



VOLUME 2
ISSUE 4

THE PRESBYTERIAN
PLUMB LINE

The Presbyterian Plumb Line is an online journal published four times a year and designed to biblically inform the Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church about issues that impact our ability to govern under Christ’s authority and faithfully shepherd the flock.

We strive to provide content that is accessible, firmly rooted in God’s Word, spiritually guided, and committed to the highest standards of truth. Through viewpoint and observation, news items, sermons, book reviews, and other material, we seek to lead our denomination toward a more biblical expression of our Presbyterian conviction: that biblically informed elders, seeking the mind of Christ in the courts of the Church, is the most faithful way to align with God’s plumb line.

The editors welcome all inquiries to info@presbyterianplumbline.org.

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Note from the Plumb Line Editors

There are only a few weeks left before the General Assembly meeting in Denver. A record number of commissioners have already registered for this historic gathering which has the potential to be a major turning point in the EPC.

The Ad Interim Committee on Same Sex Attraction and Ordination (AIC) will give its report with recommendations. An overture from Pacific Northwest Presbytery, passed by four presbyteries, offers an alternative to the AIC recommendations. We encourage commissioners to carefully review the General Assembly Handbook when it arrives so that they can participate in debate and voting on all the issues before the EPC at this year's Assembly. On Thursday (June 18) the Assembly will meet at the bigger venue of Cherry Hills Church to accommodate the number of commissioners for the important votes that day. To help you prepare thoughtfully and prayerfully for GA, we offer the May issue of the Presbyterian Plumb Line.

The first article by RE Yvonne Chapman, a former moderator of the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC), is a review and critique of recent PJC rulings on homosexuality. The second article by the Plumb Line editors responds to the AIC's "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQ) document. A third article is by TE Sharon Beekmann, a psychotherapist with clinical experience with homosexuals who helped write the original EPC Position Paper on Human Sexuality. Fourth is an article by TE David Weber, whose Session endorsed the Pacific Northwest overture, in which he offers a big-picture view of what's at stake at the 46th General Assembly. He argues

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that we need a definitive verdict at this Assembly. The final article is by TE Peter Larson. He warns that viewing same sex attraction as fixed and unchanging is a denial of the transforming power of the gospel of grace. As always, former GA Moderator Gordon Miller offers a variety of thoughts. At the end of these five new articles, we have included two standalone articles that we published in previous weeks.

There are four new articles in the News section. The first item reports on a recent presbytery overture coming to the Assembly which asks that the Position Papers on Homosexuality and The Sanctity of Marriage be posted back on the EPC website. The second article describes the ongoing issues of financial accountability in the Office of the General Assembly. Finally, we report on the departure of two EPC churches from the denomination: Covenant Presbyterian Church in Monroe, La., and Lebanon Presbyterian Church in Greenwood, Va.

We want to thank all the individuals and Sessions who have provided financial support for the Presbyterian Plumb Line. The editors of the Plumb Line are all unpaid volunteers, and you stepping up to help us cover the costs of publishing our articles is a great encouragement to us! Your prayers and gifts have sustained us through the last eighteen months. We thank God for His faithfulness. He has met us at every turn, and we give the Lord praise for His provision.

It has also been encouraging to see a growing number of ruling and teaching elders submitting articles to the Plumb Line.

As the editors of the Plumb Line, our goal is to build up the church according to the plumb line of Scripture (Amos 7). We are extremely grateful for your support and encouragement and ask that you please pray for us.

Previous issues are available at www.presbyterianplumbline.org/archive, where they can also be downloaded in printable PDF format. As always, we welcome and value your comments.

If you would like to contribute to the Plumb Line financially or submit an article for consideration, we invite you to contact us at info@presbyterianplumbline.org.

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Five Overtures Ruled Unconstitutional: An Appraisal of the PJC Report on Overtures to Amend G.9-3A

*By Yvonne Chapman
RE, Central South Presbytery*

Editor’s Note: In a deeply divided decision, the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) ruled that five proposed overtures that would forbid the ordination of homosexuals were unconstitutional. (The report, “PJC Report, Concurrences, and Minority Materials Regarding the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest G.9-3A Overture” is available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>). In addition, the rulings produced a minority report signed by three members of the PJC (See pp. 10-14 of the above PJC Report). In this article, RE Yvonne Chapman explains why the PJC ruling is both “remarkable and meaningless.” A professional trial lawyer, Chapman served two terms on the PJC and moderated that body for four years.

Executive Summary: There was no unanimous decision by the PJC. The PJC examined the proposed amendments under the “three Cs” test (Clarity, Consistency, Compatibility) and determined by a slim majority — which included a member of the AIC serving on the PJC — that the overtures coming out of five presbyteries were neither consistent in language nor compatible with other provisions of the EPC Constitution. Here is the breakdown of the votes on the PJC examination of each amendment:¹

Amendments proposed by:	Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of clarity of language?	Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of consistency of language?	Does the amendment satisfy the requirement of compatibility with other provisions of the EPC Constitution
AIC	Yes. Vote: 7-2.	Yes. Vote: 8-1	Yes. Vote: 8-1
Pacific Northwest	Yes. Vote: 4-3, with one abstention.	No. Vote 5-3	No. Vote: 5-3.
West	Yes. Vote: 8-1.	No. Vote: 5-4.	No. Vote: 5-4.

Despite these findings, the PJC made no recommendation to the General Assembly on either accepting or rejecting any of these amendments, including that of the AIC. Furthermore, in the matter of the PNW overture, members of the PJC issued not only a Majority Report, but two

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Concurring with the majority reports, plus a Minority Report with a Concurring with a minority report. None of this is customary practice and creates an extra obstacle for these overtures to reach the floor of the Assembly for consideration. The PJC report was not only ambiguous and conflicting but provided little or nothing in the way of cogent recommendations.

Remarkable and Meaningless

It is difficult to respond to the conclusions reached by the Permanent Judicial Commission. This is because so much about the process and results of examining these proposals by the PJC is, on the one hand, remarkable, and, on the other hand, meaningless. As a very wise man said:

I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. (Ecclesiastes 1:17-18)

Nevertheless, in order to make sense of it all the reader must accept that the PJC report is not the main issue — and may be the least important factor to consider at the 46th General Assembly. In this article, I offer reasons why the PJC report is deeply flawed and offer some recommendations on what to do about the PJC report and its subject: the proposed amendments.

What Issue Led to the PJC Report?

“The EPC is currently considering whether individuals who identify as homosexual and experience ongoing same-sex attraction may be ordained to leadership in the church. The Bible clearly teaches that homosexuality is an unnatural desire and contrary to God’s design for his creation. Those who struggle with same-sex attraction deserve our compassion and pastoral care, but *they must not be ordained to leadership in the church.*”²

This issue is now before the EPC because the Ad Interim Committee (AIC), appointed by the 44th General Assembly,³ determined in its proposed amendments to the Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality (available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/SSA-Recommendation-46-27-Pastoral-Letter-Edits-Comparisson-46th-GA.pdf>) that homosexual candidates who experience same sex attraction⁴ may be considered for ordination in the church.⁵ See this affirmation also in the AIC Final Report.⁶

The possibility that any church or presbytery within the EPC would permit ordination of homosexuals is of crucial importance to every person within the denomination who believes that Holy Scripture, “The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.”⁷

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This crisis prompted several presbyteries⁸ to propose amendments to the Book of Government section 9-3A. Currently, G.9-3A provides as follows:

According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office.

Four presbyteries proposed to amend G.9-3A with identical language. Collectively, these are referred to as the PNW amendment. The Presbytery of the West (PoW) proposed an almost identical overture to amend G.9-3A, merely omitting the adjective “unnatural” preceding the word “desires.”

Both the PNW and PoW overtures would disqualify any homosexual — including one claiming to be celibate with continuing attraction to the same sex, which the AIC would consider ordaining — from holding office in the church.

By contrast, the AIC is proposing its own amendments to the Book of Government, Sections 9-3A, 9-3B, 12-2.B, 12-3A, 12-3B.1, and 12-6 (collectively, the “*AIC Amendments*”)⁹

All three competing proposals are restated in the tables below.

What is Remarkable About the PJC Report?

1. The PJC did not recommend whether to accept or reject any or all of the competing proposals to amend the Book of Government.

The PJC Report provided no guidance to the Assembly about three competing proposals that may be considered for debate on the floor. Elders commissioned to participate and vote must be able to maneuver through complicated parliamentary procedures set forth in the Rules for Assembly and *Robert’s Rules of Order* to speak on and consider a preferred amendment.

2. The division indicated by the breakdown of voting within the PJC rendered a recommendation prohibitive.

There was no unanimous decision by the PJC, which is remarkable in itself due to its historic rarity. Clearly, the members of the PJC show a division of opinion similar to that which currently exists in the EPC.

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Clearly, there are only two sides in this debate: one advocating for consideration of some homosexuals for ordination and the other advocating against any homosexuals for ordination. Of course, the pro side claims it would consider only the homosexual who claims celibacy although he continues to identify as a homosexual and entertains thoughts of attraction to the same sex.

3. A member of the AIC, who is also a member of the PJC, participated in deliberations and voting on these proposals.

It is apparent from the PJC report that the single member of the AIC who serves also on the PJC participated in deliberating and voting on these overtures, despite there being a conflict of interest. Given the breakdown of the voting members of the PJC shown above, all nine (9) members of the PJC voted on both the AIC and POW overtures; this particular member also deliberated and voted on the PNW overture with seven other members of the PJC — obvious by the submission of his Concurring Opinion to the Report.

In my experience as a former moderator, I would have requested that the conflicted member recuse himself altogether and not attend the deliberation, much less vote, where the conflict is this obvious. We are not privy to the reasons why a recusal was not observed in this instance.¹⁰

This observation is not intended to cast dispersions on that member, nor on the moderator or the PJC as a whole, but to call attention to this remarkable factor as Commissioners make their own assessment on the validity of the PJC report.

4. The PJC failed to fulfill its ministerial role in service to the General Assembly.

The PJC serves within the church and, as such, has a ministerial role just as any other committee or court within the denomination. Therefore, its members serve a ministerial function.¹¹ In that role, the PJC has a duty to help presbyteries and committees in getting proposals to the floor of the Assembly for consideration.¹² The Book of Government specifically provides more than one means for the PJC to fulfill its ministerial role.

The first is that after the PJC examines a proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language and for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution, it “shall report its findings to the General Assembly along with its recommendations, *which may include an amended version of any proposed constitutional changes* as well as advice to accept or decline the proposals referred to the Commission.” G.21-3D.2.b.

In this case, the PJC failed in this ministerial duty. If the PJC had provided an amended version of the five presbyteries combined proposals to amend G.9-3A, the General Assembly would be better equipped to debate on two competing proposals, rather than wasting its time and effort arguing over the meaning of words. That approach would have shown respect to 30 percent of the presbyteries in the EPC, set a clear path on what to debate on the floor, and reduced the

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frustration and anger among the Commissioners attending the 46th Assembly. In addition, that approach would have returned to the PJC the high regard it once held when it did fulfill its ministerial role.

The second method is found in “Recommendations to the General Assembly” in G.21-3D.4:

The Permanent Judicial Commission shall have the authority to make recommendations of its own to the General Assembly concerning wording, changes, amendments, additions, or other matters relating to the Constitution of the Church.

On its own accord, the PJC could have submitted its own amendment to address this vital issue coming before the Assembly due to the resulting work of the AIC, including its recommended Pastoral Letter and Position Paper.

Perhaps the PJC could have acted as mediator between the AIC and the presbyteries in crafting an amendment that would preserve the purity of the church and provide unity on this issue.

Five of our 16 presbyteries, representing 30 percent of the EPC, proposed amendments to prevent homosexuals from holding office in the churches — which has always been the position of the EPC and was the impetus for its founding.¹³ Within the concept of its own ministerial role, the AIC itself, comprised of seven Teaching Elders and two Ruling Elders, could exhibit pastoral compassion and seek to work with these presbyteries. Why did the AIC not seek to reach a compromise within the bounds of Scripture to prohibit ordination of homosexuals as officers in the church? Have the members of the AIC failed to consider the 330 signers of the Red Line Statement,¹⁴ many of whom represent presbyteries other than the five who have proposed overtures?

Commissioners to the General Assembly, including those who serve on its various committees, interim committees, and permanent committees have shared interests in matters coming before the Assembly. As such, they should be working to preserve the unity of the church and to avoid conflict before it reaches the floor of the General Assembly.

When appointed to participate in Presbytery or General Assembly, (the Ruling Elders) shall watch over the spiritual welfare and participate diligently in the workings of that portion of the Church to which they are commissioned, recognizing that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a connectional church. The Ruling Elder shares authority with the Teaching Elder in all of the courts of the Church, in both rights and duties. *It is the first duty of the Ruling Elder to represent the mind of Christ, as that person understands it, in the various courts of the Church* (G.9-8, emphasis added).

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5. The PJC erroneously analyzed the PNW overture under a heightened standard and exceeded its authority by analyzing theological terms and the merits of a theological position.

When analyzing a proposed constitutional amendment, the PJC performs two tests: first, the PJC “shall examine the proposed amendment for clarity and consistency of language;” second, it shall examine the proposed amendment “for compatibility with other provisions of the Constitution.” G.21-3D.2.a.

As indicated in its opinion, and by the breakdown of votes, the PJC subjected the proposal to three tests, rather than two. The *Minority Report of the PJC* explains, “The PJC separated ‘clarity and consistency of language’ into two categories, and engaged in an extensive exegetical analysis of ‘consistency’ beyond a review of whether the language is in fact internally consistent.”¹⁵

If one reads the PJC opinion on the PNW overture without reference to the proposed overtures themselves, one would overlook the important recitals and preambles in the Overtures of the Pacific Northwest, Central Carolinas, Florida and the Caribbean, and New River. These recitals provide authoritative foundations to their proposals — though not part of the proposed amendment itself — from Holy Scripture, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the EPC’s Position Paper on Homosexuality (1996), and the Position Paper on Human Sexuality (2017).

Although the majority opinion of the PJC declared its task was limited to evaluating the “three-C” criteria pursuant to G.21-3D.2.b and claimed it did not address the merits of the overtures, its extensive analysis of theological applications and interpretations of Scripture clearly did address the merits — matters best left to deliberations on the floor of the Assembly.

The opinion *Concurring with the Report of the PJC*,¹⁶ May 1, 2026 (TE Zachary Hopkins) recognizes that when, rather than seeking to clarify technical matters in a proposal, the PJC itself deliberates on the essence of the theological matter coming before the Assembly, it interferes and constrains with the deliberative process of the Assembly itself.

The opinion *Concurring with the Report of the PJC*,¹⁷ (RE Thomas C. Werner) thinks that the PJC did not go far enough in concerning itself with the matter of interpretation of Scripture. According to this opinion, the PJC should consider further whether a constitutional amendment that prohibited ordination of a homosexual would “bind the conscience” of a presbytery who has the right to examine, ordain and install its candidates¹⁸, or whether the PNW overture meets a Biblical standard that is required to be held in unity, and whether the Westminster Confession can determine whether ordination is an essential of the faith which unifies us, or is a non-essential in which we have freedom.

