Test Results
Church Polity
8/25/2012

Section I
Constitutional Heritage

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

*The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity* (F-1.0404) states:

"In Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all creation, the Church seeks a new openness to God’s mission in the world…. As it participates in God’s mission, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks:

"… a new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms in order to ensure the faithfulness and usefulness of these forms to God’s activity in the world;”

REQUIRED RESPONSE

Drawing on this foundational principle, cite at least four (4) references (e.g., X-0.0000) from the *Book of Order*, excluding *The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity*, and write an essay demonstrating how this “new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms” may be manifested within the PC(USA).

Answer

The church's "new openness to see both the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms" is manifested within the PC(USA) in many ways. Our Presbyterian polity illustrates the church’s historic desire to do everything in order. Presbyterian polity is not an episcopal system, where power lies in individuals who are positioned hierarchically, nor is it a congregational form of government, where each local church is autonomous and therefore not attuned to the larger concerns around it. Rather, the Presbyterian church adopts a representative form of government, in which individuals are elected to serve in the church. It is the form of
government itself which contributes to the church's openness to seeing the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms, because it naturally creates a system of checks and balances by which the church can evaluate its goals and objectives. It also allows for the church to continue to be "reformed and always reforming."

One way that the church demonstrates this is the process by which one may become a member of a Presbyterian church. The very existence of membership says that we are committed to setting ourselves apart, although church membership is open to anyone. This suggests a certain level of commitment from those who join, although each church may determine what that entails. The Book of Order specifies that members are expected to profess faith in Jesus Christ (G-1.0302) and, upon so doing, may enter into church membership by public profession of faith, certificate of transfer from another Christian church, or by reaffirmation of faith (G-1.0303). This process allows for the church to take those in who desire to be faithful, while distinguishing itself from those who have not expressed that desire. New members are received by the session, which is composed of persons elected by the representative process described above. As members of a congregation, the people of God are called to reconciliation, justice, and peace (W-7.4002-W-7.4004), which also requires openness.

Another way the church demonstrates openness to seeing the possibilities and perils of its institutional forms is in its process for calling leaders. Although the church is composed of anyone who desires to be faithful to God's call, there are some who sense God calling them to serve the church in a more detailed capacity in ordered ministry. This call comes from the Holy Spirit, and includes deacons and presbyters. Presbyters include both teaching elders and ruling elders (G-2.0102). Again, one should feel God's call to one of these offices of the church, but the call process, particularly for teaching elders, serves as an external affirmation of one's inward sense of call. The process for teaching elders includes an extensive period of preparation for ministry as described in G-2.0601-G-2.0608 (see especially G-2.0607). For new deacons and ruling elders, training is also included, during which time the individuals are educated on the duties and terms of their service as well as Presbyterian polity. When a person entering an ordered ministry, whether it be that of ruling elder, teaching elder, or deacon is deemed ready by the appropriate body, they are ordained and/or installed. During this ceremony, the church sets them apart for service in the church with prayer and the laying on of hands. The appropriate format and questions for this are found in W-4.4003-W-4.4006. The call and ordination process allows for openness on the part of both the person and the church to prayerfully consider whether God is truly calling them to this ministry, and gives time for both parties to either affirm or deny.

The church seeks to reaffirm all people based on Scripture and the teaching of the church, but there are times when that process is more painful. When a body or individual has committed an error, the process for correction also allows openness for seeing the possibilities and perils in the situation. Disciplinary measures may be taken against an individual in a disciplinary case, in which a trial is conducted by a church session or a permanent judicial commission at the level of Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly (D-11.0101). If the complaint is against a body, a remedial case may be filed with the jurisdiction of authority which is one step above the offender (cases against a session are filed with Presbytery, cases against Presbytery are filed with the Synod, etc. - D.6.0202). Again, the disciplinary process gives time for the Holy Spirit and for the process as laid out by the church to lead people in discernment and make the best decision possible, given the evidence of the situation.

