

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, the study will investigate the history of the polity of the ordination and/or installation of gay and lesbian Christians as officers, i.e. deacons, elders, and ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church. The historical development of polity in general in the Presbyterian Church from 1706 will be studied, with specific focus on the ordination and/or installation polity in the period from 1976 in the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. (UPCUSA) and the Presbyterian Church in the U.S. (PCUS) until their reunion in 1983 to form the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (PC(USA)), and from 1983-2009 in the PC(USA). The development of the ordination and/or installation polity and the current standards of the PC(USA) in light of the historical study will be evaluated.

Specific markers in the ordination and/or installation debate are: 1) The “definitive guidance” statements of 1978 and 1979; 2) The Authoritative Interpretation of the “definitive guidance” in 1985; 3) The “definitive guidance” recognised as Authoritative Interpretation in 1993; 4) The inclusion of paragraph G-6.0106b in the *Book of Order* in 1997 specifying “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness”; 5) The effect of the 2005 *Peace, Unity, and Purity* Report by the Theological Task Force (TTF) on ordination standards; 6) The rulings by General Assembly Permanent Judicial Commissions (GAPJC) regarding ordination and/or installation; 7) Various Authoritative Interpretations issued by General Assemblies; 8) The Authoritative Interpretation by the 2008 General Assembly repealing the 1978 and 1979 “definitive guidance” and subsequent rulings based on it.

Second, and interconnected with the first topic, the study will examine the history of the polity regarding same-gender unions, blessings, and marriages in the PC(USA) and evaluate the current position. The historical study will focus mainly on the period from the late 1980s until 2009 in the PC(USA). Specific markers are: 1) The various

overtures to and resolutions by General Assemblies; 2) The Authoritative Interpretation by the 1991 General Assembly; 3) The rulings by the GAPJC, especially the 2000 Benton and the 2008 Spahr rulings. The development of the same-gender blessing and marriage polity of the PC(USA) in light of the historical study will be evaluated.

1.2 Reason for the Study

Since 1970, the gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation debate has become the most divisive and contentious issue in the Presbyterian Church. It has dominated nearly every single General Assembly meeting since 1978 until the present time and continuously threatens to tear the denomination apart. In the last decades, the same-gender blessing and marriage debate has added to this tension. Tens of congregations and thousands of members in recent years have left the denomination for the conservative Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) due to the ongoing disagreements. When G-6.0106b, which was added into the *Book of Order* in 1997, is finally deleted and/or amended, this writer, along with others, predicts a mass exodus from the PC(USA) to the EPC.

This author is not aware of anyone who has undertaken a documented study of both the ordination and same-gender marriage issues from either a historical or a polity viewpoint. The development of the polity via a chronological list of approved General Assembly decisions and GAPJC rulings detailing the church's position on gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation and same-gender blessings and marriages is available online, but the rationale and history behind these decisions is not available. In addition, the overtures and decades-long discussions that have led up to these decisions, which form the background of the current policies and decisions, are not detailed at all. One must meticulously search through the Minute books of the various General Assembly meetings to find both the historic build-up of the polity and the Authoritative Interpretations issued by either the General Assembly or the GAPJC, and request Minutes from stated clerks of presbyteries and synods regarding rulings by their Permanent Judicial Commissions (PJC). This information is not readily available; thus, an overall picture of the debates is missing. It is this

writer's hope that through this study, a chronology of the debates, focusing on the history and polity, will become a valuable resource for the PC(USA).

The two predecessor churches of the PC(USA); namely, the UPCUSA and the PCUS, both studied the topic of homosexuality prior to their unification in 1983. The 1978 General Assembly of the UPCUSA accepted a minority report, not the majority report, regarding homosexuality, which the General Assembly believed was non-binding "definitive guidance." Unfortunately, the Stated Clerk Thompson erroneously decided that the "definitive guidance" should be binding on the entire church:

That unrepentant homosexual practice does not accord with the requirements for ordination set forth in Form of Government . . .

Additionally, the GAPJC concluded erroneously in 1985 that the 1978 General Assembly of the UPCUSA (and the 1979 General Assembly of the PCUS) intended its action to be binding on the whole church. The 1978 and 1979 "definitive guidance," through various decisions by General Assemblies and GAPJCs, became an Authoritative Interpretation of the *Book of Order* in 1993. Yet, the *Book of Order* does not contain the words homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, same-sex, same-gender, or same-gender unions, blessings or marriages.

