction of the church, without regard for the assessment by the council with jurisdiction over the work. The proposed amendment would set up a constitutional bar to any work done by the individual based solely on the individual’s having renounced the jurisdiction of the church during a judicial proceeding. Many different alleged delinquencies or irregularities could lead to a remedial complaint while more serious offenses could lead to a disciplinary process. Without regard for the nature, seriousness, or truth of the alleged delinquency, irregularity, or offense, renunciation in the midst of a judicial proceeding would trigger a permanent bar to employment or volunteer service.

Even if the individual does not resume membership in the PC(USA), the church is committed to openness. “Persons who are not members of, or who may have ceased active participation in, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) are welcome and may participate in the life and worship of this church and receive its pastoral care and instruction” (G-1.0404). This openness does not eliminate the authority of a council having responsibility for particular paid or volunteer service to assess the suitability of the individual. These two proposed amendments would not permit the council with responsibility for the work to fulfill its G-1.0404 responsibility, regardless of its finding about suitability.

The proposed amendment attempts to create a permanent bar to participation in the life and work of the PC(USA). Renunciation of jurisdiction is a very serious matter, but it does not create an unchangeable status. The return path is to accept the jurisdiction of the PC(USA) anew by joining a congregation. “The members of a congregation put themselves under the leadership of the session and the higher councils (presbytery, synod, and General Assembly)” (G-1.0103).

An individual, who has renounced jurisdiction, may later take a return path of seeking employment or attempting to volunteer in a congregation or other entity of the PC(USA). There is an authoritative interpretation that states:

A person who has renounced membership and/or church office in a PC(USA) congregation may, at some subsequent point, seek admission to membership in another PC(USA) congregation by reaffirmation of faith. (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 274, authoritative interpretation)

If the council having jurisdiction over that paid or volunteer work learns of the prior renunciation, that council has the responsibility to inquire into the circumstances to assess the suitability of the particular service for the individual. These proposed amendments would bar the participation of the individual without regard for whether the unresolved issues have a bearing on the individual's suitability for the particular service.

This proposed amendment seeks to address a local issue by means of a constitutional amendment creating a churchwide rule. Alleged prior misconduct is a serious issue and should be addressed by councils in their administrative manuals. Councils should explicitly ask, in writing, about any involvement as a defendant in disciplinary cases or renunciation of jurisdiction from the PC(USA).

Section F-3.0209 provides that "Councils possess whatever administrative authority is necessary to give effect to duties and powers assigned by the Constitution of the church." Any council that employs individuals in paid or volunteer service already has the authority to screen such individuals in order to protect those served by the church. Most employing councils have adopted employment policies, and should consider adding to their administrative manuals the requirement of appropriate background checks.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to disapprove the proposed amendment 48/7/2. The 221st General Assembly (2014) amended the original overture and approved 309/207/0.

For the full report of Item 06-05 go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4573>

14-B. Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams (Item 06-12)

Background

These two proposed amendments (Item 06-12, recommendations 11 and 12) are part of the recommendations of the Report of the Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams. The Special Committee was formed in response to the referral from the 220th General Assembly (2012): *On Reevaluating the Process by Which Ordination Exams Are Written, Administered, and Graded* (Minutes, 2012, Part I, p. 682).

14-B.1. Final Assessment

On Amending G-2.0607 (Item 06-12, Recommendation 11)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0607 be amended as follows? [Text to be deleted is shown with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in *italic*.]

“A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery *of care*. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination *by a presbytery* for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

“a. [Text in a.–c. remains unchanged.]

“d. ~~satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers~~ *examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries.*”

Rationale

The special committee gave the following rationale for the approval of Recommendation 11:

This change in language seeks to distinguish the standard ordination examinations from examination by presbyteries for ordination as well as to reiterate that candidates are accountable to their presbytery of care. It also makes specific that the standard exams are evaluated by way of written comments but are not “graded” and would allow for the introduction of exams for which the “work product” of the exams may be other than written responses to essay questions.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve Item 06-12, Recommendation 11, providing the following advice:

The proposed amendments to the lead paragraph of G-2.0607 are clear and do not change the intent of the section being modified. However, the Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises that these amendments are not necessary, as the meaning of the paragraph is already clear:

- The presbytery that performs a final assessment of a candidate can only be the presbytery “of care.”
- An examination for ordination can only be conducted by a presbytery (G-2.0702). The final assessment of the presbytery (ready for examination for ordination, pending a call) is a determination made after all of the tasks of preparation for ministry have been completed (G-2.0607a–d), including satisfactory evaluations of the standard ordination exams.

