

Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the PCUSA

Approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016) and recommended to the Presbytery of Nevada for concurrence.

A non-biased and politically correct report and recommendation from:

- Jim (the rightwing jack booted theological thug of the Nevada Presbytery) Houston-Hencken
- Richard (the fuzzy headed knee jerk theological liberal of the Nevada Presbytery) Hutchison

Note:

This report will summarize the proposed amendments using the background rationale provided by the Advisory Committee on the Constitution, provide a statement of what is really going on in each amendment, and a recommendation from both the theologically right leaning and left leaning activists at the podium who were asked to do this by the moderator of the Equipping Committee...BLAME HER!

Further information regarding each of these proposed amendments has been compiled by Art Ritter and is available in the back of the room and a meeting will be held Wednesday morning for any who would like further discussion and information prior to our final vote.

16-A. Child and Youth Protection Policy on Amending G-3.0106

Shall the fourth paragraph of G-3.0106 of the Form of Government be amended as follows?

“All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct policy and a child *and youth* protection policy.”

What this is about:

*Since the child protection policy amendment went into effect after the 221st General Assembly (2014), issues have arisen regarding the interpretation of the text. Some councils have interpreted the amendment to mean that the sexual misconduct policy and child protection policy are one policy with one intent and purpose. **However, the intent of the original amendment, when further reading the rationale, is that these would be two separate policies with two separate purposes.***

What is really going on here:

This is housekeeping. It simply cleans up language of the original amendment approved in 2014 to clarify the intent. Basically, this means that all councils shall have sexual misconduct statements or policies for the protection of both youth and children.

Hutch recommends Yes
Houston-Hencken recommends Yes

16-B. Parity in Committees -On Amending G-3.0109

Shall the second paragraph of G-3.0109 of the Form of Government be amended as follows?

“A committee shall study and recommend action or carry out decisions already made by a council. It shall make a full report to the council that created it, and its recommendations shall require action by that body. Committees of councils higher than the session shall consist of both teaching elders and members of congregations, ~~with at least one half being members of congregations~~ in numbers as nearly equal as possible.”

What this is about:

While parity is essential in decision making, requiring it of all committees (which by definition do not make decisions, but only study matters assigned to them, make recommendations, and carry out decisions made by councils or their commissions), is an unnecessary restriction placed on councils. In particular, it is a burdensome requirement in the matter of committees of counsel, which, as defined in D-6.0302, may be composed of no more than three persons.

What is really going on here:

Housekeeping again! This amendment simply wants to lessen the restrictive nature of parity in committees between teaching elders and ruling elders. It continues to uphold the principle of parity but allows for some flexibility when it is difficult to make the numbers work.

Hutch says: Yep

Houston-Hencken says Why not...it will make presbytery great again!

16-C. Ordered Ministry Titles 1-8

We are taking 16-C1, C2, C3, C4, C5, C6, C7 and C8 as a group. they are all the same issues with each representing a wording change in a different part of the Book of Order.

What this is about:

These proposed amendments (16-C.1. through 16-C.8) originated as an overture from the Presbytery of Great Rivers. The overtures simply change the terms of teaching elder

and commission teaching elder to Minister of the Word and Sacrament and Commissioned Pastor respectively.

If the 16-C. proposed amendments that would change “teaching elder” to “minister of the Word and Sacrament” in the Book of Order are approved by a majority of presbyteries, where the term “teaching elder” is used in the Book of Order will be editorially corrected to “minister of the Word and Sacrament.” Editorial corrections will also be made for inclusion of the word “the” in the phrase “ministers of the Word and Sacrament” in the Book of Order

If the 16-C. proposed amendments that would change “ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service” to “commissioned pastor (also known as commissioned ruling elder)” in the Book of Order is approved by most presbyteries, where the term “ruling elder commissioned to pastoral service” is used in the Book of Order, will be editorially corrected to “commissioned pastor (also known as commissioned ruling elder).”

What is really going on here:

We are going back to the way it was done before. The only difference is that the ACC recognizes that the terms for Minister of the Word and Sacrament, Teaching Elder can be used interchangeably.

Hutch says: Yes, progressives like change!