6. There is a PJC Minority Report that finds the PNW Overture compliant with the Constitution.

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A minority opinion coming out of the PJC is rare, exceptional, and remarkable. Elders attending the 46th General Assembly should read the *Minority Report of the PJC*, which provides a reasonable examination of the PNW Overture and concludes:

In conclusion, upon examination, we believe that the PNW Overture is clear, consistent, and compatible, and should pass the 3-C examination, and should be commended to the General Assembly for due consideration with the blessing of the PJC.¹⁹

Why Is the PJC Report Meaningless?

Contrary to a statement in the opinion *Concurring with the Minority Report* (RE Gordon A. Miller),²⁰ while PJC decisions may resemble a “Court Function,” the PJC is not akin to the Supreme Court. While decisions of the Supreme Court are the final word on a legal case, the PJC is not the final word on issues coming before the General Assembly. The PJC has no authority to decide issues before the General Assembly; it is not a Court within the EPC.

The PJC has the authority to interpret provisions in the Book of Order (G.21-3D.1), examine proposals requesting amendment to the Constitution (G.21-3D.2), and make only preliminary judgments on matters of discipline referred to the General Assembly (G.21-3D.3). In each instance, the PJC shall give reasons for its conclusions on these matters and make a recommendation to the General Assembly. The Assembly itself makes the final decision. The Assembly may ignore any decision or recommendation made by the PJC — the PJC role is only advisory, not final.

What Do We Do About the PJC Report? Vote to Reject.

You are urged to vote to reject the PJC Report on all presbytery overtures proposing amendment to G.9-3A. You also should vote to reject the PJC Report on the AIC proposed constitutional amendments, which compete with the presbytery overtures. Only by voting to reject the PJC Reports can these proposed constitutional amendments be fully debated by Commissioners to the General Assembly.

Vote to reject because:

- The PJC made no recommendation in its opinion;
- The PJC members were profoundly divided in their opinions;
- The PJC permitted a member of the AIC to participate in deliberations and voting on the presbytery overtures and the AIC proposal;
- The PJC failed to fulfill its ministerial role although the Book of Government provides two specific methods to do so;

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- The PJC exceeded its review authority by analyzing the theological merits of the proposals.

Conclusion

Commissioners are urged to reject the PJC Report. Commissioners must inform themselves, read the materials, meet with others and discuss the overtures.

Commissioners to the 46th General Assembly are encouraged to be familiar with the Book of Order²¹ and the Rules for Assembly²² regarding the procedures for amending the Constitution. Do not underestimate the role/responsibilities of the Standing Committees.

The choice is ours — let us choose wisely. Approach this duty with prayer and sincere devotion to God, with wisdom and discernment, keeping in mind our responsibility to the Body of Christ.

It is the first duty of the Ruling Elder to represent the mind of Christ, as that person understands it, in the various courts of the Church (G.9-8).

Proposed Amendments to the Book of Government

Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest Amendment (changes indicated in bold):

According to Scripture, those who bear office in the church **shall** exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill **these offices shall** exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. **Therefore, persons eligible for church office shall conform in heart, mind, and conduct to God’s design for human sexuality, embracing with gratitude the calling of either chastity in singleness or fidelity within marriage between one man and one woman. Those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections, contrary to God’s created order and condemned by Scripture as against nature, are disqualified from holding office in Christ’s Church.**¹ A **presbytery** or congregation preparing to elect persons to **these holy offices shall** carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the **Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, and Deacon**, and be very prayerful in **electing** persons to **these offices**.

¹ See Romans 1:26–27 on desires contrary to God’s created order; Genesis 1–2 on the creation of male and female; Westminster Larger Catechism Q.139 on the moral duties of Christians and the proper ordering of affections.

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Presbytery of the West Amendment (changes indicated in bold):

According to Scripture, those who bear office in the church **shall** exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill **these offices shall** exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. **Therefore, persons eligible for church office shall conform in heart, mind, and conduct to God’s design for human sexuality, embracing with gratitude the calling of either chastity in singleness or fidelity within marriage between one man and one woman.¹ Those who profess, persist in, or identify with desires or affections contrary to God’s created order and condemned by Scripture as against nature, are disqualified² from holding office in Christ’s Church.³ A presbytery or congregation preparing to elect persons to these holy offices shall** carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the **Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, and Deacon**, and be very prayerful in **electing** persons to **these offices**.

¹ See *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24:1.

² *While these individuals are disqualified from ordination, repentant believers with such ongoing yet not embraced unnatural desires are true believers and included in Christ’s church. Likewise, by the redemption of Jesus Christ, such desires and the resulting disqualification may be removed in this life.*

³ *See Romans 1:26–27 on desires contrary to God’s created order; Genesis 1–2 on the creation of male and female; Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 138-139 and 150-151 on the moral duties of Christians and the proper ordering of affections, especially for those in church leadership and be very prayerful in electing persons to these offices.*

<i>Current Wording</i>	<i>AIC Proposed Amendments (03/05/26)</i>
<p>BoG 9-3.A (Life and Character of Officers)</p> <p>According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of</p>	<p>BoG 9-3.A (Life and Character of Officers)</p> <p>According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church shall exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office shall exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. Whether single or married, officers must conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity (see</p>

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<p>Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office.</p>	<p>Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138-139)1 in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct. A congregation preparing to elect persons to these holy offices shall carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to these offices and be very prayerful in selecting persons to them.</p>
<p>BoG 9-3.B (Life and Character of Officers)</p> <p>As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all</p>	<p>BoG 9-3.B (Life and Character of Officers)</p> <p>As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all. Officers in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. While office bearers will see spiritual perfection only in glory, they will continue in this life to confess and to mortify remaining sins in light of God’s work of progressive sanctification. Therefore, to be qualified for office, they must affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit- empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions.</p>
<p>BoG 12-2.B (examination of candidates for ordination as a Teaching Elder):</p> <p>The Candidate shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth</p>	<p>BoG 12-2.B (examination of candidates for ordination as a Teaching Elder):</p> <p>Candidates shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth. (See D.1-6C.)</p>

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<p>BoG 12-3.A (examination of an EPC TE transferring into another EPC Presbytery)</p> <p>EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2 and they shall relate their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth</p>	<p>BoG 12-3.A (examination of an EPC TE transferring into another EPC Presbytery)</p> <p>EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2, shall relate experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth. (See D.1-6C.)</p>
<p>BoG 12-3.B.1 (examination of a Reformed Minister transferring into an EPC Presbytery)</p> <p>The Minister shall be examined on views and beliefs and may be examined on knowledge</p>	<p>BoG 12-3.B.1 (examination of a Reformed Minister transferring into an EPC Presbytery)</p> <p>Ministers shall be examined on views and beliefs, may be examined on knowledge, and shall relate experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth. (See D.1-6C.)</p>
<p>BoG 12-6 (examination of candidates for RE and Deacon)</p> <p>The Session shall confer with each person elected to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth, 2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected</p>	<p>BoG 12-6 (examination of candidates for RE and Deacon)</p> <p>The Session shall confer with each person nominated to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, their faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth, 2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected. (See D.1-6C.)</p>

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¹ The PJC did not issue separate decisions regarding the other three ascending overtures (Central Carolinas, Florida and the Caribbean, and New River), since the language of the proposed amendment is the same, but simply made reference to the Pacific Northwest decision.

² “[A Letter from Andrew Brunson](https://presbyterianplumbline.org/a-letter-from-andrew-brunson/),” Presbyterian Plumb Line, Volume 2 Issue 2. Available at <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/a-letter-from-andrew-brunson/>

³ See Act of Assembly 24-05, also set forth verbatim in the AIC Final Report available at [https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/Other/Report to the 46th GA.pdf](https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/Other/Report%20to%20the%2046th%20GA.pdf)

⁴ In its Pastoral Letter, the Ad Interim Committee uses the phrase “latent propensity.” The Cambridge dictionary defines these words as follows: *latent* (adjective) – present, but not yet active, developed, or obvious; *propensity* (noun) – a tendency to behave in a particular way.

⁵ See “Our Counsel to Pastors, Session, and Presbyteries” in the *Pastoral Letter chapter on Homosexuality and Same Sex Attraction*, p. 11, lines 3-6. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/SSA-Pastoral-Letter-Clean-Numbered-46th-GA-copy.pdf>

⁶ AIC Final Report, p. 3. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/Other/Report%20to%20the%2046th%20GA.pdf>

⁷ Essentials of Our Faith, p. iv.

⁸ See Ascending Overtures to Amend G.9-3A from Central Carolinas Presbytery, Florida and the Caribbean Presbytery, New River Presbytery, Pacific Northwest Presbytery, and Presbytery of the West. Available at <https://epconnect.org/ga/ga2026documents/#overtures>

⁹ The AIC’s proposed revisions are available at <https://epconnect.org/adinterimonssa/>

¹⁰ See *Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised (12th ed.)* §45:4 — **Abstaining from Voting on a Question of Direct Personal Interest**. No member should vote on a question in which he has a direct personal or pecuniary interest not common to other members of the organization. For example, if a motion proposes that the organization enter into a contract with a commercial firm of which a member of the organization is an officer and from which contract he would derive personal pecuniary profit, the member should abstain from voting on the motion. However, no member can be compelled to refrain from voting in such circumstances.

¹¹ See also, RE Gordon A. Miller opinion *Concurring with the Minority Report*, p. 15. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>

¹² In fact, the PJC noted that in its report on the AIC amendments that it permitted the AIC to make changes to its text before a final decision was reached on the “consistency of language” test. See footnote 2 in the PJC Report, p. 1, available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-AIC-Amendments-for-publication.pdf>

¹³ “Yes, It’s Sodomy” by TE Nate Atwood, Presbyterian Plumb Line, Volume 2 Issue 3. Available at <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/yes-its-sodomy/>

¹⁴ <https://sites.google.com/view/epcopenletter/redlinestatement>

¹⁵ Minority Report of the PJC, pp. 10-14. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>

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¹⁶ PJC Report, Concurrences, and Minority Materials Regarding the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest G.9-3A Overture: “Concurring with the Report of the PJC” p. 7. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ See G. 25-2A. The Church may make no laws to bind the conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture. No person may be rejected for membership or ordination because of such matters of conscience unless that matter has been officially declared a heresy by the Church or unless it obstructs the constitutional governance of the Church. However, those seeking ordination in the EPC, either initially or by transfer, voluntarily limit their free exercise of conscience to the lawful bounds of the Essentials of Our Faith, the Westminster Standards, and the Book of Order of the EPC (see G.13.2).

¹⁹ *Minority Report of the PJC*, pp. 10-14. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>

²⁰ *Concurring with the Minority Report of the PJC*, p. 15. Available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/CommitteeReportAttachments/PJC-Report-PNW-9-3A-Overture-for-publication-FINAL.pdf>

²¹ See G.21-3D.2 (PJC responsibility regarding proposals to amend Constitution) and G.23-1 (procedures for amendments).

²² See Rules for Assembly, 2016-2025, Chapter VII, Proposed Amendments, esp. Sections 7-4, 7-5, 7-6, 7-7; Chapter IX Standing Committees (all sections), Chapter XIV, Parliamentary Procedure, Chapter XV, Amendment or Suspension of Rules.

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AIC Answers to Frequently Asked Questions Are Imprecise and Incomplete

By the Plumb Line Editorial Board

The following is a response of the Presbyterian Plumb Line Editors (PPL) to amend or supplement answers provided by the Ad Interim Committee on Same Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards (AIC) in a May 26, 2026, email from the Office of the General Assembly with the subject “AIC on SSA and Ordination Standards FAQ” available at <https://mailchi.mp/3615737ceeae/help-the-gospel-priorities-better-serve-you-at-general-assembly-13514340?e=df41fbd965>. This post contains the full text of the AIC FAQs with PPL Editors’ comments.

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This is an FAQ from the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards. We encourage all commissioners to the General Assembly to read our recommendations and report for themselves. You can find them at EPConnect.org and in the commissioner’s handbook. The following are brief answers to the main questions we have received about our recommendations.

Theological Framework

Q1: How does the Bible shape these recommendations?

A: Our recommendations are built upon the foundation of God’s Word. The Position Paper and Pastoral Letter rely heavily on scripture and both documents are chock-full of scriptural citations. Biblical passages that provided special guidance include Genesis 1-2; Jesus’ teaching on marriage, singleness, and adultery in the Gospels; Romans 1; Romans 7-8; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 12; Colossians 3; 1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; and James 1:12-15. Christ’s teaching on temptation in the Lord’s Prayer and the Garden of Gethsemane, and then the commentary on the person of Christ and temptation in Hebrews 2 & 4 especially formed our recommendations.

PPL Reply: Romans 1 is mentioned, but the emphasis in Romans 1 should be verses 26 and 27 which state “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” This is the most pertinent text to the discussion of homosexuality. It should be noted that the temptation of Christ is very different from ours for, while he was tempted outwardly by the world and Satan, he had no internal temptations because he had no sin nature inherited from fallen Adam. As the second Adam he had no sinful human nature as do all other human beings.

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Q2: How do our recommendations rely on the Westminster Confession and Catechisms?

A: The Westminster Confession and Catechisms contain the system of doctrine found in the scriptures and provide the theological framework for how we understand the Bible and apply it to this issue. We are putting the first ever confessional citation into the *Book of Government* (WLC 138-139, on the 7th commandment). WCF 6 (Of the Fall of Man), WCF 13 (Of Sanctification), WLC 23-27, 149 (Sin & Misery & the Law), WLC 45 (Christ's office of king), WLC 75, 77-79 (Sanctification), WLC 138-139 (the 7th Commandment), and WLC 195 (Lead Us not into Temptation) especially shaped our recommendations.

PPL Reply: The AIC does not reference Westminster Larger Catechism Q150 and 151, which describe some sins as being more heinous than others. Q151 points solely to Romans 1:26-27 as describing sin “against the light of nature.” It is clear that homosexuality is unnatural sin which is more heinous sexual sin by virtue of its departure from God's design of men and women created for each other sexually by God — this fact is transparent for all to observe in nature. This is standard Reformed understanding of Romans 1:26-27.

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Q3: Do these recommendations diverge from the EPC's historic views on sexuality?

A: No. Scripture is unambiguous. All people are created in God's image, and his good design for marriage and sex is present in creation. Marriage is instituted by God between one man and one woman and sexual intimacy is reserved exclusively for that union. Jesus affirmed the goodness and purpose of marriage and the single life. Homosexuality, including homosexual lust, is sinful. These recommendations continue to uphold the EPC's historic affirmation that the Bible requires chastity in singleness and fidelity in marriage.