Simultaneous to the gay and lesbian ordination debate is the issue of same-gender unions and marriages in the PC(USA). The 1991 General Assembly adopted a new Authoritative Interpretation on the status of same-gender unions. The decision states that ministers should not perform, and sessions should not allow the use of the church property for same-gender unions if they determine them to be the same as marriages. Furthermore, W-4.9001, introduced into the *Book of Order* in 1983, states:

Marriage is a civil contract between a woman and a man. For Christians marriage is a covenant through which a man and a woman are called to live out together before God their lives of discipleship. In a service of Christian marriage a lifelong commitment is made by a woman and a man to each other, publicly witnessed and acknowledged by the community of faith.

Thus, PC(USA) ministers are forbidden to perform a same-gender ceremony which they consider to be the same as a heterosexual marriage ceremony. Ministers have defied this ruling since 1991 and have performed (liturgical) same-gender marriage ceremonies; some have had complaints filed against them. A few complaints have

become charges and the result is that these ministers have and will stand trial at the various levels of PJs. This study is all the more relevant since civil same-gender marriages are and will be legal in six states: Massachusetts from 18 November 2003, Connecticut from 29 October 2008, Iowa from 27 April 2009, Vermont from 1 September 2009, Maine from 14 September 2009, and New Hampshire from 1 January 2010. It was legal in California from 16 June - 4 November 2008.

Matters became more complicated when the 1996 General Assembly voted to send an ordination amendment to all presbyteries for their vote, which a slight majority of 51% of presbyteries approved:

Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001) or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-6.0106b *Book of Order*).

G-6.0106b or Amendment B, as it is more commonly known, is an attempt to exclude any partnered gay and lesbian Christians from ordination and/or installation. Attempts to delete G-6.0106b and/or amend the language through overtures have repeatedly failed. Three times, in 1997, 2001, and 2008, General Assemblies voted to send amendments to presbyteries to delete and/or amend G-6.0106b, which have failed. Thus, under the current Constitution, as affirmed by the *Book of Order* and Authoritative Interpretations by General Assemblies and GAPJCs, gay and lesbian Christians cannot be married and live in chastity like heterosexual married couples in the PC(USA). Consequently, sexually active or partnered, monogamous gay and lesbian Christians cannot fulfil the requirements of G-6.0106b of living in “chastity in singleness.” However, they can be ordained and/or installed as church officers if they declare a scruple (departure or disagreement) to the examining body (the session for deacons and elders, the presbytery for ministers), and if these bodies find that the scruple of an ordination standard in matters of belief or practice is not an essential.

This writer set out with the perception that the various biblical texts, which prohibit same-gender sexual activity, have played a pivotal role in the ordination and/or installation and same-gender marriage debate. However, Lv 18:22, 20:13, Rm 1:26-27, 1 Cor 6:9, and 1 Tm 1:10, have virtually played no role in the decisions by either

General Assemblies or GAPJCs. After exhaustive research, it has become clear that the main issue is church polity, not the interpretation of biblical texts and theological discussion. Therefore, this study will focus on the polity debate since the 1970s.

The statement of the problem will centre on the question: Can the PC(USA) return to a pre-1927 position based on theological grounds, in place of polity which has ruled for more than ninety years? From the main question, others arise. How would the PC(USA) return to the local ordination and/or installation practices of the *Adopting Act of 1729*? How would the denomination return to a prior position when one prohibition regarding sexual activity was not lifted up in the *Book of Order*, excluding a whole range of persons from ordination and/or installation? Is this exclusion of partnered gay and lesbian Christians compatible with the inclusiveness that the *Book of Order* promotes in all other aspects of church life and membership? Can theological discussion rather than polity solve the same-gender marriage debate?

1.3 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this writer is that debates regarding ordination and/or installation of partnered gay and lesbian Christians and same-gender unions and marriages in the PC(USA) have focused on personal opinions and reinterpretation of polity decisions, not on the study of biblical texts and sexuality and subsequent theological discussion. The PC(USA) needs to revisit the biblical texts regarding same-gender sexual expression, apply the methods of Scripture interpretations which it adopted in 1983, and solve the issues theologically, not only through polity. The church has based its decisions on outdated biblical interpretations from 1976 and misconceptions about gays and lesbians in general, and not on newer exegetical insights of the texts. These insights should form the basis for the theology and polity practices of how the church deals with both celibate and partnered gay and lesbian Christians called to church leadership positions.

