Item

Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams

The Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams recommends that the 221st General Assembly (2014) do the following:

1.   Challenge the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to demonstrate its commitment to the full diversity of the Body of Christ described in Scripture (1 Cor. 12:12–13) and the constitution (*Book of Order*, F-1.0403)[1] by:

a.   Encouraging presbyteries to prioritize the election and appointment of persons of diverse cultural heritage to committees or commissions overseeing the preparation for ministry process;

b.   Encouraging presbyteries to broaden the pool of standard ordination exam readers to be more reflective of the denomination's diversity and to include more participation from racial ethnic persons; and

c.   Directing the General Assembly Nominating Committee to increase the number of racial ethnic nominees to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) who are presented to the General Assembly for election.

Rationale for Recommendation 1

To do justice to the varied heritages and experiences of racial ethnic persons under care and to serve the church within a context that is becoming more culturally diverse, presbytery committees and commissions must include members whose experiences are inclusive of the spectrum of races and cultures within the ministry context of the presbyteries. As they engage a process of discernment and preparation within covenant partnership, committee members offer more effective guidance when they are sensitive to the gifts and challenges engendered by cultural differences for the sake of the individual entering the process, and in service to the church's own call to ministry.

The committee is convinced that the collaborative process in place for overseeing the examinations has been effective, but the process will always be affected or influenced by the diversity or the lack of diversity reflected in those participating in the committee's work. Because eliminating cultural bias in the questions and in the reading of exams is a goal of presbyteries and their committees responsible for preparation for ministry, it is important that we aggressively pursue bringing voices to the table that can reflect the realities of ministry in many cultural contexts.

Members for the PCCEC are elected by two different constituencies: the regional reading groups and the General Assembly through nomination by the General Assembly Nominating Committee (see excerpt following from the Manual of the General Assembly). To change the makeup of the PCCEC, it is necessary to challenge both constituencies that elect members.

Procedures for filling the PCCEC (from "Guiding Principles of Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates," p. 69, which are part of the Manual of the General Assembly):

MEMBERS: The Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) will be composed of no fewer than 12 members and no more than 24 members who are ruling or teaching elders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Any changes to this membership range will require a two-thirds majority vote of the PCCEC before submission to commissioners at a General Assembly for action on behalf of the presbyteries.

•   No more than half and no less than one-third of the members will be elected by the General Assembly to four-year terms on a staggered schedule. These members will be eligible to be re-elected for an additional term. Candidates for these positions are nominated through the General Assembly Nominating Committee with consideration being given to areas of needed expertise, to gender and racial/ethnic representation, to an approximate balance of ruling and teaching elders, and to various sub-cultures within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) with regard to the overall composition of the PCCEC.

•   Remaining members of the PCCEC will be elected from among and by examination readers designated by the presbyteries. To facilitate representation from across the church, the PCCEC will group presbyteries into regions. The reader representatives will be nominated from and voted on by readers from their respective regional groupings of presbyteries following procedures determined by the PCCEC. These members will be elected and serve on a staggered schedule in four-year terms, and will be eligible to be re-elected for an additional term. (*Minutes*, 2012, Part I, p. 710, electronic version)

2.   Direct the Mid Council Ministries Area of the Office of General Assembly, in consultation with the racial ethnic caucuses of the church and with presbytery leaders, to develop a list of resource persons for circumstances where assistance with cultural proficiency may aid in developing an appropriate process of discernment and preparation for possible service as a teaching elder.

Rationale for Recommendation 2

The need for and range of cultural diversity across the church is outstripping the ability to develop training resources that can assure cultural proficiency by every presbytery member charged with working with inquirers and candidates for all cultural groups in the PC(USA). Identified resource persons from these cultural groups can help presbyters understand cultural differences among inquirers and candidates, increasing the likelihood that the discernment and preparation process is appropriately tailored to the gifts and needs of the individual. Presbyters tasked with overseeing preparation for ministry as

teaching elders are encouraged to consult with these resource persons when *beginning* work with an individual of a different racial ethnic or cultural heritage, to prepare for interaction with the applicant that will be characterized by cultural humility and respect. These resource persons also can be made available to inquirers and candidates as advocates for appropriate process, and as interpreters of the theological commitments and communal values of the Reformed tradition.

3. Direct that Standard Ordination Examinations be retained as one means of assessing a candidate's readiness[2] to be examined for ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder.