The proposed language to amend G-2.0607d is clear, and adequately expresses the flexibility the special committee proposes for certifying a candidate's readiness for examination for ordination, pending a call.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment was 54/0/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 578/41/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 27, 75, 379.)

For the full report of Item 06-12, including the report of the special committee, go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4773&promoID=331>

14-B.2. Accommodations

On Amending G-2.0610 (Item 06-12, Recommendation 12)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-2.0610 be amended as follows? [Text to be deleted is shown with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“G-2.0610 ~~Exceptions~~ *Accommodations to Particular Circumstances*

“~~By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery~~ *When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an individual seeking ordination, it may, by a three-fourths vote, waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for ~~exception~~ any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred.*”

Rationale

The special committee gave the following rationale for the approval of recommendation 11:

The new phrasing proposed in G-2.0610 first changes the title of the paragraph to address the perception of some that being an exception is prejudicial in and of itself. The changes proposed in the paragraph are intended to clarify that presbytery minutes should include reasons for both waivers and for alternate means of assessment. The sequence of sentences in the current paragraph could be construed to mean that a presbytery may “waive” everything but G-2.0607d without “good and sufficient reasons” or explanation in the minutes so long as the three-fourths vote threshold was met.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve Item 06-12, Recommendation 12, with amendment (subsequently adopted in plenary), providing the following advice:

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advises that the phrase “individual seeking ordination” is more appropriate language for the first part of Recommendation 12 than “inquirer or candidate.”

There are other situations where G-2.0610 is applicable, such as a presbytery receiving by transfer a minister of another denomination (G-2.0505a): “... Such ministers shall furnish credentials and evidence of good standing acceptable to the presbytery, and shall submit satisfactory evidence of possessing the qualifications of character and scholarship required of candidates of this church. (G-2.0607 and G-2.0610) ...” The proposed amendment will limit the availability of a

waiver to the requirements of G-2.06 to inquirers and candidates only, preventing a presbytery from considering such waivers in these other situations.

Otherwise, the proposed language of the amendment clearly and adequately expresses the intent of the special committee to remove language which the special committee judges to be prejudicial.

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution makes no comment on the proposal to strike “Exceptions” and insert “Accommodations to Particular Circumstances,” as this is not a constitutional matter. The indexing system and related titles are not part of the Constitution. Only the text itself is constitutional.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment 57/1/1. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee’s recommendation with amendment by voice vote. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 27, 72, 75, 379–80.)

For the full report of Item 06-12, including the report of the Special Committee, go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4773&promoID=331>

14-C. Child Protection Policy
On Amending G-3.0106 (Item 08-14)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 as follows: [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy *and a child protection policy.*”

Background and Rationale

This proposed amendment originated from the Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) requesting that the Stated Clerk be directed, “to send proposed amendments to the *Book of Order* regarding the requirement of all councils of the PC(USA) to adopt and implement a child/youth protection policy....” ACWC provided the following rationale:

Currently the Presbyterian Mission Agency (PMA) and Child Advocacy Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has provided some extremely helpful resources regarding Child/Youth Protection measures and policies, which are available online. One such resource can be found under Creating Safe Ministries through pcusa.org.^[1] However, many of these resources are focused primarily on sexual harassment policies and procedures and not adequately on the broad scope of child/youth protection. The Advocacy Committee for Women’s Concerns (ACWC) asks that the Presbyterian Mission Agency direct that new/updated resources be created for synods, presbyteries, and particular church use that are from the PC(USA) and address child youth protection measures and policies – including and expanding beyond the focus of sexual harassment. There are many issues that have evolved with working with children/youth which need to be addressed in the work of the church.

The focus of child/youth protection policies is to ensure a safe, thriving, and nurturing environment for children and youth in our churches and church-sponsored events. These policies address screening child and youth workers and volunteers, how to implement mandatory training, simple rules involving transportation, adult/youth/child ratios, minimum age requirement of volunteers, facility security and safety, etc. *It is important to understand in developing these policies that these policies and procedures are completely separate from sexual misconduct policies*, and there is a need to differentiate between these resources and policies. That is why we request an amendment in the *Book of Order* to require all councils of the PC(USA) to make this differentiation and adopt and implement a child/youth protection policy alongside a separate sexual harassment policy.

