

Section I.

The principal that the persons who exercise the authority laid down in scripture should be elected by the affected group is fundamental to our Reformed heritage. It reflects our commitment to the priesthood of all believers, in that there is no ecclesiastical authority has the right to choose who will lead us. Rather, while acknowledging the ultimate authority of scripture, those who are led choose those who will lead. Section G-1.0306 is affirmed by the following references in the Book of Order:

G-6.0107 – The government of this church is representative, and the right of God’s people to elect their officers is inalienable. Therefore no person can be placed in any permanent office in a congregation or governing body of the church except by election of that body. This citation in effect restates the principle laid down in G-1.0306, and makes clear that it applies to any congregation or governing body at any level. It does specifically state that it applies to permanent offices in a congregation. This citation would permit the appointment of a person to a temporary or short term position.

G-7.0103 – The members of a particular church voluntarily put themselves under the leadership of their officers, whom they elect. This statement again reiterates that the leadership, this time of a church congregation, is elected. It also points out that once these leaders are elected that the members, voluntarily, by virtue of their vote, are subject to the decisions of their elected leadership, although elsewhere provision is made for dissent and other disagreement. This section also states that “The laws and government of the PC (USA) presuppose the fellowship of women and men with their children in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love.” This is a remarkable statement, which could not be made in most

governing bodies outside the church. It is reflective of the whole polity of the church, which in turn reflects a commitment to reconciliation. In the very first section of the Book of Order we proclaim the Six Great Ends (G-1.0200), and affirm our commitment to the “shelter, nurture, and fellowship of the children of God.”

G-7.0301 – The congregation is made up of all members on the active roll of a particular church. All such members who are present at a congregational meeting are entitled to vote. Again the principle of election by those governed is affirmed. In the sections following under the heading of Meetings of the Congregation (G-7.0300), the tasks of congregational meetings are to include election of officers (G-7.0302), and the requirement for public notice on two successive Sundays is affirmed, so that the congregation has adequate notice that business, including elections, will be conducted. The establishment of a quorum (G-7.0305) further guarantees that elections or other business cannot be conducted without reasonable representation of those who will be affected.

G-14.0201 – Every congregation shall elect men and women from among its active members, giving fair representation to person of all ages and of all racial ethnic member and persons with disabilities who are members of that congregation, to the office of elder and to the office of deacon.... This provision, and others like it in other sections of the Book of Order which speak to higher levels of governance, indicates the commitment to fair representation of all the membership, particularly targeting the diversity of gender, ethnic group, age, and handicapping conditions which exist among us, and guaranteeing the representation of their particular interests among the elected leadership.

G-14.0501b – A pastor or associate pastor shall be elected by the vote of the congregation

This states that after the work of the Pastor Nominating Committee in the process of calling a pastor, the final decision at the congregational level is made by a vote of the congregation. The election of the pastor, who will, among many other duties serve a moderator of the session, is among the most important decision a congregation makes by process of election. This process is echoed at each governance level, and of course the relationships are also dissolved by vote of the body being governed.

Section II.1.

There are numerous errors described in the situation described at Southminster Presbyterian Church. Among them are the following four:

G-7.0303a – Meetings of the congregation shall be called by the session..., by the presbytery..., or by the session when requested In no case can the pastor call a congregational meeting, so the pastor was correct to refuse.

G-7.0303b – Public notice of the meeting shall be given on two successive Sundays. You cannot call, visit, or write members to inform them of a meeting, and in could not be held on the very next Sunday.

G-7.0301 – The congregation is made up of all members on the active roll of a particular church. All such members who are present may vote. Elsewhere, active members are specifically defined, and the right to vote affirmed (G-5.0202), and similarly it is specifically stated that inactive members does not have the right to speak in the meetings of the congregation and to vote and hold office (G-5.0203).

G-7.0305 – The quorum of a meeting of the congregation shall be not less than one tenth of the members.... Assuming that the vote of 16-2 is reflective of the number present, the quorum (25) for this congregation of 250 was not met.

Perhaps the most glaring error is in regard to the process of dissolution of pastoral relationships described in G-14.0600.

G-14.0601 – The pastoral relationship between a pastor, associate pastor and an church may be dissolved only by presbytery. The church cannot simply write a letter to the presbytery office and notify them that the relationship has been dissolved.

Section G-14.0603 specifically describes the steps a congregation must take to dissolve a relationship. Among the ones not followed by this congregation are a duly called congregational meeting, the presiding over that meeting by the pastor unless he deems it to be impractical, The Committee on Ministry may be given authority to dissolve this relationship in cases where the pastor and congregation concur, but that does not appear to be the case in this situation.

Section II.2.