Rationale for Recommendation 3

Because ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder is an action of a presbytery taken on behalf of the whole church, the committee affirms the need for some denominational standards when determining readiness. Though important as a church-wide standard, the standard ordination exams should not be used as the singular means of assessing readiness for ministry. That is, presbyteries may discern that a candidate who passes the standard ordination exams is not in fact ready for ministry; by the same token, presbyteries may discern that a candidate who has difficulty with the standard exams merits an opportunity to demonstrate readiness in other ways. For this reason, standard ordination exams are only one means of assessment among many.

4. Direct the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCCEC) to consult with the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) for comment on the cross-cultural accessibility of standard ordination exam questions before they are finalized.

Rationale for Recommendation 4

The process used by the PCCEC to develop ordination exams is complex and spans three years. This process allows ample time to read and consider how a candidate might engage with a particular question as well as how the question is relevant to ministry in the church. Our research identifies the intrinsic impossibility of cultural neutrality. No matter how diverse the composition of the PCCEC, the committee cannot be expected to compose exams that are "culturally neutral." However, we believe that ACREC's input will help the PCCEC to compose exam questions that are more accessible across cultures.

5. Direct the PCCEC to include more culturally diverse resources and references in its instructions to and preparation of readers of the examinations, so that the Reformed theological insights of racial ethnic and non-European persons are included.

Rationale for Recommendation 5

Because the exams are intended to be "anonymous" and those writing the exams are instructed not to include anything that would identify themselves to the readers, some students have observed that they have felt unable to cite persons from their cultural contexts (e.g., Latin American, Asian, African, African American). In their instructions to the exam-takers, proctors can assure students that such references are welcome but readers must also be prepared to accept those references as appropriate and non-prejudicial. The examinations handbooks for candidates and for readers, which are posted online on the PC(USA) website, should include this information, and readers and candidates should be encouraged to read both guides to understand the expectations of the process.

6. Direct the PCCEC to develop means to broaden the format of standard ordination examinations beyond time-limited essays, and include additional protocols that may integrate oral presentations into the standard examination process.

Rationale for Recommendation 6

The committee considered the possibility that the written essay-style exams may not be the best assessment of competence for all candidates and that being considered an "exception," if one is assessed by an alternative to the standard ordinations exams, may be perceived as prejudicial. In accomplishing this recommendation, there will be logistical challenges and resource implications (financial and human) that we cannot predict. However, the committee believes that in the current environment, different formats beyond the usual timed, written, essay exams are needed and feedback to this point has concurred. We understand that any standard exam developed and administered by the PCCEC would not be an "alternative means" of assessment requiring a super-majority action of a presbytery under G-2.0610.

7. Direct that the presbyteries, in consultation with sessions and seminaries, be mandated to address with persons under care the contemporary challenges of the ministry of teaching elder as well as the realities of financial debt incurred from education and other sources. Such conversations would consider

   a. bi-vocational probabilities;

   b. expectations of tent-making;

   c. innovative approaches to ministry;

    d. cultivating nontraditional communities (e.g. 1001 Worshiping Communities);

    e. acquisition and use of nonprofit skills (including but not limited to grant writing, volunteer and donor relations, etc.); and

    f. the number of candidates seeking a call compared to the number of open positions for which they might be considered.

Rationale for Recommendation 7

The reality for many candidates seeking a call is that there are increasingly fewer congregations that can afford to hire and provide benefits for full-time teaching elders. Candidates, particularly those in second careers, carrying forward student loans and other debt on top of the costs of living, must confront the possibility that they may not be able to rely solely on ministerial employment to meet their financial needs. The process of preparation for ministry must address these circumstances as matters of stewardship and honoring the covenant between presbyteries, sessions, and the persons under their care.

8. Direct that presbyteries, through whatever structure they have in place to guide the preparation of persons for ordered ministry as a teaching elder, make full use of the flexibility provided by the Form of Government in G-2.06, particularly G-2.0610, to respond to the unique needs of individual inquirers and candidates, especially those from immigrant and underserved communities.

Rationale for Recommendation 8

The committee believes that there has not yet been sufficient time for the church to adjust to the changes in the Form of Government since its revision in 2011. The revised Advisory Handbook for Preparation for Ministry, a valuable resource for presbyteries, clarifies the new flexibility permitting presbyteries to shape the preparation process in ways that would accommodate their unique contexts and circumstances. The next recommendation would provide additional resources for presbyteries as they consider their options.

9. Direct the Mid Council Ministries Area of the Office of the General Assembly to solicit from presbyteries and make available on the PC(USA) website and by other appropriate electronic means, models of ways presbyteries are responding to unique and emerging issues related to the preparation and equipping of persons for ordered ministry as a teaching elder.

