

*[A presbyter/bishop] must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled... must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, [in order to] be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.*

~ Titus 1:8-9 ~



Dear Friends,

Examining candidates for leadership in the church is Biblical, and it is foundational to our Reformed tradition. Those entrusted with leadership are called by God and chosen by the people, but the church also takes steps to discern with those who are elected whether they possess the required gifts and qualifications for the roles for which they have been chosen.

Those of you who joined us for our Stated Meeting in January know that National Capital Presbytery voted to approve an amendment to the Book of Order, Amendment 24-C, that would change the way councils examine candidates for church office—deacons, ruling elders, and ministers of Word and Sacrament. This amendment, which will take effect if a majority of the PCUSA’s presbyteries approve, adds two new requirements for the examination of officer candidates. Currently, candidates must be examined in the requirements of church officers as expressed in the constitutional questions asked at their ordination and installation (W-4.0404). If Amendment 24-C is approved, candidates would also need to be examined in the Book of Order’s provisions on Unity in Diversity (F-1.0403) and the Historic Principles of Church Order (F-3.01).

As of the time I am writing this, Amendment 24-C has received the affirmative votes of 41 presbyteries, the negative votes of 21, and 105 presbyteries have yet to vote. Nevertheless, anticipating the need to revise our examination process for ministers, as well as to provide guidance to sessions about examining ruling elders and deacons, the Commission on Ministry has formed a working group on examinations, consisting of ministers and ruling elders reflecting the diversity described in F-1.0403 (including a diversity of expressed views on Amendment 24-C). They will hold their first meeting next Tuesday, March 4.

The purpose of the working group is to develop a process that simultaneously fulfills the new constitutional requirements and upholds the broad range of diversity we value in National Capital Presbytery. We are grateful for the engagement of the presbytery community in the period of discernment on Amendment 24-C, and all the hopes and concerns expressed there will help to inform this work on how we carry out examinations. We also look forward to continuing these conversations as the working group turns to the members of our community in open forums for input and feedback.

The Book of Order reminds us that “ordered ministries are gifts to the church to order its life *so that the ministry of the whole people of God may flourish*” (G-2.0102). To tend and nurture these gifts serves also to build up the ministry of all members, so that our congregations become communities of faith,

hope, love, and witness to Jesus Christ. Thank you all for your engagement with this vital facet of the church's life.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. David A. Baer, Stated Clerk