It is very important in this situation to consider that this situation has been developing over a three year period. Though this relationship may not be completely broken, it has certainly been going down hill for a long time, and this will make the process of reconciliation more difficult, if not almost impossible. The other issue that must be considered is that the vote at the congregation meeting was far short of quorum, and therefore perhaps not very representative of the congregation. Though the session is not bound by the views of the membership, and members are free and even called to vote their own consciences, in resolving the issue it would be important to consider the feelings of the whole congregation. In any case, in the initial

meeting with the session, it would seem to be important to emphasize the need to move a little more slowly, to recognize the seriousness of our commitment to reconciliation, to order in governance, and to G-7.0103, which affirms, "The laws and government of the PC (USA) presuppose the fellowship of women and men with their children in voluntary covenanted relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests upon the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love." Coming from this perspective, I would approach this session using the following outline:

I. Opening

- A. Scripture and prayer affirming our love for God and one another, and giving space for silent reflection
- B. Explanation of the role of the Committee on Ministry (G-11.0502) particularly paragraph i, in reference to promoting peace and harmony particularly in matters arising out of the relations between ministers and churches.
- C. Focus on reconciliation, if possible, and explanation of the seriousness and importance of the step they are considering
- D. Reiterate the assumption that diversity of opinion is respected and honored in the Presbyterian tradition.
- E. Affirm the assumption of good faith of all involved, and establish some ground rules for disagreement.

II, Explanation of the process of dissolving a relationship. (G-14.0600)

- A. Can only be dissolved by presbytery (G-14.0601)
- B. Dissolution at the request of the congregation (G-14.0603)
 - 1. Duly called congregational meeting, moderated by pastor

- 2. Request to presbytery
- 3. Pastor's concerns heard by presbytery

III. Suggest that before the steps outlines above are taken that there be opportunities for the concerns of the session and the pastor to be heard by the representative(s) of the COM, and that the possibilities of reconciliation be explored.

IV. Close with a specific plan for each of these parties to meet with the COM

V. Prayer and Benediction

Section III.A.1.

The issues raised by this discussion include the general but fundamental acknowledgement of various gifts of the Spirit, as well as the specific office of trustee. The following specific citations apply:

G-6.0106 – To those called to exercise special functions in the church...God gives suitable gifts for those duties. The issue raised is that we are given different gifts and called to serve in differing ways. Frank appropriately acknowledges his belief that his gifts would be more appropriate to the office of trustee. This section also emphasizes that in addition to possessing particular gifts for an office the person who serve should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Christ. This suggests that, although financial training and skills are important to this particular office, it is equally important that the person possess and exhibit characteristics that would make him a good church officer in another role.

G-7.0402 – The issue raised is the role and duties of the office of trustee, and the relationship of the trustees to the elders and session. G-7.0402 specifically lists the powers of the trustees to receive, hold, encumber, manage, and transfer property, real or personal, for the church, to

accept, execute deeds to property, to hold and defend titles to property, and to manage any permanent special funds. It also reiterates the statement in G-7.0401 that the powers and duties of trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session or deacons, by stating that all the duties of the trustees are subject to the authority of the session and under the provision of the Constitution of the PC(USA). Further, that they may act to buy, sell, or mortgage property only after the approval of the congregation at a duly constituted meeting.

Section III.A.2.

Festus, the Constitution of the PC(USA) says that each church, where it is allowed by law, should form a corporation. In some churches, the elders in active service take this role in addition to their role as elders. But the congregation, acting as a corporation, can choose to elect a nominating committee to propose the names of trustees to be elected by the congregation. The terms of the trustees are supposed to be the same as the terms of the elders. If the church cannot by law form a corporation, it may select trustees from the active members of the church.

Trustees primarily deal with the property and with special funds of the church. They manage the property, and with the vote of the congregation, can buy or sell it. Selling or mortgaging property, or acquiring property with a mortgage, requires that the session get the written permission of the presbytery. This presbytery approval is also needed for leasing the property used for worship, or, for that matter, any property that is leased for more than five years.

All these duties of the trustees are subject to the authority of the session. The trustees are sort of the financial managers of the church, while the elders have much broader responsibilities for governance and leadership in worship, education, and most other aspects of church life.

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>5</u>
Section II (Required)	-	Pastor/Session Conflict	<u>5</u>
Section III A	-	Elders/Trustees	<u>4</u>
-OR-			
Section III B	-	Nominating Committee	_____
FINAL GRADE			<u>5</u>

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

Helen Hutchinson
Reader's Signature (please write clearly)

(OVER FOR COMMENTS)

OK
SHO

I Bravo!!!

II Another Bravo! (only suggestion is proof reading)
The paper was extremely pastorally sensitive
in addressing this history, concerns and reality
of the situation.

III The paper addressed the question and would
have been stronger if it expanded the discussion
about the role of elders.

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FINAL GRADE			<u>5</u>

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Carol Rahn
Reader's Signature (please write clearly)

(OVER FOR COMMENTS)

PKT
ES

I. The response to this question was excellent. Appropriate citations were ~~given~~ given and the discussion was knowledgeable and articulate, the paper demonstrated the ability to apply the citation to the state historical principle clearly and thoughtfully.

II. This response also demonstrated a good working knowledge of the Book of Order, especially in a conflictual situation. While it did address many of the issues involved it could have been improved with more discussion of COM's responsibility, particularly 11.0502 a + c.

III. Again, an excellent response that showed understanding of the issues involved, ability to use the Book of Order, and ability to explain clearly and concisely the differences between Trustees and Elders.