For thirty years, the minority report of 1978, which became “definitive guidance” and ultimately an Authoritative Interpretation of the Constitution of the PC(USA), has guided the polity and decisions made by General Assemblies and GAPJCs. In June of 2008, a new Authoritative Interpretation was issued by the 2008 General

Assembly, revoking the 1978 and 1979 “definitive guidance” and every Authoritative Interpretation that was a reaffirmation thereof. However, the “definitive guidance” and Authoritative Interpretations thereof were supplemented by an even more prohibitive G-6.0106b in 1997 - requiring “fidelity in marriage or chastity in singleness” - which is the current polity in a theologically diverse denomination.

A minor issue of polity is that since 1973, the GAPJC decisions are not reviewable by the General Assembly. In 1988, G-13.0103r was introduced into the *Book of Order*. Both a General Assembly can issue an Authoritative Interpretation, currently every two years, and the eighteen-member GAPJC can issue an Authoritative Interpretation with every decision it makes between General Assembly meetings. However, the GAPJC decisions are not reviewable; only a new Authoritative Interpretation by either a General Assembly or future GAPJC can replace it. The GAPJC does not utilise any theological discussion, but only deals with each issue based on the current polity of the church. This writer will show how GAPJC rulings, guided only by the polity of the church, not on Scripture or the Confessions, create an impasse not furthering the debate.

1.4 Motivation and Goal

The topic of gay ordination came to the writer’s attention in 1992 when he graduated from the Faculty of Theology of the Dutch Reformed Church at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Being a heterosexual married male, this writer was ordained and entered ministry, but a gay friend could not be ordained, despite God’s calling in his life to be a minister. A few classmates were divorced before completing seminary, but they were ordained and received calls as ministers. Since completing seminary, several classmates and other ministers have divorced their spouses, but in most cases, they continued their ministry.

In 2001, this writer emigrated from South Africa to the United States of America and joined the PC(USA) as a minister of the Word and Sacrament. The PC(USA) has become a denomination that is inclusive of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) persons as members. However, the church is not as welcoming to its gay and

lesbian members in becoming church officers. Since 1997, when G-6.0106b was added to the *Book of Order*, the battle lines have been drawn between the conservatives and liberals; subsequently, the whole denomination has suffered through intense lobbying seeking the vote of the majority of loyalists or centrists (Weston 2003:65).

In the broader context of the denomination, several presbyteries and congregations, some belonging to the New Wineskins Association of Churches (NWAC), have and continue to separate from the PC(USA) and join the EPC. Several congregations are involved in court cases regarding the ownership right to their church property.

The goal of this study is to review the history and evaluate the polity regarding the church's same-gendered members, specifically in regards to ordination and/or installation, and same-gender blessing and marriages. This writer perceives that the PC(USA) is applying a double standard to its ordination and marriage standards: one set for heterosexual Christians and a different set for gay and lesbian Christians.

1.5 Research Methodology

The gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation, and same-gender blessing and marriage debates are relatively recent issues in the history and polity of the PC(USA) and its predecessor churches, dating from the 1960s. Therefore, it falls within the scope of contemporary church history and polity, which are inextricably interwoven with each other. Yet, the debates are grounded in the past history and polity practices of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and denominations which grew out of it. First, a historical approach will be used to study the history and polity from 1706 to the 1980s, to lay the foundation for the debates.

The *Adopting Act of 1729* and the Report of the *Special Commission of 1925* are of vital importance. The historical approach will then focus on the Minutes of the UPCUSA, PCUS, and PC(USA) since the 1960s up to the present time to formulate how the various denominations' General Assemblies and GAPJCs have historically dealt with the debates. Additionally, all General Assembly Papers and Reports

pertaining specifically to sexuality, same-gender relationships, Scripture interpretation, ordination standards, historical principles, etc. will be studied and evaluated.

Second, and inter-dispersed with the historical development, the development of the polity aspect of the debates will be tracked regarding the decisions made by General Assemblies, GAPJC, and other PJC's of the PCUSA, UPCUSA, PCUS, and PC(USA) up to present. Specific polity markers, such as the he *Adopting Act of 1729*, the Report of the *Special Commission of 1925*, the 1978 and 1979 “definitive guidance” statements, changes in the *Book of Order* which include the introduction of W-4.9000, G-13.0103r, G-6.0106b, and G-6.0108, the issuing of Authoritative Interpretations by General Assemblies and GAPJC's, etc. will be studied and evaluated.

