

**EXAMINATION POLICY
EASTERN OKLAHOMA PRESBYTERY
REVISED DECEMBER 2007**

The 217th General Assembly (2006) approved an authoritative interpretation (AI) based on G-6.0108 in our *Book of Order*. It states, in general, that the Presbyterian Church (USA) and each of its governing bodies (Session, Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly) live in an historic balance between the right of the PCUSA to set national ordination standards and the responsibility of the local governing body to apply those standards as they set their own requirements for membership and officers. The Session is the governing body which determines qualifications for the office of elder or deacon; the Presbytery is the governing body which determines qualifications for the office of minister of word and sacrament. Each governing body applies the constitutional standards and is, as each is led by the Holy Spirit, free to accept or not accept the qualifications of a person ordained by another governing body. A full text of G-6.0108 and the authoritative interpretation can be found in Appendices A and B.

According to G-13.0103r, authoritative interpretations “shall be binding on the governing bodies of the church.” In this AI, Sessions and Presbyteries are given a model for how governing bodies may evaluate candidates for church office who express disagreement with any of the provisions of the Constitution during their examination. Though not used in the AI, the word “scruple” has frequently been used to indicate any reservation a candidate may express with regard to any of the provisions of our Constitution. The premise of declaring a scruple dates back to the Adopting Act of 1729, where candidates were allowed to declare their reservations with specific articles of the Westminster Confession. This paper seeks to offer some guidance for how the concept of scruples and the new AI will be applied in Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery.

The new AI makes no distinction between belief and behavior when it asks the governing body to determine the acceptable limits of “departure from scriptural and constitutional standards for fitness for office.” Such a distinction will ultimately have to be settled by the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission or a subsequent ruling by a future General Assembly.

However, based on the cases of *Maxwell v. The Presbytery of Pittsburgh* (commonly referred to as the “Kenyon” case) and *Londonderry v. The Presbytery of Northern New England*, we do not believe that the AI permits a governing body to permit scruples of behavior, only those based on belief. In other words, acceptance of a “scruple” acknowledges that a candidate disagrees in principle with a provision of the Constitution or interpretation of Scripture which the examining body determines to be “non-essential” to Reformed faith and polity, but does not condone or forgive departure in practice from essentials approved and described in the *Book of Confessions* and *Book of Order*. No governing body may exempt itself from adhering to any mandatory provisions of the Constitution (*Londonderry*). Stated more simply in the Preface of the *Book of Order*:

In this Book of Order

- (1) SHALL and IS TO BE/ARE TO BE signify practice that is mandated,
- (2) SHOULD signifies practice that is strongly recommended,
- (3) IS APPROPRIATE signifies practice that is commended as suitable,
- (4) MAY signifies practice that is permissible but not required.

For example, a candidate to serve as Pastor may express a reservation with the constitutional requirement that a child presented for baptism must have at least one person acting in a parental role who

is a member of a Christian Church (W-2.3014). The Presbytery would have to determine if such a reservation was essential to Reformed faith and polity. The Presbytery could choose to admit the person for ordination or installation as Pastor if the reservation was deemed non-essential. However, this would not permit the Session to authorize nor the Pastor to conduct such baptisms contrary to the expressed requirements of the *Book of Order*. Disagreement in belief is permitted, but conformity in behavior is required. This is the essence of constitutional connectionalism.

The 217th General Assembly took great care to assure the whole Church that governing bodies may not avoid or deny their constitutional authority when they amended section (d) of the AI to require that not only the process of examination but also the content of the examination (as well as the resulting decision) comply with the Constitution. This is important because our connectional nature leads us to believe that the decision of one governing body is subject to review and correction (if necessary) by a higher governing body. Such review and, specifically, the adherence to constitutional standards are essential to our life together as a covenanted community. This is affirmed in the Stated Clerk's Advisory Opinion #18, which states clearly:

The 217th GA left in place the Authoritative Interpretation of 1993 (*Minutes*, 1993, page 322): "Current constitutional law in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is that self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons."

What, then, does the authoritative interpretation (AI) say?

- The standards for church office are set forth in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), both the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order*.
- These standards are established and amended only by the whole church.
- These standards are applied locally as governing bodies examine candidates for offices within the Church.
- The candidate for office may declare reservations (scruples) to the essentials of Reformed faith and practice as found in scripture and our Constitution.
- The examining body must determine whether any expressed reservation is considered a departure from the essentials of the Church and whether that departure constitutes a bar to ordination or installation.
- The examination and the decision to ordain or install must nevertheless comply with the requirements of the Constitution (governing bodies are bound by any mandatory language in the Constitution).

