



INTRODUCTION

Once again the ordination standards of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have been challenged. This time, unfortunately, the vote of the General Assembly that placed this issue before the presbyteries is being ratified by a small but sufficient majority of elders and ministers within those presbyteries. This will be a massive change in our covenantal life, and it is urgent for elders and ministers to understand the impact of this change, to be prepared to minister to people in their congregation, and to speak with clarity and biblical conviction when approached by people beyond the PC(USA). The document that follows is designed to assist you in meeting these challenges.

The change in our ordination standards will be a surprise to many Presbyterians who will first hear about it from the secular media—an experience not unlike hearing about the death of a sibling from an acquaintance you meet at the grocery store. Even for those who have been following the voting, the reality of this change is a source of unspeakably deep grief. While in some ways this vote is just another step in the ongoing disintegration of a denomination we have known and loved, this particular vote verifies the deep and unquestionable divisions among us—and consummates a significant institutional departure from the Christian faith we have been called to proclaim. For those who love the Presbyterian Church, this is a form of death. Expect to encounter all the classic stages and symptoms of grief, and be prepared to listen with patience and respond with compassion.

Just as in any other season of significant grief, now is not the time for quick action or far-reaching decisions. That time is coming. But for now, it is important that we speak honestly with one another about the reality of the pain, anger, fear, and loss we are experiencing, and that we find appropriate ways of lamenting before God. If we, individually and corporately, can take our burden of grief to God in prayer, and wait with joyful anticipation for the discerning of his Spirit, we can hope to find a biblically faithful path for ongoing ministry with integrity. PFR is committed to walking this path with you and with your congregation, beginning with the basics, and addressing questions people will be asking now and in the coming months.

FAQS ON AMENDMENT 10-A

Q: What is Amendment 10-A? What does it say? What does it not say? What does it change?

A: Amendment 10-A is a change in the language of the Book of Order proposed by the 2010 General Assembly. It calls for the removal of paragraph G-6.0106b:

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

and replaces it with:

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.

Proponents of the changed wording will argue that the passage of Amendment 10-A, in and of itself, changes nothing for those who remain committed to upholding historic orthodox teaching. Technically they are correct. Explicit language will be removed from the Book of Order that, for the vast majority of Jesus' followers around the globe and for many who are still within the PC(USA), remains implicit. In other words, no vote by the Assembly and presbyteries can change the truth of God's Word, and Scripture clearly teaches that God intends the gift of sexual intimacy to be expressed only within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman. If we in the PC(USA) agreed on the clear teaching of Scripture, we would never have needed G-6.0106b. But we don't agree, and so we defaulted to polity to find a way to live together.

Passage of this amendment does not mandate the ordination of practicing gay and lesbian deacons, elders, and ministers, although some people within the PC(USA) and the majority of people outside the denomination will read it as though it does. With the current standard eliminated, PC(USA) congregations will be free to ordain people in a variety of sexual relationships not currently affirmed for those seeking to be ordained (i.e. those living together outside wedlock as well as self-affirming, practicing gay, lesbian, bi and transsexual persons). With this change, there will be no stated sexual behavior standard for persons in church leadership. Passage of this amendment does make further attempts to redefine Christian marriage a certainty in the near future.

Q: How did this proposal get through the General Assembly? Why is it passing in the presbyteries this time?

A: Four overtures that have challenged ordination standards have been passed by the General Assembly over the past 15 years. A majority of presbyteries have refused to ratify the Assembly's actions until this time. While there are several possible reasons why this change is passing now, one unavoidable reality is that people are simply weary of this seemingly ceaseless struggle and have disengaged from the process.

Q: What does passage of this amendment mean for our denomination?

A: This remains to be seen. Currently the Book of Order states, "Ordination for the office of minister of the Word and Sacrament is an act of the whole church carried out by the presbytery..." (G-14.0480). As long as this provision remains, ordinations that are made possible with the removal of G-6.0106b will create a serious crisis of conscience and integrity for many in the PC(USA). One thing is sure—passage of this amendment will change the PC(USA).

Q: What does passage of this amendment mean for mission personnel and global relationships?

A: The answer to this question will vary by culture and region, but the simple fact is that the validation of same-gender attraction is a liberal, white, privileged, Euro-centric concern. The vast majority of Jesus' followers around the globe are dismayed that the PC(USA) has now joined a handful of other denominations in undermining biblical authority in matters of human sexuality. For many people serving on the mission field, this action will make life more difficult at best.

Q: What does passage of this amendment mean for theologically orthodox evangelical women in leadership?

A: Evangelical women who are ordained deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament are perhaps the most vulnerable in the changing landscape of the PC(USA). Their options for distancing themselves from this crisis (see below) are minimal at best. Our long-standing affirmation of God's equal call on men and

*Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the PC(USA)
to be biblically faithful and missionally minded
in their service to Jesus Christ
www.pfrenwal.org*

women to leadership in the Church undergirds PFR's commitment to creating a way for ministry with integrity within the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition.

Q: What does passage of this amendment mean for our local congregation, and for me as a Presbyterian?