1.6 Source Review

The primary resources for the historical study on the polity of the UPCUSA, PCUS, and PC(USA) are: 1) The General Assembly Minutes, which contain overtures; commissioners' resolutions; General Assembly Committee reports; General Assembly decisions, Authoritative Interpretations, amendments, reports, papers, resolutions, publications, recommendations, amendments; and GAPJC decisions, regarding gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation, same-gender blessings and/or marriages, and interpretation of biblical texts pertaining to homosexuality; 2) Various PJC rulings recorded in presbytery and/or synod Minutes; 3) *The Book of Confessions*; 4) Various issues of the *Book of Order*.

The secondary sources include news releases from General Assembly meetings; the PC(USA) website; the Presbyterian News Service; newsletters and articles from Presbyterian organisations such as the Presbyterian Outlook, the Covenant Network, the Presbyterian Layman, and the Layman Online; and Polity Notes and Opinions issued by the Office of the Stated Clerk. Tertiary sources include books by Johnson (2006a,b), Rogers (2006a), Weston (2003), articles by Presbyterian scholars and

other news releases. One can find most of the material for this study through the internet (cf. Bibliography).

1.7 Study Sections

The first part of this study will examine the controversies of the 1830s and 1920s and how they influenced the Presbyterian Church to rely on polity, not theological discussion, to solve the differences. The second part will investigate the ordination and/or installation policies regarding both celibate and partnered gay and lesbian Christians in the UPCUSA and PCUS from 1960s-1983, the third part will examine the role of Special Organisations, and the fourth part will focus on the history and polity in the PC(USA) from 1983-2009. Where applicable, the interpretations of the relevant biblical texts pertaining to same-gender sex acts will be evaluated, as well as how the interpretation of these texts has influenced the polity on gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation and same-gender marriages. Finally, the debates will be summarised, alternatives discussed, conclusions drawn, and recommendations made.

1.8 History of the PC(USA)

One has to take note of the recent history of the PC(USA) (see *A Chronology of American Presbyterianism*, pages xv-xvi). In the early 1950s, the United Presbyterian Church in North America (UPCNA), the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) and the PCUS planned to unify but, in 1954, the PCUS voted it down. In 1958, the small UPCNA and the large PCUSA merged to become the UPCUSA, also known as the Northern church (Smylie 1996:124). In the 1970s, a major schism occurred in the PCUS, which led to the formation of the conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) (Weston 2003:45).

In 1983, the northern UPCUSA and southern PCUS united, after separating 122 years earlier before the American Civil War in 1861, to form the PC(USA) (Weston 2003:46). Each of these three church groups had their own numerically numbered General Assemblies. All General Assembly meetings of the PC(USA) since 1983 are

in the following format: the denomination's name is not mentioned, e.g. 195th General Assembly in 1983 or the 1983 General Assembly. General Assemblies of the predecessor churches include the name of the denomination, e.g. 117th General Assembly of the PCUS in 1977 and 190th General Assembly of the UPCUSA in 1978. The numbering of a meeting is written in this format: 195th and not 195th General Assembly. Additionally, the numbering of the UPCUSA General Assembly meetings was taken over by the PC(USA) in 1983. Until 2004, all General Assembly meetings were yearly; since 2006, they are biennial meetings. For the sake of simplification, the Minutes of General Assembly consistently refer only to Part I, while Part II contains the statistical reports, which will not be referenced.

1.9 Terminology

The biggest problem with terminology used in church polity and theology is that it can easily label and dehumanise persons. It is vital, in both the ordination and same-gender marriage debates, to remember that we are dealing with and speaking of church members; Christians. These persons have come to a living faith in Jesus Christ, have confessed their faith through membership and/or baptism, and called by God and the congregation to leadership in the church. (Others might disagree that God can call someone who has a “sinful” lifestyle to leadership, but that falls within the realm of the theological and ethical discussion of the topic.)