Houston-Hencken says Yes, it is the way we have always done it!

16-D.1, D.2 Relationship to the PC(USA) of a Person Who Has Renounced Jurisdiction of the Church

These two overtures are related to the same issue and will be dealt with together as one issue in this report.

What this is about:

In 2014–2015, G-2.0509 of the Book of Order was amended to create a permanent ban on teaching elders who renounce jurisdiction while being accused in a disciplinary process from working in or for the church in either a paid or volunteer capacity. While this amendment was written in response to the renunciation of a teaching elder accused of sexual abuse, the ban applies to all teaching elders who renounce while being accused “[w]ithout regard for the nature, seriousness, or truth of the alleged delinquency, irregularity, or offense.”

As Christians, we live in hope of reconciliation for all. This overture proposes a process by which a former teaching elder, after many years (perhaps decades) of therapy, may publicly face accusations that he or she had evaded before, as a step

towards possible reinstatement to be able to work in the church (at least in some capacity).

What is really going on here:

This is housekeeping on a serious matter. The current rules of discipline do not allow for grace or reconciliation for any minister who has renounced jurisdiction while under investigation for any discipline matter. These two overtures allow for a way to complete the disciplinary process and restore a teaching elder to the church as a member or possibly ordination.

16-D.1

“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.) *unless and until the person rejoins the church, comes forward and resubmits to the disciplinary process.*”

Note: this amendment simply adds words of grace that allow a person to complete the disciplinary process which itself is designed to promote grace and reconciliation.

16-D.2

“For instances where a former teaching elder comes forward in self-accusation to undergo a disciplinary process to regain permission to perform work under the jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (G-2.0509), no time limit from the time of the commission of the alleged offense to the filing of charges shall apply. Charges based on all accusations that had been made by the time that the former teaching elder had renounced jurisdiction may be brought regardless of the date on which any such offense is alleged to have occurred.”

Hutch recommends: Yes; saying, “blessed are the gracemakers!”

Houston Hencken says: Yes; saying, “I think Jesus said, “grace is good, or something like that!”

16-F Certified Service Requirements

“Persons may be certified and called to service within congregations, councils, and church-related entities, serving in staff positions. These individuals endeavor to reflect their faith through their work and to strengthen the church through their dedication. They should be encouraged by their session and presbytery to meet, or be prepared to meet, the certification requirements ~~in a handbook provided by~~ of a national certifying body approved by the General Assembly. Names of those who have earned certification through a national certifying body shall be transmitted to the appropriate body of the General Assembly, which will forward them to the stated clerk of the presbyteries in which those persons labor.”

What this is about:

Current language in the Book of Order calling for a “handbook” seems antiquated and limiting. Most organizations maintain certification requirements on-line or in other electronic formats. This change would provide clarification and reflect current practice.

What’s really going on here:

MORE HOUSEKEEPING FOR HEAVEN’S SAKE!!! This is just bringing the language up to the 21st century.

Houston-Hencken says: Yes, ho hum, let’s move on...nothing to see here.

Hutch recommends: Yes, are we really in the 21st century already?

16-F. The Ministry of Members

“Membership in the Church of Jesus Christ is a joy and a privilege. It is also a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission. A faithful member bears witness to God’s love and grace and promises to be involved responsibly in the ministry of Christ’s Church. Such involvement includes:

1. **“proclaiming the good news in word and deed,**
2. **“taking part in the common life and worship of a congregation,**
3. **“lifting one another up in prayer, mutual concern, and active support,**
4. **“studying Scripture and the issues of Christian faith and life,**
5. **“supporting the ministry of the church through the giving of money, time, and talents,**
6. **“demonstrating a new quality of life within and through the church, “responding to God’s activity in the world through service to others, “living responsibly in the personal, family, vocational, political, cultural, and social relationships of life,**
7. **“working in the world for peace, justice, freedom, and human fulfillment,**
8. **“caring for God’s creation,**
9. **“participating in the governing responsibilities of the church, and “reviewing and evaluating regularly the integrity of one’s membership, and considering ways in which one’s participation in the worship and service of the church may be increased and made more meaningful.”**

What this is about:

Amendment add the phrase “caring for God’s creation” as part of the responsibilities of membership.

