

**Overview of reasoning raised in PMT discussions regarding Amendments A & C
from 2024 GA**

Majority recommended non-concurrence, Minority concurrence

The PMT thought it would be helpful to provide a summary to the presbytery

Those on PMT voting for non-concurrence on A & C have differing convictions about and interpretations of the scriptures on sexuality, as the “mutual forbearance” and “freedom of conscience” principles express in our Historic Principles of Church Order from 1788, F-3.

The wide range of concerns raised included:

In 2012 the PCUSA 220th GA, seeking to create a path forward *together*, in a “Big Tent Church” with room for diversity, adopted a significant change in the BOO regarding sexuality. It was embraced as the way to uphold “the peace, unity and purity of the church” and uphold that “God alone is Lord of the conscience, ...” F-3.0101. Mutual forbearance will characterize us “as we also believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which [men] of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.” F-3.0105. The GA wrote:

“The 220th General Assembly (2012) acknowledges that faithful Presbyterians earnestly seeking to follow Jesus Christ hold different views about what the Scriptures teach concerning the morality of committed, same-gender relationships. Therefore, while holding persons in ordered ministry to high standards of covenant fidelity in the exercise of their sexuality, as in all aspects of life, we acknowledge that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) does not have one interpretation of Scripture in this matter. We commit ourselves to continue respectful dialogue with those who hold differing convictions, to welcome one another for God’s glory, and not to vilify those whose convictions we believe to be in error. We call on all Presbyterians to join us in this commitment.”

This has been referred to in a variety of ways from protecting the diversity in our Big Tent Church, local option, to practicing mutual forbearance, honoring freedom of conscience, a compromise, or “détente”.

“Diversity is the hardest thing to live with but the most dangerous thing to live without.”

Henry Sloan Coffin

Amendment A

1. Clarification: The PUCSA is already clear:

In the words of the Advisory Committee on the Constitution on this Amendment, “...the witness of Scripture and the *Constitution* testifies to the full inclusion of persons as members of the Church (universal), as noted not only in F-1.0403 but also reiterated in G-1.0302 regarding the church particular: “No person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith” ”. That is not at issue here as we have a *Book of Order* which provides for a “Big Tent Church”. See 2.

2. The current wording in this sentence already covers and provides for the additional wording in the amendment. The proposed words are not a new category, but *are an expanded subset under one of the existing categories*, sex. Example: The same objection would apply if 2 subsets under race or ethnicity were being proposed.

3. This matter is also already covered in the following sentence on discrimination in F-1.0403.

4. The proposed phrases have no specific definitions given or agreed upon in the wording as we have it. The lists of orientations and genders have varied over the last several years and continued to grow.

5. Adding a detailed subset under a category is returning to the long “manual of operations” use of the Form of Government which the PCUSA dispensed with in 2010 when it adopted the revised, streamlined NEW Form of Government.

Background: Over about 4+ years, the PCUSA’s “New Form of Government” Task Force streamlined and reworked the existing *Form of Government* which most agreed had become long, detailed, and in many instances a highly prescriptive *one size fits all* “manual of operations” across our diverse regions, cultures and churches. Presbyteries, congregations, synods ... were to create their own contextualized Administrative Manuals.

Amendment C –

1. From the PCUSA’s Advisory Committee on the Constitution’s advice on this amendment, last paragraph: “The current examination standards already require a candidate to affirm W-4.0404e, to be governed by our church’s polity and to abide by its discipline. Adding the proposed language to the examination requirements is redundant.”

2. In the name of inclusivity, this amendment would mandate both the process and additional questions which will function in a divisive, destructive manner, in varied and diverse churches/presbyteries, communities, when God’s people are seeking to be the church together in these times. It forces every congregation, usually diverse, through it’s Nominating Committee and then its session (which is required to examine each officer nominee accordingly) and every presbytery, through it’s PMT/COM/Candidates Com. and as a presbytery, to explicitly examine each candidate’s (elder, deacon, seminary/CRE student, pastor...) theological convictions on all matters of sexuality, as well as the list of categories.

3. In divisive times and a denomination of predominantly small churches, this functionally *curtails leaders, ministry possibilities and candidates. It has and will be used to prohibit those from serving in a congregation or presbytery.*

4. Overture proponents were clear that the intent is to move towards eliminating all from any future/new office who do not hold one uniform theological position on human sexuality, a functional litmus test. No longer would the differences, diversity acknowledged and protected since 1788, by non-discrimination, by “freedom of conscience” and “mutual forbearance”, F-3, apply in practice, only lip service. F-3.0105 “we believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which [people] of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.”

