

**[OVT-001] On Amending the Book of Order to Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Among the Categories Against Which This Church Does Not Discriminate**

**Source:** Presbytery

**Committee:** Unassigned

**Event:** 226th General Assembly (2024)

**Sponsor:** Olympia Presbytery

**Type:** General Assembly Full Consideration

## Recommendation

### On Amending the Book of Order to Include Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Among the Categories Against Which This Church Does Not Discriminate

The Presbytery of Olympia overtures the 226th General Assembly (2024) to direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendments to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative votes:

(Text to be added is *[underlined, in brackets and italics]*.)

**1. Shall F-1.0403 be amended as follows:**

“The unity of believers in Christ is reflected in the rich diversity of the Church’s membership. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God unites persons through baptism, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, sex, *[gender identity, sexual orientation,]* disability, geography, or theological conviction. There is therefore no place in the life of the Church for discrimination against any person. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall guarantee full participation and representation in its worship, governance, and emerging life to all persons or groups within its membership. No member shall be denied participation or representation for any reason other than those stated in this Constitution.”

**2. Shall G-2.0104b be amended as follows:**

“b. Standards for ordained service reflect the church’s desire to submit joyfully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life (F-1.02). The council responsible for ordination and/or installation (G-2.0402; G-2.0607; G-3.0306) shall examine each candidate’s calling, gifts, preparation, and suitability for the responsibilities of ordered ministry. The examination shall include, but not be limited to, a determination of the candidate’s ability and commitment to fulfill all requirements as expressed in the constitutional questions for ordination and installation (W-4.0404) *[and in the principles of participation, representation, and non- discrimination found in F-1.0403]*. Councils shall be guided by Scripture and the confessions in applying standards to individual candidates.”

## Rationale

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Twice in 2022 Olympia Presbytery held ordination votes on the floor of presbytery involving ordinands with

opinions that did not fully embrace the equal and affirmed status of LGBTQIA+ persons in the church. Those conversations were difficult because the *Book of Order* does not include gender identity or sexual orientation in its list of protected classes. These experiences reveal the need for denominational clarity concerning the church's ministry to LGBTQIA+ individuals as full participants in all aspects of life in the church.

While affirming the freedom of councils of the church to make ordination decisions as guided by the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge that the Church has been called upon historically to be ever more faithful to the most inclusive and affirming statements of Scripture and promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Church continues to find and confirm that the limits of each council of the church in their "local option" are conditioned by affirmations found in the *Book of Order*: sex, race, or any other prejudicial category, now to include gender identity and sexual orientation.

We feel that the Spirit is working in the churches concerning this matter. The 223rd General Assembly (2018) approved the following resolution:

- 1. Celebrating the expansive embrace of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the breadth of our mission to serve a world in need, the 223rd General Assembly (2018) affirms the gifts of LGBTQIA+ people for ministry and celebrates their service in the church and in the world.*
- 2. The assembly celebrates that over the years, LGBTQIA+ people have faithfully, lovingly, and courageously served in every kind of service to which Christian disciples are called— notwithstanding the church's efforts to exclude them from particular types of service.*
- 3. The assembly laments the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful, LGBTQIA+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.*
- 4. At the same time, the assembly gives thanks for the LGBTQIA+ pioneers of the faith who have persisted in relationship with the Presbyterian church, at great personal cost and sacrifice, together with the whole of the LGBTQIA+ community, moving the church toward a more generous, loving, and just understanding of God's grace.*
- 5. The assembly also gives thanks for those who continue to seek deeper understanding, and more authentic welcome, even amid discomfort or uncertainty about how best to show hospitality, in the spirit of continuing Reformation.*
- 6. Today, openly LGBTQIA+ people are leading churches, preaching the gospel, serving those in need, and otherwise using their gifts for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).*
- 7. With an eye toward the future, the assembly affirms God's presence and call in the lives of all God's people and commits to seeking justice, equality, and inclusion for all in church and society.*
- 8. The assembly calls on the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, the Presbyterian Mission Agency (through its Office of Public Witness), and all who represent the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to actively work for the protection of human and civil rights, both in the United States and around the world, especially the rights of marginalized and oppressed groups, including people facing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.*
- 9. The assembly calls upon mission co-workers and ecumenical representatives to advocate for justice and equality for all God's people in ways appropriate to their cultural and ecclesiastical context.*
- 10. The assembly encourages all congregations and councils of the PCUSA continually to seek to expand their welcome so that all might know the Good News of Jesus Christ and encourages all other communions to do the same.*

We follow this encouragement by urging that gender identity and sexual orientation be established as protected classes against which we must not discriminate. As the PC(USA) continues to celebrate the gifts of our

LGBTQIA+ siblings, we must amend our *Book of Order* to prevent discrimination against those same siblings.

We further feel that justice will be served and the children of God will be supported by this amendment. Studies show that LGBTQIA+ youth who have religious parents that share negative views on being LGBTQIA+ have higher rates of suicide attempts.[1] We believe that the Church is being called to affirm and support this at-risk population as children, youth, and adults.

We pray that the PC(USA) will fully affirm our LGBTQIA+ siblings by adding language that protects these historically oppressed people.

[1] The Trevor Project: (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LGBTQ-Youth-and-Religion-Research-Brief-April-2020.pdf>)

## Concurrence

### **New Castle Presbytery**

### **San Jose Presbytery**

### **Mission Presbytery**

Even as the General Assembly called on the church to lament the ways in which PC(USA) policies have caused prior harm to LGBTQIA+ people, categories of sexual orientation and gender identity nonetheless remain omitted from the list of protected classes against which the church will not tolerate discrimination.

Even as the General Assembly called on the church Stated Clerk and other representatives of the PC(USA) to work for the general protection of the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, the Spirit has called the church into a moment in which such discrimination has taken on increasingly vivid form in our laws and in our society. Therefore it is incumbent upon the PC(USA) in this moment to bear cohesive, unified witness to the fully inclusive nature of God's creation. As the activity of any one council represents the activity of the whole church, it is incumbent upon the whole to make a determinative standard for full inclusion in the elemental language of its constitutional foundations.

While we affirm and value the freedom of local councils to examine candidates for ordination, we also recognize that such freedom exists within historical limits and that the so-called "local option" should not be construed to allow for discriminatory practice in one corner of the church which necessarily infringes on the inclusive witness of the whole church.

Furthermore, while we affirm and value the full inclusion of diverse theological convictions, we also recognize that sexual orientation and gender identity are matters of core identity, akin to other identity categories already present in F-1.0403 and that people of diverse theological convictions may nonetheless affirm their commitment to nondiscriminatory practice.

Finally, we pray with thanksgiving for the work of the Spirit in this time and place and for the possibility that by our hands, the Spirit might transform us into a church where all are truly welcome and valued.