

## Polity Exam

The *Book of Order* states: "This examination shall assess the candidate's working knowledge of the constitutional structure of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the method by which differences are properly resolved and programs to fulfill the mission of the church are determined" [G-14.0310d (5)].

### General Musings

This test asks that you identify constitutional and interpersonal issues of church polity according to the *Book of Order* and to relate this knowledge to given situations. The *Book of Order* includes the "Form of Government," the "Directory for Worship," and the "Rules of Discipline."

- You will be given a situation and the comments of one or more people. If you cannot ascertain how the person feels, then in your answer you might want to examine several ways you might respond (e.g. "If Mary were just curious, I would respond xxxxx. But if Mary were seriously disturbed, I would xxxxx.")
- Demonstrate that you not only know the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law. After you give the exact rule, explain its meaning and relevance to the situation in your own words. This does not need and should not be a lengthy explanation. One or two sentences should be sufficient.
- It is also helpful to give theological reasons for our rules. You might say something like, "The rule says this because Jesus instructed us to . . ."
- State the rule specifically if you can. If you can't find the rule then at least say something like "In chapter three of . . ." It is important to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding by referring to specific passages or areas.
- In dealing with conflict situations always try to reconcile first. Use the judicial process last. Don't ever begin a counseling session with the Book of Order.
- The "Golden Rules for the Church Polity Examination" by the Polity Task Group is an excellent resource for study. It is attached at the end of this guide.
- Your answers on this exam will likely to be the shortest of all the exams. That's fine. Just be sure to answer the question.

## The Sections of the Polity Exam

### I. Constitutional Heritage

### II. & III. Constitutional Order as a Tool for Ministry

The first of the three parts of the *Book of Order* is called "Form of Government." The first four chapters of the "Form of Government" clearly "state the theological underpinnings by which Presbyterians live out their lives in the church and the world. It is important that you thoroughly know and understand these four chapters. The remaining 14 sections of the "Form of Government", as well as the "Directory for Worship" and the "Rules of Discipline", develop ways to live out that theology in concrete ways. Our polity (our way of living together) is a direct outgrowth of our theology. Polity is the way we live out our theology. The challenge is to see the theology that lies behind the law.

You need to bring a *Book of Order* to use with all three sections.

The test is divided into three sections. You have one hour for each of the three sections.

There are two parts to each question in each section. In part 1, be sure to identify the issues of the given situation and how these difficulties should be dealt with according to the *Book of Order*. It is very important to carry the insights developed in part 1 over to part 2.

#### Section I-- Constitutional Heritage

The purpose of this section is to test your knowledge and understanding of the basic theological principles drawn on to develop the constitutional order contained in The Book of Order.

You must be able to cite places in the *Book of Order* where we see the theology taking concrete form. For example, what principles of church government grow out of the understanding that "God alone is Lord of the conscience" or the Reformed watch words "by scripture alone."

Think through the various ways we Presbyterians live out the basic tenets of the Reformed Faith (chap. 2) in the ways we function in each of our governing bodies.

#### Section II and III-Constitutional Order as a Tool for Ministry

Both section II and section III has two parts for each question. In part 1, be sure to identify the issues of the given scenario and how these difficulties should be dealt with according to The Book of Order.

Part 2 asks that you respond to individuals in a given situation. It is very important to carry the insights developed in part 1 over to part 2. In the second part of the question, refer back to the information in part 1.

Look at the situation from each person's point of view--not just yours as the pastor. It is important to evaluate issues from different perspectives.

Your writing should reflect the kind of sensitivity and concern that you, as a pastor, would have for your congregation.

In section III you will be asked to respond to one of two given situations. Read both of the questions before you decide which one to answer. Once you've decided, reread the chosen one. Make sure you mark each facet of the question so that when you write your answer, you will answer each part.

#### Suggested Bibliography\*

Beattie, Frank. *Companion to the Constitution: Polity for the Local Church*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999.

*Book of Order*. "Directory for Worship." Louisville, KY: General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1991.

Chapman, William E. *History and Theology in the Book of Order: Blood on Every Page*. Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 1999. (This book is extremely helpful in understanding the theological framework of the first four chapters of the Book of Order. The first question on the exam is always from these chapters.)

Gray, Joan S. *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999.

\*Prepared by the faculty at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