It is the church’s responsibility to provide a safe, thriving, and nurturing environment for children and youth, and we must take seriously how our faith informs this responsibility. Our theology of the child is reflected in how we care and nurture children and youth who are under the care of the church. This theology must reflect the love, care, and high regard for the humanity and dignity of the child reflected in the Gospels.

[1]“Create Policies,”*Creating Safe Ministries*, <http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/creating-safe-ministries/create-policies/> (16 January 2014).

The Stated Clerk, through the Office of the General Assembly (OGA), advised the assembly that this recommendation could be accomplished by the following action:

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directs the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 as follows: [Text to be added is shown as italic.]

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy *and a child protection policy.*”

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) as follows:

If it is the intent of the assembly to require each council to adopt and implement a child protection policy, the ACC believes the language of the proposed amendment, as shown in the OGA comment, is clear and concise.

The Assembly Committee on Mission Coordination (08) voted to approve the OGA proposed language to amend the *Book of Order* 69/0/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 554/18/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 40, 43, 531–32.)

For the full report of Item 08-14 go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4763>.

14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery

On Amending G-3.0301 (Item 06-06)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

**Shall the second paragraph of G-3.0301 of the Form of Government be amended as follows?
[Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]**

“The minimum composition of a presbytery is ten duly constituted sessions and ten teaching elders, unless an exception is approved by its synod and the General Assembly giving consideration to the responsibilities assigned to presbyteries in G-3-01 and G-3.03.”

Background and Rationale

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of Eastern Oregon as Item 06-06. The Presbyteries of Boise, Northumberland, and San Joaquin concurred. The Presbytery of Eastern Oregon provided the following rationale:

1. Of the 173 presbyteries in the PC(USA), 30 presbyteries have 30 or fewer churches. Of those, 3 are racial ethnic and 3 are east of the Mississippi River, leaving 24 of the smallest presbyteries in the PC(USA) in the western United States where the distances between churches is often measured in hours and presbytery boundaries include entire states.

The Comparative Statistics 2012 of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shows 67 percent of our congregations have fewer than 150 members and 75 percent have fewer than 200 members. We are a denomination of small churches and vital ministries in the locations where we are planted; where history and connectionalism meet in faithful congregations as they have for hundreds of years.

2. The representation of small churches and presbyteries is vital to the direction and sustainability of the PC(USA) now and into the future. Small presbyteries pay per capita to participate in the life of the denomination, to support the task forces of the denomination, and to have access to the PJC’s of the synods and General Assembly.

Small presbyteries also pay mission, joining our contributions together with those of the larger presbyteries to support Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and World Missions. We are faithful in providing leadership at all levels of the denomination. The leadership and modeling of small presbyteries provides a path for others to follow as we remain faithful to Christ in local settings. The representation of small presbyteries at the synod and General Assembly level is a necessary and responsible voice to and with the denomination.

3. Mission is not dependent upon size. In small presbyteries the local PC(USA) congregation is often the only Protestant witness within their community. As such these congregations are responsible for the food pantries, schools, social gathering places, and many other creative ministries. These are more than buildings where people meet on Sunday; this is Christ at work in the midst of the people. These congregations are supported monetarily and spiritually by the presbytery and sustained by the connections with other congregations within the presbytery.

4. Matthew 18:20 states, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Neither the exact number of congregations nor teaching elders determine the validity of a presbytery. Rather, the validity and vitality of the presbytery lies in its ability to support the ministry of its congregations, synod, and General Assembly as it is the body gathered in Christ’s name, doing His work with the resources at hand and through the congregations being the body of Christ in the world.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve Item 06-06 with amendment (subsequently adopted by the assembly committee), providing the following advice:

This overture seeks to amend Section G-3.0301 of the Form of Government to allow the synod and General Assembly to change the minimum composition of a presbytery from a minimum of ten sessions to a lesser number on a case-by-case basis. The purpose of this change is to increase the flexibility when forming a presbytery. This change is in keeping with:

1. The recently adopted Form of Government's statement "Councils of the church exist to help congregations and the church as a whole to be more faithful participants in the mission of Christ" (G-3.0101). Leaving the minimum number of sessions in the hands of the synod allows each synod to consider how best to fulfill this mandate.
2. The minimum number of sessions was reduced from twelve to ten by the actions of the General Assembly in 2008 (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, p. 146, Item 03-07). Allowing flexibility for the minimum number would continue the efforts of the General Assembly to be responsive to the missional needs of the church and its mission.
3. Permitting flexibility, with review, is in keeping with the guiding principles behind the recently adopted Form of Government that "mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work" (G-3.0106).
4. The change of "*the*" to "*its*" provides clarity as to which synod would be asked to approve the exception. This change would clearly designate the synod wherein the presbytery is located.
5. Presbyteries are charged with a wide variety of responsibilities for the church's mission in G-3.01 and G-3.03. Synods that are requested to approve a presbytery that has less than ten congregations and ten elders should carefully review these responsibilities to determine whether the smaller presbytery can fulfill them.

