

General Assembly actions Require Majority Vote from Presbyteries

This year General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) held its bi-annual meeting July 3rd through 10th in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This meeting of representatives is the primary decision-making body for our denomination. Every other year elder and minister commissioners from our 173 presbyteries gather to consider Overtures (policy statements or calls to action) submitted by presbyteries, learn about ministries, consider suggested changes to how the church works and determine where the church stands on often difficult social issues. Changes to the church constitution require a majority vote in the presbyteries by July of the following year before they become church law.

Three such decisions were sent down to the presbyteries at this year's General Assembly. The Belhar Confession, Form of Government Changes and changes to our Ordination Standards. In the course of the coming year, our presbytery will be considering and voting on these issues. The following schedule for voting is being proposed: Belhar Confession – October 2010, Form of Government – March 2011, Ordination Standards and other proposed amendments to the *Book of Order* – June 2011.

The PC(USA) has not voted to add a new confession to the Book of Confessions in almost thirty years. The Belhar Confession challenges the church to work against racism and for reconciliation and justice throughout our church and country. We will vote whether to ratify this decision to include the Belhar Confession in the Book of Confessions at our presbytery meeting to be held October 17 at Grace (L). The Belhar Confession is available in the Resource Center and on the presbytery's website at

www.providencepres.org

After two years of work, the FOG Task Force recommended



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the following changes to the current Form of Government. If approved by a majority of the presbyteries, The Book of Order will include a new section entitled “The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,” and amended versions of Form of Government and Advisory Handbook for Councils for the Development of Policies and Procedures Required by the Form of Government. The Form of Government changes to the Book of Order seek to maximize flexibility to meet the changing needs of churches and presbyteries, while maintaining standards that are appropriate to the practice of the whole church. A forum for understanding and discussing the changes will be included in the E3 programming in January. To read about the changes, go to <http://ga219.pcusa.org/> and click on Form of Government.

The change to ordination standards is the final item we will need to vote on. This change involves removing G=6.0106b from the Book of Order and adding the following language: *“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.”* A forum regarding this change will be included in the January training event, E3. For more information about the Ordination Standards change, visit <http://ga219.pcusa.org/> and click on Ordination Standards Final FAQ.

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