



# The Presbytery of Western North Carolina

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## LETTER ON ORDINATION STANDARDS AMENDMENT 10-A (BOOK OF ORDER G-6.0106B)

FROM: Bobbi White, General Presbyter, Presbytery of Western North Carolina  
Bert Sigmon, Stated Clerk, Presbytery of Western North Carolina  
James Aydelotte, Moderator, Presbytery of Western North Carolina

TO: Ministers, Clerks of Session, Elders, and Educators in Presbytery of Western North Carolina

DATE: May 6, 2011

May the peace of Christ be with you.

We have recently received a number of questions about what will occur should the proposed amendment to G-6.0106b concerning our church's ordination standards receive sufficient positive votes to become part of the *Book of Order* on July 12, 2011. A minimum of 87 positive votes among our 173 presbyteries is needed for the amendment to be adopted. According to the latest tally of the General Assembly, 75 presbyteries have voted in favor of the amendment, and 57 have voted against it. That official tally is usually a week or more out of date; unofficial tallies say the amendment will pass. Each minister, elder and session should therefore be clear as to what may change and what will not change, if this amendment passes.

The current text of G-6.0106b reads:

*Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life of obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.*

The text proposed to replace this paragraph reads:

*Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240; 14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.*

### ***What precisely does the proposed new language mean?***

1. It affirms that ordained service in the church must reflect a desire to submit one's self joyfully to the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ. Our denomination's ordination standards remain strong and demanding.
2. The proposed language eliminates reference to sexual behavior as an explicit standard for ordained office in the church. The *Book of Order* will no longer highlight this one issue, which was the case

before 1997. This does not mean that **ordaining bodies** – sessions for elders and deacons, and presbyteries for ministers – should not consider the sexual behavior of candidates, but only among many other important factors. The previous paragraph, G-6.0106a, still requires all officers and candidates to be “persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord,” and that “their manner of life should be a demonstration of the Christian gospel in the church and in the world.”

3. As has generally been the practice of the Presbyterian Church since 1729, it will be up to each ordaining body to determine the suitability of individual candidates, applying biblical and confessional standards as that body is led by the Spirit to understand them.

4. Each session or presbytery must prayerfully and carefully determine what Scripture and our confessions say concerning the requirements in the ordination questions (W-4.4003). Those questions ask the candidate to affirm, among other things, faith in the Triune God and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as acceptance of the Scriptures as God’s Word, and obedience to Christ under the authority of Scripture and the guidance of our confessions. After examination, the ordaining body must then assess whether each candidate is committed to live out those requirements.

5. This change, if adopted, does not mean that ordination is a right for anyone. No session or presbytery will be under any obligation to ordain any candidate or receive as a member any transferring officer, unless the ordaining body’s sense of faithfulness to Scripture and our Constitution commends that action. Each presbytery will continue to be the sole judge of its membership; and as now, no minister can be installed in a congregation without that congregation’s consent.

### **Summary**

**The proposed new language of G-6.0106b places squarely on the shoulders of each session and presbytery the responsibility of conducting thorough and insightful examinations of those proposed for the church’s ordered ministries, for which the guidance of Scripture and our Constitution (books of confessions and order) is mandated.**

The Stated Clerk of the General Assembly has advised that, should this amendment be passed, additional information, guidance and resources will immediately be made available to all our congregations.

As always, we are ready and eager to support the work of our sessions as they assess their examination practices. Please feel free to call any of us and let us know how we may be of help. Should a session have any particular questions, we would be glad to meet with them.

As we prayerfully consider the next weeks and months in the life of our churches and presbytery, may we remember that we are all called to be a part of the one Body of Christ, serving him and his world. It is thus all the more important for all to work together in the Body of Christ, regardless of our understanding of the issues surrounding this amendment, may we respect and encourage one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Grace and Peace in the Lord!

*Bobbi White*

Bobbi White  
General Presbyter

*Bert Sigmon*

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Stated Clerk

*James Aydelotte*

James Aydelotte  
Moderator

