

PROPOSED ALBANY OVERTURE ON ORDINATION STANDARDS

Overture from the Session of [Church] to the Presbytery of Albany to send the following overture to the 218th General Assembly (2008):

The Presbytery of Albany respectfully overtures the 218th General Assembly (2008) of the Presbyterian Church USA to do the following:

1. Provide the following authoritative interpretation:
Interpretative statements concerning ordained service of homosexual church members by the 190th General Assembly (1978) of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America and the 119th General Assembly (1979) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and all subsequent affirmations thereof, have no further force or effect.
2. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

Shall G-6.0106b be stricken?"

Rationale:

1. The present categorical exclusion of certain church members from service in ordained office is unjust to the excluded individuals and spiritually damaging to the body of the church. It creates a category of "second-class membership" and fosters the heretical attitude that those assigned to this category are not really deserving of membership at all, i.e., are not Christians. Profession of faith in Jesus Christ is and must be the only requirement for church membership (Book of Order G-5.0103). Any policy that promotes erosion of this principle does damage to the Body of Christ.
2. According to the Book of Order, "a faithful member accepts Christ's call to be involved in the ministry of his Church" (G-5.0102), including "participating in the governing responsibilities of the church" (G-5.0102e). G-6.0106b, which bars an entire class of persons from participating in some of the most important areas of church governance, violates the conditions of membership and sets the Book of Order in contradiction with itself.
3. Ordination is an important qualification for participation in the discernment process that sustains the spiritual life of the church at all judicatory levels. Our goal is not to "make" decisions, but to seek to discern God's intention for us. It has been a long-standing article of faith in our tradition that discernment requires a democratic inclusion of many voices. To rule out certain voices in advance as ineligible is both undemocratic and unjust. True reconciliation that seeks to restore peace, unity, and purity to the church is possible only between equals who mutually share access to power and who acknowledge that all power, ultimately, comes from God.

4. When Christians fall into two sides through disagreement, all involved are obliged to think charitably of those on the opposite side. If G-6.0106b is removed from the Book of Order, the “losers” will not have lost their status as full members of the church, eligible to participate in all decisions, including future decisions about ordination on an individual basis. On the other hand, if G-6.0106b remains in the Book of Order, the “losers” will continue to feel that their very humanity has been cast in doubt by a church that condemns what they understand to be their God-given nature. Deletion of G-6.0106b will honor everyone as a child of God and will permit the assignment of particular duties on the basis of the particular gifts that God has granted.

5. Injustice that exists now demands to be remedied now. Many a prophet would have preferred to exercise the call to prophecy at a more opportune time, but God has always made clear that the prophetic call is immediate. To appeal now for relief from the injustice fostered by G-6.0106b is simply to obey God’s command with humility and love for all those who now serve and for those who earnestly desire to serve God in the future.