A: Truly, the only initial effect passage of this amendment will have upon us individually or upon our local congregations is one of perception—other people asking, “How can you still be a part of the PC(USA)?” Perceptions can form a potent reality, but we must remember that the only One whose approval ultimately matters is the One whose Son defied earthly perceptions to become the atoning sacrifice for our sin. Decisions about our present and future affiliation must be made in discernment of God's call to mission and ministry, not on the basis of gossip and intimidation.

Congregations still have the right and the responsibility to examine and elect deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament. The new constitutional language, though lacking the clear expression of “fidelity/chastity,” does not require us to violate our understanding of biblical standards. It does not mean that congregations will be required to maintain a quota of gay elders and deacons or interview at least one gay candidate when seeking a pastor or associate pastor. However, we are now entering a season when opposition to ordinations because of theological integrity may come at a price, and where further erosion of biblical authority may be reflected in the decisions and actions of middle governing bodies and future Assemblies.

Q: What options do we have in a post-Amendment 10-A denomination?

A: The most obvious and least realistic option is to pretend nothing has changed. This is an exercise in self-deception. While it might appear to be a pleasant placebo for the moment, it is only putting off an inevitable confrontation with the deep and far-reaching implications of a dying denomination. More responsible options that are available at the present time include dissenting in place, defecting in place, and distancing ourselves from the crisis within the PC(USA).

- **Dissenting in place** involves “taking a stand” in your local neighborhood and presbytery; offering a win-some witness to the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ and intensifying your participation in Christ-honoring ministry both within and beyond the PC(USA). Depending on your context, this may include a polite but firm refusal to participate in any ordinations that are outside the clear teaching of Scripture and the Confessions. Dissenting congregations must become increasingly vocal in presbytery discussions and examinations, and active in the ministry of presbytery-shaping committees and/or councils. In addition, by affiliating with like-minded congregations, they can receive support, encouragement, and fellowship from others in the PC(USA) who share their theological commitments.
- **Defecting in place** involves disengagement with the PC(USA) without actually taking steps to leave the denomination. Defecting in place often begins by redirecting financial support (including general mission and per capita funding) from the presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. Defecting in place might also include limited (or no) participation in the actions or decisions of the presbytery. Defecting congregations can also form independent local and global partnerships, and seek informal affiliations with individuals and congregations for discipleship and mission.
- When it comes to **distancing ourselves from the crisis** within the PC(USA), the only option currently available is departure to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church or a similar denomination. This could be changing, however. Several proposals are currently being explored for different types of affiliation:

*Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the PC(USA)
to be biblically faithful and missionally minded
in their service to Jesus Christ
www.pfrenewal.org*

- non-geographic presbyteries and synods within the PC(USA) based on theological affinity
- a “presbytery within a presbytery,” based on theological affinity
- the creation of a “fellowship” or “association” that would consist of congregations and individuals both within and beyond the PC(USA)
- the creation of a category of “affiliated congregations” that would function at the presbytery level much like affiliate members currently function at the congregational level
- the creation of a new Presbyterian and Reformed association apart from the PC(USA) that would affirm our confessional heritage and unflinchingly honor God’s equal call on people of both genders and all races, ages, and cultures in all aspects of church life and leadership.

Q: What does PFR recommend?

A: As we have said, this is a time of deep grief for many in the PC(USA). Although PFR and its predecessor organizations have worked and prayed in opposition to this change for the decades of this battle, the denomination we have loved is now choosing to proclaim lies as truth, and our covenant with one another has been broken.

In this time of deepening crisis, PFR remains determined to help form the continuing orthodox witness of Presbyterians. Now is not the time for rash decisions or quickly reasoned action. It is a time for repentance of the sin in our own life, prayer for discernment of God’s clear leading, and cooperative action among the evangelical orthodox in the creation of Christ-honoring ministry.

As biblically faithful people, we must see that God is using this time and these circumstances to shape and form his Church and to continue to challenge and change us. If we miss the opportunities this crisis presents, we will be poorer in the short term, and much more apt to repeat mistakes of the past that have contributed to our current situation. We are on the threshold of losing a significant battle. However, we are also aware that at some future point we may realize we have learned a good deal in the process, and we will be far better prepared for what lies ahead.

As missionally minded people, we must remember as well that our primary call is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in words and actions, exhibiting the Kingdom of Heaven. This is a congregation by congregation call, and a person by person commission. This we can do regardless of the theological confusion expressed in our middle governing bodies.

Regardless of long-term plans for dissent, defection, distancing, or other forms of realignment, PFR strongly advocates the creation of a “Presbyterian order:” a voluntary association of individuals and congregations who mutually and publically commit to a disciplined life of prayer and service, seeking to follow the teachings of Jesus, accept the counsel of our Confessions, and stay faithful to our core identity as Presbyterian Christians. This is not a time for independent, entrepreneurial experimentation in ministry. We need to work together, being willing to sacrifice our own desires and risk the misunderstanding of others to accomplish the ministry to which we have been called.

*Mobilizing leaders of congregations within the PC(USA)
to be biblically faithful and missionally minded
in their service to Jesus Christ
www.pfrenewal.org*