PPL Reply: Yes, the AIC recommendations not only fundamentally change EPC historic views on sexuality, but also fundamentally change the EPC's historic view of sin. The 1986 Position Paper on Homosexuality represents the historic view of the EPC, a paper which was largely ignored by the AIC though they were directed to look at EPC position papers (plural) — not just the Position Paper on Human Sexuality. WLC 139 says that “sodomy and all unnatural lusts” are violations of the 7th Commandment. The proof texts for “sodomy and all unnatural lusts” are Romans 1:26-27 and Leviticus 20:15-16 — homosexuality and bestiality. These are disordered sexual attractions. The AIC's position is that someone with a disordered sexual attraction (described by AIC as “ongoing SSA”) can be ordained as long as he or she is celibate. Celibacy will not order a disordered sexual attraction. The AIC alters the doctrine of sin by declaring that it is disqualifying only if one acts on that disordered sexual attraction. Jesus declared that sin committed in the heart or mind is still sin.

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Q4: Is this making the issue of same-sex attraction a non-essential?

A: No. A non-essential in the EPC is a subject left unaddressed in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, whether directly or by necessary inference, and upon which reasonable people could disagree about the Bible's teaching. The Bible and the Westminster Standards are clear on, and our recommendations affirm: i) God's design for marriage and human sexuality and singleness; ii) the sinfulness of lust and same-sex sexual activity; iii) the reality of indwelling sin and total depravity and the necessity for repentance; iv) the reality of progressive sanctification in our union with Christ; v) and the nature of temptation and weakness in the condition of misery. Our recommended amendments to the *Book of Government* would be binding upon the whole denomination, while the Pastoral Letter provides guidance on how Session and Presbyteries should wisely exercise their judgment when addressing this issue.

PPL Reply: Yes, it would make ordination of someone sexually attracted to their same sex a non-essential in the EPC because it would leave the decision up to individual courts. On page 3 of the Ad Interim SSA Report, the AIC affirms, "Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord." If the AIC report is adopted, it would in effect make ordaining SSA individuals a local option, thus a matter of Christian liberty. To ordain someone who has dishonorable passions contrary to nature is a violation of our Constitution.

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Q5: Will these recommendations allow for the ordination of homosexuals?

A: No. Officers in Christ's church are called to the church by Christ. Such disciples are marked by their commitment to Christ and his lordship, reflected in their godly character. Homosexuality is incompatible with the Christian life.

PPL Reply: Yes, the AIC recommendations will allow for homosexual ordination. Persons who have ongoing experiences of desire for sexual relations with their same sex are homosexual. On page 3 of the Ad Interim SSA Report, the AIC affirms, "Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord." The AIC defines homosexuals as those who engage in homosexual acts. The AIC redefines homosexuals who are celibate but continue experiencing desires for sexual relations with their own sex as a new category of candidates for ordination, "those with SSA." The Bible makes no distinction between the two. Neither does our culture, which defines an SSA person as a homosexual who embraces an

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enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to people of the same sex. Instead of bringing clarity, the AIC has brought confusion by not using the Biblical language of Romans 1:26-27 – “dishonorable passions” and “contrary to nature” for desires/acts for sex with a person of one’s own gender. The AIC claim that SSA and homosexuality are not the same thing is deceptive. By defining terms unilaterally without using Biblical language, the AIC has created a distinction that is not valid Biblically, confessionally, or legally.

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Q6: Are these recommendations the same as the PCA’s position?

A: The proposed language for the *Book of Government* revisions is taken almost verbatim from the PCA’s constitution. The approach used in the Position Paper and Pastoral Letter was both theologically and pastorally informed by the PCA’s study of this issue.

PPL Reply: This is true and this is the problem. The PCA position has not prevented SSA ordination in the PCA. There is a case pending now against a PCA presbytery which recently approved for ordination a celibate homosexual with continuing desires for sexual relations with their same sex. The case is now before the Standing Judicial Committee (SJC) of the PCA — we have confirmed this fact with a member of the PCA SJC. The fact that this case even exists is evidence that the PCA language is not adequate. Many in the PCA thought their Book of Government language was strong enough to keep homosexual candidates out of the PCA, but alas this apparently has not hindered a presbytery from proceeding on a same sex attracted candidate. Many in the PCA trust that their SJC will declare this presbytery action a violation of their constitution. If the AIC recommendations are approved, we will face the same situation in the EPC — complaints against presbyteries and severe division.

Furthermore, if the AIC was informed by prior actions of the PCA, then it would have overtured the EPC General Assembly to amend its Book of Government with language similar to that employed by the PCA which declared that homosexuals — including those who identify as homosexual using language such as gay, same sex attracted, or similar phrases — “are not qualified for ordained office.”

More problematic than the similarity between the AIC report and the PCA position is the similarity between the AIC report and the 1997 position taken by the PC(USA). In that year the PC(USA) approved Amendment B. It required all candidates for ordination to live either in: “fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, or chastity in singleness.” From 1997 to 2011 a homosexual candidate could be ordained only if he remained celibate. Bottom line: the AIC is recommending the PC(USA)’s policy on homosexuality from 1997 to 2011.

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Terminology

Q7: What definitions are being used for the terms “gay”, “homosexual”, and “same-sex attraction”?

A: The terminology on this issue is constantly shifting and almost everyone has their own definitions. In our work, especially the Pastoral Letter, we use “gay” and “homosexuality” as umbrella terms to describe homoerotic worldview, lifestyle, conduct, and desires. The term “same-sex attraction” (SSA) is used to describe someone’s inward desires or proclivities. Additionally, we speak of “latent propensity,” which applies to individuals who know themselves to be especially vulnerable to homosexual temptations but who are repentant of all their homosexual lusts.

PPL Reply: Only terminology used in the secular culture is subject to change over time; the Bible — though subject to translation — is unchangeable. The concepts of “proclivities” or “latent propensity” are neither Biblical nor confessional. They are categories invented to create a distinction between homosexuality and SSA, which does not exist. There are no such categories used in orthodox historical theology because the Church Fathers, Reformers, and later Reformed theologians have been satisfied to use Biblical language when talking about sexual sin — both desires and acts.

. . .

Q8: Is it appropriate to use the term “gay Christian”?

A: No. Individuals who experience SSA may want to use the term “gay Christian” in order for the church and world to more readily understand their experience of a persistent, latent pull towards same-sex sexual temptation even as they make every effort by God’s grace to think and act according to His will. However, in our culture, the term “gay” is normally understood as affirming or engaging in homosexual practice. It is sinful to intentionally approve of sin and missionally foolish to invite that misunderstanding. Our identity is in Christ as his new creation, and we should not inadvertently communicate to the world that Jesus approves of sin. It is inappropriate to use terminology, including “gay Christian”, that welcomes confusion from the church and world.

PPL Reply: This is certainly correct, and we’re pleased to see this correction made to the Pastoral Letter which had allowed for using the term, stating: “gay Christian ... may be a useful descriptive term in some settings” (see page 11 in a previous version of Pastoral Letter).

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Q9: Are these Side B recommendations?

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A: No. While Side B is a diverse movement, there are some areas of agreement between it and our recommendations. We agree that sex is reserved for marriage between one man and one woman, that homosexuality is a result of the fall into sin, that homosexual sex and lust are sinful, and that those who identify as gay are called to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus. This is commendable. However, we disagree with Side B in a number of crucial ways. We insist that homosexuality and same-sex attraction is a moral and sinful condition that demands repentance and mortification. We firmly reject the idea that there are any unique, healthy parts to same sex-sexual orientation that are gifts to be enjoyed and received. EPC officers must treat impulses towards same-sex attraction as impulses and temptations towards sin which must be denied.

PPL Reply: While it is true that the AIC is not making Side B recommendations per se, it is also true that it is opening the door to Side B in the EPC. The AIC is recommending changes to our Constitution, Position Paper on Human Sexuality, and Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality that if approved open the door to the ordination of celibate homosexuals. Furthermore, the AIC refused to acknowledge that someone could be supernaturally healed from homosexuality. Does the AIC believe homosexuality is unchangeable? Isn't that a tenet of the "Side B" position?

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The AIC's Recommendations

Q10: What are the concrete recommendations from the committee?

A: We have four items that will be presented for a vote. They are to amend: i) the EPC's "Position Paper on Human Sexuality"; ii) the section "Same-Sex Attraction" (which we are recommending be retitled "Homosexuality and Same-Sex Attraction") in the EPC's "Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality"; iii) *Book of Government* 9-3.A and 9-3.B; iv) and *Book of Government* 12-2.B, 12-3.A, 12-3.B.1, and 12-6.

PPL Reply: We recommend that all Commissioners to GA read the AIC findings that are presented in the proposed amendments to (1) the existing Position Paper on Human Sexuality, (2) the existing Pastoral Letter on Human Sexuality, (3) proposed amendments to BoG 9-3.A and 9-3.B and (4) proposed amendments to BoG 12-2.B, 12-3.A, 12-3.B1, and 12-6. All of these are available on the Ad-Interim Committee on SSA page on the EPC website at <https://epconnect.org/adinterimonssa/>.

In addition, we recommend that all Commissioners to GA read the ascending overture from the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest consisting of preliminary recitals of theological justification as well as a proposed amendment to BoG 9-3.A. This is available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/2-What-We-Do/2-General-Assembly-Meeting/2026/Ascending-Overtures/PNW-Overture-to-the-46th-GA.pdf>

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Q11: Where can I find a summary of the committee’s recommendations?

A: Our committee is providing a report to the 46th GA. You can find it on EPConnect.org (<https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/Other/Report%20to%20the%2046th%20GA.pdf?t=1775742633>) and in the commissioner’s handbook for GA. The substance of the report is only 2.5 pages long.

PPL Reply: We recommend that all Commissioners to GA read the AIC final report.

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Q12: Brass tacks, can someone who is same-sex attracted be ordained in the EPC?

A: We affirm that only those “who conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct should be considered for leadership.” Additionally, we affirm that “Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord.” This is not a change in the EPC’s doctrine, but a clarification and strengthening of our language and standards.

PPL Reply: This statement, “Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted *sin nature* unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a *temptation* not entered into, but rather fled; a *weakness* not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord” is very convoluted and incoherent. How can someone with an “ongoing experience of SSA” (present tense) not be participating in indulging one’s sin nature, yielding to temptation and embracing a weakness? This statement implies that SSA is beyond the person’s control, thus is a condition that is not in itself sinful. The condition of perceiving oneself to be SSA is yielding to sexual sin rather than killing (mortifying) it. According to Scripture, it is our sinful desires which produce temptation! (James 1:13-14)

The Position Paper on Human Sexuality, if approved, will rescind the denomination’s position papers on Homosexuality and The Sanctity of Marriage; though one must read the footnotes to know this (see p. 6, footnote 49). To rescind those previous position papers with a footnote buried in their report seems devious and underhanded, to say the least. It’s like the fine print you don’t read when signing a legal document. Who would think of doing such a thing?

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Creation, Sin, & Sanctification

Q13: What is concupiscence, and what is its connection to same-sex attraction?

A: While the term “concupiscence” is absent from the Westminster Standards, the Reformed understanding of the doctrine is present. The human heart is sinfully corrupt and gives rise to disordered desires, which are also sin. Until Christ returns, this corrupt nature, while pardoned and mortified by Jesus, remains in the regenerate during this life and the corruption itself and all motions proceeding from it remain truly and properly sin (WCF 6.5). Same-sex sexual lusts and desires are an example of such sin. This means that these desires are to be repented of and mortified, and the totally depraved heart which gives rise to them is also to be repented of and mortified. This corrupt nature is often called indwelling or remaining sin and remains with the believer their whole life long (WCF 6.5, 13.2-3, 17.3; WLC 78) and therefore the whole of the Christian life is one of repentance.

PPL Reply: The word concupiscence in the Bible means strong desire, especially pertaining to sexuality. The word is found in older translations such as the 1599 Geneva Bible and King James Version. Newer translations substitute phrases such as “covetous desires” (Romans 7:8, NLT), “evil desires” (Colossians 3:5, NIV), and “passion of lust” (1 Thessalonians 4:5, ESV). The AIC states that “same-sex sexual lusts and desires” qualify as concupiscence. But how is it possible to be “experiencing ongoing same sex attraction” and *not* be experiencing same sex sexual lusts and desires? To say same sex attraction in itself is not sin per se is a denial of what Scripture and the confessional standards teach about sinful sexual desires.

• • •

Q14: How do temptations and latent propensity to same-sex attraction fit into this?

A: Growth in sanctification does not mean the decline of temptation in a Christian’s life, nor does it automatically mean the healing of weakness, but rather means the Christian growing in strength to resist and flee temptation. The experience of temptation is not itself sin (WLC 195). Our corrupt heart tempts us to sin, as do Satan and our fallen world. Our bodies and temperaments are also broken by sin, leaving us weak and vulnerable to sin and temptation — a latent propensity towards them. Same-sex attraction can refer both to the experience of remaining sin, and can also refer to temptation and vulnerability, like a thorn in the flesh. Neither the scriptures nor the Westminster Standards ever teach that we are to repent of temptation or weakness. We are to repent of and mortify sin, including our sinful nature from which some temptations may arise internally, and are to flee all temptation and rest upon the strength of Christ in our weakness. Jesus corrects us in our sins, and supports us in *all* our temptations and sufferings (WLC 45).

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PPL Reply: This statement is asserting that same sex attraction is a thorn in the flesh, a weakness making one vulnerable to temptation. Yes, we are not told to repent of temptations. But we *are told* to repent of the sinful desires that are behind those temptations to further sin (James 1:13-14). The reason someone is having ongoing same sex attraction is they have not mortified (killed) by the Spirit these sinful desires. Attempts to explain away the experience of same sex attraction as though it was not intrinsically sin are futile.

. . .

Q15: Shouldn't someone who is a new creation in Christ and progressing in holiness be free of same-sex attraction?

A. Someone who is a new creation in Christ, united to him and indwelt by his Spirit, and progressing in holiness should be strengthened in grace and the practice of true holiness, meaning that the power of sin no longer has dominion and sinful lusts are weakened in their life and do not characterize their behavior (WCF 13.1). However, sanctification in this life is imperfect and the corruption of sin remains in “every part” of the believer and we “are continually plagued with desires of [our] old sinful nature that are contrary to the spirit” (WCF 13.2; WLC 78, modern edition). Therefore, the sanctified life is one of constant warring and progressive victory against the impulses to sin, not the absence of the pressure to sin (WCF 13.3; WLC 78, 195). The growth in holiness for the person who experiences same-sex attraction includes increased strength in resisting sin, including same-sex lusts; the Spirit enabling them to flee every temptation, including the temptation to same-sex lusts; and resting their weakness on the power of Christ.

