

Background to the Statement adopted by NPC's Session on August 9, 2011

As some of you may be aware, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has wrestled for several decades with ordination standards for church officers. Along with other mainline denominations, we have given special attention to guidelines governing human sexuality. As of May 10, a majority of the presbyteries have now approved Amendment 10A that will change the language currently in our Book of Order about these ordination requirements.

This amendment removes specific references to sexual behavior currently in our Book of Order (the "fidelity and chastity" clause of G-60106b) and substitutes language instead urging a more general "joyful submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life." The specifics of this statement may then be interpreted according to Scripture and confessional standards by individual governing bodies such as presbyteries and church sessions.

Actual text of Amendment 10A sent to the presbyteries for their vote:

The 219th General Assembly (2010) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-6.0106b be amended by striking the current text and inserting new text in its place as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added 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), 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. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G-14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates."~~

Given the decisive vote cast on May 10, 2011, the italicized language above will become part of the *Book of Order*. For the moment, no one yet knows exactly what impact this will have on our denomination. We will be carefully monitoring developments. There are conversations across the country on sessions of like-minded churches and between pastors in our denomination about what this will mean and how we should respond. We will need to be carefully reviewing options as we move forward, and we will need to keep the congregation informed as well.

Historically, the leadership of Newton Presbyterian Church has been clear about what we believe the Bible and our Book of Confessions teach concerning sexual standards for leaders in the church. This has not changed. NPC will continue to take our guidance from the Scriptures as we examine officers for leadership at NPC. At our August 9, 2011, meeting, session approved a statement in response to these constitutional changes. What will change is how we will relate within the broader governing bodies within the church: the presbytery, synod and GA. As we gather more information about future options, I ask for your prayers for our leadership, for our denomination, and for our witness and mission in the world.