

OVERTURE to Heartland Presbytery from the Central Presbyterian Church Session

RE: Amending G-6.0106b and G-14.0450

The Session of Central Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, Missouri, respectfully requests Heartland Presbytery to overture the 219th General Assembly (2010) to do the following:

1. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

a. Strike the current text of G-6.0106b and insert new text to read as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted 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. Those who are called to ordained service in the church, by their assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.4003), pledge themselves to live lives obedient to Jesus Christ the Head of the Church, as revealed in Holy Scripture, striving to follow where He leads through the authoritative witness of the Scriptures, and to understand the Scriptures through the instruction of the Confessions. In so doing, they declare their fidelity to the standards of the Church. Each governing body charged with examination for ordination and/or installation (G-14.0240 and G-14.0450) establishes the candidate’s faithful efforts to adhere to these standards.”~~

b. Amend G-14.0450 by inserting a new paragraph “b.” and by relettering current paragraphs “b.” through “d.” as “c.” through “e.” The text shall read as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with a strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown as italic.]

“Final Assessment of Readiness to Begin Ordained Ministry

“In the final year of theological education or when a candidate has satisfied all of the requirements of this section, and before the candidate has received a call, the committee on preparation for ministry of the candidate’s presbytery shall conduct a final assessment of the candidate’s readiness to begin ordained ministry. A summary of this assessment shall be reported to

the presbytery and shall be transmitted to a calling presbytery when requested. The committee on preparation for ministry shall report to the presbytery when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. This consultation shall focus on the outcomes of inquiry and candidacy and shall include each of the following requirements of certification:

“a. demonstration of readiness to begin ministry of the Word and Sacrament as required to fulfill the candidacy phase of preparation;

“b. demonstration of readiness to assent to the constitutional questions for ordination and installation;

“~~b~~. c. presentation of a transcript showing satisfactory grades at a regionally accredited college or university, together with a diploma;

“~~e~~. d. presentation of a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, the transcript showing satisfactory grades, and presentation of a plan to complete the theological degree including Hebrew and Greek and exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek texts;

“~~d~~. e. presentation of satisfactory grades together with the examination papers in the five areas covered by the Presbyteries’ Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates.”

RATIONALE

The opening paragraphs of the Form of Government are a powerful statement of the fundamental Christian and Reformed affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. In support of this primary affirmation, Chapter I of the Form of Government calls Christians to attend to the Scriptures, insofar as they set forth “Christ’s will for the Church,” and Chapter II identifies the church’s confessions as its guides, subordinate to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as revealed to us in Scripture alone. Our church thus has bound itself to a hierarchy of authority in which we are to obey Jesus Christ its Head, and, the Scriptures as the authoritative witness to Him, and then the confessions, to the extent that they accurately bear witness to Christ’s will. This fundamental hierarchy of authority is accurately and eloquently reflected in the first three of the constitutional questions, the assent to which is required of each candidate for ordination and/or installation.

Although the hierarchy of the church’s authority is clear, it is subverted by the current language of G-6.0106b, which substitutes for our obedience to Christ two concepts that are foreign to Reformed understanding: “obedience” to Scripture and “conformity” to the confessions. We do not confess, “Scripture is Lord” nor “the Confessions are Lord.” Instead, we boldly confess that “Christ is Lord!” The proposed amendment would

substitute new language, which (1) reflects the church's historical understanding of where its authority is to be found, and (2) reaffirms the church's reliance on the examination of candidates by its governing bodies as the principal means by which to ensure the commitment of its ordained officers to the duties of faith. The amendment additionally would insert appropriate language to ensure that each such examination would include discussion of the constitutional questions and the governing body's determination of the candidate's readiness to accept their principles and faithfully live by them to the extent any of us is able.

In order to be able to rely on Jesus Christ as its Head and as its chief guide in all of life, the church must shed any human-made, subordinate source of authority that would bind its ability to follow where our Savior leads.