In practice, these principles suggest that, should issues arise about a particular matter of doctrine, polity, or practice, the examining body has an *obligation* to allow the candidate to explain the nature of his or her reservations. Then, the examining body should also determine whether the reservations would prevent the candidate from complying with the mandatory requirements of the Constitution. The depth, quality and clarity of the candidate's own personal faith may be considered as part of their decision. But the governing body may not accept the candidate's statement of reservation, no matter how well articulated, if that candidate is unwilling to comply with all constitutional requirements. A decision not to ordain or install should not be considered a rejection of the candidate's conscience, but as a candidate's *failure to affirm the ordination vow requiring all officers to abide by the polity of the church*.

Every governing body is encouraged to develop examination standards. Presbyteries and their Committees on Ministry are required to examine those who wish to serve as Ministers of Word and Sacrament in their midst. This is often done by reviewing a written statement of faith and conducting an examination based on current guidelines. Sessions are required to examine those who wish to serve as Elders or Deacons. Sessions may require a written statement of faith, but often request an oral presentation of the candidate's faith journey and statement of belief.

During any such examination, the candidate may (and should) be asked to declare areas of disagreement in faith, polity, or practice with regard to the requirements of the Constitution. Standard areas for examination by a governing body may include particular areas of doctrine, polity and practice such as:

Sovereignty of God
Doctrine of the Trinity
Christology
Biblical and confessional authority
Sacramental theology
Sin and Salvation
The Christian Life

However, the governing body *may not* prepare a list which specifies particular positions which it deems to be "essential." Each person is to be examined on a case-by-case basis (there are to be no "litmus test" questions and prescribed answers). For example, the examination should not be sustained or not sustained based on:

Substitutionary theory of atonement (vs other accepted theories of atonement)
Inerrancy of Scripture (vs Scripture as our "infallible rule of faith and practice")
Double predestination (vs other Reformed understandings of the doctrine of election)

This paper seeks to offer not only an interpretation of the actions of the 217th General Assembly, but also models for the examination process. The General Assembly commended to all governing bodies the need to apply examination requirements consistently and rigorously across the denomination. Attached to this paper are additional appendices detailing how standard areas of examination (Appendix C) may be applied in the examination of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Appendix D), of Lay Preachers (Appendix E), of Inquirers (Appendix F) and Candidates (Appendices G & H), and of Elders and Deacons (Appendix I), as well as Constitutional Musing #11 "Examining Officers" (Appendix J).

In summary, the standards for examination in Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery (and recommended standards for Sessions within Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery) include the following assumptions:

- only beliefs may be scrupled, not behaviors;
- scrupling applies to current belief and does not permit violation of the Constitution;
- no governing body may exempt itself from mandatory provisions of the Constitution;
- examining bodies may not reject a scruple based on an *a priori* list of essentials without weighing the candidate's defense of the scruple;
- irregular examinations and decisions to ordain or install are subject to review as to their conformity to process *and* compliance with constitutional requirements.

Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery is very grateful for the resources shared by other persons and agencies within the PCUSA, some of which were incorporated into this document. Among those to whom we are indebted are: the Presbytery of Plains and Peaks, the Office of General Assembly, and Ed Koster (Stated Clerk of Detroit Presbytery).

APPENDIX A
BOOK OF ORDER G-6.0108

Freedom of Conscience - Individual and Corporate:

a. It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve in it as officers shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in *The Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained.

Within Certain Bounds:

b. It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves. (G-1.0301; G-1.0302)

Candidates for Ministry:

c. Persons seeking to be received as candidates for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall have their attention drawn to the constitutional documents of the church including its statement on freedom of conscience. (G-14.0304)

APPENDIX B
PEACE, UNITY & PURITY REPORT APPROVED BY 217TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY
INCLUDES AUTHORITATIVE INTERPRETATION (RECOMMENDATION 5)

1. The Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) strongly encourage
 - a. every member of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to witness to the church's visible oneness, to avoid division into separate denominations that obscure our community in Christ, and to live in harmony with other members of this denomination, so that we may with one voice together glorify God in Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit; and
 - b. all sessions, congregations, presbyteries, and synods to renew and strengthen their covenanted partnership with one another and with the General Assembly.

2. The Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) urge governing bodies, congregations, and other groups of Presbyterians to follow the example of the task force and other groups that, in the face of difficult issues, have engaged in processes of intensive discernment through worship, community building, study, and collaborative work.

3. The Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) commend for study the Theological Reflection that heads the task force report (see lines 35-260).

