

SEPTEMBER 2003

EXAMINATION IN CHURCH POLITY

OPEN BOOK

MAXIMUM TIME: 3 HOURS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

This examination is intended to "assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined" [G-14.0310d(5)].

The intent of this examination is to test readiness for ministry, which includes using the *Book of Order* effectively. Candidates will utilize a clean, unmarked, printed copy of the 2003-2004 *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in responding to the questions. No additional books, notes, outlines, or other outside resources may be used. Questions will be from the Form of Government, the Directory for Worship, and the Rules of Discipline.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

THREE HOURS

OPEN BOOK

The examination consists of three Sections. Sections I and II are required. Section III has two options. Select one option. Each Section is designed to be completed in one hour.

The final grade for the examination will be the average of the grades received on all three Sections, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. However, the paper must receive a grade of 3 or higher on at least two of the three Sections in order to be considered Satisfactory.

**If you prefer you may use a word processor. You may bring your own equipment or, at some exam sites, you may use equipment provided by the proctor. You may not consult or copy from personal notes or any other source on the computer or network during the exam. A printed copy of the exam must be turned in before you leave the exam area. Because failure to turn in the exam before leaving will result in failure of the exam, you are strongly urged to make sure that all the necessary equipment (computer, printer, font and printer software, etc.) is properly working and coordinated. Please use double spacing and 12 point font size. Please number the pages, include your candidate number on each page of the exam, and staple the printed copy to the first few pages of the exam booklet.**



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**SECTION I. CONSTITUTIONAL HERITAGE**

**ONE HOUR      OPEN BOOK      REQUIRED**

The *Book of Order* states under the section on Historic Principles of Church Order:

Election by the People:

That though the character, qualifications, and authority of Church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of their investiture, yet the election of the persons to the exercise of this authority, in any particular society, is in that society. (G-1.0306)

**REQUIRED RESPONSE:**

Cite and discuss five (5) references from the *Book of Order* (e.g., X-0.0000) that give expression to this statement in the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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**SECTION II. CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER AS A TOOL FOR MINISTRY**

**ONE HOUR                      OPEN BOOK                      REQUIRED**

As a member of Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, you and the committee learn for the first time that for three years the pastoral relationship between the pastor and the 250-member Southminster Presbyterian Church has been deteriorating. At the last session meeting the situation exploded with accusations and name-calling. Session demanded that the pastor call a special congregational meeting for the purpose of dissolving the pastoral relationship. The pastor refused. Over the next few days session members called or visited or wrote to members of the congregation to inform them that such a congregational meeting would be held the very next Sunday.

At the congregational meeting, the clerk of session presided and noticed that several persons present and voting were inactive or former members. Voting by ballot, the congregation voted 16 to 2 to dissolve the pastoral relationship, effective immediately. The clerk informed the presbytery office of this action by letter the following day.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. Identify and briefly discuss at least four (4) errors in this situation. For each error cite at least one (1) reference from the *Book of Order* (e.g., X-0.0000).
2. Guided by your answer in Required Response 1 and as a member of the Presbytery's Committee on Ministry, outline your initial presentation to the session of Southminster Presbyterian Church.

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SECTION III. CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER AS A TOOL FOR MINISTRY

ONE HOUR                  OPEN BOOK                  REQUIRED

CHOOSE ONE: A OR B

A.

You are the pastor of First Presbyterian Church. The Church Officers Nominating Committee is meeting to discuss nominees for session and the board of trustees. You are a few minutes late and when you enter the room the following discussion is happening.

Ann:                  Frank, I would like to put your name in nomination for elder. I hope you will agree to letting me do so.

Frank:                I feel honored that you think I am capable of holding the office of elder. However, I feel my gifts lie in another area. You know I have business training especially in financial management.

Sheila:              That's wonderful, Frank, then perhaps you would be willing to be nominated for the board of trustees.