Rationale for Recommendation 9

The committee is aware that a number of presbyteries have implemented or are exploring alternative structures and processes for guiding all inquirers and candidates through preparation toward final assessment. Others are responding to particular circumstances that may be true for other presbyteries as well. Posting these models where presbyteries and committees can easily find them would provide a very useful resource.

10. Direct that through creation of a special task force or direction to the Mid Council Ministries Area of the Office of General Assembly, the General Assembly review the programs and procedures used by, or available to, presbyteries to prepare, equip, credential, and deploy pastoral leadership for congregations other than the preparation process for those seeking ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder, with a report to be submitted to the 222nd General Assembly (2016).

Rationale for Recommendation 10

In wrestling with the charge to study the overall process of preparation for ministry, the special committee concluded that the focus mandated by the referral from the 220th General Assembly (2012) was the preparation of those seeking ordination to the ordered ministry of teaching elder. Limiting the work, however, precluded attention to the spectrum of leadership needs emerging across the church as the denomination responds to a rapidly changing context. Approval of this recommendation would invite review of programs and procedures already in use or under development for the preparation of ruling elders for commissioning to particular service. The review should provide a forum for discussion of how the church will nurture leaders called to emerging communities of worship and service, communities that might seek alternatives to traditional forms of leadership and organization. It shall also explore what options could be made available to allow credentials for pastoral leaders who might have some training, but do not have practical access to the established process of preparation for ministry as a teaching elder, e.g. a leader of an immigrant faith community.

11. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-2.0607 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

"A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery *of care*. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination *by a presbytery* for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

"a. [Text in a.–c. remains unchanged.]

"d. ~~satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers~~ *examination materials, together with evaluations that declare those materials satisfactory* in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries."

Rationale for Recommendation 11

This change in language seeks to distinguish the standard ordination examinations from examination by presbyteries for ordination as well as to reiterate that candidates are accountable to their presbytery of care. It also makes specific that the standard exams are evaluated by way of written comments but are not "graded" and would allow for the introduction of exams for which the "work product" of the exams may be other than written responses to essay questions.

12. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the following proposed amendment to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote:

Shall G-2.0610 be amended as follows: [Text to be deleted is shown with strike-through; text to be added or inserted is shown in italic.]

"G-2.0610 ~~Exceptions~~ *Accommodations to Particular Circumstances*

"~~By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery~~ *When a presbytery concludes there are good and sufficient reasons for accommodations to the particular circumstances of an inquirer or candidate, it* may, *by a three-fourths vote,* waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for ~~exception~~ *any waiver or alternate means to ascertain readiness* shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred."

Rationale for Recommendation 12

The new phrasing proposed in G-2.0610 first changes the title of the paragraph to address the perception of some that being an exception is prejudicial in and of itself. The changes proposed in the paragraph are intended to clarify that presbytery minutes should include reasons for both waivers and for alternate means of assessment. The sequence of sentences in the current paragraph could be construed to mean that a presbytery may "waive" everything but G-2.0607d without "good and sufficient reasons" or explanation in the minutes so long as the three-fourths vote threshold was met.

Overall Rationale

Introduction

These recommendations are in response to the following referral from the 220th General Assembly (2012): *Item 07-07, On Reevaluating the Process by Which Ordination Exams Are Written, Administered, and Graded* (*Minutes,* 2012, Part I, p. 682).

1. Reexamine the viability of testing as a way of discerning a candidate's suitability for ministry.

2. Reevaluate and reassess the process by which the exams are written, administered, and graded.

3. Assess the exams' assumed cultural neutrality and revise exams as needed to address disparities in pass rates.

4. Work with councils to develop effective, alternative methods of examination, and to encourage their use to grow the pastoral leadership pool for immigrant communities in need.

5. Request the assembly fund an expanded study the overall process of preparation for ministry including the standard ordination examinations with recommendations to be reported to the 221st General Assembly (2014).

Context

The General Assembly referral to the Special Committee to Review the Preparation for Ministry Process and Standard Ordination Exams emerges from a context of significant changes in American society, changes that multiply exponentially the challenges faced by the 21st century church.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is a church shaped by the Reformation ethos of Western Europe, with institutional forms reflecting assumptions and structures of a body politic significantly different from that which frames U.S. culture today. Despite our commitment to diversity and ecumenism, the PC(USA) is still a majority white church deeply rooted in

the traditions of its history. These demographics expose a disconnect from American society's trend toward greater racial and cultural diversity.

If the PC(USA) is to minister effectively, it is imperative that we take into account the ways our context—both local and global—is changing. Soon, there will no longer be a white majority within the American population. As faith traditions continue to multiply, Christianity will become less a normative religion and more one religion among many. In our intensely market-driven climate, religious consumers will continue looking past the familiar mainline denominations in favor of their own personalized spiritual paths.