The Assembly Committee on Church Polity and Ordered Ministry (06) voted to approve the proposed amendment 57/0/2. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee's recommendation 510/9/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 72, 73, 361–62.)

For the full report of Item 06-06 go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4589>

14-E. Interreligious Stance

On Amending G-5.0102 (07-02, Recommendation 2)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-5.0102 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 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) at all levels seeks new~~ *will be open to and will seek opportunities for conversation and understanding respectful dialogue and mutual relationships with non-Christian entities and persons from other religious [entities] traditions. It does this in the faith that the church of Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is a sign and means of God’s intention for the wholeness of all humankind and all creation.”*

Background and Rationale

This proposed amendment originated from The General Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations (GACEIR) as part of their recommendation to the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve the policy statement, *The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to disapprove Item 07-02, Recommendation 2, providing the following advice:

The committee recommendation does not indicate how the proposed language strengthens or clarifies G-5.0102. Section F-1.03 and F-1.0404 more completely address the intent of the recommendation.

The Assembly Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations (07) voted to approve the proposed amendment 59/4/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) approved the committee’s recommendation by a hand vote. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 34, 35, 444.)

For the full report of Item 07-02, including the adopted policy *The Interreligious Stance of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4673>

14-F. Marriage

On Amending W-4.9000 (Item 10-02)

The 221st General Assembly (2014) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Amend W-4.9000 by striking the current text and replacing it with the following: [Text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

“Marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind for the well-being of the entire human family. Marriage involves a unique commitment between two people, traditionally a man and a woman, to love and support each other for the rest of their lives. The sacrificial love that unites the couple sustains them as faithful and responsible members of the church and the wider community.

“In civil law, marriage is a contract that recognizes the rights and obligations of the married couple in society. In the Reformed tradition, marriage is also a covenant in which God has an active part, and which the community of faith publicly witnesses and acknowledges.

“If they meet the requirements of the civil jurisdiction in which they intend to marry, a couple may request that a service of Christian marriage be conducted by a teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who is authorized, though not required, to act as an agent of the civil jurisdiction in recording the marriage contract. A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the teaching elder, who may agree to the couple’s request only if, in the judgment of the teaching elder, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the teaching elder may seek the counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.

“The marriage service shall be conducted in a manner appropriate to this covenant and to the forms of Reformed worship, under the direction of the teaching elder and the supervision of the session (W-1.4004–.4006). In a service of marriage, the couple marry each other by exchanging mutual promises. The teaching elder witnesses the couple’s promises and pronounces God’s blessing upon their union. The community of faith pledges to support the couple in upholding their promises; prayers may be offered for the couple, for the communities that support them, and for all who seek to live in faithfulness.

“A service of worship recognizing a civil marriage and confirming it in the community of faith may be appropriate when requested by the couple. The service will be similar to the marriage service except that the statements made shall reflect the fact that the couple is already married to one another according to the laws of the civil jurisdiction.”

“Nothing herein shall compel a teaching elder to perform nor compel a session to authorize the use of church property for a marriage service that the teaching elder or the session believes is contrary to the teaching elder’s or the session’s discernment of the Holy Spirit and their understanding of the Word of God.”

Background and Rationale

This amendment originated from the Presbytery of the Cascades as Item 10-02. Presbyteries of Albany, Baltimore, Boston, Cayuga-Syracuse, Chicago, East Iowa, Genesee Valley, Heartland, Hudson River, National Capital, New York City, San Francisco, Southern New England, The Redwoods, Twin

Cities, and Transylvania concurred, many with additional rationale. Presbytery of the Cascades provided the following rationale:

The PC(USA) has a long history of working for social justice and equal rights for all people.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches throughout the denomination are seeking to be inclusive, welcoming communities of Christian faith and are committed to honoring diversity and promoting peace, health, and justice in personal relationship, church, community, and the world.