Festus:              The Presbyterian Church I grew up in didn't have a board of trustees. Does every church need a board of trustees? Please explain the difference between being an elder and a trustee.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Identify and discuss at least two (2) issues raised by this discussion. For each issue raised, cite at least one (1) reference from the *Book of Order* (e.g., X-0.0000).
2. Guided by your answer in Required Response 1, respond to Festus.

-OR-

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**SECTION III. CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER AS A TOOL FOR MINISTRY**

**ONE HOUR            OPEN BOOK            REQUIRED**

**CHOOSE ONE: A OR B**

**B.**

You are a member of the Committee on Ministry in your presbytery. You are approached by John, an elder moderator of the Nominating Committee at Center Presbyterian Church. Center Church is a congregation of 50 members currently being served by a Stated Supply pastor. John is concerned because it is becoming increasingly difficult to find people willing and eligible to serve as elders. In fact, it is difficult to find persons to serve on the nominating committee. John wants to know if you have any suggestions to solve these problems.

**REQUIRED RESPONSES:**

1. Identify and discuss at least two (2) issues raised by this situation. For each issue discussed, cite at least one (1) *Book of Order* reference (e.g., X-0.0000).
2. Guided by your answer in Required Response 1, respond to John by giving suggestions about how these problems might be resolved.

## CHURCH POLITY EXAMINATION

### I. CONSTITUTIONAL HERITAGE

1) This passage lists several different themes, or issues, that touch on the matter of election of officers by the people. We might ask: What sort of person is an officer to be? What kind of authority do officers exercise? Is there a Scriptural basis for the offices and their duties? How are officers to be ordained? How and by whom is an officer elected to office? Five citations that pertain to these questions are as follows:

- a. G-6.0102 – “One responsibility of membership in the church is the election of officers who are ordained to fulfill particular functions.” This passage states concretely that in the life of the church, its members vote on those who are to be installed or ordained as officers. It is important to note that while G-5.002 describes voting as *a privilege and a right*, the passage we are discussing describes it as *a responsibility*, linking the election of officers by the members to the obedience of discipleship.
- b. G-6.0106 – This passage on “gifts and requirements” notes that officers who are called to office are those to whom God has given suitable gifts, who are of strong faith, who are dedicated disciples, and who love Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. These people are expected to live lives that demonstrate the gospel both to the church and the world. They are expected to live their lives in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Thus, this citation explains the character of church officers and their qualifications.

- c. G-6.0100 – As for the authority of officers, this citation notes that all serve “under the mandate of Christ, who is the chief minister of all,” and whose ministry “is the basis for all ministries.” It is emphatically pointed out that Jesus came not to be served, but rather to serve. Thus, whatever powers and responsibilities are given to church officers, it is to be noted that these are to be exercised from a perspective of servanthood. G-1.0307 also makes this clear, pointing out that all Church power is “only ministerial or declarative.” See also G-14.0103, which addresses the “servant style” of leadership officers are to follow as pattern, after Jesus Christ.
- d. G-6.0301 – This passage notes that the basis for the office of elder is emphatically Scriptural. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are cited as Biblical precedent for the office of elder in the church. Thus, this is one citation that reflects the fact that Scripture indeed bears on our church’s understanding of church office and the execution of all the activities those offices entail.
- e. G-14.0206 to G-14.0209 – These passages are a collection of several that could be cited regarding “method of investiture.” These passages cover how officers are to be ordained and installed. Noteworthy of mention from this passage are that ordination and installation occur in a service of worship, that elders being ordained and installed are expected to affirm a number of questions about their faith and how they will carry out the duties of their offices, and that the congregation is an active participant in the ordination and installation (see G-14.0208 regarding this). G-6.0102 is

careful to note that officers are invested (ordained) to fulfill certain *functions*, and that it is *only* with regard to these *functions* that church officers differ from members of the congregation. This makes it clear that the investiture of officers is not *sacramental*, as in other churches, and that they are not viewed as different kinds of Christians or superior in any way to non-ordained believers.