4. The Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) direct the Committee on the Office of the General Assembly, and urge those who plan and moderate meetings of other governing bodies, to explore the use of alternative forms of discernment preliminary to decision-making, especially in dealing with potentially divisive issues.

5. **The Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church recommends that the 217th General Assembly (2006) approve the following authoritative interpretation of section G-6.0108 of the *Book of Order*:**
 - a. ***The Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government of the *Book of Order* set forth the scriptural and constitutional standards for ordination and installation.**
 - b. **These standards are determined by the whole church, after the careful study of Scripture and theology, solely by the constitutional process of approval by the General Assembly with the approval of the presbyteries. These standards may be interpreted by the General Assembly and its Permanent Judicial Commission.**
 - c. **Ordaining and installing bodies, acting as corporate expressions of the church, have the responsibility to determine their membership by applying these standards to those elected to office. These determinations**

APPENDIX C
STANDARD AREAS OF EXAMINATION - EASTERN OKLAHOMA PRESBYTERY

The *Book of Order* offers the following guidelines for the examination of ministers seeking membership in a presbytery:

“The presbytery, through its appropriate committee, shall examine each minister or candidate who seeks membership in it on his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Sacraments, and the government of this church...” (G-11.0401c)

Candidates for ordination are to be examined in a like manner:

“The candidate shall appear before the presbytery in which he or she shall make a brief statement of personal faith and of commitment to the ministry of Word and Sacrament... [The presbytery] shall conduct any further examination of his or her Christian faith and views in theology, the Bible, the Sacraments, and the government of the Church as it deems necessary.” (G-14.0402a)

In the following appendices, sample questions are provided in each of these areas for ministers (Appendix D), lay preachers (Appendix E) candidates for ministry (Appendices F-H), and church officers (Appendix I). **These questions are only examples of the kinds of questions which could be asked and are not meant to prevent other questions from being asked.** In general, the following guidelines for examination may be drawn:

- persons SHALL be asked questions in the following areas:
 - one’s personal Christian faith
 - theology
 - the Sacraments
 - polity (the government of the Church)

- persons MAY be asked questions in particular areas of doctrine, polity and practice, such as:
 - Sovereignty of God
 - Doctrine of the Trinity
 - Christology
 - Biblical and confessional authority
 - Sin and Salvation
 - the Christian life

- persons MAY NOT be asked a set of standard questions which specify or imply particular responses are “essential,” such as:
 - substitutionary theory of atonement (vs other accepted theories of atonement)
 - inerrancy of Scripture (vs Scripture as our “infallible rule of faith and

- practice” - Westminster Confession)
- double predestination (vs other Reformed understandings of the doctrine of election)

Finally, two questions are always appropriate:

- If a person identifies any “scruples” (areas of theological or philosophical reservation about Scripture or the Constitutional standards of the Church), it is appropriate for the examining body to ask, “Will you nevertheless abide within the discipline of the PCUSA and the constitutional mandates of the *Book of Order*?”
- It is also always appropriate to ask of any candidate for office, “Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular in G-6.0106 a&b?”

APPENDIX D
RECEPTION OF MINISTERS OF WORD & SACRAMENT

Process Notes: (Ref: G-11.0400)

Steps accomplished prior to presentation to the Presbytery:

- if being called to a congregation:
 - examined by PNC (including reference checks by PNC)
 - called by congregation
- sustained **presbytery-to-presbytery reference checks**
- sustained professional **criminal background checks**
- been **examined by the Committee on Ministry** for theological competence (and, if being called to a congregation, fitness for that particular call)

Action by Presbytery:

- **COM moves that the person be enrolled as a member of EOP, including transfer from previous presbytery (& to approve terms of call, if called by congregation)**
- candidate presents Statement of Faith & Statement of Personal Journey
- Presbytery may examine the person in four areas:
 - Christian faith, theology, Sacraments, polity
- COM Moderator (or liaison) will ask up to 2 questions to begin the exam
- EOP Moderator will call for further examination from the floor
- for ministers receiving a call, congregation issuing the call shall be asked to attest to **action by the congregation** [NOTE: if the congregation/PNC representative is not an elected commissioner, we will need to offer the privilege of the floor to allow them to speak]
- to conclude examination requires a **motion to sustain the examination**
- candidate (and family) are **excused from the meeting** during final debate & vote
- if sustained, person is **approved for membership**
[NOTE: request for membership **must include a call or validated ministry, or standing as honorably retired - G-11-0402**]
- presbytery should approve date, time, place for installation as well as a commission to install (7 persons, all from EOP - at least 3 clergy & at least 3 elders; each elder must be from a different congregation; commission should include EOP Moderator or his/her designee)
- concludes with welcome by the EOP & COM moderators

Specific rules for receiving Ministers of Other Denominations: G-11.0404-.0405

Specific rules for Honorable Retirement: G-11.0412

Specific rule for Release (& Restoration) of Ordained Ministry: G-11.0414

Examination Guidelines and Possible Questions:

Under the standard areas of examination, the Committee on Ministry often asks some of the following questions of persons seeking membership in Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery as either Ministers of Word and Sacrament or authorized Lay Preachers. Similar questions could be asked by the presbytery as persons are being examined for membership.