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) churches throughout the denomination also have a long history of struggling with issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) equality; working within the structure and standards of the PC(USA) and also taking actions of ecclesiastical defiance when their conscience leads them to believe the teachings of Jesus require such actions.

As requested by the 220th General Assembly (2012), many churches have been studying the issue of marriage equality both in the pulpit and through adult education classes.

The Presbytery of the Cascades stands with those in the PC(USA) who believe that the teachings of Jesus call for radical inclusion of all people and that the actions of Jesus, passed down in Scripture, showed unconditional love and equality for all people. We believe that God created each of us with many differences, including sexual preferences, and that those differences are to be celebrated as part of the creative plan of God.

Support of marriage equality is consistent with our faith tradition. The covenant of marriage requires love and commitment; qualities that are in no way gender specific.

Failing to allow for marriage equality continues to have negative consequences for the Body of Christ, the Church, in that it gives some of our members fewer rights than others, treating them as second-class members. This is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus. Valuing the worth, health, and happiness of our children and youth, requires that they are allowed to grow wholly and holy in a church that embraces them and their visions of their future loving relationships. To deny marriage to the GLBT community will continue the discrimination they already experience and increase the level of stress and mental health issues that make this community more susceptible to substance abuse, depression, and suicide.

Marriage equality, on the other hand, will reduce the numbers of young people who find banning gay marriage to be hypocritical, unfair, and not the act of a caring Christian congregation.

The *Book of Order* of the PC(USA) should be amended to allow marriage between “two people” rather than limiting marriage to “between one man and one woman” and to allow PC(USA) church officials to perform marriage ceremonies between same-sex couples.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on the Constitution

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to disapprove Item 10-02, providing the following advice:

The Advisory Committee on the Constitution’s advice on this overture is the same as its advice to the General Assembly Committee on Civil Unions and Marriage in 2012 (*Minutes*, 2012, Part I, pp. 1164ff) and is not intended to be advice on the theological, ethical, and legal merits of the overture. The overture does not propose to change the basic premise that “marriage is a gift God has given to all humankind,” rather the overture seeks to amend the definition of marriage from “a man and a woman” to “two people.” Amending the definition of marriage to two people would alter the foundation on which previous AIs of this section have rested. A possible consequence of the proposed language is perceived tension between Scripture, the Confessions, and the *Book of Order*. The assembly will need to articulate the reasons for changing the current definition of Christian marriage.

If the assembly approves this overture, a constitutional issue that should be considered is the use of the word “shall” in the third paragraph (“who shall agree to the couple’s request only if ...”). This could be interpreted to limit the teaching elder’s ability to deny performing a service of Christian marriage for any reason other than that given in the overture.

Advice from the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)

The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP) advised approval of Item 10-02. The full text of ACSWP’s advice can be found in the report of 10-02 on PC Biz

Advice from the Advisory Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC)

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns advised the 221st General Assembly (2014) to approve Item 10-02, providing the following advice:

The Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns concurs with the rationale given in this overture.

The ACWC believes that in withholding the right to marry from same-gender loving people, the church is upholding a patriarchal standard for humanity. Committed to standing against patriarchy and its effects within the world and the church, ACWC advocates giving access to all that Christian marriage provides to same-gender couples in committed and loving relationships who are in the PC(USA).

The proposed amendment is a clear and compelling statement reflecting the gift of God that marriage provides to human beings. It encourages healthy families, congregations, and communities.

The Assembly Committee on Civil Union and Marriage Issues (10) voted to approve the proposed amendment 49/18/0. The 221st General Assembly (2014) amended and approved the committee's recommendation 429/175/0. (See *Minutes*, 2014, Part I, pp. 29, 30, 780–81.)

For the full report of Item 10-02 go to <http://pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=4593>

LIST OF PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

14-1. Confession of Belhar—Amending the *Book of Confessions*1

14.A. Renunciation of Jurisdiction—On Amending G-2.05096

**14-B. Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and
Standard Ordination Exams**

14-B.1. Final Assessment—On Amending G-2.06078

14-B.2. Accommodations—On Amending G-2.06109

14-C. Child Protection Policy—On Amending G-3.010611

14-D. Minimum Composition of a Presbytery—On Amending G-3.030113

14-E. Interreligious Stance—On Amending G-5.010215

14-F. Marriage—On Amending W-4.900016