PPL Reply: In WCF 13:3 (the pinnacle of the chapter on Sanctification), the Westminster Divines asserted: “Although the old nature temporarily wins battles in this warfare, the continual strengthening of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ enables the regenerate nature in each believer *to overcome*. And so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” The word “overcome” is key — the born-again believer, by the power of the Spirit overcomes, perfecting holiness. This is what one would expect in the life of a minister of the gospel. A person experiencing ongoing same sex attraction has not truly repented and overcome this unnatural sin.

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Q16: How does natural/unnatural sin or desires work into this conversation?

A: There is no such thing as “natural sin”. In Romans 1 Paul says that homosexuality is an unnatural relation which is a dishonorable passion contrary to nature, and Jude 7 describes Sodom and Gomorrah as being judged for pursuing “strange flesh”, often translated “unnatural desire”. Our recommendations agree with Paul and Jude and we quote them. WLC 139 states “The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment. . . are adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts (‘unnatural desires’ in the modern edition).” Homosexuality is

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certainly an unnatural sin and desire, and it is not the only one. “Unnatural lusts” serves as a comprehensive description of all sins that violate the seventh commandment. Unrepentant sinners who indulge unnatural lusts or desires have no place in church office. Our recommendations are clear—Christians are to flee all sexual sin and temptation, and that Jesus is a great savior who can redeem even those of us who have committed unnatural sins (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

PPL Reply: This attempted explanation of “unnatural” is not consistent with Paul’s argument in Romans 1. These comments are telling because they expose the AIC’s unwillingness to accept the Church’s historic understanding of Romans 1:26-27 and the WLC’s use of this text. Romans 1:26-27 uniquely equates homosexuality with “unnatural desires or affections.” This is the very point Paul is making — homosexual passions and acts are contrary to nature, that is, rejecting God’s creation and opposing the way God created men and women for each other sexually. The unique description of homosexuality as against nature is so transparent in Romans 1:26-27 that Larger Catechism. Q. 139 and 151 cite the text as a proof for the assertions that homosexuality is an “unnatural lust” and “against the light of nature.” For certainty in understanding the intent of the words used in the Larger Catechism, look at the Scripture texts the Westminster Divines reference!

. . .

Standards for Ordination

Q17: What about those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections?

A: A lot of EPCers have asked why our committee has not used this language, especially since it seems so simple and clear. But we think it’s very unclear and either doesn’t do anything at all or does far too much. “Unnatural desires” include homosexuality, but also includes much more than that (WLC 139). If “profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires” means “indulged and unrepentant”, then Amen! We agree that those who indulge in and are unrepentant of unnatural desires should not be officers of the church. However, if that’s what that phrase means, then it doesn’t actually address the issue before the EPC since we are talking about people who *are* penitent and who *don’t* indulge same-sex attraction. If “profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires” means something like “sin nature that continues to exist or ongoing temptation we face or besetting weakness we experience” then it bars literally every human ever, besides Christ, from ordained office. This understanding is contrary to scripture, our confessional system, and the redemptive message of the gospel. All believers have remaining sin whose desires are contrary to nature and scripture, and who therefore fail to perfectly keep God’s law (WCF 6.5, 13.2; WLC 78, 149), and all believers face ongoing temptation (WLC 195) and vulnerabilities to sin and temptation (WLC 27-28, 45, 81). So either “profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires” doesn’t solve anything or it dangerously undermines the EPC’s biblical confession of faith.

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PPL Reply: The AIC asserts, “We agree that those who indulge in and are unrepentant of unnatural desires should not be officers of the church.” If this is true, then logically the AIC would not be recommending that same sex attracted persons be ordained. If one is experiencing ongoing same-sex desires, then they are unrepentant and indulging a desire that should be killed and overcome by the power of the Spirit.

The AIC falsely states that “‘unnatural desires’ include homosexuality but also includes much more than that (WLC 139).” Yes, there are many sexual violations of the 7th commandment listed in WLC 139. But when it mentions “sodomy and unnatural lusts” it cites Romans 1:26-27 and Leviticus 20:15-16 (homosexuality and bestiality) as the “unnatural lusts” to which the Divines are referring. They do not include all the other sexual sins under the rubric of unnatural, but only these two sins which violate the creation order of sex between a man and a woman.

Claiming that a high standard of ordination that excludes celibate homosexuals would disqualify “every human ever” is a red herring. The Bible names a unique kind of sin called “unnatural” which is homosexuality. In Scripture, homosexuality is described as an abomination. Prior to the last 50 years, the Church has never knowingly ordained a homosexual person — this is because he or she has deep-seated sexual problems, cannot relate properly to men or women, cannot be an example to the flock, and is not above reproach in the sight of God nor the Christian community. There are many other ongoing sins that may disqualify from ordination, but homosexuality is intrinsically disqualifying as shameful passions contrary to nature. Persons with homosexuality in their backgrounds but have marked freedom from and have thus overcome this sin pattern, may be considered for ordination — but again, not someone with ongoing same sex attraction.

Question 17 in the AIC FAQ is challenging the wording of the Pacific Northwest Presbytery overture to the General Assembly. This critique is out of place in a document whose stated purpose is to address questions about the AIC recommendations. An explanation of the language used in the Pacific Northwest Presbytery overture can be found at <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/FAQ-on-the-PNW-Overture.pdf>.

. . .

Q18: Shouldn't the EPC have higher standards for leadership?

A: Yes. The standards are higher for those who would serve as officers in the church and the examinations for TEs are most detailed and strenuous. Unrepentant sinful behavior and unrepented lusts disqualify candidates for office in the EPC. Our examining bodies must use wisdom to ask and understand whether the individual seeking ordination is dealing repentantly with lust, desires, vulnerabilities and propensities or embracing, accommodating or making peace with those. This is precisely why we are recommending that the *Book of Government* be amended to include more specific character qualifications.

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PPL Reply: The AIC’s declaration that high standards are a certainty is unreliable. We all should hope that all Sessions and Presbyteries utilize “detailed and strenuous” examinations of candidates for ordination of all officers (TE, RE, Deacon). However, commissioners who will be considering these matters at the 46th General Assembly do not have this as a guarantee now — and certainly will not expect it to be the case if the GA approves the consideration of same sex attracted homosexual candidates for ordination.

. . .

Q19: Why don’t your recommendations specifically provide language to amend the *Book of Government* to allow or deny the ordination of individuals experiencing same-sex attraction?

A: Temptations accompany Christians their whole life, confronting both the immature and the mature. To profess the ongoing temptation to same-sex lust is to profess the reality of indwelling sin, bodily weakness and vulnerabilities, the fallenness of our world, and the providence of God in our experience of temptation. The existence and persistence of same-sex sexual temptation is not in itself sin or a sign of spiritual immaturity. If a candidate’s corrupt sin nature means there remain “old self” sin vulnerabilities (here, SSA), but they are **not** indulging in it (aren’t acting upon it physically or mentally), **are** repentant of it (have turned from it to the Lord), **are** mortifying it (are putting it to death by engaging in practices that seek to reduce any vulnerability they have to it), **are not** entering into it (don’t act on their vulnerability), **are** fleeing it (don’t put themselves in risky situations), **are** mourning it (see it as something to grieve), and **are** relying on the grace and strength of the Lord to have it replaced more and more by their new self in Christ, then they may be considered for ordination. To deny ordination to someone solely on the grounds of the experience of possessing a sin nature, ongoing temptation, and bodily weakness contradicts both scripture and our confessional standards.

PPL Reply: The AIC was charged by the 44th General Assembly to address the matter of same sex attraction (homosexuality) and ordination. The AIC does this by recommending a change in our ordination standards through “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries” in its proposed Pastoral Letter. A Pastoral Letter has *no constitutional authority*. Yet if passed, that “Counsel” will grant permission to ordaining bodies to ordain those presently experiencing same sex attraction.

. . .

Q20: Is someone who experiences same-sex attraction able to be above reproach?

A: Yes. Officers of Christ’s church must absolutely be above reproach! They must be blameless — not marked by vice, able to withstand accusations of sinful character and behavior. This is why we recommend the *Book of Government* be amended to say that officers **must** “conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct” and that to “be qualified for office, they must affirm the

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sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions.” To be above reproach is about how one addresses their sin nature, the temptations they face, and weaknesses they experience. Someone who experiences same-sex attraction can be blameless by their repentance and mortification of sin, fleeing temptation, and resting on Christ’s strength.

PPL Reply: A person is “blameless” not by repenting of and mortifying sin, by fleeing temptation or by resting on God’s strength. It comes only and completely by accepting Jesus as Savior. The AIC has elevated intent without change as the animating concept of being “above reproach.” The fact of the matter is that there are multitudes of believers who have been delivered from their homosexual past. Those are the kinds of persons who would qualify for ordination, not someone with ongoing experience of homosexual desires (SSA). A person freed from those old sin patterns by the Spirit would certainly be considered by God and the Christian community as being “beyond reproach.”

. . .

Q21: If someone experiences a latent propensity towards same-sex attraction, is a court of the church obliged to ordain them?

A: No. No one has the right to church office. We are addressing eligibility for consideration for ordination, not rights. No Church court is required to take a position on a candidate it feels is unbiblical or imprudent.

PPL Reply: Why would an official committee of the EPC propose a position or policy that immediately creates division within the denomination and confusion for Sessions and Presbyteries? The Bible warns against this — see Romans 16:17-20, 1 Corinthians 1:10-31, and 1 Corinthians 12:25-26. With the passage of the Pastoral Letter and changes to the Book of Order and Position Paper, the EPC will enter a dangerous place. Remember that the Pastoral Letter creates a process. If at any point of that process the ordination candidate who “experiences a latent propensity towards same sex attraction” believes that he was not treated in a way consistent with that process (for example, the candidate concludes that the ordaining court did not “exercise their authority in a spirit of gentleness, compassion and understanding”) he will be in a position to bring substantial public pressure on the church or presbytery. How will the church court protect and defend itself in public? Whether or not the ministerial exception applies, the reputational harm and dissension within the presbytery and church could result in great damage.

. . .

Q22: How should candidates and courts handle disclosures of same-sex attraction?

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A: We advise those Christians who experience same-sex attraction to use discretion in disclosing their experience to others, normally only to those who can give good private counsel or to those who would be edified by their largely fruitful struggle. Since we believe, in most cases, “coming out of the closet publicly” is not helpful to others, we advise against that. Ordaining courts **must examine** all candidates in their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth. All candidates **must affirm** the sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions. If a candidate has publicly disclosed that they experience same-sex attraction, the ordaining court **must ensure** that the candidate meets the biblical and confessional standards outlined in the Position Paper and Pastoral Letter.

PPL Reply: If same sex attraction is no different from every other sin, why is it necessary to “use discretion in disclosing their experience to others?” Is this an encouragement to deceive those conducting examination of candidates for office? This reiterates our concern noted in our response to Q18 above.

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Why Homosexual Desire Is Evil

*By Sharon Beekmann
TE, Presbytery of the West*

Before I became a Christian I worked for many years as a psychotherapist. It was the late 1970s and half of my psychotherapy practice consisted of gay and lesbian judges, doctors, lawyers, and musicians. Some realized they were same sex attracted (SSA) in their early to late teens, others later in life. Some were bisexual, even married with children, while others were single. Some of them suffered from psychiatric disorders such as clinical depression and/or anxiety.

One of my clients was 32-year-old Daniel, who entered therapy because the man he loved had rejected him. He grieved the loss and struggled with a deep sense of unworthiness. Daniel responded well to therapy, but two years later he called to say he'd been raped in a bath house and AIDS had ravaged his body. I last saw him in his apartment. After we talked, he shuffled across the room and sat down at the polished black piano in the corner. He silently fingered the keys, then tenderly pressed one and then another to play a simple tune. He turned, stared at me, and said, "I can't change who I am. I shouldn't have gone to the bath house, but how can loving someone be wrong?"

At the time, I couldn't answer him. Christ had not yet saved me. The Bible was not my standard to determine right and wrong, truth from error. Daniel and I relied on personal experiences, friends, and the culture when making moral judgements. We believed that sexual preferences were personal, private decisions. I was heterosexual, others were SSA. I couldn't account for the tragic downside of the homosexual lifestyle: AIDS, ER visits for rectal bleeding, fractured families, deep self-centeredness, personal degradation, histrionics, and promiscuity. I saw them as desperate people in need of compassion and help.

After Christ saved me in spring 1987, gay and lesbian clients abruptly left my practice because they assumed I would judge them. Many years later — after seminary and EPC ordination as a Teaching Elder — I served on the EPC National Leadership Team (NLT). I joined the committee charged with writing the EPC Position Paper on Human Sexuality. I summarized social science research and Christian books on SSA and gender dysphoria. We wrote a position paper that was compassionate and upheld standards of the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).

APA and the Social Sciences

The American Psychological Association (APA) stated, "There is no consensus among social scientists as to the cause of gay and lesbian SSA. It may be genetic, hormonal, developmental, social, and/or cultural. Nature and nurture are relevant."¹ Social science research affirms this conclusion, but the research is seriously flawed. Most researchers relied on small samples of

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SSA men from urban areas and studies could not be replicated. Meanwhile, militant homosexuals fought to change American beliefs, attitudes, and laws — often inflating data to advance their cause. Today, conventional wisdom is that homosexuality and lesbianism is like skin color: a condition of birth that cannot be changed. Furthermore, SSA is now included on the normal spectrum of human sexuality and represents natural human diversity.² Those who argue that homosexuality is intrinsic to identity see Christians as “flat earth people” — which means their position is indefensible given the scientific evidence.

Identity

A segment of American popular culture believes that identity is a social construct. People can and should define themselves based on their sense and experience of themselves. I recently talked with 18-year-old Ashleigh, who told me she first dressed in boys’ clothes to look like her friends. One day she realized that she was a boy. She said, “It’s who I am! My parents must accept that.” In Ashleigh’s mind, her new identity was the core of her being. Similarly, many homosexuals believe their sexual orientation is the cornerstone of identity. They crave acceptance and fight hard when challenged. They blame family, friends, and especially Christians for condemning and thus causing their angst and anger.

Daniel asked, “How can loving someone be wrong?” The truth is that sinners cannot answer that question when they are separated from Jesus and ignorant of Scripture. In fact, Christ establishes our identity and enables us through Word and Spirit to understand what is required of us. Jesus redeems the ruin of sin, and no sin is too fixed or beyond His reach, including homosexuality and lesbianism. The Bible is God’s standard. Jesus is our North Star, and His Word is our map as He takes us to the other side.

Why is homosexuality reprehensible to God, more so than heterosexual lusts and infidelities? The Genesis creation account describes God’s design for His creation and His creatures. God created an orderly universe — one with boundaries. He spoke creation into being and separated light from darkness, sky from earth, water from the ground. He created vegetation and animals, each after their own kind and with the ability to reproduce and perpetuate themselves. God created a fruitful universe, then He created the first two humans, male and female.

The Cultural Mandate

God commanded:

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28).