This writer will use where possible the terms “gay and lesbian persons or Christians,” which are the terms that gay and lesbian Christians prefer to define themselves with, rather than the loaded term “homosexual(s),” which does not differentiate between men and women. Additionally, the terms “partnered gay and lesbian Christians” rather than “practicing homosexual persons,” “same-gender sexual orientation” rather than “homosexuality,” and “same-gender” rather than “same-sex” will be used wherever possible.

The Rules of Discipline in the *Book of Order* differentiates between two types of judicial cases. A remedial case is one in which an irregularity or delinquency by any governing body may be corrected by a higher governing body (D-2.0202). A

disciplinary case is one in which a church member or officer may be censured for an offense, which is either an act or omission that is contrary to the Scriptures or the Constitution of the PC(USA) (D-2.0203).

Rulings by the various PJs of the PC(USA) have been referenced differently at various times. This writer will be consistent and use the latest form of referencing used by PJs, especially in the cases with more than one appellant, and apply it to older rulings, e.g. *Anderson, et al vs. Synod of New Jersey* in 1962 becomes *Anderson, et al. v. Synod of New Jersey*. Yet, even current PJs are inconsistent in their referencing methodology, and this writer has taken the liberty of standardising the referencing in their decisions.

The Constitution of the PC(USA) consists of two parts. Part I is *The Book of Confessions* consisting of eleven Confessions. Amending it requires the approval by the General Assembly and two-thirds vote of the 173 presbyteries (G-18.0201). Part II is the *Book of Order* [“the” not italicised or capitalised] consisting of the Form of Government (G), Directory for Worship (W), and Rules of Discipline (D). No page numbers exist since the referencing method used refers to an article in one of the three parts, e.g. G-6.0106b is in the Form of Government, Chapter VI The Church and Its Officers (G-6), Subsection 1. Offices of Ministry (G-6.0106), b (G-6.0106b). The *Book of Order* can be amended through approval by the General Assembly and ratification by a majority of the 173 presbyteries; namely 87 votes (G-18.0301).

The PC(USA) and its predecessor churches use technical ecclesiastical terms that need to be defined. “Ordainable,” “unordainable,” and “unordained” are used and not “eligible for ordination,” “ineligible for ordination,” and “not ordained.” “Ordination and/or installation” is a technical term, which distinguishes between ordination to a specific office through the laying on of hands, while installation refers to someone already previously ordained to that specific office. Once you are ordained to a specific office, you are an officer for life for that specific office and you are not re-ordained, but installed or even re-installed to the same office. Thus, you are ordained and/or installed separately to each office of deacon, elder, and minister.

The term “candidate” is confusing, since it pertains to either a candidate for ministry of the Word and Sacrament (see Chapter 1.10.3) or a candidate who has been elected to the office of deacon, elder or minister. This writer will distinguish between the two by adding the word “(minister)” before candidate when it refers to a candidate for ministry.

1.10 Governing and Ordination Practices in the PC(USA)

The distinctive character of the governing system and ordination of officers in the PC(USA), as found in the *Book of Order*, should be clarified, since this is at the heart of the gay and lesbian ordination and/or installation debate.

1.10.1 Governing in the PC(USA)

The presbytery is the basic constituent institution of the PC(USA). The pillars of the church are the presbyters or elders. The Constitution of the PC(USA) in the *Book of Order* states:

Elders are chosen by the people. Together with ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they exercise leadership, government, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a particular church as well as the church at large, including ecumenical relationships. They shall serve faithfully as members of the session (G-10.0102).

This church shall be governed by presbyters (elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament, traditionally called ruling and teaching elders) (G-4.0301b).

The body of elders elected to govern a particular congregation is called a session.

The congregation elects them and in one sense, they are representatives of the other members of the congregation. The minister(s) and elders in active service form the session and govern the congregation (G-10.0101).

The PC(USA) has four governing bodies, namely the session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly, which are governed by both elders and ministers of the Word and Sacrament (G-9.0101). Every governing body has a Moderator and a Clerk. The minister is the Moderator of the session. The presbytery and synod choose their Moderator for a determined term, while the General Assembly elects a Moderator at each stated meeting (G-9.0202b) and a Stated Clerk for a four-year term.

Every session sends an allotted amount of delegates or presbyters, consisting of the minister(s) and elders, to represent the congregation in the local presbytery. Any elder, whether active or inactive from session, can be a commissioner (delegate) to the local presbytery, synod, or the General Assembly (G-14.0210), and participates and votes with the same authority as ministers and is eligible for any office (G-6.0302). Honourably retired ministers, as well as ordained ministers serving in other capacities outside of congregations (ministers-at-large, validated ministries), hold their membership in the local presbytery.