Finally, the openness to see the possibilities and perils of the church's institutional forms is seen in the necessity of the church being an institution. This is seen in the fact that the church, while being God's called people, is also an incorporation which has trustees, because of the need to comply with the state (G-4.0101-G-4.0102). An annual meeting is required of the corporation (G-1.0501), and special meetings may be held as well.

These are just a few of the ways the church demonstrates openness to see the possibilities and the perils of its institutional forms. The church's polity contributes to its identity of being the called people of God.
Reader Responses

S  Very thorough response! Thank you for being mindful of the traditional forms of the institutional church and how they can and often do provide openness to possibility. I would have liked to see more done with the "perils" part of the Required Response beyond not being open, but all-in-all a great response.

U  The paragraph on church membership refers to the welcome and openness of membership to anyone so they can join in Christ's mission in the world.

The response on the process for calling members describes the process but doesn't connect it to how structure accomplishes mission in the world or hinders it.

The response on disciplinary measures does not fully discuss the connection to mission in the world.

This response overlooked the importance of G-5.01 ecumenical commitment and G-6.04 the process and openness to changes in structure.

Section II

Constitutional Order for the Particular Church

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

You have recently been installed as pastor and are conducting a training session for newly elected members of session. When you begin to instruct the class about “teaching elders” and “ruling elders” several members of the class raise issues and ask questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joshua:</th>
<th>I feel uncomfortable calling you an “elder.” To me it belittles the call to ministry to say “elder,” rather than “pastor” or “minister.”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Esther:</td>
<td>Pastor, why do they call you a “teaching” elder? Wouldn’t it make more sense to call you a “preaching” elder?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew:</td>
<td>I’ve been an elder in this church for thirty years. I used to think that “ruling elder” was what you called an elder in active service on session. You’re saying something very different. I don’t understand.</td>
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<td>Ruth:</td>
<td>Since we’re changing our terminology and using more inclusive language, shouldn’t we get rid of the word “elder” altogether? Aren’t we supposed to have session members of all ages?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**REQUIRED RESPONSES**

1. Drawing on the *Book of Order*, identify at least one (1) issue raised by each of the four elders and cite at least one (1) reference (e.g., X-0.0000) for each issue identified.

2. Informed by your answer in Required Response 1, write a page for an officer instruction manual that succinctly describes the roles of a ruling elder and a teaching elder in a particular church and what the two roles have in common.

**Answer**

**Response 1**

Joshua’s concern about calling me an "elder" is understandable. While "pastor" and "minister" are also common titles for the office of teaching elder, the *Book of Order* uses this term to identify the primary function of the office. Our Reformed heritage affirms the priesthood of all believers, and the teaching elder is so named because of the primary responsibility to teach the faith and equip the saints for ministry (G-2.0501).

Esther’s question regarding the distinction between an "teaching" elder and a "preaching" elder involves a fine nuance. While it is indeed the teaching elder who normally has primary responsibility for preaching, the session may invite someone else, or the presbytery may authorize other people, usually ruling elders, to preach (W-2.2007). Ruling elders may also be commissioned to particular pastoral service, in which they have the primary responsibility for preaching in a specific congregation (G-2.1001). So, preaching may be done by people other than the teaching elder, even though preaching is often a primary responsibility of the teaching elder.

Matthew’s question about the distinction between elder and ruling elder is one of changes in language. Under the current *Book of Order*, a ruling elder exercises "leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and [has] responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church..." (G-2.0301). A ruling elder may serve actively on session for a determined term. However, because a ruling elder is an ordained office of the church (G-2.0102), the name does not change based on whether one is active or inactive, i.e. currently serving or not serving on session.

Ruth’s question addresses two different points. First, the title of the term "elder," in its dictionary definition, is often used to refer to persons who are further along in years. We commonly refer to the "elderly" as people nearing the end of their life, or an "elder" sibling as being older than another child in the family. However, this
term comes from the Greek word "presbuteros," or "presbyter" in English (G-2.0102), and simply means one who is a leader. The second point Ruth raises is whether the session should be composed of ruling elders of all ages. The answer to this question is yes. The Book of Order specifies that session "shall express the rich diversity of the congregation's membership and shall guarantee participation and inclusiveness" (G-2.0401). So, if there is a wide variety of ages in the congregation, this should be reflected by the ages of those who are elected to session.