## II. CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER AS A TOOL FOR MINISTRY

### 1) Four errors in this situation:

- Perhaps the greatest error is the mistaken belief that the congregation can dissolve the pastoral relationship. The authority to do this rests with presbytery. See, for example, G-11.0103n) and G-14.0506 and G-14.0601. The final decision and authority to both call and dismiss pastors rests with the presbytery alone. The congregation may meet regarding the dissolution of a pastoral relationship, but only so that it can *request* the presbytery to actually undertake the dissolution. Further, this request is *not* binding on presbytery.
- Another error is that session demanded the pastor call a congregational meeting. G-7.0303a. gives three ways that congregation meetings can be called. The members of session were apparently unaware that the pastor *does not* have the authority to call congregational meetings. Further, they were apparently unaware that if they wanted to have a congregation meeting, it was *in their power* to call one [see G-7.0303a.(1)].
- Another error relates to the preceding one. It appears that, being frustrated by the pastor's not calling a congregational meeting, *session never officially voted* to call a meeting, but rather some session members went around in an loose, ad hoc manner announcing the meeting. This is a violation of G-9.0302 which states that meetings are to be governed by *Robert's Rules*. Further, the method of notification does not appear to be *public*, as required in G-7.0303b.
- Another error relates to the holding of the congregational meeting on the very next Sunday. G-7.0303b. mandates that public notice be given on two successive

Sundays (the meeting can be convened following the notice given on the second Sunday). In the matter at hand, there has not been a sufficient lapse of time between calling the meeting (improper as it is), and the meeting itself.

2) The Committee on Ministry has two primary concerns in this instance. First, it needs to make sure that the session (and the pastor and congregation, as well) understand various procedures related to calling congregational meetings, voting in those meetings, what may be voted on by the congregation, and how the Committee on Ministry interfaces with this process of calling pastors and dissolving pastoral relationships. Second, the Committee on Ministry needs to consider how it will provide pastoral care and counseling to the session, the pastor, and the congregation. An outline of a presentation is as follows:

- I. Basics of Congregational Meetings (The key resource here is G-7.0300)
  - a. How and when called? (Cover the three ways such a meeting is called -- by session, by presbytery, or by session at request of  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the active members; Point out that notice is to be given on two successive Sundays)
  - b. What rules govern the congregational meetings themselves? (Discuss exceptions to when someone other than the pastor may moderate; note that a quorum for this church would  $\frac{1}{10}$  of its active members)
  - c. What can the congregation properly vote on (i.e., what actual powers does it have)? [cover various types of business in G-7.0304]
  - d. Who is entitled to vote? Active members only
- II. Dissolving a Pastoral Relationship (G-14.0600 is the key reference here)

- a. Note that pastoral relationship can only be dissolved by presbytery (G-17.0601)
- b. When requested by a pastor
- c. When requested by a congregation (Can outline the process: Session calls meeting to request dissolution by presbytery, pastor moderates unless he or she deems it impractical – refer to G-7.0306 regarding alternatives to pastor moderating, what happens in the case where pastor does not concur)

III. The Role of the Committee on Ministry (G-11.0500 is the key citation here)

- a. Point out that the Committee on Ministry (COM) exists to facilitate relations between congregations, ministers, and presbytery
- b. The role of counseling churches regarding pastoral relations
- c. The role in dissolving pastoral relations (what kind of authority does this presbytery give the COM in this regard – see G-11.0502h.)

IV. Offer by the Committee on Ministry to counsel session, pastor, and congregation in resolving the current conflict

- a. Note that the chief concerns of the COM is the welfare of the particular church, its strengthening, and that the unity of the body of Christ be made manifest (G-11.0502i), *not* fault finding and pointing fingers.
- b. Explore with the congregation, session, and pastor whether the relationships in the church can be repaired (Note that the COM's role is to serve as an "instrument of harmony; reconciliation should be sought, if possible)

- c. Discuss a structure for how the COM can meet with session and the pastor and organize discussions and help move a resolution to the conflict forward.