Theology

1. Identify two major theologians who have influenced you and describe why they are important to you.
2. What specific Scripture passages and/or portions of our confessional statements most guide your ministry? How and why?
3. How would you help the congregation you serve to wrestle with issues of theology and doctrine?
4. What do you see to be the critical issues facing the church today?
5. Do you fully endorse the ordination of women to offices of leadership in the church? Do you use inclusive language - and why? Are there any other doctrinal statements of our denomination with which you disagree and how would they affect your ability to serve the congregation?

Sacraments

1. How often would you like to see the Lord's Supper celebrated in worship? Why?
2. Reflect on your understanding of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.
3. What advice do you have for parents seeking guidance on when their children should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper?
4. Would you ever re-baptize someone?
5. Under what circumstances would you baptize someone outside of a normal worship service?
6. How do you explain the nature of baptism with parents who indicate an interest in having their children baptized?

Polity

1. In what ways do you see our church's polity as a reflection of Reformed theology?
2. Many in our congregations come from non-Presbyterian backgrounds. How would you help them understand our system of polity?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of our system of church government? In what ways might our current ecclesiastical system of government be changed to better serve our Church, its governing bodies, and its congregations today?
4. Describe your relationship with the Session in your role as Moderator?
5. Describe your previous service and involvement with the larger church. How will you be an active member of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery? How will you encourage the congregation you serve to be active and faithful members of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery?

General

1. Describe your leadership and conflict management styles. What particular gifts do you bring to this congregation?
2. What are the growing edges of your ministry? Where do you need to grow in ministry? How can the Presbytery help in your growth?
3. Describe your experience and involvement with para-church organizations. Describe your experience and involvement with renewal groups within our denomination.
4. Have there ever been incidents of ethical, professional, or sexual misconduct related to your professional life? Have there been any charges or convictions?
5. Are there any personal, financial, or health-related difficulties which would interfere with your ministry?
6. Discuss the importance for you of personal rest, days off, vacation, and time for study. How do you take care of yourself?
7. Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular in G-6.0106 a&b?

APPENDIX E
AUTHORIZATION OF LAY PREACHERS AND COMMISSIONED LAY PASTORS

Process Notes: (Ref: G-14.0801)

Steps accomplished prior to being examined:

- completion of course of study, approved by the COM, in the areas of:
 - Bible; Reformed Theology & Sacraments; Presbyterian Polity; preaching; leading worship; pastoral care; teaching
[NOTE: EOP's Lay Leadership Academy requires completion of 10 courses]
- attestation by Session regarding membership in good standing
- examination by the Committee on Ministry which includes:
 - submission of a written sermon
 - submission of accompanying bulletin, demonstrating understanding of Reformed principles of worship
 - examination under same set of questions used from incoming ministers

Action by Presbytery:

- **COM Moderator moves that the person(s) be approved as Lay Preachers and/or Commissioned Lay Pastors**
 - Lay Preachers are authorized to preach and serve Communion within EOP
 - CLP's are commissioned to a particular congregation or parish and may be authorized with additional responsibilities:
 - officiate a Baptisms; officiate at weddings; moderate Session (under the guidance of a Minister); have voice & vote at presbytery meetings
 - authorization of Lay Preachers must be renewed annually; CLP's may be commissioned for up to three years at a time
- Presbytery may examine the person in four areas:
 - Christian faith; theology; Sacraments; polity
- COM Moderator (or liaison) will ask up to 2 questions to begin the exam
- EOP Moderator will call for further examination from the floor
- to conclude examination requires a **motion to sustain the examination**
- candidate (and family) are **excused from the meeting** during final debate & vote
- if sustained, person is **authorized for service (and commissioned, if CLP)**
- EOP Moderator shall ask questions found in G-14.0801g
- concludes with statement in G-14.0801h and welcome by the EOP & COM moderators

Examination Guidelines and Possible Questions: (same as in Appendix D)

APPENDIX F ENTRY INTO INQUIRY

Process Notes: (Ref: G-14.0302-.0303)

It is the policy of EOP to allow the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) to examine and enroll persons who wish to become Inquirers. The action of the committee is reported to the next presbytery meeting - NO FURTHER ACTION IS REQUIRED OTHER THAN TO RECORD THE ACTION OF THE COMMITTEE.