1.10.2 The Ordination and/or Installation of Deacons and Elders

Presbyterian deacons and elders are both elected and ordained. Typically, every congregation has a Nominating Committee, elected by the congregation during a congregational meeting, to nominate deacons and elders from the active membership on behalf of the congregation. The Nominating Committee consists of representatives from the active membership, deacon board (if one exists) and session. The minister serves *ex officio* with no vote (G-14.0223). The congregation can nominate deacons and elders, and active members can self-nominate themselves (G-14.0232). The session does not vote on the slate from the Nominating Committee; the congregation votes on the slate during a congregational meeting.

Once the congregation votes to elect the nominated deacons and elders, the session examines and trains the newly elected officers. Upon session's approval, a date is set during a worship service for ordination and/or installation. If the session does not approve the examination of an elected officer, it reports the decision to the Nominating Committee, which will bring a new nomination to a congregational meeting (G-14.0240).

Through ordination, deacons and elders are officially set apart for service. "Those ordained are not *separated out* from the people of God but rather placed into special tasks within the people of God [original italics] (Gray & Tucker 1999:19). The constitutional questions asked of deacons, elders, and ministers being ordained and/or installed to office differ only in the specific responsibilities of each office. The

congregation affirms the election of the new officers by agreeing to accept them, encourage them, respect their decisions, and follow their guidance (W-4.4004).

Gray & Tucker (1999:20) point out that in answering the constitutional questions (W-4.4003; W-4.4005) in the affirmative, the newly ordained officers become more accountable to the PC(USA). They bind themselves closer to the faith and polity of the church. An officer's commitment to Presbyterian polity and discipline is more explicit than that of an unordained active member, who "has voluntarily submitted to the government of the church" (G-5.0202). Officers promise to be "governed by our church's polity" and to "abide by its discipline" (W-4.4003e). This includes deacons accepting the decisions of the Board of Deacons, and deacons and elders accepting the decisions of the session, presbytery, synod, or General Assembly, even when one disagrees with the decision (Gray & Tucker 1999:20).

A vital Presbyterian distinction is that deacons and elders retain their ordination beyond their term in office; it is perpetual (G-14.0210). They are ordained for life and for the whole church. If re-elected to the same office, they are not re-ordained. A deacon or elder's ordination is valid in any PC(USA) congregation and a minister's in any presbytery where they hold membership. This practice is at the heart of the debate: if a session or presbytery ordains a gay or lesbian, in defiance of the Constitution, or under a scruple, their ordination is valid for the whole church. However, a session or presbytery does not have to accept the ordination of the officer, since they set their local ordination standards. In theory, one is ordained for the whole church; in practice, one's ordination might not be acceptable to another session or presbytery.

A deacon or elder can ask their local session to release them from their exercise of ordained office, if they are in good standing. The session deletes their names from the particular register (G-6.0600a-b). If a person later desires restoration to ordained office, they shall apply to the session that granted the release, and upon the session's approval, the person is restored to ordained office without re-ordination (G-6.0600c).

1.10.3 The Ordination and/or Installation of Ministers of the Word and Sacrament

Ministers of the Word and Sacrament (or teaching elders) are called by the Pastor Nominating Committee (PNC), a committee appointed by the session and voted on by the congregation. The PNC conducts the search for a minister, extends a call, and reports it to the session, which sets a date for a congregational meeting to extend the call. Once the minister is voted on, the PNC informs the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, and the Committee on Ministry (COM) typically meets with the candidate and makes a recommendation to the presbytery to examine and/or approve the minister at the next presbytery meeting. Once the presbytery approves the call, it approves a committee to ordain and/or install the minister. Ministers who serve the congregation are also part of the session, with vote, but their membership belongs with the local presbytery (G-11.0401a). Thus, a minister in the PC(USA) is not a member of the congregation but a minister member of the presbytery. A minister's membership is valid in any presbytery where they hold membership. Ministers without a pastoral call in the presbytery or honourably retired ministers apply for membership within the presbytery (G-11.0402, G-11.0412a-b). Ministers can be either active members or members-at-large of the presbytery and can vote, but inactive members cannot vote (G-11.0406a-c). Members-at-large and inactive members remain under the care and discipline of the presbytery (G-11.0413).