Response 2
Membership in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) may be extended to anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Our Reformed heritage teaches us that the priesthood of all believers means that all people may have access to God, and we do not need to go through a priest or other intermediary to act on our behalf. Therefore, our denomination reflects the principle that the average person should be allowed to be active in the governmental processes of our church. The PC(USA)'s government is representative, and any called member of the church may participate. God calls all to faith, but God calls some to be set apart in ordered ministries of the church. In the Presbyterian Church, these include the offices of deacons and presbyters. The word "presbyter" means simply one who leads in governance, and this office has two separate categories: teaching elders and ruling elders. It is people called and elected to these two offices who compose the session in our tradition.

Teaching elders and ruling elders together carry out many aspects of ministry in the church. Teaching elders, often referred to as pastors, primarily carry out the ministry of Word and Sacrament. They are normally responsible for the selection of scripture for services of public worship; preparation and preaching of the sermon or other exposition of the word; prayers offered in worship; music to be sung; and the use of drama, dance, and other art forms in worship. The teaching elder is generally responsible for preaching and teaching the faith of the church, and also administers the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Teaching elders pray with and for the congregation, and, along with ruling elders, provide pastoral care to the congregation. They are also responsible for sharing in governance of the church, both on session and in higher levels of the church, such as presbytery, synod, and general assembly. The teaching elder moderates the session, but has no vote.

The primary ministry of ruling elders is that of discernment and governance. They are to be people of wisdom and maturity of faith, being compassionate and demonstrating leadership skills. They are chosen by the congregation and exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline in the life of the local congregation and in higher levels of the church. They are members of the session, having both a voice and a vote. They may also vote as members of higher councils of the presbytery, synod, and/or general assembly.

Both the offices of teaching elder and ruling elder are ordained offices of the church. This means these individuals have felt internally called by God and have received external affirmation of that call by the church, and are ordered (ordained) to that call by the church in prayer and the laying on of hands. Members of both offices are responsible for carrying out together ministries of pastoral care within the congregation. Both serve in the governance of the church, at local, regional, and national levels. The offices of teaching elder and ruling elder are important ministries of the church, and are a vital part of being Presbyterian.

Reader Responses

| S | Great responses to Required Responses 1. Except with regard to your response to Esther, your answers and citations were clear and appropriate. Your response to Esther seemed muddled and circular to me. You responded to the "preaching elder" suggestion without clarifying the reason for pastor/ministers being called "teaching elder". Defining "teaching elder" would have been much clearer than nuances "preaching elder" and clarifying that others can preach. Ultimately, I think you |
Section III

Constitutional Order as a Tool for Ministry, A

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

(CHOSE ONE: A or B)

A.

Jeff, a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church, expresses concern to you, his pastor, about whether he should accept a nomination to the presbytery committee responsible “to guide, nurture, and oversee the process of preparing to become a teaching elder” (G-3.0307). Jeff asks, “How is a person who isn’t a pastor supposed to know how to help inquirers and candidates through the preparation process? They would be better served under the guidance of experienced pastors. Why are ruling elders required to be on this committee?”

REQUIRED RESPONSES
1. Drawing on the Book of Order, identify at least three (3) issues raised by Jeff. Cite at least one (1) reference (e.g., X-0.0000) for each issue identified.
2. Informed by your answer in Required Response 1, respond to Jeff.

--- OR PROCEED TO NEXT PAGE FOR OPTION B ---

**Answer**

**Response 1**

Jeff's concerns appear to stem from a lack of full understanding regarding the priesthood of all believers, and perhaps a fear of the unknown or feelings of inadequacy because he thinks he cannot contribute if he has not had the same type or level of experience and education as those candidates whom he will be required to evaluate as part of his responsibility on the committee.