These trends are layered with a widespread disillusionment with institutions, a dramatic shift in the source of authority, an expanding knowledge base, the accessibility of various worldviews, and the impact of technology—for good and ill—on human relationships and interaction. Within the church we find decreasing financial resources, declining denominational loyalty, and inconsistent patterns of participation in worship and education. In this new reality, the forms and processes that have served the PC(USA) in the past may no longer do so and the assumptions and expectations of corporate life and congregational leadership are being tested.

There are wonderful possibilities associated with these cultural and technological changes. For instance, we already see potential for increased and deepened communication. Opportunities for artistic and linguistic expression increased by social changes as well as technological development will enhance capacities for spiritual and theological expression. All of these changes are currently widening our horizons for mission in exciting and creative ways. The creative possibilities for preparation for ministry are increasing exponentially. How can we find ways to infuse our preparation for ministry process with this potential?

Despite significant changes to the constitutional requirements in 2011, this committee finds that the process of preparation for ministry as a teaching elder is still implemented in many presbyteries as largely unchanged from the linear, form-driven process that was in place prior to 2007. This adherence to old procedures continues in the face of changing cultural expectations and related shifts in the demographics of inquirers and candidates, church leaders, and congregations.

Thirty years ago, the majority of those discerning service as teaching elders were young people who entered seminary right out of college.[3] They were significantly formed in their pastoral development through first calls as associate or assistant pastors or pastors of smaller congregations. Ruling elders and other members of presbyteries frequently mentored them during the transition to pastoral ministry. Now, the majority of those in preparation are exploring ministry as a second or even third career. Their sense of call may have developed while they were in seminary rather than within the faith community of a congregation. They may not begin their theological education with any denominational affiliation, much less having been taken under care. A growing number of persons entering preparation are older, multicultural, or immigrant. More are geographically tethered, and many leave seminary with significant educational debt. There is no one process of preparation to fit all candidates.

At the same time, the demographic and leadership needs of our congregations are also changing. Just over half of our congregations are under one hundred members, and there are fewer full-time pastoral positions. Small congregations, rural and urban alike, have been identified as "underserved" because they find it difficult to call pastors. In many areas the isolation of congregations is exacerbated as nearby churches are closed. Congregations may be yoked where several are served by a single pastor. In other areas, presbyteries are equipping ruling elders to provide pastoral leadership for congregations unable to afford or attract a teaching elder. Others are working with the spiritual leaders in immigrant communities to identify pastoral leaders who can communicate in their languages and who understand their cultures. As presbyteries respond to the denomination's challenge to create new worshiping communities, they are working with new types of leaders for what may be nontraditional communities.

In light of this church environment, how can we better prepare a diverse range of candidates for the church the Spirit is reforming?

These new realities argue for a more flexible, individualized process for preparing persons for ministry in today's church. The 2011 revision to the Form of Government provides presbyteries with great latitude to shape the process to meet the specific needs of inquirers and candidates, while at the same time defining churchwide standards for readiness for examination for ordination.[4] Exercising that latitude will require the committees that guide that process to understand the unique cultural traditions of individual inquirers and candidates and their implications for the preparation process. We must become more culturally competent; we are called to embrace a diversity that may not be reflected in our own congregations or life experiences. Thus committees must become much more aware of and open to fresh methods of formation, education, and assessment.

Not only is the preparation process in the PC(USA) a covenant between an inquirer or candidate, a congregation, and a presbytery, it also involves a partnership with other entities within and outside the church. The realities described above need to be taken into consideration by all parties. While the overall process is primarily guided by the presbytery, usually through a committee, the final assessment of readiness includes ordination examinations prepared and administered by the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. For most inquirers and candidates, the educational requirements will be met by a course of study at a seminary or other theological institution, some having no relationship with the PC(USA). This education may be residential, commuter, or through distance learning. An individual's practice of

ministry will likely be shaped at least in part by a supervised practice of ministry experience, Clinical Pastoral Education, or an internship. The quality of communication and active partnership will determine the degree to which the process can be successfully individualized in such a complex situation.

Committee Process

To develop recommendations in the areas assigned to us, we engaged in the following:

- Compiling and reviewing recent mainline pastor preparation studies and practices;

- Analyzing standard ordination exams for cultural bias and failure rates;

- Evaluating the demographics of PCCEC members and readers; and

- Interviewing a sample of pastors, mid council presbyters, racial ethnic caucus members, Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) members, and seminary students, at various venues such as Big Tent, the Polity Conference, Presbyterian Mission Agency Board meetings, presbytery meetings, committee on preparation for ministry (CPM) meetings, and seminary on campuses.