Ministers can request the presbytery for release from the exercise of ordained office, if they are in good standing. The presbytery deletes their names from the roll of presbytery (G-6.0600a-b). Should a minister later desire restoration to membership in a presbytery, the minister must apply to the presbytery that granted the release. Once the presbytery approves, the minister shall reaffirm his or her ordination vows and become a continuing member in presbytery and be restored to the full exercise of ordained office without re-ordination (G-6.0600c).

The training of ministers is under the care of the presbytery and the local congregation to which the person belongs. The covenant relationship with the presbytery has two phases, namely inquiry and candidacy (G-14.0401). The purpose

of the inquiry phase is for the church and those who believe themselves called to ministry, to explore their call and the presbytery to make a decision regarding the inquirer's suitability for ministry (G-14.0404).

The Advisory Handbook explains the process and requirements for inquiry and candidacy (G-14.0403). A person desiring to be an inquirer indicates to the session a desire to explore the implications of becoming a minister (G-14.0404). The person has to be an active member of the congregation for at least six months (G-14.0403). If the session endorses the person, the Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) interviews the person and upon their approval and recommendation, the presbytery votes to accept the person as an inquirer (G-14.0410-.0411). The date of enrolment is the beginning of the covenantal relationship that lasts at least two years, including at least one year as candidate (G-14.0403).

After a sufficient time, the inquirer, the session and CPM can decide for the inquirer to become a candidate for ministry. After the inquirer meets with the session, it makes a recommendation to the CPM. The CPM meets with the inquirer and makes a recommendation to the presbytery whether to receive the inquirer as candidate. The presbytery examines the inquirer and if it approves the examination, the presbytery welcomes the inquirer as candidate. The inquirer answers four questions and is enrolled and recorded on the presbytery's roll of candidates (PC(USA) Advisory Handbook [s a]).

Upon completion of studies and readiness to begin ministry and completion of ordination exams and other requirements (G-14.0431), the status becomes "certified ready for examination, pending a call" (G-14.0450). Both the presbytery issuing a call to a candidate and the presbytery under whose care the candidate is, have to approve the call. Either presbytery can ordain the candidate, although typically the candidate is ordained in the congregation where their membership is (G-14.0483) and then installed in the congregation where the candidate received the call to be the minister (G-14.0484).

1.10.4 Summary

In the PC(USA), the session is the smallest governing body, which oversees the ordination and/or installation of deacons and elders to perpetual service. The next governing bodies are presbyteries, composed of several churches, which oversee the ordination of ministers of the Word and Sacrament; synods, which are composed of several presbyteries; and the General Assembly, which represents the entire denomination. G-13.0102b sets a formula for the equal amount of minister and elder commissioners that each of the 173 presbyteries elects to represent them at the biennial General Assembly meeting: 752 commissioners in 2008.

The local presbytery is instrumental in the determination of who is ordained and/or installed as minister of the Word and Sacrament, since there is an intimate relationship with all future ministers. The presbytery approves, ordains, and installs ministers. The PC(USA) motto for officers is: once ordained, always and for everywhere ordained. However, it does not mean every session or presbytery throughout the denomination will install you as deacon, elder, or minister. Some who are eligible for installation might not be installed.

1.11 Chapter Outline

Chapter 2 will review the controversies in the 1830s and 1920s and their impact on the polity of the Presbyterian Church. Chapter 3 will review the history of the polity of the UPCUSA and PCUS regarding gay and lesbian inclusion and ordination and/or installation, to come to a historical synthesis. Chapter 4 will review Special Organisations and the role they have played in the same-gender relationship debates.

Chapter 5 will examine the history of the polity of the PC(USA) regarding gay and lesbian inclusion in the denomination, ordination and/or installation, and same-gender blessings and marriages, to come to a historical synthesis. The results from the historical analysis will be used to evaluate the PC(USA)'s current position and policy of the *Book of Order* regarding the ordination and/or installation of partnered gay and lesbian Christians as officers, and same-gender blessings and marriages.



Chapter 6 will explore the results from the historical analysis of the gay and lesbian ordination debate in the UPCUSA, PCUS, and PC(USA); summarise the thesis, and offer conclusions, alternatives, and recommendations on the current ordination and/or installation, and same-gender blessing and marriage polity of the PC(USA).