As a ruling elder, Jeff may serve as a commissioner to any higher council within the denomination (G-2.03). This is one of the rights and responsibilities of his ordination as a ruling elder, which acknowledges God's call to him to serve the church. It is also an acknowledgement of the priesthood of all believers, and follows the Scriptural exhortation for believers to build one another up, just as "iron sharpens iron."

A second issue is that, although Jeff himself is not a teaching elder, God has given him spiritual gifts for use in service to the church (W-1.1005). His specific gifts would likely be of value for this committee, since membership in the committee requires nomination and thus external affirmation that he would be a good "fit" for the duties involved.

Furthermore, Jeff's service on the committee can be seen as preliminary work for a future pastoral nominating committee. The candidates whom Jeff will help to guide, nurture, and oversee on this Presbytery committee could be the same individuals who would potentially apply for pastoral service at his or another church. As a ruling elder, Jeff would also be able to serve on a pastoral nominating committee (G-2.0802) for his local church. This opportunity to serve on the presbytery committee gives him, as a leader in a local church, a different lens through which to look. As a member of a local congregation, he can give an important point of view by asking himself of each candidate, "If I were serving on my church's pastoral nominating committee, would I look at this candidate as a possible person to serve as pastor at my church?" Upon answering that question, Jeff could give valuable feedback to candidates who are preparing for ministry as teaching elders.

Finally, the Presbyterian Book of Order requires that this committee be comprised of both teaching elders and members of congregations, and, in fact, at least half of the members must be local congregation members (G-3.0109). This is to ensure that committees do not become too "top-heavy" and contributes to both our denomination's representative government and the theological idea behind it, the priesthood of all believers.

**Response 2**

Jeff, this is a great question. The thought of serving with pastors on the presbytery committee that nurtures and guides candidates who are preparing to be ordained as teaching elders is a little daunting, isn't it? But I think your service on this presbytery committee would be invaluable. Let me tell you why.

Although this committee certainly has teaching elders on it who contribute valuable points of view, it is also important for ruling elders to have a say. Think about this committee as being the preview of the work that future pastor nominating committee members will do. If asked, you would serve on the pastor nominating committee for this church, wouldn't you? Well, your participation on the presbytery's committee gives you the chance to ask, "Would I look at this candidate as a possible person to serve as pastor at my church?" Based on your answer to that question, you could give each candidate some really valuable feedback. The pastors who serve on the presbytery committee come at it from a whole different point of view, because their perspective is
whether or not they would like to have this candidate as a pastoral colleague. They are evaluating the person's theological knowledge and other aspects based on their training and experience, but you, as a ruling elder, also offer important information.

I really think it's an honor for you to be nominated to this committee, and I think you're a great fit. We've talked a lot in recent session meetings about our spiritual gifts, and I think your gifts of encouragement and discernment would be a wonderful addition to the committee. Remember that our spiritual gifts are not only for use within the local congregation, but also for service within the broader church.

Remember too that our Presbyterian government is representative, which is based on the Reformed understanding of the priesthood of all believers. In fact, the Book of Order requires that these presbytery committees have representation by both teaching elders and ruling elders, and, in fact, at least half of the members must be members of a local congregation.

I would encourage you to think about all this, and pray about whether God is calling you to serve in this capacity. If you have any more questions or want to talk some more, I'm glad to help in any way I can.

**Reader Responses**

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| S | Fabulous job of identifying appropriate issues and citations to Required Response 1. Your response hit a number of key areas and even applied the implications of serving on a presbytery committee to the home church. I thought you understood the question and issues involved well.

Very pastoral response to Jeff. I think you more than adequately addressed his perceived issues and would have calmed any fears he might have. I felt like you were very positive and informative in your response and that will help you a great deal in ministry. |

| S | Response 1 presents three issues concerning the work of ruling elders with citations. It would have been strengthened by adding the qualifications for being a ruling elder in G-2.0104a and G-2.0301 and the responsibility of the committee on preparation G-2.0104b.

Response 2 is a good response to Jeff addressing each of the issues in Response 1. Good pastoral response. |