These and other approaches will be evident below.

Part 1: Reexamine the viability of testing as a way of discerning a candidate's suitability for ministry.

As we considered Part 1 of the committee's charge, we noted that the standard written ordination exams are not designed to discern "suitability" for ministry. In the candidacy phase, "fitness and readiness" are to be established (G-2.0604), with the standard written exams to be one tool for that work (G-2.0607d). "Suitability," in the language of the *Book of Order,* is to be established during the inquiry phase (G-2.0603). The committee proceeded with its work with this understanding of the exams' purpose.

The committee considered the history of the standard written ordination exams. They were established in order that presbyteries would have some method to test all candidates on a denomination-wide basis. Individual calling presbyteries could then trust that a candidate coming from another presbytery was able to articulate adequate responses to ministry situations with both Reformed theological and pastoral concerns in view. This method of examination continues to stand as the only denomination-wide standard for evaluating candidates, and for this reason the committee deemed it valuable enough to keep.

We confirmed that seminaries continue to use written, timed examinations as part of their assessment of students. Therefore such exams in and of themselves are not a strange and foreign concept to candidates. However, we also noted that during seminary studies particular students may be allowed to substitute other work and forms of examination, and that some specific courses do not require exams at all. We concluded that retaining written, timed exams simply in order to mirror seminary methods does not have a viable basis.

Investigation into the discernment practices of other denominations revealed that standard written exams are required by certain denominations but not by others.[5] Different denominations have varying approaches to the preparation of candidates for ministry. Some use a classroom-and-testing model; others use an apprenticeship model. All practices have strengths and liabilities.

Part 2: Reevaluate and reassess the process by which the exams are written, administered, and graded.

The standard ordination exams are written, administered, and evaluated by the PCCEC. We received a full explanation of its work from the Reverend Dr. Timothy Cargal, staff support to the PCCEC, and the Reverend Dr. Michelle Bartel, former moderator of the PCCEC. We learned that:

- Five exams comprise the standard ordination examinations. The Bible Content Exam (BCE) is designed each year at the PCCEC's annual meeting. The Worship and Sacraments, Biblical Exegesis, Theological Competence, and Church Polity exam questions are composed over a three-year span by the PCCEC. Each question is evaluated thoroughly by the members of the PCCEC in order that the exams may ascertain as clearly as possible a candidate's ability to articulate the Reformed faith in ministry situations. The PCCEC works diligently to avoid elements in the exams that would distract candidates or readers from this articulation.

- The exams are administered as timed events, completed on computer. Time extensions may be requested by the candidate and authorized by the presbytery committee overseeing that candidate's preparation process.

- The PCCEC stresses that exams are "evaluated," not "graded." "Grading" implies a fixed rubric against which an exam is evaluated, which does not happen with these exams. Readers are instructed to evaluate exams with a final mark of "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory," with comments to indicate why either mark was given. Members of the PCCEC review all marks and reader comments for consistency and clarity. Readers elected by the presbyteries and trained by the PCCEC evaluate the exams.

We observed that the composition of the exams takes place with rigor and over considerable time, both positive assets. The administration of the exams has moved fluidly from an entirely paper-based system to an electronic, online system, making the process easier and more affordable for the readers and keeping pace with the cultural habits of our time. The evaluation system uses a constituency of readers with the broadest possible base (all presbyteries) and includes ruling and teaching elders. The committee could not envision the administration of an exam process labeled "standard" much improved from the present one.

We examined different "learning styles" and how it might impact candidates taking the standard exams. The concept of "learning styles" is not confirmed by rigorous academic research. The several proponents of "learning styles" in the education community[6] differ in their definitions and implications of "learning styles," making the usefulness of the concept in our situation difficult to ascertain. Furthermore, "learning style"—how a student receives learning—may not coincide usefully with "expression style"—the means by which the student's learning is demonstrated. Thus, this committee is not able to respond helpfully to the referral's appeal to "learning and processing knowledge in different ways."

We recognized and reaffirmed that candidates with learning disabilities have avenues for accommodation of those disabilities in taking the standard exams. A presbytery can also arrange for an alternate form of assessment to accommodate an individual candidate's needs (G-2.0610).