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God designed Adam and Eve to fulfill this mandate. He created them in His image for a personal relationship with Him. He united the material physical body with the immaterial spirit, heart, mind, spirit, and heart to enable them to freely communicate with holy God and one another. God inspired, empowered, and equipped the couple to love God and each other, to have sexual relations, produce children, and create families. So designed, the man and woman worshipped holy God and fulfilled His mandate to be God's representatives on earth.

After the Fall, sin entered the world. But one sin in particular angered God. Homosexuality shamelessly flaunted God's mandate and design for humanity. He deemed it unnatural along with bestiality and incest. In judgment, He gave them over to intense, unnatural lusts for the same sex (Romans 1:24–27). God hates all sin, but this one strikes at God's core intent for His created order.

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.” (Leviticus 18:22–23; also see 20:13).

Ordination of Celibate SSA Men and Women

Our culture has normalized sexual practices condemned in Scripture. Sodomy, once regarded as criminal and perverse, is now widely accepted and celebrated as the Supreme Court has endorsed gay marriage. I hear people say, “Homosexual lust is no worse than heterosexual lust. We all struggle.” Actually, it's not the same. EPC elders need to encourage SSA people to resist homosexual fantasies and longings by turning and standing with Christ and His Word. Christ will redeem them! The intensity of this struggle suggests that demons inspire SSA, as they do other sexual sins. Satan wants to destroy the Church, which means that leaders and all believers must stand with Christ — who defeated Satan at the cross. For the church to counsel homosexuals that their desires are normal, harmless, and not sinful will never help them to overcome and win this spiritual battle.

After I migrated to a Christian psychotherapy practice, I counseled a young woman with two small children whose husband had an affair with a gay man. He received counseling at Grace Abounds, a Biblically based counseling center. Shocked, angered, and grief-stricken, she asked me, “Even if he agrees to come back, can he change?”

I replied, “Yes, in Christ he can, but he must repent of his homosexual desires before holy God, who he has deeply offended. He must also repent of the affair. Then he might be able to see how cruelly he's treated you and your children and ask for forgiveness.” His counselor at Grace Abounds agreed. A year later, the couple reconciled.

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Recently, I watched a video of an early interview of Sam Allberry about his book *Is God Anti-Gay* which I read when writing the Position Paper on Human Sexuality. In the video, Allberry taught that homosexual attraction was not sinful and encouraged Christians to show compassion for their struggle. I thought to myself, “*he’s content with being gay, and he’s influencing pastors to accept that SSA is comparable to heterosexual lusts. His SSA should disqualify him from church leadership.*”

Allberry’s affair or inappropriate relationship with another man did not surprise me because he denied the evil that was haunting him. He experienced no urgency and saw no need to resist these sinful desires. When same-sex attraction is not considered evil, we make a home for it in our hearts. Evil disguised as good is difficult to discern, but once seen and rejected, Christians can cling to Jesus as His transforming power makes all things new. This is the gospel.

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation>

² Stanton L. Jones and Mark A. Yarhouse. *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church’s Moral Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000) 24-29, 48-51.

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Calibrating a Dial or Rendering a Verdict? How the AIC Improperly Frames the Question

*By David Weber
TE, New River Presbytery*

The current discussion surrounding ordination and same-sex attraction has largely been framed in terms of degree. How much homosexual desire is too much? At what point does temptation become disqualifying? Is there a tolerable level of struggle that may be present in a candidate for office? And how might we discern that level?

This framing, however, asks the wrong question. The issue before us is not one of degree, but of kind. The question cannot be “*How much* homosexual desire is compatible with ordination?” But rather, “*Is* homosexual desire compatible with ordination?” This is not a dial to be calibrated but a verdict to be rendered.

The Problem with a “Dial” Approach

The Ad Interim Committee (AIC) report has attempted to address homosexual desire and ordination by distinguishing between various levels:

1. Desires that lead to sinful behavior.
2. Desires that lead to lustful temptations.
3. Desires that are present but are not repented of.
4. Desires that are present but are repented of.

In doing so, the AIC rightly excludes certain levels of temptation as incompatible with ordination. Yet it stops short of excluding homosexual desire altogether. The report allows for candidates currently experiencing homosexual desires so long as this desire is resisted and repented of. But why have they drawn the line there? Why not require our candidates for ordination to be completely free of homosexual sin?

Ostensibly, the committee is concerned that requiring complete freedom from homosexual sin is demanding a kind of perfection that we do not require in other areas of the Christian life. And this apparent concern is understandable. Our Reformed theology rightly affirms the ongoing struggle with sin even in the most mature of believers. Sanctification is progressive and life-long. Even the apostle Paul in Romans 7 speaks of his continuing battle against sin.

On the surface, then, the AIC’s caution seems wise. To require the total absence of homosexual desire appears to set the bar too high. If we require the complete absence of sin in one area, what will keep us from requiring it in other areas of life as well?

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But this reasoning depends entirely on the assumption that all sinful desires belong to the same category. As such sins differ only in intensity, not in kind.

However, that is clearly not the case with homosexual sin — and the AIC knows it.

A Question of Kind, Not Degree

Scripture and our Confessional standards give us reason to distinguish between types of sin, not merely their severity (WLC 150,151). In Romans 1:24–27, homosexual desire and behavior are described as “against nature.” This is not merely another example in a list of sins. It is presented as a particularly vivid expression of rebellion against God as Creator. Similarly, Jude 7 speaks of sexual immorality that pursues what is “unnatural.” The language is not incidental. It highlights a violation of the created order itself.

The Westminster Larger Catechism, in Question 139, follows this Biblical pattern by grouping “sodomy” and “unnatural lusts” together, drawing on these very texts. What unites these sins is not simply their intensity, but their character. By their very kind they transgress the boundaries established in creation.

This category of unnatural lusts includes sexual desire and behavior in the following categories:

- Man with man (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13; Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10; Jude 7)
- Woman with woman (Romans 1:26)
- Human with animal (Leviticus 18:23 and 20:15–16; Exodus 22:19; Deuteronomy 27:21)

Each represents a departure from the created design of one man and one woman. These are not distortions of a natural end; they are rejections of that end altogether. And are completely antithetical to God’s created design. It is to go after flesh that is not *fit* to proper created order nor purposes. As such they represent the height of disobedience against God as Creator. This is what makes them “unnatural.”

Natural Desires and Their Corruption

By contrast, other sins are corruptions of something good and natural.

- Sexual desire between a man and a woman may be misdirected into fornication or adultery, yet it still corresponds to a God-ordained end.
- The enjoyment of food may become gluttony, yet eating itself is a gift.
- Anger may become sinful, yet there is such a thing as righteous anger.
- The use of alcohol may be abused, but Scripture speaks of it as a blessing.

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In each of these cases, the desire itself has a proper and lawful fulfillment. The problem lies in its misdirection or excess. But this is not true of homosexual desire.

There is no circumstance in which such desire finds a God-blessed end. It cannot be rightly ordered, only denied. It is not the overextension of something good, but a movement away from the good itself. That is a difference not of degree, but of kind.

The Implications for Ordination

If this distinction holds, then it follows that homosexual desire cannot be treated like other ongoing struggles with sin.

Ordination requires that a man be above reproach, an example to the flock, and sound in life as well as doctrine. The question is not whether he is entirely free from sin but whether, by God's grace, his life accords with God's design in a way that is exemplary to the flock.

When it comes to natural desires, we do not disqualify a man for possessing them, even though they may be occasions for temptation. A single man is not required to repent of his desire for a wife even though it might lead to lustful thoughts. A man is not required to repent of enjoying a meal or a drink, even though it might lead to gluttonous indulgence or drunkenness. A preacher is not required to repent of desiring to make his living from the gospel even though it might lead to a love of money.

Why not? Each of these desires could give rise to sin. But they are not disqualifying in and of themselves because these desires have natural and lawful ends.

But if a desire has no lawful end. If it is, by its nature, disordered. Then its presence is itself a moral issue, not merely its expression. That is the case with homosexual desire.

An Inconsistency in Practice

It is worth noting that even those who advocate for a "degree" approach implicitly recognize this distinction of kind.

The AIC insist that homosexual desire must be repented of, even when not acted upon. Yet they do not say the same about heterosexual desire. Why not?

Because they know that heterosexual desire, in itself, is not sinful. It is part of God's good design.

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This reveals an underlying inconsistency. On the one hand, the AIC report treats homosexual desire as sinful. On the other hand, it is treated as if it were simply like any other sin that may be present in an officer's life to a certain degree.

Both cannot be true at once.

If homosexual desire is indeed a distinct kind of sin. If it is one that is “against nature.” Then it cannot be evaluated on a sliding scale. Its presence cannot be normalized as one struggle among many.

The Danger of the “Middle Way”

History offers a sobering lesson here. When a church adopts a “dial” approach to issues of this kind, the dial rarely remains fixed. It tends to move up. Some might say the dial becomes a ratchet.

Standards loosen over time. Categories expand. What was once tolerated reluctantly becomes accepted openly and even celebrated.

The AIC report, by introducing gradations and gray areas, creates precisely this dynamic. It attempts to hold a middle position, but in doing so, it establishes a framework that can be exploited.

Even now, there are those who would use such a framework to argue for broader acceptance, including positions associated with “Side B” theology and candidates such as Greg Johnson. To suggest otherwise is to ignore history and to deny man's depravity. The EPC is not especially sanctified, with no temptation toward accommodation with the world. If the mechanism for accommodation is created it will be exploited. If the issue is treated as one of degree, the debate will not end. It will only shift to new thresholds and new definitions.

A Clearer Path

What, then, is needed? Clarity.

If homosexual desire is a form of “unnatural” desire, then it must be addressed as such. The church must decide whether it will accept or reject it as compatible with ordained office. A verdict must be rendered.

This stance is not about demanding perfection. It is about recognizing the nature of the issue before us.

The proposed overture seeks to provide that clarity:

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Persons eligible for church office shall conform in heart, mind, and conduct to God's design for human sexuality... Those who profess, persist in, or identify with unnatural desires or affections... are disqualified from holding office in Christ's Church.

This language does not introduce a novel standard. It simply applies a longstanding Biblical and confessional distinction.

Conclusion: Switch, Not Dial

In the end, the question is straightforward. Will we treat this issue as a matter of degree, to be measured and managed? Or will we recognize it as a matter of kind, requiring a clear judgment? A dial invites endless adjustment. But ordination is not a matter of calibration, it is a matter of qualification.

The church must determine not how much, but what is present. For the sake of faithfulness, clarity, and the peace of the church, this issue cannot become a sliding scale. It must be one or the other. In bounds or out of bounds. Our yes must be yes, and our no must be no.

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Giving Up on the Gospel

*By Peter Larson
TE, Midwest Presbytery*

During a recent meeting of Midwest Presbytery, a teaching elder stood up to speak against a proposed overture that would forbid the ordination of homosexuals who claim to be celibate. He argued that since many of us in the EPC are addicted to pornography, it would be wrong and hypocritical to deny ordination to those who struggle with same-sex attraction.

No one denied this statement. By our silence, we seemed to concede that it was true, or at least true enough to require no rebuttal. It was one of those moments when the words of Jesus (so often used in this debate), shame us into silence: “*Let he who is without sin cast the first stone*” (John 8:7).

No one is perfect. All of us are sinners. Who are we to judge? Why should we focus so narrowly on the sin of homosexuality while ignoring other sins? By condemning homosexuals, aren't we being exactly like the man who saw the speck in his brother's eye but not the log in his own?

By now, all of these arguments have become very familiar. Instead of dealing with the issue before us — the ordination of celibate homosexuals — they deflect blame back on their opponents, accusing them of being pharisees: harsh and hypocritical, eager to cast the first stone.

The real question, however, is whether we have given up on the gospel. If you have truly experienced the grace of God, *it changes you*. In Christ, we are no longer slaves of sin. In Christ, we are a new creation. In Christ, we have been washed clean and made new. In Christ, “God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves” (Colossians 1:13).

At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior ... (Titus 3:3-6)

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in

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the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

These Scriptures speak of a new life, distinctly different from the old life. In fact, it is so different that Jesus spoke of dying to self and being reborn, what we call regeneration. If it is true that many of us in the EPC are hopelessly addicted to porn, it gives a lie to the gospel and denies the transforming power of Jesus Christ. If it is true that some people are born with homosexual desires and can never change, then the gospel is a hoax and a fraud; the best we can do is make peace with our sinful nature.

It is true that no one is perfect. In the words of Martin Luther, we are *simul justis et peccator* — at the same time justified and sinners. Our sanctification will only be complete when Christ returns to take us home. However, to argue that gross and heinous sin is normative and acceptable in the Christian life makes a lie of the gospel. The Christian story is the story of men and women who were violent, drunk, godless, wicked, sexually immoral, and demon-possessed — but they were transformed by the grace of God.

While it is true that we can expect too much sanctification in this life, the danger is we can expect too little. If we believe that change is impossible, and sin is inevitable, we are denying the power of Jesus Christ who cast out demons and made lepers clean. Do we truly believe in the amazing grace of God that changes sinners, or have we settled for something less than the gospel?

No one is perfect. When you surrender to this kind of logic, it becomes an excuse for unholiness and immorality. According to this logic, anyone who attempts to set a standard of holiness in the church is a hypocrite and a pharisee. It is a logic that normalizes sin and makes it permissible. This is not God's standard at all but the standard of Satan.

Jesus died on the cross to save sinners. But the goal of our salvation is holiness: a life that is pure, God-honoring, and free from sin. The church is the bride of Christ and His purpose is, "... to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain, wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (John 5:26-27).

When the church becomes lax, when we lower our moral standards and knowingly ordain men and women who are still enslaved by sinful lust and homosexual desire, the result is not surprising: you end up with a church that is ungodly, unholy, and impure. When we make allowances for sin, we are working against God's purpose to create a radiant church without stain, wrinkle, or any other blemish.

Jesus said to the woman caught in the act of adultery, "Neither do I condemn you." However, He also said to her, "Go and from now on sin no more." Unfortunately, those who advocate the

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ordination of homosexuals have ignored this command. They quote Jesus' word of grace while neglecting His clear command to live a changed and holy life.

As the church of Christ, we must speak both of these words: grace and truth, knowing that the gospel has the power to wash us clean and make us new. We must not, in the name of grace, allow sin and unholiness to creep into the church and its ordained leaders. As Jesus said to the Apostle Peter, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (John 13:8).

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A Moderator's Meanderings

*By Gordon Miller
Moderator, 34th General Assembly*

“Meanderings” definition: Rambling or passing from one topic to another.

I hope you find the following collection of articles, quotes, quips, and Scripture to be informative, edifying, and thought-provoking. This information is not as thorough or detailed as the other articles in the Plumb Line. But I hope to stimulate honest and open debate on a variety of topics and challenges facing the church — especially the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. With cultural changes coming at ever-increasing speed, all of us on the Plumb Line Editorial Board desire that believers will stand firm, rooted in Scripture. I pray that you read this content in the spirit intended: love for Christ and for each other.

