Test Results
Church Polity
2/1/2014

Section I
Constitutional Heritage

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED
BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

The Book of Order declares that after time for discernment and discussion, the vote of “a majority shall govern” (F-3.0205).

Yet the Book of Order repeatedly upholds the principle of freedom of conscience.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Discuss at least three (3) different ways in which the Book of Order provides for a presbyter’s exercise of freedom of conscience even when a majority vote in a council has prevailed against the conscience of that presbyter. Include at least one (1) different citation (e.g., X-0.0000) for each way identified.

2. Discuss at least one (1) limitation in the Book of Order on a presbyter’s exercise of freedom of conscience when a majority vote in a council has prevailed against the conscience of that presbyter.
Answer

1. The Book of Order holds in tension two important principles: ruling by majority vote (F-3.0205) and freedom of conscience (G-2.0105). In order to keep both of these principles, the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity discusses both; immediately after the principle stating the majority vote rule, a statement about "Rule and Control" is listed. F-3.0206 lists the three ways in which a presbyter can exercise his or her freedom of conscience even after a council has ruled. They are "reference, complaint, or appeal" (F-3.0206).

In a reference, a session or permanent judicial commission can write a written request to the next higher council. This procedure should be used for cases which have not yet been decided (D-4.0101).

In a complaint, an individual files a written statement with the stated clerk (D-6.0101) which alleges information about a specific decision or action which has taken place (D-6.0102).

There are two different types of appeals, ones for remedial cases (D-8.0000) and ones for disciplinary cases (D-13.0000). For remedial cases, after a council has already been decided by a lower court, one or more of the parties involved in the case (D-8.0102) can appeal to the next higher court to review the proceedings (D-8.0101). The grounds for filing the appeal are clearly stated in D-8.0105 and include "f. injustice in the process or decision; and g. error in constitutional interpretation." Both of these reasons are tied to the matter of freedom of conscience in decision which are made by lower councils. The appeal in a disciplinary case can only be made by the one who has been found guilty (D-13.0101), but the grounds for the appeal include the two mentioned above (D-13.0106).

From the Book of Order, it is clear that the majority vote governs, but there are three specific ways in which presbyters can exercise their freedom of conscience, even after the vote has been taken. They are reference, complaint, and appeal.

2. There is indeed at least one limitation to a presbyter’s right to exercise his or her freedom of conscience. That limitation is explained in G-2.0105: "His or her conscience is captive to the Word of God as interpreted in the standards of the church so long as he or she continues to seek, or serve in, ordered ministry" (G-2.0105). In other words, those who are in ordered ministry (namely deacons, teaching elders, and ruling elders (G-2.0102)), are required to abide by the standards of the church, under Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture, while they are serving in their ministries. Another way to think about this is to say that all in ordered ministry have the power to disagree with decisions that have been made by majority vote in the above mentioned ways, but while they are in ordained ministry, they need to abide by the standards of the church.

Reader Responses

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<th>Well documented examples. It showed excellent example distinguishing between remedial and disciplinary cases.</th>
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<td>U</td>
<td>This paper gives only one citation. It uses that citation to give three different ways to exercise freedom of conscience. The question asks for at least one different citation for each way identified. It ignored important citations. The answer to part two does give a good citation.</td>
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Section II

Constitutional Order for the Particular Church

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

https://exams.pcusa.org/tests/3175/results/
You have been called to a congregation that recently merged with a smaller neighboring congregation with Congregationalist polity. You have been asked to host a retreat to explain the Presbyterian system of government led by ruling and teaching elders working together.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Cite four (4) references (e.g., X-0.0000) from the *Book of Order* that illustrate the principles of shared governance by ruling elders and teaching elders. Choose the citations as follows:

   —one from The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity that illustrates the *heritage* of shared governance,

   —one from The Form of Government that illustrates the *practice* of shared governance,

   —one from The Directory for Worship that illustrates how shared governance affects *worship*, and

   —one from The Rules of Discipline that illustrates how shared governance affects Presbyterian *discipline*.

2. For each citation identified in Required Response 1, describe how that reference illustrates the theme of shared governance.

Answer

1. The Presbyterian Church (USA) believes strongly in the principle of shared governance. In individual congregations, ruling elders and teaching elders share the work of the church. This principle can be illustrated in each of the four sections of the *Book of Order*.

   In the first section, the Foundations of Presbyterian Polity, the *Book of Order* reminds us that it is a historic principle of the church to use shared governance within the "Officers". F-3.0103 states, "That our blessed Savior...hath appointed officers, not only to preach the gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline" (F-3.0103). Therefore, we believe that Christ calls people with a variety of gifts into service of the church, some for preaching and administering the Sacraments, others for ruling.

   In the second section, Form of Government, the practice of shared governance is explained. G-2.0102 lists the types of ordered ministries as "deacons and presbyters (teaching elders and ruling elders)" (G-2.0102). Chapter 2 of the Form of Government will go on to specifically list the duties of each of these ministries, but what is important is to note that each is considered an important role in the church, and that the government of the church is "representative;" those who are ordained are both called by God and elected to the position (G-2.0102).

   The third section of the *Book of Order* describes worship within the church. Specific roles are outlined for the duties of the session (W-1.4004) and of the teaching elder (1.4005). For instance, the session makes sure that the congregation has regular preaching of the Word (W-1.4004a), but the selection of the Scripture itself which is used for preaching is the responsibility of the teaching elder (W-1.4005a(1)).