The rationale for this part of the mandate included an appeal to consider the failure of "many of our candidates" on first, second, or third attempts of an examination area. For perspective on how many candidates might reasonably pass the standard exams at all, we note that in the legal and medical professions pass rates of students taking written board exams range from 69–88 percent. In recent years, satisfactory results on our exams fall at the upper limit of these rates (see Table 1, and our work on the racial ethnic dimension of this problem in the next section), which would suggest that as professional exams they are not overly rigorous.[7] It is unrealistic to expect a 100 percent pass rate for our candidates; if no one would fail to satisfy the requirements of the standard exams (even on second or third attempts), we might well ask whether the exams really functioned as a tool to assess readiness.

Table 1: Performance by Inquirers and Candidates Taking Exams Fall 2011-Fall 2013

Examination Area	Total Number Inqs/Cands	% of total who "Satisfied" Area	Taken Once		Taken Twice		Taken 3 times		Taken >3 times	
			% Ttl	% "S"	% Ttl	% "S"	% Ttl	% "S"	% Ttl	% "S"
Bible Content	1694	94%	94.7%	96%	4.1%	69%	1.0%	88%	0.2%	33%
Bible Exegesis	1357	87%	77.0%	89%	15.1%	83%	5.9%	73%	2.0%	59%
Theology	1352	87%	79.3%	91%	13.7%	81%	5.3%	68%	1.8%	54%
Worship	1351	88%	77.7%	92%	15.7%	80%	5.1%	65%	1.5%	65%
Polity	1409	87%	77.3%	90%	15.6%	80%	5.2%	67%	1.9%	74%

The table reports the full experience with the examinations for all inquirers and candidates who took an examination in any area from the Fall 2011 administration through Fall 2013 (five exam cycles). For each exam area, the total number of inquirers and candidates is reported along with the percentage of the total that had satisfied the requirement in that area by Fall 2013. The total for each exam is then broken down by the number of attempts, showing the percentage of the total who had taken the exam in that area once, twice, three times, or more than three times, and the percentage who received a "Satisfactory" evaluation on their respective most recent attempt.

Part 3. Assess the exams' assumed cultural neutrality and revise exams as needed to address disparities in pass rates.

Conversations with members of the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) and within the committee revealed the intrinsic impossibility of cultural neutrality. While the PCCEC and the bodies that provide its membership may be encouraged to comprise a diversity reflective of the PC(USA), all specific ministry situations arise out of a particular cultural context. The issue for the exams, then, is that these ministry contexts be cross-culturally accessible.

In light of the method of exam creation, we considered the racial ethnic composition of the PCCEC. During the period of our work, African American and Korean persons served on the PCCEC, though in insufficient numbers; in addition, the absence of Hispanic members was pointedly observed. We discovered that the PCCEC has been trying to recruit members who are Hispanic. We assert that in order for standard exams (of any type) to be cross-culturally accessible, members of the PCCEC must come from a broad variety of contexts.

Upon investigation into the statistics related to "Satisfactory" evaluations on the exams, the committee could not say with conviction that racial ethnic candidates as a group consistently satisfy exam requirements at a statistically significant lower rate than Caucasian candidates as a group when one considers rates on first attempts within a particular examination area and applies necessary controls such as for varying sample size. The committee reviewed reports prepared for previous study groups that sought to statistically analyze performance on the examinations by racial ethnic inquirers and candidates. When trying to study the outcomes for racial ethnic inquirers and candidates, who account for roughly 1-in-5 (twenty percent) of all test takers, sample size problems are exacerbated—especially when further differentiated by specific racial ethnic categories. A particular racial ethnic category may be represented by no more than a few percent of total exam takers. For example, in one recent exam cycle Hispanic test takers were 3 percent of the total, and those who opted to write in Spanish represented just one percent of the total. In such circumstances, the impact of individual test takers on overall

"Satisfactory" rates is widely incommensurate with the impact of individual Caucasian (non-Hispanic) test takers within their respective sample sets. What the patterns in these studies show are that while racial ethnic candidates are less likely than their Caucasian counterparts to satisfy all the subject areas with only a single attempt in each area, there is only minor difference in rates of "Satisfactory" evaluation on any first attempt of a particular examination area. Moreover, for both Caucasian and racial ethnic candidates, the strong likelihood is that those who will satisfy all four subject areas will do so having repeated no more than two exams (either two areas repeated once, or one area satisfied on a third attempt).