Note: The views and opinions expressed here are mine alone, and do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the full Editorial Board of the Plumb Line.

Books You Might Enjoy

Confessing the Faith: A Readers' Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith
by Chad Van Dixhoorn
Banner of Truth Trust, last reprint 2024.

If you're Reformed in your faith, it's likely you are familiar with the Westminster Confession of Faith. Before being ordained you may even have had to swear your adoption of the Confession as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. The Confession's importance to Reformed doctrine demands more than a passing familiarity with what the Divines had to say. Within Reformed circles, many reviewers would suggest a great place to start in obtaining a working knowledge of the Confession is Van Dixhoorn's book. Laypersons will find it easy to read and enjoy its devotional tenor. Long recognized as an expert on the theology and history of the Assembly, the author combines historical context, the Divines' proof texts, and traditional Reformed theology to offer a great place to gain a fuller understanding of and appreciation for the Confession.

. . .

The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented
by David Steele, Curtis Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn
P&R Publishing, second edition 2014.

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Continuing with an emphasis on the Reformed faith, *The Five Points of Calvinism* is recognized as a classic Reformed resource. (Add this and R.C. Sproul's *What is Reformed Theology* to your library and you can rest easy when your neighbor wants to argue with you over free will!) I first read this book when I was new to the Reformed faith and Calvin was still some mysterious guy a lot of people seemed to dislike. It brought clarity and understanding to the main points of Calvinism and made Scripture come alive. I was able to understand God's role in bringing me to faith. What a joy it was to see how from Genesis through Revelation a God I could trust was in control. (I had already proven to myself that I was not trustworthy.) I'm now taking a class being taught by one of our Elders using this classic as the basic resource. If this book has been sitting on a shelf in your library for an extended period of time, "tolle lege" — take up and read! May your faith be as rejuvenated as mine has been by revisiting this wonderful explanation of God's amazing grace.

Articles of Interest

"EPC Teaching Elders: Church History's Inconvenient Truths"

by Helen Louis Herndon

"The Aquila Report" May 9, 2026

<https://theaquilareport.com/epc-teaching-elders-church-historys-inconvenient-truths/>

The author points out the obvious. The gay agenda has not been kind to mainline Protestant denominations. Starting down the road to homosexuals being ordained disturbs the peace and unity of the church and leads to division. If a homosexual can be ordained because his/her desires arise only infrequently, why not a pedophile? The author asks, "If the door is opened, where will it stop?" In my view, these are great questions.

. . .

"Normalizing Pedophilia: The Implication of Ordaining Men who Experience Unnatural Lust"

by Tom Hervey

"The Aquila Report" February 2, 2026

<https://theaquilareport.com/normalizing-pedophilia-the-implication-of-ordaining-men-who-experience-unnatural-lust/>

As the discussions surrounding the possible decisions the AIC might make began to percolate, I rejected arguments where the issue of pedophilia was used to criticize the AIC. Whatever their final documents might say, they would be clear enough for all of us to understand we could not possibly ordain someone sexually attracted to children. The Final Report of the AIC demonstrates I was wrong. Read the report then read Hervey's article. We cringe at the thought of such an idea and intuitively reject it. Emotionally we find such a thing abhorrent. Follow Hervey's logic and see if the AIC report doesn't allow a pedophile to be ordained who does not identify as a pedophile, does not act on such desires, regrets such desires, repents of such desires,

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does his best to mortify such desires, and only occasionally is tempted by such desires. Hervey's examples point out an obvious problem:

- “For livestock? (‘Other species attraction’)”
- “Dead bodies? (‘Other vital state attraction’)”
- “For multiple people at once? (‘Multiple people at once attraction’)”
- “Children? (‘Minor attraction’)”

The response of AIC supporters needs to be more than “No, we’d never allow for that!” I would argue that to say more would require them to use words like “heinous” and “unnatural.” Words they ignore, words their opponents use, words found in our Constitution.

• • •

“Pastor Sam Allberry Resigns From Church After Revealing ‘Inappropriate relationship with another man’”

by Staff Writer

“Protestia” May 3, 2026

<https://protestia.com/2026/05/03/pastor-sam-allberry-resigns-from-church-after-revealing-inappropriate-relationship-with-another-man/>

Read this article in conjunction with Peter Larson’s article in this edition of the Plumb Line, “Searching for Unicorns, The Sad Case of Sam Allberry” on page **XX** and the above two articles, and you can see the Pandora’s Box of problems we will unleash if we follow the AIC’s suggestions. Sam Allberry was the poster boy for those advocating for allowing the ordination of those dealing with same sex attraction. Allberry would seem to have been able to check all the boxes required by the AIC. Yet it was necessary for him to resign from his church for an inappropriate relationship with another man. Larson reports on another Christian leader, Alan Chambers, who has also failed in his struggle with same sex attraction, leading to his arrest for soliciting someone he thought was a 14-year-old boy. Turns out it was the cops. These three articles in Meanderings point out the possible dangers found in the AIC Report. Should we not demand a full explanation from those advocating for acceptance of the Report why these dangers are unfounded? For a fuller explanation as to why the AIC position does not work, see Teaching Elder David Weber’s article in this edition, “Calibrating a Dial or Rendering a Verdict? How the AIC Improperly Frames the Question.”

Quotes

“You cannot change what you refuse to confront.” —Unknown.

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“Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm.” —Winston Churchill.

• • •

“Wisdom begins in wonder.” —Socrates.

Humor

“But the fact that some geniuses were laughed at does not imply that all who are laughed at are geniuses. They laughed at Columbus, they laughed at Fulton, they laughed at the Wright Brothers. But they also laughed at Bozo the Clown.” (Carl Sagan)

• • •

“What do you call a woman who knows where her husband is at all times? A widow!”
(Unknown)

• • •

“I hate being placed on committees. They are always having meetings at which half are absent and the rest late.” (Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr.)

Personal Observations

We can strive to serve the culture, or we can strive to serve God. If we first strive to serve God, we will be enabled to serve the culture. If we first strive to serve the culture, we will distance ourselves from God. We all must choose.

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Searching for Unicorns: The Sad Case of Sam Allberry

*By Peter Larson
TE, Midwest Presbytery*

In ancient times people searched for the unicorn, a mythical creature with the body of a horse and a spiraling horn on its forehead. Of course, no unicorn was ever found because unicorns don't exist in real life.

In recent years, evangelicals have searched for a different kind of unicorn. With great zeal and determination, they have searched for a homosexual candidate who could be ordained to ministry in the church. To qualify for ordination, such a candidate had to be celibate, repentant, not engaging in homosexual lust, making progress in sanctification, and not promoting a gay lifestyle or identity.

In the person of Sam Allberry, progressives believed they had found their unicorn. Raised in England, Allberry became aware that he was attracted to men when he was 15 years old. At the age of 18, he became a Christian. Although attracted to men, Allberry drew a distinction between attraction and behavior, using the term "Same Sex Attraction" (SSA) to define the difference between homosexual behavior and homosexual desire. According to this view, homosexual attraction is not in itself a sin and is therefore not disqualifying for ordination.

As an author and speaker, Allberry quickly rose to prominence in the evangelical world, working with Ravi Zacharias and writing for the Gospel Coalition, *Desiring God*, and *Living Out*. He served as a fellow of the Keller Center for Cultural Apologetics and wrote numerous books, including *Is God Anti-Gay?* and *What God Has to Say About our Bodies*.

Along with others in the Gospel Coalition, Allberry advocated a "third way" that stressed empathy for sinners while still upholding Biblical standards of marriage and sexuality. Third way advocates believed that in order to influence culture, evangelicals had to shed the image of being hateful and intolerant toward homosexuals and become more winsome and welcoming.

In 2023, Allberry was hired as an associate pastor at Immanuel Nashville Church where he served alongside such prominent leaders as Russell Moore, Ray Ortlund, Gavin Ortlund, Barnabas Piper, and T.J. Tims. At long last, the church had found its unicorn: a homosexual person eligible to serve in ministry.

However, the rise of Sam Allberry was followed by a sudden and spectacular fall. In January 2026, the elders at Immanuel Church received information that Allberry had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with another man. In a statement to the church, the Immanuel elders stated: "... while the relationship did not go as far as it could have, Sam's conduct constituted a

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serious breach of trust and a failure to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel.” The elders unanimously decided that Allberry was “disqualified from gospel ministry” and accepted his resignation.

The resignation sent shockwaves through the Gospel Coalition. Even more shocking, however, was the revelation that Allberry had been investigated two years earlier.

“In Spring of 2024, Immanuel Elders were made aware that Pastor Sam Allberry engaged in an inappropriate relationship with an adult man in 2022,” Immanuel elders stated. “This relationship concluded prior to Sam being called as a Pastor at Immanuel in 2023.” In that previous investigation, Immanuel elders concluded that, “... though Sam’s conduct was unwise, it did not rise to the level of disqualification.” However, when new information about the relationship came to light in 2026, the investigation was reopened, resulting in Allberry’s resignation.

Did Allberry engage in a physical relationship with another man? Was it sexual lust or something more? We are left to wonder. However, the fact remains that it took two years and multiple investigations before Allberry was forced to resign from Immanuel. Clearly, the church had a huge interest in trying to keep Allberry on staff until it finally became impossible.

In the wake of the scandal, Allberry resigned from serving as a canon theologian for the Anglican Church in North America. Also, the Gospel Coalition announced that it would remove all of Allberry’s articles from its website, as well as episodes of the podcast for pastors that he co-hosted. Desiring God also removed Allberry’s content from its website; the Living Out website still includes his material.

Although they were quick to distance themselves from Allberry, these evangelical organizations offered no apology for having promoted Allberry and provided him with a major platform. By trying to soften the church’s approach to sodomy, these organizations have contributed to the “queering” of the church and the effort to normalize homosexuality. With the Allberry scandal, that project that is now thoroughly discredited.

The List Grows Longer

While evangelicals were still reeling from Allberry’s disqualification, another scandal broke involving a prominent Christian leader. Alan Chambers, former president of Exodus International, was arrested May 19 in Orange County, Fla., by undercover police for exchanging sexual messages with someone he thought was a 14-year-old boy. Chambers was charged with solicitation of a minor and for allegedly paying for sexual favors from male prostitutes.

As President of Exodus International, Chambers gained national notoriety for promoting “conversion therapy” to homosexuals who wanted to change their gay orientation. The Exodus

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ministry disbanded in 2013, and Chambers apologized for promoting sexual change that “stigmatized” people. In his apology, Chambers said his Christian ministry had harmed the people it meant to help.

As Christians, we should never rejoice at the downfall of a brother or sister in Christ. What happened to Allberry and Chambers is sad and lamentable. Nevertheless, the church should learn from this experience. The lesson is simple: a person struggling with unnatural, homosexual desire should not be ordained to ministry in the church, whether they claim to be celibate or not.

Does this mean that a person who has experienced homosexual attraction in the past should never be ordained to ministry? No. I have several friends who experienced same-sex attraction in their youth, but who are now happily married with children and serving effectively in ministry. Delivered from unnatural desires, they are a testimony to the transforming power of the gospel: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The difference, however, is that they are no longer struggling with same sex attraction: their homosexual desire is *past tense, not present tense*. The most basic requirement for ordination is that a pastor be spiritually healthy, otherwise he poses a risk to himself and to others. A doctor who is battling a serious infection should not be performing surgery on his or her patients, no matter how skilled he may be. In the same way, a person struggling with ongoing homosexual desire should not be ordained to ministry.

The scandal is not that Sam Allberry engaged in a homosexual relationship; the scandal is that Immanuel Church was aware of the issue for two years and did nothing about it. All the red flags were ignored by a church that refused to acknowledge the clear and present danger. Allberry’s downfall was an accident waiting to happen, enabled by those who should have known better.

Because the truth is that unicorns do not exist.

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AIC Recommendation Create Hidden Legal and Financial Risks: This Is What Ruling Elders Have Not Been Told

*By Yvonne Chapman
RE, Central South Presbytery
and Robert Flores
RE, Presbytery of the East*

If the General Assembly adopts the recommendations of the Ad-Interim Committee (AIC) to permit the ordination of celibate homosexuals, it will have profound legal and financial consequences for churches in the EPC. These concerns are not addressed in the AIC final report or in any of the proposed documents that will be presented during the 46th General Assembly. In this article, we will examine the hidden costs and consequences of accepting the AIC recommendations. This article is for information only and does not constitute legal advice; always consult a qualified attorney for advice specific to your church.

Ruling Elders, in particular, must be mindful of our fiduciary duties to our congregations and our responsibility to perform due diligence when considering the business of governance in our Sessions, Presbyteries, and on the floor of the General Assembly.

We hope all Ruling Elders will become aware of the repercussions of the AIC recommendations which may expose your church to costly litigation. As fellow Ruling Elders, we want to inform you of the ramifications of potential lawsuits and harm to the reputation of your church and to the EPC.

We further hope that all will take to heart the admonition to “avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless.”² Even if you think the AIC recommendations are appropriate, remember your brothers and sisters in Christ. Think about *all* the churches in the EPC and consider the ethics of creating a divisive situation that can put any of our churches, their membership, and their missionaries in legal and financial jeopardy.

Consequences due to erosion of the ministerial exception doctrine

For decades the United States Supreme Court has provided protection to religious organizations through what it calls the *ministerial exception doctrine*. This legal protection falls under the First Amendment’s *establishment* and *free exercise* provisions³ and prevents the State and the courts from interfering with an employment relationship between churches or religious associations and their ministers and other ministerial employees; the ministerial exception pertains to and protects the internal governance of the church.⁴ The Supreme Court has stated that:

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Requiring a church to accept or retain an unwanted minister, or punishing a church for failing to do so, intrudes upon more than a mere employment decision. Such action interferes with the internal governance of the church, depriving the church of control over the selection of those who will personify its beliefs. By imposing an unwanted minister, the state infringes the Free Exercise Clause, which protects a religious group's right to shape its own faith and mission through its appointments. According to the state the power to determine which individuals will minister to the faithful also violates the Establishment Clause, which prohibits government involvement in such ecclesiastical decisions.⁵

Due to developments in the secular culture, a little over a decade ago Sessions within the EPC were tasked with updating and developing policies necessary to reinforce the ministerial exception against claims of discrimination in employment. These policies, pertaining to paid staff as well as volunteers in church ministry, were founded upon the Holy Scriptures and the Westminster Confession of Faith. At the time, these policies were founded also on positions then declared by the EPC.

Because the ministerial exception is not limited to the minister or pastor of a religious congregation⁶ but applies to all employees — as well as volunteers with ministerial roles — church policies should specify which job duties of employees or roles of volunteers fulfill a ministerial role (religious function), such as:

- Leading congregants, adults and/or children, in prayer;
- Teaching Bible studies and devotions;
- Attending and participating in church services;
- Leading worship music (song leader, musician, singer, adult and children choir directors, etc.);
- Volunteers and leaders of Vacation Bible School and other children's ministry activities;
- Evangelical outreach to the community; and
- Otherwise carrying out the religious mission of the church.