### III. CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER AS A TOOL FOR MINISTRY

#### A.>

1) Two issues that are raised are:

- whether active elders can also serve as trustees
- the relevance of Frank's financial skills as an elder

With respect to the first issue, G-7.0401 states that active elders (who are eligible under civil law) may serve as trustees as well. In fact, they *are* to serve as trustees, *unless* the church has been organized as a corporation in such a way that it has determined another method for electing trustees. That is apparently the case in this church, since we are told that the nominating committee is considering both elder and trustee nominees. Even if the church were not a corporation, it would select its trustees from the role of active members, which would include active elders, of course. The main point for this scenario, is that there is no apparent reason why Frank cannot be a trustee, even if elected to serve as elder.

With respect to Frank's financial management acumen, it should be pointed out that these skills are important to have on the session. Its responsibilities include budgeting (G-10.0102i.), management of property, and securing insurance (G-10.0102o.). Indeed, an entire section of the Book of Order's chapter on the session is devoted to the church's finances (G-10.0400). Frank seems mistaken that the gifts of business administration and financial management are not important and necessary to have on the session. It should also be pointed that these gifts are no less important for session than for trustees, peculiar as that may sound. G-7.0402 notes the powers of trustees, and is clear that these are all subject to the authority of the session. The trustees really serve

what is primarily a legal function (e.g, holding and encumbering property, accepting and executing deeds, etc) and are there to execute the decisions of session and the congregation. Since it is session that does much of the actual decision making about what and how the trustees are to execute their responsibilities, the gifts of administration and decision-making would perhaps be considered more critical for the session, than for the trustees. Having said this, I don't want to downplay the importance of trustees understanding what they are doing, and hence the relevance of Frank's gifts for this work, as well. This is particularly the case when session's or the congregation's instructions to the trustees contain any flexibility about *how* the trustees are to carry out a particular task.

2) Festus, you ask a good question. Although we Presbyterians like our order, we also have some freedom within that order, and the area of trustees is one area where we see some flexibility. How the role of trustee is handled in a particular church is partly a function of civil law governing that church, and partly a function of how that church has chosen to operate as a legal entity.

To answer your question, every church does have trustees. Some churches are incorporated (which our Constitution requires, when allowed by the law). In this case, the active elders will serve as trustees, unless the church has made arrangements for another way of electing trustees. If not set up as a corporation, the church is to elect trustees from the active member role. The church you grew up in must have been a corporation where active elders served as trustees, so that there was not board of trustees *per se* – the members of session simply served as trustees themselves.

It is also worth noting that the duties of the trustees are really to simply execute the decisions of the session and the congregation. Because of this, one can see why it is

practical for session members to serve in a dual capacity as trustees, as well. This also points out the fact that Frank's business and financial skills, while important for the duties of a trustee, are also important for session as well. As the Book of Order states, session is responsible for budgeting, administering church property, and the overall financial health of the church. Frank and the nominating committee should consider this as they deliberate the wisdom of his nomination.

**READER'S GRADING SHEET IN CHURCH POLITY**

**I. OVERALL EVALUATION FOR THIS EXAMINATION.** A single overall grade must be assigned by the reader to this examination. The overall grade for the examination will be the average of grades received on all three questions, with rounding up or down to be determined by the reader on the basis of the examination's overall merit. However, the examination must receive a grade of "3" or higher on at least two out of the three questions in order to be considered "SATISFACTORY." The examination will fail if any one of the sections is omitted.

Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3,4, or 5, the final grade is **SATISFACTORY**. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is **UNSATISFACTORY**. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3,4,5, the paper will be given a third reading, to determine the final grade..