Steps involved in becoming an Inquirer:

- the person shall have been a member of a local congregation for at least 6 months
- the person visits with their Session and asks to begin the process
- at the invitation of the Session, CPM meets with the person's Session to describe the process and the Session's responsibilities; the Session appoints a liaison to work with the Inquirer
- CPM assigns a committee shepherd to work with the Inquirer
- CPM holds annual consultations with the Inquirer

Examination Guidelines and Possible Questions:

Under the standard areas of examination, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry asks the following general questions of persons seeking to come under care of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery as Inquirers:

1. Have you been an active member of your particular congregation for 6 months?
2. Have you met with your Session and pastor? Have they both endorsed your desire to come under care of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery?
3. Explain why you feel called to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.
4. Have there ever been incidents of ethical, professional, or sexual misconduct related to your professional life? Have there been any charges or convictions?
5. Are you willing to abide by the decisions and practices of the CPM of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery? Do you understand that the Book of Order is the basis for the work of the CPM, but not exhaustive?
6. Do you endorse the ordination of women to offices of leadership in the church?

7. Do you understand that acceptance under care of EOP as an Inquirer does not guarantee that you will be endorsed to move to the Candidate phase?
8. What is your current level of indebtedness? How do you plan to pay for seminary?
9. Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular in G-6.0106 a&b?
10. Do you understand that the ordination process in the PCUSA is two-fold: both ecclesiastical and academic? Do you understand that acceptance to seminary, even one affiliated with the PCUSA, does not guarantee ordination upon completion of the academic track?
11. Are there any personal, financial, or health-related difficulties which would interfere with your preparation for ministry?

APPENDIX G ENTRY TO CANDIDACY

Process Notes: (Ref: G-14.0304-.0309)

Steps accomplished prior to request for candidacy:

- was enrolled as an inquirer at least one year
- provided CPM with statement of **understanding of Christian vocation** in the Reformed tradition as related to their personal sense of call
- provided CPM with a **personal statement of faith**
- provided CPM with **theological analysis** of one concept from their personal statement of faith (eg: God, humanity, sin)
- provided CPM with **statement of what it means to be Presbyterian** (growing out of their participation in a particular church)
- provided CPM with a **personal statement of self-understanding** (personal and cultural background with concern for maintaining spiritual, physical, and mental health)
- provided CPM with a **statement of understanding of the task of Ministers of Word and Sacrament** (including awareness of personal specific gifts for ministry and areas of needed growth)

Action by Presbytery:

- **CPM moves that the person be enrolled as a Candidate**
- Presbytery shall examine the person in three areas:
 - candidate's Christian faith (as it pertains to their understanding of call)
 - forms of Christian service undertaken
 - motives for seeking ministry
- CPM Moderator (or liaison) will ask up to 3 questions to begin the exam
- EOP Moderator will call for further examination from the floor
- to conclude examination requires a **motion to sustain the examination**
- candidate (and family) are **excused from the meeting** during final debate & vote
- if sustained, candidate returns for **constitutional questions offered by EOP Moderator** (G-14.0305f) and **charge by CPM**
- person is **enrolled** as a candidate
- concludes with **prayer for the candidate** (often by home church pastor)

Examination Guidelines and Possible Questions:

Under the standard areas of examination, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry often asks the following questions of persons seeking to move from Inquirer phase to Candidacy phase of care in Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery:

1. Have you been an active member of a particular PCUSA congregation while in seminary?
2. Have you met with your endorsing Session and pastor? Have they both endorsed your desire to move from the Inquiry phase to the Candidacy phase of care of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery?
3. Describe your understanding of Christian vocation. Explain how this understanding shapes your sense of call to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.
4. How has the Reformed tradition shaped your personal faith?
5. Describe your self, providing an understanding of your personal and cultural background. In lieu of this self understanding, how do you maintain spiritual, mental and physical health?
6. What is your understanding of the tasks, duties and responsibilities of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament? How will your gifts enhance your ability to minister? What are areas in which growth will be needed?
7. Are you willing to abide by the decisions and practices of the CPM of Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery? Do you understand that the Book of Order is the basis for the work of the CPM, but not exhaustive?
8. Do you fully endorse the ordination of women to offices of leadership in the church? Do you use inclusive language - and why? Are there any other doctrinal statements of our denomination with which you disagree and how would they affect your ability to serve a congregation?
9. Do you understand that endorsement to move to the Candidate phase by EOP does not guarantee that you will be ordained?
10. What is your current level of indebtedness? How do you plan to pay for the remainder of seminary? How do you plan on living if you do not receive a call immediately upon graduation from seminary?
11. What does it mean to be Presbyterian, and how does your awareness grow out of your participation in a particular church?
12. Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular in G-6.0106 a&b?