In order to fortify the ministerial exception, clearly developed church policies and handbooks will include descriptions of these ministerial roles in employment contracts, acknowledged by the employee, and will require staff and volunteers to sign a statement of faith and adhere to a code of Christian conduct as conditions of employment and participation as volunteers in church ministries.

While the civil courts traditionally decline to impose a test in determining whether a ministerial exception applies, they will consider a variety of factors in determining whether a specific position falls within the exception. Some factors considered by courts are found in the policies and practices adopted by an individual church, such as those described above.

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It may seem clear, under both the ministerial exception doctrine as well as the current EPC Constitutional documents, that an individual church decides who is or is not a suitable candidate for ordination and who it may hire or accept as volunteers in ministry.

However, if the AIC recommendations are approved by the General Assembly, it may cloud that assumption. An additional factor a court may consider in determining whether a ministerial exception applies in a particular case is the EPC's position on who may be a suitable candidate for ordination or other positions of employment or leadership within a church.

Although the AIC attempts to differentiate a repentant homosexual who claims celibacy but continues to desire relationships with the same sex from the non-abstaining practicing homosexual, the federal discrimination laws make no such distinction. Persons who identify as same-sex attracted are homosexuals. If the Assembly passes the AIC recommendations, in the eyes of the government, we are ordaining homosexuals.

Consider the following:

What happens if the EPC changes its previous position to permit the future ordination of a candidate who the church previously considered unsuitable, pursuant to the formal written policies and long-standing practices of that church? That change will likely become the basis for litigation if the church does not ordain and hire an individual who was once considered unsuitable by the EPC, but the church could now hire without violating the EPC's canon law.

What if the EPC, in the course of acknowledging progressive secular practices, established a working group which declared: Church Sessions and regional Presbyteries may consider for hiring and ordination as Pastors and Elders candidates who have continuing desires of sexual attraction to their same sex?⁷ Even if Federal law might still provide some protection, state courts might allow a Plaintiff who was not hired to bring a lawsuit and engage in discovery. And because discovery is extremely expensive and could involve time to review and produce thousands of documents, merely requiring the church, presbytery, and EPC to disclose internal documents relevant to decision making and debate to determine whether the decision in the case of the rejected applicant was merely a pretext designed to hide discrimination could bankrupt a church.

What if a majority of the voting members of the EPC approve the revised posture reflected by the working group in its publications, and amends the EPC's governing documents to permit ordination of the candidates considered unsuitable by some member churches and presbyteries?

What if an individual church declines to hire the unsuitable candidate? The candidate might be able to seek redress before the EEOC and then the Courts. [The EEOC Compliance Manual unquestionably would be referred to/used by such individuals to challenge adverse decisions.]

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What if a presbytery within the EPC declines to ordain those considered unsuitable candidates but another presbytery would permit such ordination?

Such a situation would put the EPC and presbytery at odds with each other, raising governance questions that are much more likely to be entertained by a court because the questions do not deal with religious belief, but with whether the EPC's rules are being followed by those it governs.

Can a church or a presbytery which declines to embrace the new governance within the EPC successfully defend itself against litigation brought by a candidate seeking ordination and employment? The answer to this question is that a successful defense can be determined only after the costly litigation is concluded.

What is the financial cost of this litigation, which can be (and has been) substantial; the cost to the reputation of the church, presbytery, and EPC; the cost to the membership of the church? Can EPC churches obtain reasonably priced liability insurance covering negligent selection/retention/supervision litigation? Does it stop there? Once the EPC decides that ordaining homosexuals as officers is permitted by the Holy Bible, it is a small step to have homosexual staff and volunteers in children's ministry.

The AIC's recommendations erode the ministerial exception and may expose congregations who choose not to ordain unsuitable candidates to potential liability.

As noted above, the AIC recommendations open the door not only to candidates for Teaching Elders who claim to meet its new ordination standards, but to individuals who seek employment for all other positions in a church and others who seek to serve in volunteer roles in ministry. Moreover, since the AIC changes are not definitive and the meaning of words are not capable of being understood with mathematical precision, the EPC, its presbyteries, and their member churches should prepare to consider applications from people who believe they are qualified to be hired under the AIC proposals but who are unsuitable.

Ruling Elders who believe that the AIC proposal is limited and presents an "eye of the needle" entrance to ordination or hiring must remain mindful of their fiduciary duty to recognize that, regardless of the reasons for not hiring a homosexual applicant, *a good faith decision is not a bar to litigation and legal claims once the new standard is approved.*

Simply put, a homosexual candidate who is not ordained or hired will be able to bring a complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). And if the EEOC refuses to sue the church on behalf of the candidate, the EEOC could provide the individual with a *Right to Sue Letter*. This *Letter* allows the candidate to sue the church in Federal District Court. Commissioners to the 46th General Assembly should understand that when a case is brought by

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the EEOC against an employer, the case is much more expensive because the EEOC has the benefit of limitless resources paid for by the taxpayer — not the litigant.

Employment discrimination lawsuits take years to resolve, even if settled, and can easily cost in excess of \$500,000. Church liability insurance may cover some of the cost, but the congregation will be responsible for the difference. Defense lawyers charge hourly fees and firms require payment of monthly invoices which include legal fees as well as litigation expenses.

With insurance costs already skyrocketing and insurers dropping coverage entirely, Ruling Elders have a fiduciary duty to determine whether to expose their church to these costs — costs that will be paid by funds that could be spent on foreign missions, church planting, and financial compensation for ministry staff who usually work for much less than their education and experience would command in the private sector.

Two additional hidden (unintended) consequences

1. Missionaries

For four and a half decades, the EPC has employed various means to shield the identities/assigned locations for those commissioned as missionaries to protect them and their families. This has been especially the case for those assigned to non-Christian countries, where groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, or al-Shabaab were/are present.

Ruling Elders meeting their fiduciary duty must consider the costs and risks to foreign mission staff that work in Muslim countries. If it should become known that the missionary belongs to a denomination that affirms homosexual clergy, it could expose EPC missionaries and their families — especially nationals who are already at risk from simply converting to Christianity — to heightened safety risks. These risks could result in the need to purchase additional insurance, as well as underwrite the costs to develop and initiate plans to deal with kidnappings, assaults, and arrests — along with the difficulty and legal costs should EPC missionaries be prosecuted. These are not illusory costs.

The AIC offers no evidence that it engaged missionaries over the two-year period of its work, nor that it even considered the impact of its progressive SSA recommendations on EPC missionaries' work and their families, abdicating its own fiduciary responsibility. Given this void, should the 46th GA approve the recommendations of the AIC?

2. Continuing viability of the EPC and its churches

Already, the work of the AIC has resulted in the resignation of EPC members and church withdrawals. Conclusions reached by the AIC prompted five (5) presbyteries to offer overtures⁸ in opposition to the AIC SSA recommendations. Has the AIC considered how many red line⁹

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members and churches the EPC will lose if its divisive recommendations are adopted? How many churches/presbyteries will no longer be viable?

Conclusion

If a majority of the General Assembly approves any recommendation proposed by the AIC, the churches that decline to ordain homosexuals who profess celibacy as Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon could face costly litigation. These are the churches who have long considered homosexuals unsuitable candidates because Scripture does not differentiate a practicing homosexual from a non-practicing one who continues to desire same sex relationships. These are the churches that joined the EPC when it supported their beliefs.

The AIC position will not strengthen the witness of EPC. The AIC position will not promote unity within the EPC or between presbyteries. Like a small crack in a large dam, approval of the AIC position could unleash a flood of costly litigation for the church. The reputational harm to EPC churches and presbyteries will be immense. Ruling Elders must consider whether supporting the conclusions of the AIC will build up the EPC or cause harm and damage.

¹ Yvonne Chapman (RE, Central South Presbytery) and Robert Flores (RE, Presbytery of the East) are both attorneys with litigation experience. RE Flores' law firm successfully represented defendant World Vision in the lawsuit referenced below; RE Chapman served on the Permanent Judicial Commission (PJC) from 2017-2023 as was the PJC's Moderator from 2019-2023. For more extensive bios, see <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/yvonne-chapman/> and <https://presbyterianplumbline.org/robert-flores/>

² Titus 3:9.

³ The First Amendment reads, in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the *free exercise* thereof ...".

⁴ "Freedom to select the clergy (by churches and religious associations), where no improper methods of choice are proven, we think, must now be said to have federal constitutional protection as a part of the free exercise of religion against state interference." (Parenthetical added). See *Kedroff v. St. Nicholas Cathedral of Russian Orthodox Church*, 344 U.S. 94, 116 (1952) available at <https://www.loc.gov/resource/usrep.usrep344094/?pdfPage=1>. The *ecclesiastical abstention doctrine* established in *Kedroff* evolved into the *ministerial exception doctrine* after several laws recognizing civil rights in employment were passed by Congress.

⁵ See *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, 565 U.S. 171, p. 188 (2012), a unanimous decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, available at <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/ll/usrep/usrep565/usrep565171/usrep565171.pdf>. See also *McMahon v. World Vision Inc.*, 24-3259 (August 5, 2025) available at <https://cdn.ca9.uscourts.gov/datastore/opinions/2025/08/05/24-3259.pdf> and *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. 732 (2020) available at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/19-267_1an2.pdf.

⁶ See *Hosanna-Tabor*, p. 190.

⁷ "Additionally, we affirm that 'Courts may consider for ordination candidates whose ongoing experience of SSA is a corrupted sin nature unindulged, repented of, and mortified; a temptation not entered into, but rather fled; a weakness not embraced, but rather mourned as they rest upon the grace and strength of the Lord.' (e.g. Pastoral

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Letter, page 9-10, “Our Counsel to Pastors, Sessions, and Presbyteries”; Book of Government recommendations), AIC Final Report of the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction and Ordination Standards, p. 3, available at <https://epconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/Files/Other/Report%20to%20the%2046th%20GA.pdf>.

⁸ <https://epconnect.org/ga/ga2026documents/#overtures>

⁹ <https://sites.google.com/view/epcopenletter/redlinestatement>

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Overture Calls for Reaffirming Position Papers on Homosexuality and The Sanctity of Marriage

An Overture to reaffirm the Position Papers on Homosexuality (1986) and The Sanctity of Marriage (2004) and restore them to the EPC website has been approved by Pacific Northwest Presbytery for consideration at the 46th General Assembly.

Questions about the status of the two papers has emerged amid denominational debate on same sex attraction and ordination. Members of the Ad-Interim Committee on Same-Sex Attraction (AIC) have claimed that these two older position papers were “rescinded” or “superseded” by the Position Paper on Human Sexuality adopted in 2017. Recently, the AIC added a final footnote at the end of the current revised version of the Position Paper which states:

“This ‘Position Paper on Human Sexuality’ is the official update and revision of both the older ‘Position Paper on Homosexuality’ and the ‘Position Paper on The Sanctity of Marriage.’”

A contrary view has been expressed by Jeff Jeremiah, who was the Stated Clerk during the 36th General Assembly. According to the Minutes from that Assembly, the Position Papers on Homosexuality and The Sanctity of Marriage were never rescinded but merely removed from the EPC website. [In a letter to Pacific Northwest Presbytery](#) written by TE Bill Heming, Jeremiah explained the history behind that GA action:

On June 26, 2015 the US Supreme Court legalized the marriage of homosexuals. While this decision clarified the status of married homosexuals, what was not clear was the rights of churches and religious groups, which on religious grounds opposed this judicial ruling. In the EPC, fears were expressed to the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) and the National Leadership Team (NLT) that churches could face civil lawsuits from LGBTQ+ groups alleging illegal discrimination for refusing to employ homosexuals or to make their facilities available to such groups Another response came from EPC churches fearful of the appearance of the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on the Sanctity of Marriage on the EPC website. Since material on the EPC website is available to the general public, they claimed these two Position Papers in their public presence ‘placed a target on the back’ of EPC churches. Due to the lack of clarity in the courts as to the religious rights of churches in the face of the LGBTQ+ agenda at the time, it was proposed that the Position Papers on Homosexuality and the Sanctity of Marriage be removed from the EPC website but made available upon request.

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Given this history and the fact that some churches have had difficulty obtaining the two position papers from the Office of the General Assembly, Pacific Northwest Presbytery has overtured the 2026 Assembly to again make the papers available on the website. [The overture states:](#)

Therefore, in an effort to correct and clarify the misconception that the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on the Sanctity of Marriage had been “rescinded” or “superseded,” the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest overtures the 46th General Assembly to 1) Re-affirm the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on the Sanctity of Marriage as the position of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church on these matters, and 2) Restore the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on The Sanctity of Marriage to the EPC website.

Pastor Bill Heming of Parkway Presbyterian Church offered this rationale for the overture:

“While having these Position Papers available upon request may have served amid the fear and confusion following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Obergefell v. Hodges, such fears and confusion are no longer valid The simple solution to the problem is to restore the Position Paper on Homosexuality and the Position Paper on The Sanctity of Marriage to the website. This action would make these documents available to Sessions and Pastors navigating these fraught issues and give wisdom from our denomination’s history. The restoration of these papers to the website, coupled with the re-affirmation of these papers, would also clarify that these remain the public positions of the EPC.”

Commissioners to the 46th General Assembly will face a major choice, whether to approve the Pacific Northwest Presbytery overture to reaffirm these two historic position papers and keep them on the EPC website, or to remove them as recommended by the AIC report.

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Churches Find Fault with Financial Reporting

Editor's Note: In October 2025, 11 churches in the Presbytery of the Pacific Northwest (PNW) met with representatives of the Office of the General Assembly (OGA) to express their concerns about financial reporting. In response, the OGA agreed to make significant changes in financial reporting. In this interview, Brad Tedrow provides an update on that agreement. Tedrow serves as a Ruing Elder at Oakville Presbyterian Church in Shedd, Ore., and has 32 years of professional experience as a CFO, accountant, and financial manager for non-profit organizations.

Plumb Line: In the fall of 2025, the Office of the General Assembly agreed to make changes in its financial reporting and budgeting process to provide for greater transparency. Has the OGA complied with the terms of that agreement?

Tedrow: I am sorry to report that I am not pleased with the way the OGA and the NLT are handling the financial reporting for the denomination, nor from what I am being told, the financial management. A brief overall opinion from my perspective is that the current reporting is more or less meaningless to members of the GA or the denomination. The OGA and NLT could, in my opinion, do a better job of exercising commitment to internal control and effective communication to the General Assembly when it comes to financial reporting and budgeting.

Plumb Line: In what ways has the OGA complied with the agreement?