What’s really going on here:

This is an effort to make environmentalism part of the responsibility of each member of our denomination.

Houston-Hencken says: Yes, maybe, I don't know. This seems political and not necessary in our constitutional documents. Environmentalism is a moral and theological issues for all Christians, however to make it part of our constitution seems to move us back to the days of having a constitution that is more a manual of operations that includes particular political positions. Not a deal breaker for me, but seem unnecessary. If we are going to do this, should we consider other political / social issues that should be put in the constitution of our denomination such as sanctity of life?

Hutch recommends: Yes.

16-G. Access to the Lord's Table on Amending W-2.4011a. and b. (Item 14-03)

"Theology of the Lord's Supper

"a. The opportunity to eat and drink with Christ is not a right bestowed upon the worthy, but a privilege given to the undeserving who come in faith, repentance, and love. All who come to the table are offered the bread and cup, regardless of their age or understanding. If some of those who come have not yet been baptized, an invitation to baptismal preparation and Baptism should be graciously extended.

"Worshippers prepare themselves to celebrate the Lord's Supper by putting their trust in Christ, confessing their sin, and seeking reconciliation with God and one another. Even those who doubt may come to the table in order to be assured of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ.

"Welcoming to the Table

"b. In cases where baptized children who have not yet begun to participate in the Lord's Supper express a desire to receive the Sacrament, the session should provide an occasion to welcome them to the table in public worship. Their introduction to the Lord's Supper should include ongoing instruction or formation in the meaning and mystery of the Sacraments."

What this is about:

Current wording in the Book of Order regarding who can partake in Holy Communion excludes those developing Christians who have not yet made the baptismal declaration. Children whose parents decided to not partake in infant baptism would be excluded until such time as (usually during the Confirmation experience) they themselves choose to be baptized. People who are new to the faith and are being nurtured by a congregation would also be excluded. In both cases it appears that the

Book of Order would exclude these people from participation and require them to stay behind in the pews while everyone else goes forward to receive the elements.

What's really going on here:

This is an effort to open the Lord's table to all who desire the sacrament.

Houston-Hencken says: Yes.... grace is good and should be extended to all who desire it.

Hutch recommends: Yes...grace is progressive and should be distributed liberally.

16-H. Directory for Worship

What this is about:

This amendment replaced the Directory for Worship with a new shortened condensed version. The complete text has been provided in supporting documents. Each voting member should read the new version and decide for themselves if the proposed version is an adequate replacement.

What is really going on here:

This new Directory for Worship is part of the denominations ongoing effort to simplify our constitutional documents. This directory reduces the number of words from the previous directory from 27,000 to 17,000. It allows local congregations and worshipping communities more freedom as it is less a manual of operations. This directory is well written, reformed in its theology and based in scripture.

Jim's recommendation: Yes. There are a few concerns for conservative members of our congregations but none that are deal breakers. Of note are sections W-5.0304 and W-5.0305 where they read:

We confess our participation in unjust systems, pray for an end to violence and injustice, offer our gifts to support Christ's liberating work, and commit ourselves to pursue peace and justice in Jesus' name.

we are called to: tend the land, water, and air with awe and wonder at God's gifts; use the earth's resources wisely, without plundering, polluting, or destroying; use technology in ways that preserve and enhance life; measure our production and consumption in order to provide for the needs of all; foster responsible practices of procreation and reproduction; and seek beauty, order, health, harmony, and peace for all God's creatures.

I question why these items are part of a directory for worship. They seem politically motivated and not well defined. Who determines what systems are unjust that require or personal confession? This seems to be an attempt to affirm liberation theology in our congregations.

Additionally, the idea of advocating the use of technology to measure consumption and foster responsible practices of procreation are odd and, I believe politically motivated, statements to have in a directory for worship. Who defines these terms for worship? Are we advocating birth control lessons in worship? Just because something is a good idea does not mean it should be in a theological directory for worship. I would support future amendments to clean up this language, however I still believe this is an exceptional document of which both sides of the theological aisle be proud.

Hutch's recommendation and notes:

No written response...ask him in person? - Christy