APPENDIX H
EXAMINATION FOR ORDINATION OR
CERTIFICATION OF CANDIDATES AS READY TO RECEIVE A CALL

Process Notes: (Ref: G-14.0310-.0406 for ordination; G-14.0310b for certification)

Steps accomplished prior to examination for ordination or certification:

- provided transcript & diploma from accredited university/college (bachelors degree)
- completed at least **two years under care** as Inquirer & Candidate
- given **evidence of competence** in theology, Bible, polity, worship & Sacraments (usually through the successful complete of the 5 standard ordination exams)
- usually completed at least one unit of **Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)**
- usually spent at least one year in a **Presbyterian seminary**
- completed **psychological testing** for fitness for ministry
- given evidence of ministerial skill (**supervised practice of ministry**)
- given evidence of a **call** and/or readiness to begin ministry of Word & Sacrament
- expressed understanding of the **meaning of the ordination questions** and the knowledge of the church and its ministry in diverse settings
- completed **annual consultations** with CPM
- completed **requirements for diploma** from approved theological institution
- **preached** before CPM and defended **written sermon, exegesis, statement of faith**

Action by Presbytery:

- **CPM moves that the person be ordained [or certified ready to receive a call]**
- Candidate presents Statement of Faith to the Presbytery
- Presbytery may examine the person in five areas:
 - Christian faith, theology, Bible, Sacraments, polity
- CPM Moderator (or liaison) will ask up to 4 questions to begin the exam
- EOP Moderator will call for further examination from the floor
- to conclude examination requires a **motion to sustain the examination**
- candidate (and family) are **excused from the meeting** during final debate & vote
- if sustained, candidate returns for **charge by CPM**
- person is **approved for ordination [or certification]**
- [if being approved for ordination] presbytery should approve date, time, place for ordination as well as a commission to ordain (7 persons, all from EOP - at least 3 clergy & at least 3 elders; each elder must be from a different congregation; commission should include EOP Moderator or his/her designee)
- concludes with **prayer for the candidate** (often by home church pastor)

Examination Guidelines and Possible Questions:

Under the standard areas of examination, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry often asks some of the following questions of persons seeking to be certified ready to receive a call by Eastern Oklahoma Presbytery as Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Similar questions could be asked by the presbytery as persons are being examined for ordination:

Theology

1. Identify two major theologians who have influenced you and describe why they are important to you.
2. What specific Scripture passages and/or portions of our confessional statements most guide your ministry? How and why?
3. How would you help the congregation you serve to wrestle with issues of theology and doctrine?
4. What do you see to be the critical issues facing the church today?
5. Do you fully endorse the ordination of women to offices of leadership in the church? Do you use inclusive language - and why?
6. Are there any other doctrinal statements of our denomination with which you disagree and how would they affect your ability to serve a congregation?

Sacraments

1. How often would you like to see the Lord's Supper celebrated in worship? Why?
2. Reflect on your understanding of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.
3. What advice do you have for parents seeking guidance on when their children should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper?
4. Would you ever re-baptize someone?
5. Under what circumstances would you baptize someone outside of a normal worship service?
6. How do you explain the nature of baptism with parents who indicate an interest in having their children baptized?

Polity

1. In what ways do you see our church's polity as a reflection of Reformed theology?
2. Many in our congregations come from non-Presbyterian backgrounds. How would you help them understand our system of polity?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of our system of church government? In what ways might our current ecclesiastical system of government be changed to better serve our Church, its governing bodies, and its congregations today?
4. Describe your understanding of the relationship between the Session and your future role as Moderator?
5. Describe your previous service and involvement with the larger church. How will you be an active member of the Presbytery you are called to serve? How will you encourage the congregation you serve to be active and faithful members of their Presbytery?

General

1. Describe your leadership and conflict management styles. What particular gifts will you bring to a congregation?
2. Describe your Supervised Practice of Ministry (SPM). How did your SPM prepare you-- or not--for the realities of ministry? How different was your experience from what you had imagined?
3. What are the growing edges of your ministry? Where do you think you will need to grow in ministry? How can the Presbytery help in your growth?
4. Describe your experience and involvement with para-church organizations. Describe your experience and involvement with renewal groups within our denomination.
5. Have there ever been incidents of ethical, professional, or sexual misconduct related to your professional life? Have there been any charges or convictions?
6. Are there any personal, financial, or health-related difficulties which would interfere with your ministry?
7. Discuss the importance for you of personal rest, days off, vacation, and time for study. How do you take care of yourself?
8. Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular in G-6.0106 a&b?

