

Frequently Asked Questions
Amendment 10-A and ordination standards
Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

What has happened?

In July 2010, the 219th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approved a proposed amendment (10-A) to the *Book of Order*, part of the PC(USA) Constitution, regarding ordination standards. As with all constitutional changes, Amendment 10-A required ratification by a majority of the PC(USA)'s 173 presbyteries (regional bodies) for it to become part of the *Book of Order*. While the Office of the General Assembly awaits official tallies, it appears that 87 presbyteries have approved Amendment 10-A, which is the minimum number needed for ratification.

What will change?

The following provision that is currently in the *Book of Order* (G-6.0106b) will be changed:

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.

The new language (Amendment 10-A) will read:

Standards for ordained service reflect the church's desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (G-1.0000). The governing body responsible for ordination and/or installation (G.14.0240; G- 14.0450) shall examine each candidate's calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of office. 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-4.4003). Governing bodies shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.

What does this mean?

- A person in a same-gender relationship can be considered for ordination as deacon, elder, or Minister of the Word and Sacrament.
- All other churchwide standards for ordination remain unchanged. (There was never a prohibition against a person being ordained based on sexual orientation, as long as that person was celibate.)
- Ordaining bodies continue to retain the right and responsibility to determine their own memberships. A congregation continues to elect their deacons and elders and the session examines them for suitability of office. Likewise, presbyteries examine individuals for suitability to be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament.

What's next?

Amendment 10-A will take effect on July 10, 2011 (one year after the adjournment of the last assembly). Already, the change has energized many conversations at all levels across the PC(USA) about how we can best enable the gifts of those called to service in Christ's church and have mutual respect for each other's integrity. In addition, sessions and presbyteries will review their processes for examination.

For more detailed information and additional resources

New Advisory Opinion [work in progress; URL to come]

Liturgical resources [URL to come]

Pastoral letter to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) [URL to come]