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the candidate's committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of this sheet for comments explaining why the grade was assigned to this paper.

**III. GRADING EACH SECTION.** Indicate on the spaces below the grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- 5 - Excellent
- 4 - Good
- Satisfactory 3 - Acceptable
- Unsatisfactory 2 - Less than Acceptable
- 1 - Poor
- 0 - Question Omitted

**GRADES:**

|                       |                           | Grade    |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| Section I (Required)  | - Election by the People  | <u>4</u> |
| Section II (Required) | - Pastor/Session Conflict | <u>4</u> |
| Section III A         | - Elders/Trustees         | <u>5</u> |
| -OR-                  |                           |          |
| Section III B         | - Nominating Committee    | _____    |
| <b>FINAL GRADE</b>    |                           | <u>4</u> |

**NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY.** (Please check if applicable).

*James W. Wallace*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Reader's Signature (please write clearly)

(OVER FOR COMMENTS)

*3 p/ct*

Sec I Good citations with sound following discussion.  
This paper would have been improved with more emphasis shown in the areas of election by the body.  
(G14.0501, G14.0502a, G9.0104b, G9.0202b)

Sec II Good, solid work.  
An area of improvement in this paper would be to have cited the Com's failure to be aware of the difficulties. The BofO mandates that the Com conduct Tri-Annual visits. While considerable time is spent in outlining Com's responsibilities (Sections III and IV) perhaps some notation of an apology by Com to Southminster's session would be in order.

Sec III Page 8, second full paragraph. This is an excellent presentation of the need and place for skills such as Franks on the session... with solid use of Chapter 10 of the BofO.

It was a pleasure to read this well thought out and succinctly presented paper. Thank you

**READER'S GRADING SHEET IN CHURCH POLITY**

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Each examination will be read independently by two persons. If both grades are 3,4, or 5, the final grade is **SATISFACTORY**. If both grades are 1 or 2, the final grade is **UNSATISFACTORY**. If one final grade is 1 or 2, and the other final grade is 3,4,5, the paper will be given a third reading, to determine the final grade..

**II. THIS GRADING SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE.** The reader's comments on this grading sheet should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper, which will be read by the candidate and the candidate's committee on preparation for ministry. Use the back of this sheet for comments explaining why the grade was assigned to this paper.

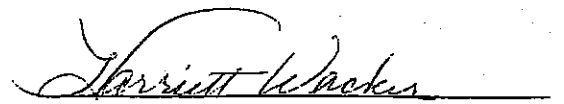
**III. GRADING EACH SECTION:** Indicate on the spaces below the grade for each section of this examination, using the following scale:

- 5 - Excellent
- 4 - Good
- Satisfactory 3 - Acceptable
- Unsatisfactory 2 - Less than Acceptable
- 1 - Poor
- 0 - Question Omitted

**GRADES:**

|                       |                           | <b>Grade</b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Section I (Required)  | - Election by the People  | <u>3</u>     |
| Section II (Required) | - Pastor/Session Conflict | <u>4</u>     |
| Section III A         | - Elders/Trustees         | <u>5</u>     |
| <b>-OR-</b>           |                           |              |
| Section III B         | - Nominating Committee    | <u>-</u>     |
| <b>FINAL GRADE</b>    |                           | <u>4</u>     |

**NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY.** (Please check if applicable).

  
Reader's Signature (please write clearly)

(OVER FOR COMMENTS)

SECTION I. This response would have been strengthened by discussion rather than restatement of the Book of Order citations.

SECTION II. 1 - This response is adequate to satisfy the assignment.  
2 - This response would be strengthened by a reference to and discussion of the failure of COM to visit regularly (Triennial Visitation).

SECTION III. A  
1 - The response is adequate to satisfy the assignment.  
2. The response offers "Festus" clear assistance in his quandary. One might note that "Festus" may have come from a denomination that did not require Trustees — the Presbyterian Church in the United States.