

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-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://pcbiz.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>

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