APPENDIX I

POSSIBLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS FOR ELDERS & DEACONS

Under the standard areas of examination, after a period of preparation, the Session shall examine the persons seeking the office of elder or deacon questions which reflect their personal faith, as well as their understanding of theology, sacraments, polity and discipline (G-14.0205). Some of the following questions, or similar questions, could be asked by the examining Session:

Theology

1. Please share your faith journey and your sense of call to this office.
2. Identify a major theologian who has influenced you and describe why he/she is important to you.
3. What specific Scripture passage and/or portion of our confessional statements most guide your faith journey? How and why?
4. What do you see to be the critical issues facing the church today?
5. Do you fully endorse the ordination of women to offices of leadership in the church? How do you feel about using inclusive language – and why?
6. What is your understanding of a church's mandate to go out to serve the wider community as reflected in Matthew 25 and Luke 4?

Sacraments

1. How often would you like to see the Lord's Supper celebrated in worship? Why?
2. Reflect on your understanding of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.
3. How would you explain the nature of baptism with parents who indicate an interest in having their children baptized?

Polity

1. Describe your understanding of the relationship between the Session and the pastor as Moderator.
2. (If being installed) Describe your previous service and involvement with the larger church. How will you be an active member of the Presbytery if you are called to serve? How will you encourage the congregation you serve to be active and faithful members of their Presbytery and the PCUSA?

3. How might you help the congregants of your congregation who come from non-Presbyterian backgrounds better understand our system of polity?

General

1. What particular gifts will you bring to a congregation?
2. What is your understanding of the importance of the Sabbath and sabbath rest (including days off, vacation, time for study) for all church officers, including pastors? How do or will you encourage this to happen?
3. Are there any obstacles to your ordination or installation based on the standards for office contained in the *Book of Order* and in particular G-6.0106 a & b?

APPENDIX J

CONSTITUTIONAL MUSING #11: “EXAMINING OFFICERS”

The Office of the General Assembly offers these thoughts about the adoption by the 217th General Assembly of the amended report of the Theological Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. This musing does not carry constitutional authority, but is instead our best advice about some of the questions that we are being asked.

1. Can a session/presbytery have a list of questions that it asks of every candidate for office?

Yes, we believe an examining body may use such a tool and that the lists should include the subjects covered by the ordination questions (G-14.0207 & G-14.0405), since those are the questions the candidates will have to answer in ordination/installation.

We also note that a pre-set of questions can be detrimental to an adequate examination of candidates for it often discourages an ordaining body from doing helpful and necessary “follow up” to the pre determined questions.

2. May presbyteries impose requirements on officers of their congregations?

No, we do not believe the new authoritative interpretation gives one ordaining body the authority to impose on another governing body particular requirements greater than those imposed by the *Constitution*. Rather, the new AI recognizes the historic¹ duty imposed upon each ordaining body to examine its own members. We believe such an attempt by a presbytery would be irregular.

3. Can a session/presbytery include a question in its examination such as “Are you able to answer all the ordination questions without exception? And if not, which ones and why not?”

Yes, that is probably the constitutional minimum an examining body should ask.

4. Can additional questions be included in such a list?

Of course. And they might cover a wide range of areas of inquiry. The Department of Constitutional Services is aware of a large number of presbyteries that currently utilize a list of questions, either written out or almost always asked of candidates. We believe such practice is permissible, even, and perhaps especially, in light of the new Authoritative Interpretation.

Descriptive lists are appropriate but we do NOT believe the *Constitution* permits requiring a particular answer to any of these questions, so prescriptive answers are not permitted. No one “size” (question) fits all candidates. An examining body needs to consider the answers and practices of each candidate individually. There can be no pre-determined answers, for no two candidates will be, nor answer, precisely alike. Examination is a process of discerning whether the Lord has called a particular individual to a particular service.

¹ PCUSA, 1927, pp. 58-86, Report of the Special Commission of 1925 (Swearingen Commission)

We believe that a governing body that creates both questions and their required answers would commit a delinquency for it would have failed to examine a particular candidate as an individual. For instance, a candidate may be able to answer the question in the prescribed manner and still not understand the question in the way intended, or may not live a manner of life consistent with the answer. Having prescribed answers is an abdication of the duty the new Authoritative Interpretation imposes on ordaining bodies.