Tedrow: The OGA has committed to providing a link to the denomination's financial reporting on a quarterly basis, which is to be the equivalent of what is received by the NLT. To share the report more widely a link to the quarterly financial report is included in the quarterly email to the denomination from the Stated Clerk. The OGA did not share the first quarterly financial report with the denomination for the period ending September 30, 2025, but has subsequently provided reports for the two following quarters ending December 30 and March 31, 2026. In addition, when asked, variances from the approved budget were explained.

It appears, however, that once a new quarterly report is posted the older reports are removed from the site. This makes it difficult to track financial changes/trends going forward.

Plumb Line: In what ways has the OGA failed to comply with the agreement?

Tedrow: Some of the financial information we requested has yet to be provided, including the presentation of three separate financial statements for the three corporations within the EPC: General Assembly (GA), World Outreach (WO), and Benefit Resources, Inc. (BRI). In prior years these corporations were included together in audited combined financial statements making it difficult to understand the financial position of the Office of General Assembly as well as the other two components making up the consolidated statements. In a recent communication from

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Pat Coelho, Chief Financial Officer for the denomination, he is planning on presenting separate financial statements at the 2026 General Assembly.

The OGA also agreed to provide a budget narrative which would outline sources of revenue as well as explanations of the expenses supporting the 2026-27 General Assembly budget. The narrative would also address changes in both revenue and expense categories between fiscal years. The narrative was also to include metrics tying together spending with goal-oriented outcomes.

The PNW group of commissioners who identified the lack of a budget narrative as a material weakness in our original letter to the OGA and NLT in February of 2025 offered to review the budget narrative prior to the upcoming GA. Pat indicated while the NLT planned to provide reports regarding the Gospel Priorities in the budget presentation and that the NLT was open to our suggestions, the presentation would be handled by the NLT in coordination with the Finance Team. We reiterated our original requests from our February 2025 correspondence to Pat.

Finally, the NLT agreed to address questions related to how unrestricted reserves are spent and how those expenditures are being reported. The NLT agreed to discuss potential guidelines for such spending and reporting, and to offer possible Acts of the Assembly to the 46th GA to establish a threshold and standard for such reporting. According to Pat, the NLT was planning to take up this question in their April meeting. We have asked for an update on the results of that discussion, but further information has not been provided.

Plumb Line: Based on the financial information provided by the OGA, it appears that significant changes are being made in the budget that were not included in the annual budget approved by General Assembly.

Tedrow: Yes, that seems to be true. It would appear from the answers provided that changes are made throughout the year by the NLT, presumably with a high degree of input from the OGA. These changes are not openly reported or discussed, but rather are being made by a relatively small number of individuals without updates to the approved budget.

In a recent communication with Pat regarding the December 31 financial reports, the OGA, WO, and BRI have all added staff positions with NLT approval since the 2025-26 budget was approved by the General Assembly last June. In addition, according to Pat, investments are also being made in software to improve efficiencies, and he explains some of these expenses were not anticipated prior to the budget preparation.

Personally, I find it interesting that the OGA and NLT added staff and software expenses after the budget had already been approved by the General Assembly. I found it even more interesting that staff could be added with no noted increase in the budget document, nor a mention of this in the published quarterly notes as of the December 31 quarterly report. How is it that the NLT can

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approve these changes without updates to the approved budget document? How does the larger General Assembly down to the local church understand what these new approved expenditures are for and for how much? According to the Rules for Assembly under section X.10-1,A,4:

“The National Leadership Team is not a court of the denomination, nor a commission of the General Assembly, but a committee of the denomination, with authority derived from the Book of Order. The NLT is, therefore, responsible to the General Assembly and carries out its work under the authority of the General Assembly by proactively making recommendations to the General Assembly and exercising authority to carry out those recommendations as approved by the General Assembly” (from citation X,10.1,A,1,c).

In the Rules of Assembly which covers NLT budget development, there is no authority extended to the committee other than to “receive projections from all committees and submit to General Assembly a proposed budget.” There are no provisions for the committee to act on its own to modify the budget after approval or make funding allocation decisions. Despite arguments voiced to the contrary, it would appear the NLT is exceeding its decision-making authority.

Plumb Line: You have expressed concern that a small group of people — the National Leadership Team and the OGA — are making these budgetary changes without having the proper authority to do so. Can you elaborate?

Tedrow: There appears to be a breakdown in the control process. The NLT, with the input from the OGA, appears to be making budget decisions without regard for GA approval whenever they deem appropriate. If this is the case, what is the point of GA going through the process of approving a budget document when the NLT and OGA can simply make changes throughout the fiscal year? Furthermore, the NLT and the OGA appear to have made similar decisions regarding the allocation of unrestricted resources without the approval of the GA.

When internal control processes are not adhered to by top management bodies of the EPC, what is to prevent them from holding back controversial expenditure authorizations or making allocation decisions until after the budget is approved by the GA? This would appear to be a convenient way to bypass the GA entirely on matters considered to be controversial. Currently, it appears the denomination has potential exposure to this type of manipulation unless better internal control processes are adhered to. These risks are further amplified by the lack of detailed budget narratives which explain the expenditures being made, as well as by incomplete reporting (i.e., no updates to approved budgets within published financial reports, and no formal process to amend and approve a budget modification by the General Assembly).

To be clear, I am not accusing anyone of manipulation. I am, however, saying that the lack of transparency and adherence to the denominations own internal control processes is of concern.

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Plumb Line: In your meeting with the OGA, your group expressed concern about more than \$1 million in unrestricted reserves that were used to fund Gospel Priorities without the approval of GA. What is the current status of unrestricted reserves?

Tedrow: Yes, this was indeed one of our major concerns. It appears from correspondence with Pat that when unrestricted reserves have been allocated, the associated expenses and any revenue are not updated in the GA-approved budget report. Rather, the expense is reported on the fund balance report. The fund balance report shows the beginning balance of individual designated and restricted funds at the beginning of the fiscal year, the net change (revenue less expenses), and the ending balance as of the report date. This report, therefore, provides no information regarding how the unrestricted reserves were used over the course of the fiscal year. It appears we have unrestricted reserves being allocated, spent, and reported at a very high summary level bypassing any GA oversight and approval.

Actual unrestricted cash reserves, which is the total amount of cash available less board-designated cash and donor-restricted cash in December 2024 was reported in a negative cash position of \$215,611. This rebounded to an unrestricted cash reserve of \$178,155 as of December 2025. When asked about the volatility of the cash reserves, Pat indicated stock market performance can be volatile and cause big swings in the unrestricted reserves, contributions may lag, expenditures above the GA-approved budget may contribute, and cash may be tied up in receivables. As of March 2026, the unrestricted cash reserves have swung to a negative \$10,270. It appears over the period of a single quarter the denomination experienced a swing in unrestricted cash reserves of slightly over \$188,000 — or about 5 percent of the approved budget.

This raises the question of how, when unrestricted cash is negative, does the denomination cover those deficits? It also raises the question of why unrestricted cash is so volatile in terms of quarterly swings which appears to be influenced, in part, by moves in the market and investments made on the part of the denomination.

Plumb Line: Would you say that EPC financial reporting has become more transparent or not?

Tedrow: At this point I would say no, not really. While it is now possible to have access to the quarterly reports which are provided to the NLT, it is not anything which was not already being published and available. It was simply being shared with a small number of people as opposed to other interested parties across the denomination. It will be beneficial to see the financial statements for the EPC/OGA as a stand-alone corporation. Again, however, this was information that was being prepared already but not being shared with the rest of the denomination.

There have been no visible improvements in a transparent budget process. We have hopes that the budget narrative will be substantial and informative as to both the planned revenues and expenditures for the upcoming 2026-27 fiscal year. We are hopeful that the NLT in its

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deliberations will look at how the internal control processes can be adhered to by proactively making recommendations to the General Assembly regarding budget modifications and the allocation of funding throughout the year. We will certainly be interested in the NLT's deliberations over how unrestricted reserves are allocated, spent, and reported.

Plumb Line: One of your concerns is that there is little reporting of staff positions and salaries, including the hiring of additional staff. Is that still an issue?

Tedrow: Yes, this is still a concern. The OGA continues to drag its feet with regards to a full reporting of staff positions and the related compensation in the form of salary and benefits.

As I mentioned earlier, additional staff has been added to the OGA and approved by the NLT this fiscal year after the budget was approved in June 2025 by the GA. No specific information has been presented as to how many staff were added, what their roles are, and how much additional resources were required to bring on those positions. Again, this action ignores the guardrails in place through the Rules of Assembly for proactive recommendations coming from the NLT to the GA for final approval

Given that salaries and benefits now make up roughly 59 percent of the approved 2025-26 budget and is apparently growing at an undetermined rate, it appears to be of growing importance to shed some transparency on the individual staff positions within the OGA. As part of the budget proposal to the General Assembly, the budget request should include each individual position (both full-time and part-time) with supporting salary and benefit amounts for each position. This was part of our original request in our February 2025 letter to the OGA and NLT. It is apparent that no action is being taken to shed further transparency on the issue of personnel expenses or the NLT acting beyond their authority as spelled out in the Rules of Assembly.

Plumb Line: Given all the information provided by the OGA, have you been able to determine the financial health of the EPC? Are you confident that the EPC will have sufficient funding and reserves to remain fiscally strong and solvent in the future?

Tedrow: At this point, from the information provided by auditors and others I see no reason to believe the EPC would not be able to continue on as a solvent entity. With that said there are indicators which give me pause regarding the GA financial management. Those include:

- Wide fluctuations in the operating cash reserves: According to OGA published reports, the operating cash reserve ratio was 1.6 months in December 2024 and 1.7 months in March 2025. Reserves rebounded to 2.9 months in December 2025 but dropped again to 2.3 months in March 2025. According to the OGA, 3 months operating cash is considered sound and 6 months strong. Over the past year plus, the denomination has been operating under less than a sound operating cash basis according to the OGA.

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- Cash on hand: As of the March 31, 2026, report, cash on hand is now trailing both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 fiscal years. Cash appears to have been declining throughout the present fiscal year with unrestricted cash currently (as of March 31) in a deficit position.
- Required Budget Escrow: According to the OGA, the denomination requires a budget escrow account in accordance with the policy of maintaining a balance equal to 20 percent of our annual operating expense budget. This account is a Cash Restricted Board Designated fund. It appears that this account may be underfunded over the course of any given fiscal year given the OGA's treatment of the annual budget. The fact that the OGA does not go through a budget amendment process when the NLT and OGA decide to add staff, materials, and services, etc., to the budget results in an understatement of both the actual budget and the amount to be reserved in the budget escrow account. The potential problem of understated escrow becomes even more pronounced when unrestricted reserves are allocated to various gospel priorities but not included in the budget document. Rather, these allocations are run through the fund balance report and bypass budget reporting completely. To get an idea of the scale of the potential issue, assume a \$1,000,000 dollar balance of unrestricted resources is allocated among three gospel priorities, \$200,000 of that allocation should be held back as Required Budget Escrow if it were treated as a change in the annual budget. That does not, however, appear to happen.

Whether this practice of understating the annual budget and therefore the budget escrow account is intentional or not, it would appear to be out of compliance with the OGA's internal control standard. It also potentially reduces the denomination's ability to weather a financial crisis.

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Louisiana Congregation Departs EPC for ARP

The congregation of Covenant Presbyterian Church in Monroe, La., voted May 3 to leave the EPC and transfer to the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP).

“As much as we are grateful for our time in the EPC, it just seemed like the difference between our core values and those of the EPC were becoming more defined,” said Pastor Jonathan Wagner. Although the elders were concerned about the AIC report on Same-Sex Attraction and the Letter of Racial Lament, Wagner said the main reason for leaving was the church’s identity.

“We are about Scripturally saturated, historically Reformed worship,” said Wagner. “We are committed to a Presbyterian and complementarian government. We are committed to sound doctrine and the ordinary means of grace.”

The church voted overwhelmingly to leave the EPC and will be formally dismissed at the September meeting of Gulf South Presbytery. According to Wagner, Gulf South Presbytery was helpful in the exit process and did nothing to hinder the congregation from leaving the EPC.

Founded in 1952, Covenant had dwindled to a few dozen worshippers when TE John Mabray accepted a call in 2012 to become pastor. Under his leadership, the church became complementarian and began to attract and develop mature Christian elders to serve in leadership. The church has now grown to more than 230 active members.

Worship became so crowded on Sundays that Covenant built a new 350-seat sanctuary costing \$3.1 million.

“The building project was funded immediately,” said Wagner. “No tricks, no gimmicks. We just went to the congregation and asked them to give sacrificially, and we raised more than enough money.”

In 2019, Covenant received the Bart Hess Award for evangelism.

“People wanted to know the secret of our growth,” said Wagner. “I replied that we were just preaching the Word of God and teaching the gospel and committing ourselves to prayer and faithful worship. We’re not relying on gimmicks, just the ordinary means of grace.”

After 15 years in the EPC, the church began to sense that the denomination was losing its focus on the ordinary means of grace.

“As I’ve looked out over the EPC, I think our missiology has gotten messed up,” said Wagner. “We’re trying to find strategies that will make us more attractive to the world.”

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In recent years, the church has attracted a large number of young families as well as international members from Egypt, Pakistan, China, South Africa, Belgium, and Canada. “We have a multi-ethnic congregation, and we didn’t do anything to get there except preach the gospel,” said Wagner.

According to Wagner, people who come to Covenant are looking for a church that takes God and the Bible seriously. “People tell us they don’t want a rock concert; they want reverence,” said Wagner. “They want to feel they are in the presence of God. Everyone who has come to Covenant says, ‘You all are preaching the Word of God in a way that isn’t happening anyplace else.’”

As the new sanctuary begins to fill up, Covenant is already looking to the future.

“If it gets larger than 350 people, we will plant a new church,” said Wagner. “In fact, we are already heading in that direction. God willing, in a few years there will be another Covenant Presbyterian Church down the road.”

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Historic Virginia Church Votes to Leave EPC

Lebanon Presbyterian Church, a historic congregation in Greenwood, Va., has voted to leave the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), with the congregation's decision sustained by New River Presbytery at its May 1 meeting. Founded in the colonial era with roots tracing back to the 1730s, the church has long identified with conservative Presbyterian convictions and joined the EPC in 1985 after departing the Presbyterian Church (USA) during a season of theological controversy.

According to Ruling Elder John Stoke, the congregation's decision was driven by several concerns, including what members perceive to be an increasingly centralized denominational structure, the EPC's ongoing discussion regarding the ordination of same-sex-attracted individuals, and shifting dynamics within the denomination that effectively restrict the freedom of conscience of complementarian churches and pastors.

Lebanon's leadership emphasized its desire to remain within a connectional Presbyterian body with meaningful ecclesiastical oversight, as well as respect for decentralized governance. The congregation is currently exploring affiliation with another conservative Presbyterian denomination, such as the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) or the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP).

Throughout its nearly 300-year history, the congregation has witnessed significant moments in both church and American history while maintaining a strong Presbyterian identity. The church's history reflects a longstanding willingness to act according to conscience during periods of denominational drift.

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