5. Opposition to C, as well as A, came from across the theological/political spectrum, before, during, and after the General Assembly in July, and notably from many committed to the full inclusion of persons regardless of sexual identity or orientation. Why? It’s wording, it’s application in Olympia, and it’s intent is to reduce diversity and exclude those who may hold diverse theological convictions. The gist of a testimony was, “The exclusion we experienced is now being attempted against those with theological differences. The Amendment denies freedom of conscience, mutual forbearance, unity in the midst of our diversity, and narrows and weakens our greater church,” as articulated in Polity Committee testimony by the lawyer who served for decades as a leader with and legal counsel seeking to change definitions regarding and ordination standards into a Big Tent Church (as described above by the 2012 GA above). (He was originally with Presbyterians for Lesbians and Gay Concerns, from the 80’s, and successor groups.)

6. Every council (session, presbytery, GA) has the right to determine its own membership, (since 1729). These amendments create internal contradictions and inconsistencies with key provisions in both the Constitution and “case law” such as:

1. Each council has the right and obligation to examine each candidate for ordination and/or installation *on a case-by-case basis*;
2. A mandate that functionally discourages candidates from commissioning, ordination, installation *before a case-by-case evaluation and corporate discernment, wrongly exceeds a session’s or presbytery’s authority.*
3. “The individual elected members of the councils [session or presbytery], in assessing persons for ordination, have the freedom to vote their conscience “for God alone is Lord of the conscience...”

7. Another internal Constitutional conflict/contradiction: The non-discrimination and diversity protections being advocated for in the area of human sexuality are elevated in the intent and focus as the most important in F-1.0403 and intended to over-ride non-discrimination and diversity in the area of theological conviction, also a protected category in this same sentence, and elsewhere in the Constitution such as the Historic Principles of Church Order in F-3. Such contradictions further erode trust in a time when institutional trust is at an all time low.

8. Church history is clear:

A. Such efforts reduce, short-circuit dialogue and the very diversity and embodied loving relationships intended to be a hallmark of Christ’s body, that in Christ all are made one. This further prevents the possibilities of greater understanding, growth or change.

B. The questionable “wins” of coerced compliance among US Presbyterians in the last century, with the Fundamentalists demands in the 20’s (Burnett article, <https://www.theologymatters.com/articles/church-and-culture/2024/shall-the-fundamentalists-win/>)

and in the 70’s-80’s (Jack Haberer *Presbyterian Outlook* article, <https://pres-outlook.org/2024/05/embracing-diversity-without-exclusion/>).

Thoughts from PMT member supporting concurrence:

F-1.0403 UNITY IN DIVERSITY (POL-01 1)

My personal statement for the affirmative vote:

As followers of Christ, we are called to come alongside the marginalized, to give them a voice, speak out for them and actively stand beside them. This is indescribably deeply personal for me as I have walked this road. In the early 1980’s, my younger sister came to me to tell me she was gay. We had always been very close, but this truly blindsided me. We spent hours talking. At the end of the visit she asked me if I would go with her to talk to our parents, but I begged her not to tell our parents. Our dad was a minister in Mission Presbytery and, even more scary, our mom had suffered for years with major depression and was still very fragile. So, my sister went without my support to talk to our parents. Guilt and shame of that sin swamped me for years. I still struggle. It was a sin against my sister not to stand with her and worse, a sin against God. I put God in a box and didn’t trust Him to walk with us through that journey. Silence and inaction, in this case, is a sin against our brothers and sisters. Being afraid to speak out because of possible repercussions in our churches puts God in a

box; lacks trust in Him to journey with us through these difficult times. Jesus' parable about the Shepherd leaving the 99 to go look for the lost sheep was about coming alongside, saving the lost, including the "other", and trusting God to care for the 99 and be there for all of us.

From the Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP):

We acknowledge the historic role that the church has occupied, both as the oppressor and as an advocate. We acknowledge that there is still much work to do in fostering healing with our siblings who have been harmed by the church....

From the Advocacy Committee for Women and Gender Justice (ACWGJ):

...The diversity in which we are united is not only plentiful but also specifically flows from God. ... Only when we explicitly affirm the theological, ecclesial, and biblical foundations of openness and welcome to individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities can we proclaim the "good news" Gospel truth.

From The Confession of Belhar:

*We believe that **together** we come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; that **together** we are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; **together** know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ; that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another. This is and will be a long and difficult journey. My prayer is that one day all will be joyfully embraced and welcome at the table.*

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