Such practice comes dangerously close to the practice of subscription; that is, requiring a candidate to subscribe to a particular interpretation of the Scriptures or *Constitution*. Subscription is a practice that has been prohibited for over 70 years.² The most recent authoritative interpretation on the subject came from the GA PJC in 1981 with the *Rankin v. National Capital Union* case, where the panel noted that subscription is not an acceptable practice.³

Relating this conclusion to presbytery's examination within constitutional confessional standards, we believe there are implications that a different focus for candidates examinations may be appropriate. Whereas, formerly, the candidates' examination sought to determine if the candidate could subscribe to the system of doctrine and the propositional statements that were a part of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms; now the focus of the examination is on the candidate's ability to use a number of confessional formulations to learn from, be guided by, and lead the people of God. **Formerly the Constitution prescribed empirical standards, as set out in the vows, the Westminster Confession, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, by which the candidate's theology was judged. Now the Constitution places the primary focus of the candidate's examination not on his or her conformity with theological prescriptions but rather on the candidate's willingness and commitment to be instructed by the Confessions of our Church and continually guided by them in leading the people of God.** The necessary implication of this current focus is that the presbytery has been assigned greater responsibility in determining the sufficiency of the candidate's commitment to be instructed by the Confessions of our Church and his or her willingness to use them in leading and guiding the people of God. The presbytery, therefore, must be vested with sufficient authority to carry out these many constitutional obligations. This determination is a judgment for which higher judicatories should substitute their judgment only for the most extraordinary reasons. As noted in the report of the Special Commission of 1925: "The Presbytery is the only body whose members see the candidate and hear him officially. It is the body qualified and constitutionally appointed to judge, at first hand, concerning his spirit and bearing, and his general attitude toward the service of Christ." (Minutes of the General Assembly, 1927, page 65.)

5. Must every candidate affirm the question "Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do ...?"⁴

² PCUSA, 1927, pp. 58-86, Report of the Special Commission of 1925 (Swearingen Commission)

³ UPCUSA, 1981, p.113, *Rankin v. National Capital Union*

⁴ G-14.0207c for elders and deacons, and G-14.0405b(3) for ministers of the Word and Sacrament

Yes

6. May a candidate declare a scruple on a mandatory provision?

An individual may declare a scruple concerning the appropriateness of a mandatory provision. But a governing body cannot excuse a mandatory provision, for it lacks the power to set aside a provision of the *Constitution*. However, a candidate may still be ordained or installed so long as she/he is still willing to comply with the mandatory provisions. This was confirmed by the GA PJC in the *Hambrick* decision⁵:

The Commission recognizes the right of individuals to hold views contrary to the Constitution of the PCUS but, for the sake of order, actions contrary to the Constitution are not sanctioned. The record of Mr. Mark's examination by Presbytery is rather ambiguous on the point of whether in fact he would or would not participate in the ordination of duly-elected church officers who are female. This question should be put to the candidate in a straightforward manner and should be answered in the same fashion. If the answer is in the affirmative, Presbytery would be justified in receiving the candidate even though he retains scruples in his views on these matters.

7. Does the new Authoritative Interpretation overturn any previous authoritative interpretations?

No, it simply clarifies the ordination process. It reminds the church that ordaining bodies are responsible for applying nationally approved standards to the manner of life and beliefs of individual candidates. Further, it reminds the church that the process utilized and the standards applied are subject to review. This in no way overturns any current authoritative interpretations concerning ordination.

8. Is language such as "self-acknowledgment must be plain, palpable and obvious"⁶ still the standard for inquiry?

Yes.

9. Can both a delinquency (failure to adequately examine) and an irregularity (applying the wrong constitutional standard) be reviewed?

Yes. This is clear from the text of section "d" of the new AI and the text of G-9.0408 in the *Book of Order*:

d. Whether the examination and the ordination and installation decision comply with the *Constitution* of the PCUSA, and whether the ordaining/installing body has conducted its examination reasonably, responsibly, prayerfully, and deliberately in deciding to ordain a candidate for church office is subject to review by higher governing bodies.

⁵ PCUS, 1983, 43, *Hambrick v. PJC, Synod of NC*

⁶ See 2002 GAPJC case, *Wier v. 2nd PC, Ft. Lauderdale*, that addresses this specifically

G-9.0408 Special Administrative Review

If a higher governing body learns at any time of any irregularity or delinquency by a lower governing body, it may require the governing body to produce any records and take appropriate action (G-12.0102n, G-12.0304, G-13.0103k, G-13.0103n).