We did recognize among many racial ethnic candidates and seminary faculty the strong perception that passing the exams is intrinsically harder for racial ethnic candidates. We sensed a need to address that perception in our recommendations, even if it is not in our control to change that perception. The statistical analyses provided to the committee suggest that these perceptions arise from two considerations. First, as already noted, the data show that racial ethnic candidates are less likely than their Caucasian counterparts to satisfy all the subject areas with only a single attempt in each area. In a study of just over eighty racial ethnic candidates and an equal number of randomly selected Caucasian candidates who all took an exam during a particular cycle, 23 of the racial ethnic test takers had satisfied all areas, compared to 30 in the Caucasian sample. Moreover, fewer than half (9 of 23) of those racial ethnic test takers had satisfied all areas without repeating any subject, whereas three-quarters (23 of 30) in the Caucasian sample group did not repeat an exam area. Second, presbytery committees overseeing inquirers and candidates appear more likely to authorize or even require third or higher attempts of an exam area in the case of racial ethnic persons than for their Caucasian colleagues. The relationship between "Satisfactory" evaluation rates for racial ethnic and Caucasian test takers remains about the same for first and second attempts even as the rates of "Unsatisfactory" evaluations rise sharply. However, at the point of third attempts or higher the two groups diverge significantly both in the number of exams attempted and the rate at which they are evaluated as "Satisfactory." In the previously cited study of equally sized groups of racial ethnic and Caucasian candidates, there were thirty-seven examinations where the most recent attempt within a subject area by a racial ethnic inquirer or candidate was their third attempt or higher, with only 35 percent (13) receiving a "Satisfactory" evaluation. By comparison, among the Caucasian inquirers and candidates in the sample group there were only six such examinations, and half of those (3) were evaluated as "Satisfactory."

Our conversations with ACREC members revealed that composing exams in English then translating them to Spanish or Korean can be of limited help to candidates. Knowing that the exam is a translation often leads candidates to spend exam time translating back to English in order to assess the meaning of the question, which defeats the purpose of translation. In the case of Spanish, colloquial and dialectical differences between Hispanic linguistic communities can mean that even official PCCEC translations of the exams by first-language Spanish speakers may use expressions that seem inappropriate to some who take the Spanish edition of an exam. Because of the problems that can arise from attempting to translate into Korean differences between specific English-language translations of biblical passages used in Bible Exegesis exam questions, the PCCEC—at the request of its Korean members—has adopted a policy of not translating that particular exam (although candidates can register to write their responses in Korean).

Part 4. Work with councils to develop effective alternative methods of examination, and to encourage their use to grow the pastoral leadership pool for immigrant communities in need.

We recognize that presbyteries across the denomination have been creating their own alternative assessments since the *Book of Order* was first published. We discussed at great length the feasibility of a standardized oral exam, or ordination exams whose means involve a combination of media. We concluded that a single method of examination serving as a denomination-wide "standard" alternative to the written exams would have to be birthed by the PCCEC. To address this referral (#4) we would have to do one or both of the following: (1) recommend that the PCCEC be given the responsibility to design a standard alternative exam or (2) without mandating a style or structure for such alternatives, create a reference document that would be helpful to presbyteries as they develop their own alternative methods of examination. This would serve as a "roadmap" for candidates and presbyteries who otherwise would consider an alternative process too daunting.

We discerned that having alternative methods of examination on hand is only one small piece of the solution to "growing a pastoral leadership pool for immigrant communities in need." Immigrant communities in need of pastoral leadership require presbyteries and committees responsible for preparation for ministry who are: (1) ready to engage the unique challenges of their immigrant communities and leaders; (2) willing to view the extra effort required to use alternative methods of assessment as an exciting opportunity rather than an onerous burden; and (3) able to navigate the social, economic, and linguistic complexities that no universal wording in the *Book of Order* can address. These needs are amplified by the fact that some racial ethnic communities consider the entire system the PC(USA) uses to find, prepare, and examine teaching elders to be alien or hostile to the way their church communities function.

Part 5. Request the assembly fund an expanded study of the overall process of preparation for ministry including the standard ordination examinations with recommendations to be reported to the 221st General Assembly (2014).

We discussed whether we should consider "the overall process of preparation for ministry" to mean preparation for ministry as a ruling elder commissioned to particular pastoral service (G-2.10) in addition to ministry as a teaching elder. Although we made no formal limitation on our discussions, it seemed to us that, given the time frame of our labors, we would not be able to explore adequately all the preparation avenues available to any person preparing for one of the ministries of the church. Therefore our work focused on preparation for the ordered ministry of teaching elder.

Much of our conversation concerning the process as a whole revolved around whether presbyteries (and their preparation committees) viewed themselves as those who place requirements before prospective pastors or those who engage in a process of (mutual) discernment of call. We observed the tension between rules and guidelines on one hand and the cultivation of possibility on the other.

Endnotes

1. F-1.0403 *Unity in Diversity*

" 'As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise' (Gal. 3:27–29).