   In the final section of the *Book of Order*, The Rules of Discipline, specific jurisdictions over discipline are outlined for ruling elders and teaching elders. All of this information is found in chapter 3. In particular, the Book of Order states that "The session of a church has original jurisdiction in disciplinary cases involving members of the church" (D-3.0101a), while it is the presbytery who has jurisdiction in disciplinary matters involving teaching elders (D-3.0101b).

2. The four above mentioned citations together work to show the PC(USA)s emphasis on shared governance. The first shows that we believe the church is called to live in such a way that we recognize God has given different gifts and different callings to each person within the church and therefore, it is our heritage to
believe in the importance of shared governance. The second reference shows that within our form of governance we set some to be ruling elders and some to be teaching elders so that the work of the church might be carried out and so that individuals will be enabled to use their gifts for the service of God and humankind. From the third section, we see that in matters of worship, leadership is shared. Ruling elders have specific tasks related to worship, including seeing that regular preaching is heard. Teaching elders share in this governance by choosing Scriptures and writing sermons. And finally, the church shares in matters of discipline. The ruling and teaching elders have different jurisdictions for matters of discipline, but both are charged with seeing the unity and purity of the church maintained. Therefore, throughout the entire life of the church, the principle of shared governance is used.

Reader Responses

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<td>While the citations referred to in this paper are adequate, there are some others that would have been better. Such as F-3.0303 and F-3.0203 While worship and preaching are mentioned the sacraments are missing. These inductions would have strengthened the paper.</td>
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Section III

Constitutional Order as a Tool for Ministry, A

OPEN BOOK REQUIRED

BOOK OF ORDER ONLY

(CHOICE ONE: A or B)

A.

You are a member of the presbytery’s commission responsible for the oversight of its teaching elders. You receive a phone call from a teaching elder in your presbytery who has been seeking a call for over a year. He has been in conversation with a local Missionary Baptist congregation that has asked him to be their Interim Pastor. He is asking you what steps need to be taken for him to receive permission to serve in this role.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

1. Cite (e.g., X-0.0000) and discuss four (4) different references in the Book of Order that address his request.
2. Explain to the teaching elder why this request may or may not be granted.

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

1. When serving on the presbytery’s commission which is responsible for the oversight of teaching elders, I receive a request from a teaching elder to become the Interim Pastor at a Missionary Baptist congregation. The *Book of Order* provides information about how this request might be granted and what steps need to be taken by the teaching elder and the presbytery.

One option the Teaching Elder can take is to leave the denomination and become Interim Pastor in another denomination. The rule for being released from ministry as a Teaching Elder is given in G-2.05.07. Under this rule, the Teaching Elder would be required to discontinue all functions of ministry within the PC(USA). There is hope of restoration to the role of Teaching Elder if one chooses to be released from the PC(USA), but this restoration will only come by the approval of the presbytery at a later date.

If the Teaching Elder does not want to leave the denomination but instead hopes that leadership within the Missionary Baptist church will be received as a ministry of the PC(USA), the procedure is more complicated. Chapter 5 of the *Book of Order* addresses Ecumenical relations for the PC(USA). In G-5.01.01, the church affirms that its desire is to visibly demonstrate unity within the body of Christ, as exemplified by positive ecumenical relationships. This union however, is understood specifically as having “conversation, cooperation, and action” with other Christian groups (G-5.01.01).

To address the specific question of exchanging ministers, one must read G-5.02.02. Here, the *Book of Order* does say that there are some churches in which we are in “full communion” and can exchange ministers as defined by ecumenical agreements. In order to meet this qualification, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) must have such an agreement. Ecumenical partners for which this applies are not listed in this section of the *Book of Order*.

One last option may be to create a “joint congregational witness.” Under this provision, two congregations of different denominations can be joined in the mission of the church, providing that each “recognize Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, accept the authority of Scripture, and observe the Sacraments” (5.05). Under this provision, each congregation would need a 2/3 majority vote to become a joint witness and the Constitution of the PC(USA) cannot be amended (G-5.05.b).

2. Without further discussion with this particular teaching elder, I believe that his or her goal is not to leave the denomination and not to join two congregations together, but instead to serve as a Teaching Elder as defined by the PC(USA) in a Missionary Baptist congregation. In the end, the likeliness of this specific request being granted is very minimal. For him or her to be recognized as a minister in the Missionary Baptist congregation as a Presbyterian, the General Assembly of the PC(USA) would need to be in full communion with the congregation. Although the *Book of Order* does not specifically list which denominations are in full ecumenical communion, it is doubtful that such an agreement exists with the aforementioned congregation because of differences in beliefs between the two communities of faith, most notably the recognition of the Confessions as guiding documents. As such, the teaching elder will have to choose whether or not he or she will leave the PC(USA) to take this position.

Reader Responses

| S | This was a well educated response. |
| S | This paper gives adequate citations in response to the question. It shows a good understanding of the problems associated with the situation. |

Overall Evaluation

General Comments for Examinee and/or Presbytery
Please include here any comments about the examination as a whole or notes for the presbytery committee/commission overseeing the examinee's preparation for ministry.

**Reader Responses**

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<th>These responses were all well prepared and thoroughly addressed the questions with documented references.</th>
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<td>This paper does an adequate job of answering the questions but could have been improved with more appropriate Book of Order citations.</td>
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