

**Examination of Inquirers and Candidates**  
**Presbytery of Mid-Kentucky**  
**Updated April 16, 2007**

**For use at Presbytery meetings and CPM and COM meetings**

The Presbytery Council has requested the Clerk to remind the Presbytery of our role in the examination of Inquirers and Candidates on the floor of Presbytery, particularly in light of the approval of the Report of the Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church (the PUP Report), which was approved by the General Assembly.

1. Presbyters are reminded that the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) works closely with Inquirers before they come to the Presbytery for examination as they seek to become Candidates. The Committee On Ministry (COM) works closely with Candidates before they come to the Presbytery to be examined for Ordination to become Ministers of Word and Sacrament.
2. Presbytery has a role in the examination of Inquirers who desire to become Candidates; our examination is limited (per G-14.0305e) to examining *“with respect to his or her Christian faith, forms of Christian service undertaken, and motives for seeking the ministry.”*
3. This means that examinations of a direct theological nature, specific interpretations of a Scripture text, or of a Confessional statement are out of order. Any questions regarding “Christian Faith” are limited to the person’s experience and understanding of faith thus far in their life. Questions of forms of service and motivations are in order. Such questions are encouraged. The Moderator, the Stated Clerk, the Chairperson of the CPM, or any elders or ministers present may raise a question as to the appropriateness of a particular question.
4. Presbytery has a role in the examination of Candidates who desire to become ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Here the examination is large and open. Per G-14.0402a: *“The candidate shall appear before the presbytery in which he or she shall make a brief statement of personal faith and of commitment to the ministry of the Word and Sacrament...The presbytery....having heard the candidate and his or her sermon preached before the presbytery or a committee thereof (G-14.0305j(6)), and having received the recommendation of its responsible committee (G-11.0402), shall conduct any further examination of his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church as it deems necessary.”*
5. Five areas of lifted up as useful areas for examination: Christian faith, views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the church. The COM always examines Candidates in these areas. Questions from Presbyters in such areas of encouraged.
6. During the course of the examination, either before the COM or the Presbytery, candidates are free to inform the body if they have a scruple in any particular area. Presbyters are also free to ask candidates if they have any scruples they would like to register. The form of the question may vary. For example, a Presbyter could ask if a candidate has any reservations about a particular theological doctrine, biblical reference, or a polity matter in the Constitution. Such questions have always been in order, and the whole church has been recently reminded of this in the PUP report. Specifically, in Recommendation 5 of that report, we read the following:
  - a. *The Book of Confessions and the Form of Government of the Book of Order set forth the scriptural and constitutional standards for ordination and installation.*
  - b. *These standards are determined by the whole church, after the careful study of Scripture and theology, solely by the constitutional process of approval by the General Assembly*

*with the approval of the presbyteries. These standards may be interpreted by the General Assembly and its Permanent Judicial Commission.*

- c. *Ordaining and installing bodies, acting as corporate expressions of the church, have the responsibility to determine their membership by applying these standards to those elected to office. These determinations include: (1) Whether a candidate being examined for ordination and/or installation as elder, deacon, or minister of Word and Sacrament has departed from scriptural and constitutional standards for fitness for office, (2) Whether any departure constitutes a failure to adhere to the essentials of Reformed faith and polity under G-6.0108 of the Book of Order, thus barring the candidate from ordination and/or installation.*
- d. *Whether the examination and ordination and installation decision comply with the Constitution of the PC(USA), and whether the ordaining/installing body has conducted its examination reasonably, responsibly, prayerfully, and deliberately in deciding to ordain a candidate for church office is subject to review by higher governing bodies.*
- e. *All parties should endeavor to outdo one another in honoring one another's decisions, according the presumption of wisdom to ordaining/installing bodies in examining candidates and to the General Assembly, with presbyteries' approval, in setting standards.*

#### **Addendum to prior Report**

- 7. Two recent General Assembly Permanent Judicial cases have raised issues regarding the examination of Candidates. Decisions of the GAPJC are considered authoritative interpretations of the Constitution. The following is copied from the "headnotes" sections of two PJC decisions, and are instructive to Presbyteries, COM and CPM in their examination of candidates and inquirers
  - a. **"Hart case"** From 2003, Presbytery of San Joaquin v. Presbytery of the Redwoods and Hart, et al. Presbytery of the Redwoods Remedial Case 215-8, Church Polity (03) pp. 277-281 Remedial Case 215-8:
    - i. Standard for Ordination - The Constitution, G-6.0106b, specifies that a person who refuses to repent of any self-acknowledged practice that the confessions call sin is not eligible for ordination or installation. Sexual orientation, therefore, alone is insufficient to make a person ineligible for ordination or installation.
    - ii. Governing body standard for inquiry - If a person does not self-acknowledge a practice that the confessions call sin, then a governing body has a positive obligation to make further inquiry only if it has direct and specific knowledge that such person is in violation of the ordination and installation standards of the Constitution. A hunch, gossip or stereotype is not a sufficient ground to compel a governing body to make further inquiry. Reasonable grounds must include factual allegations of how, when, where, and under what circumstances the individual was self-acknowledging a practice which the confessions call sin
  - b. **"Weir case"** 2002, Wier v. Session, Second PC, Fort Lauderdale, FL, Remedial Case 214-5, Church Polity (04), p. 339 Ronald L. Wier Complainant/Appellant v. Session, Second Presbyterian Church of Fort Lauderdale, FL Respondent/Appellee
    - i. Specificity of Pleading: When a complaint alleges violation of a constitutional standard that may have extreme consequences to a person's reputation, career, or friendships, a greater degree of pleading specificity is required. A complaint

making such allegations must assert factual allegations of how, when, where, and under what circumstances the person was self-acknowledging a practice which the Confessions call a sin.

- ii. Self-acknowledgment: The plain language of the Constitution clearly states that disqualified persons must have self-acknowledged the proscribed sin. Self-acknowledgment may come in many forms. In whatever form it may take, self-acknowledgment must be plain, palpable, and obvious and details of this must be alleged in the complaint.
- iii. Examination of Candidates for Ordination and/or Installation: The ordaining and installing governing body is in the best position to determine whether self-acknowledgment is plain, palpable, and obvious, based on its knowledge of the life and character of the candidate. If the governing body has reasonable cause for inquiry based on its knowledge of the life and character of the candidate, it has the positive obligation to make due inquiry and uphold all the standards for ordination and installation.