

Memorandum on Selected Proposed Amendments to the Constitution of the PC(USA)

Date: 20 November 2024
To: Bills and Overtures Committee
From: Examinations Commission

In response to a request from the Bills & Overtures Committee, the Examinations Commission reviewed 2 proposed Amendments to the Constitution: 24-A (amending F-1.0403) and 24-C (amending G-2.0104b). The Exams Commission understood that it was not asked to make an official recommendation or to take an official stance on the Amendments, but simply to give feedback. Below is a summary of the conversation around each amendment.

24-A

F-1.0403 The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, *gender identity*, *sexual orientation*, disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.

Pros:

1. Amendment does not imply or alter any *additional* language to F-1.0403, but simply expands on existing language. This is a helpful reminder of groups that might otherwise not be represented in an understanding of “all persons or groups.”
2. Explicitly calls for the protection of specific groups and individuals who might feel ostracized or excluded.
3. Bears witness to the larger Church and maintains an understanding that God’s love extends to all.
4. By expanding the verbiage in the B.O.O., the PC(USA) provides a safe place for all individuals to express their identity.
5. Helpful reminder, particularly at the local church level where a comprehensive knowledge of the B.O.O. may not always be present.

Cons:

1. By including additional groups in the language of F-1.0403, the understanding of unity and “oneness” (esp. as expressed by Paul in Galatian 3) is further obscured.
2. The language of “...all persons or groups..” is already included in this section. To add language specifying those included in “all groups” could imply exclusion of those not currently listed. In response, future revisions of this section of the B.O.O. could become increasingly fragmented.
3. This amendment could be seen as capitulating to social pressure and cultural issues of the moment.
4. Adding more stipulations is contrary to the intention that the B.O.O. be used as a book of “guiding principles” rather than reverting to a book of precepts and rules. In other words, sections (particularly in the Foundations section of the B.O.O.) should be more broadly defined rather than narrowly defined.

24-C

G-2.0104b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate's ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404), *the Historic Principles of Church Order (F-3.01)*, and in the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403. Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

Pros:

1. (Re)Affirms the intention and goal of non-discrimination. By calling attention to the Foundational portions of the B.O.O., this amendment reaffirms that ordination is grounded in the Lordship of Christ and in the sacramental nature of the church - fundamental beliefs within the PC(USA).
2. Calls attention to the pastoral urgency needed to affirm groups or individuals who might otherwise feel that they are afforded less than full participation in the life of the church.
3. Serves as a helpful reminder - even if redundant. This may be particularly true at the local church level where a comprehensive knowledge of the B.O.O. may not always be present.
4. Redundancy draws attention to a critical component of the church's polity of inclusion.
5. While the process of examination is intended to determine a Candidate's intention and willingness to abide by the Constitution and their awareness of these issues, not every church, presbytery or process can guarantee full and effective examination. This provision adds an additional assurance that the Candidate understands and will abide by critical matters of inclusion.

Cons:

1. The added language is redundant. Several other sections of the B.O.O. already bear witness to the principles of participation and inclusion. In addition, Ordination questions are already used to confirm the ordinands willingness to submit to those sections.
2. This additional language may too-pointedly emphasize one issue.
3. In essence, this amendment attempts to "doubly affirm" adherence to the church's polity. If the intent is to assure the church that a Candidate for ordination (at the local church level or at the larger church level) is willing to adhere to certain principles, it is doubtful that affirming it multiple times will guarantee it.

Respectfully,

Will Nickles