

AFFIRMATION OF BASIC CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

(G-6.0106 b and Freedom of Conscience)

This affirmation was adopted by the session of the Downtown Presbyterian Church of Rochester, NY on October 15, 2002. We urge like-minded members to submit this affirmation to their respective sessions for adoption as soon as possible. Background, rationale, and references are discussed below.

G-6.0106 b of the Book of Order is inconsistent with our great theological and historical tradition of hospitality and compassion. The teachings of Jesus are reflected in the strong statements of inclusion and equality contained in the Confession of 1967, the Brief Statement of Faith and in the Book of Order. At the same time, our church proclaims that “God alone is Lord of the Conscience.” We are only required to subscribe to the essentials of Reformed faith. Presbyterians honor freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture.

We will continue to be faithful to our church, but we do not believe that our Constitution and our theological tradition should be dominated by a single paragraph in the Book of Order. In fact, if our church focuses exclusively or even primarily on G-6.0106 b, we ignore the great themes of the Reformed tradition, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which we profess (Confessions 9.44). It is not possible to ascribe a broad, punitive meaning to G-6.0106 b, and, at the same time, implement the clear requirements of inclusion in our Constitution. We cannot agree with an interpretation of that law which subverts the welcoming essence of our faith and results in the categorical exclusion of all those persons who are in a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender relationship. We do not believe that same sex relationships are inherently sinful. We will read and apply all Constitutional provisions in the light of the Constitution as a whole, and will make judgments concerning the life and character of all persons on an individual basis.

All of us should strive to lead chaste and disciplined lives as prescribed in the Confessions (4.108), and we should act with faithfulness and integrity in all our relationships. We believe that persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship and love of Jesus Christ, and those whose manner of life is a demonstration of the Christian gospel are eligible for ordination. (G-6.0106 a).

We will continue to work to remove G-6.0106 b from the Book of Order, and, in the meantime, we will interpret this law so as to permit the ordination of those whom we deem qualified.

AFFIRMATION OF BASIC CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES

(G-6.0106 b and Freedom of Conscience)

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Recent decisions of the General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commission have stated that churches and presbyteries must comply with all parts of the Constitution. There is no right to disregard or invalidate any section of the Constitution. We must interpret the Constitution to give effect to all its provisions.

We believe that these decisions give us the opportunity to affirm our entire Constitution and declare that G-6.0106 b must be interpreted in this context so that the policies of inclusiveness and compliance can work together. This Affirmation rejects a narrow, exclusive interpretation of Scripture, the Confessions, and the Book of Order which others wish to force upon us. Instead it affirms our basic Christian principles with honesty and integrity.

REFERENCES

Confessions 4.108: “Q. What does the seventh commandment teach us? A. That all unchastity is condemned by God, and that we should therefore detest it from the heart, and live chaste and disciplined lives, whether in holy wedlock or in single life.”

Confessions 9.44: “God has created the peoples of the earth to be one universal family. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellowmen, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess.”

Book of Order G-6.0106 a: “To those called to exercise special functions in the church – deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament – God gives suitable gifts for their various duties. In addition to possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural or acquired, those who undertake particular ministries should be persons of strong faith, dedicated discipleship, and love of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their manner of life should be a demonstration of Christian gospel in the church and in the world. They must have the approval of God’s people and the concurring judgement of a governing body of the church.”

Book of Order G-6.106 b: “Those called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the confessional standards of the church. Among these standards are to live in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament.”