"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, 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. Definition of suitability, fitness and readiness assumed by this committee.

Suitability

When an individual and a presbytery explore someone's "suitability for ordered ministry" (G-2.0603), they ascertain whether God has given that person those qualities which the presbytery understands cannot be taught but are essential in ordered ministry. For instance, the presbytery may decide that character, willingness to learn, motivation, or some gifts for leadership must be present to affirm one's suitability.

Fitness and Readiness

When an individual and a presbytery explore someone's "fitness and readiness for a call to ministry" (G-2.0604), they ascertain whether that person demonstrates those qualities which the presbytery understands can be taught or developed and are essential for entering a call. For instance, our polity affirms as essential for readiness the ability to do exegesis of the Scriptures using Hebrew and Greek and to articulate Reformed responses to particular situations. Some presbyteries have affirmed that deep self-reflection in pastoral care situations (often taught in Clinical Pastoral Education courses) is essential for readiness.

3. Other than the streamlining of requirements, there has not been a major review of the process of preparation for ministry since the merger of the UPCUSA and the PCUS in 1983, which occasion required the publication of a new *Book of Order*.

4. *G-2.0607 Final Assessment and Negotiation for Service*

"A candidate may not enter into negotiation for his or her service as a teaching elder without approval of the presbytery. The presbytery shall record when it has certified a candidate ready for examination for ordination, pending a call. Evidence of readiness to begin ordered ministry as a teaching elder shall include:

"a. a candidate's wisdom and maturity of faith, leadership skills, compassionate spirit, honest repute, and sound judgment;

"b. a transcript showing graduation, with satisfactory grades, at a regionally accredited college or university;

"c. a transcript from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools acceptable to the presbytery, showing a course of study including Hebrew and Greek, exegesis of the Old and New Testaments using Hebrew and Greek, satisfactory grades in all areas of study, and graduation or proximity to graduation; and

"d. satisfactory grades, together with the examination papers in the areas covered by any standard ordination examination approved by the General Assembly. Such examinations shall be prepared and administered by a body created by the presbyteries."

G-2.0610 Exceptions

"By a three-fourths vote, a presbytery may waive any of the requirements for ordination in G-2.06, except for those of G-2.0607d. If a presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why a candidate should not be required to satisfy the requirements of G-2.0607d, it shall approve by three-quarters vote some alternate means by which to ascertain the readiness of the candidate for ministry in the areas covered by the standard ordination examinations. A full account of the reasons for exception shall be included in the minutes of the presbytery and communicated to the presbytery to which an inquirer or candidate may be transferred."

5. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Reformed Church in America require standard written ordination exams; the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the Christian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the United Church of Christ do not require such exams.

6. For digests of thinking on and critique of learning styles (with bibliographies), see:

http://institute4learning.com/multiple_intelligences.php,

http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/research_and_rationale/,

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/Professional%20PDFs/10a%20Gregorc%20Learning%20and%20Teaching%20Styles.pdf

7. The U.S. Bar (which administers exams for those hoping to practice law) reported a pass rate of 69 percent across the country (see http://www.adaptibar.com/bar-exam-statistics-11.aspx) ; from 2008–2012, the American Board of Internal Medicine reported a pass rate of 88 percent among those taking the exam for the first time; the 2011 U.S. Medical Licensing Exam had a pass rate of 94 percent among first-time test takers and 70 percent of repeat test takers; the 2012 board exams for nursing had an 80 percent pass rate.

Mid Council Ministries. *Advisory Handbook on Preparation for Ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Release 1.4. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, March 2013.

Mid Council Ministries and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. *Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Release 1.6. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, July 2013.

Mid Council Ministries and the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates. *Readers' Handbook on Standard Ordination Examinations in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Release 1.1. Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, August 2013.

Office of Vocation. "Study of Racial-Ethnic (R/E) Inquirer and Candidate Experiences with the Senior Ordination Examinations." Unpublished report prepared for study group on the standard ordination examinations in response to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates self-study to the Review Committee on Standing Committees, 218th General Assembly (2008). Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, December 2011 (revised).

Office of Vocation. "A New Vision for National Ordination Examinations: An Invitation to Discussion." Report of the study group on the standard ordination examinations in response to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates self-study to the Review Committee on Standing Committees, 218th General Assembly (2008). Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, March 2011.

Digests of thinking on and critique of learning styles, with bibliographies: http://institute4learning.com/multiple_intelligences.php, http://www.kaganonline.com/free_articles/research_and_rationale/, http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/Professional%20PDFs/10a%20Gregorc%20Learning%20and%20Teaching%20Styles.pdf

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