

The 226th General Assembly of the PCUSA, meeting in Salt Lake City in July 2024, referred a number of proposed amendments to its Presbyteries for their positive or negative vote. Among these were Amendments 24A and 24C.

**Amendment 24-A** adds “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” to the list of categories in F-1.0403 against which the church does not discriminate. Prior to this proposed amendment, this section already named race, ethnicity, age, sex, disability, geography or theological conviction as part of the rich diversity of our denomination against which discrimination was not acceptable.

**Amendment 24C** adds “ the Historic Principles of Church Order (F-3.01), and in the principles of participation and representation found in F-1.0403].” to the list of topics on which candidates for ordained offices, (Deacon, Elder, Minister of Word and Sacrament) must be examined.

As of May 13th, both of these amendments had reached the required number of Presbyteries voting in the affirmative to become part of our Constitution.

### **Implementing 24A**

The congregations of our Presbytery already work toward embodying the core value stated in our constitution: *A congregation shall welcome all persons who trust in God’s grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the fellowship and ministry of his Church (F-1.0403).* This Amendment adds two new categories to a list intended to bring to congregations’ attention and awareness groups that may have been excluded or marginalized in the past. As with the groups that were already listed, each congregation discerns together how to extend welcome and inclusion in ways that are appropriate to their particular context. Commitment to welcome and non-discrimination may include efforts such as:

- Improving the sanctuary sound system so all can hear clearly
- Adding ramps to enable all to access the choir loft or chancel
- Adapting Sunday curriculum to meet the needs of children who are not neurotypical
- Adding art and symbols that reflect non-dominant cultural backgrounds
- Singing hymns that represent a spectrum of theological convictions
- Praying in languages that reflect those spoken by a congregation’s neighbors

24A does not mandate any particular accommodation; it challenges all congregations to grow in their capacity to fully welcome all who come to them seeking community in Christ.

In regards to performing marriages, 24A does not change W-4.0602 which states:

*A couple requesting a service of Christian marriage shall receive instruction from the minister of the Word and Sacrament†, who may agree to the couple's request only if, in the judgment of the minister of the Word and Sacrament†, the couple demonstrate sufficient understanding of the nature of the marriage covenant and commitment to living their lives together according to its values. In making this decision, the minister of the Word and Sacrament† may seek the counsel of the session, which has authority to permit or deny the use of church property for a marriage service.*

### **Implementing 24C**

F-3.01 affirms that God alone is Lord of the conscience and that Christians should exercise mutual forbearance towards one another on matters upon which persons of good character and principles may differ. F-1.0403 includes the now expanded list of categories toward which the church will not discriminate.

As Amendment 24C has been debated throughout the denomination, one concern frequently expressed is that examining candidates regarding their willingness to uphold the PCUSA's commitment to diversity and non-discrimination could stand in tension with our Historic Principles of Church Governance which declare that God alone is Lord of the conscience, and that Christians should exercise mutual forbearance toward one another.

Amendment 24C upholds both our historic principles of church order and extends our commitment to diversity and non-discrimination. The amendment affirms freedom of conscience and as well as expanded welcome. How will NCCP act--and advise Sessions to act--if these two parallel commitments come into conflict during the course of the examination of a candidate for ordination?

First, NCCP will be guided by our Mission Statement:

*North Central California Presbytery,  
called as disciples of Jesus Christ to:*

*Gather in Love...Equip to Serve...Inspire Transformation*

*Based on the gospel values of: bold witness, hospitality, radical love, spiritual growth,  
community, outreach, justice and equity.*

NCCP's Vitality in Ministry Commission (VIM) and Committee on Preparation for Ministry (CPM) already view our conversations with candidates for ordination as opportunities to prayerfully

discern how candidates' gifts, training, experience, and theological convictions have equipped them for ministry in general and ministry in the specific setting in which they are exploring a call. These holy conversations are an opportunity to seek the Holy Spirit's guidance regarding how their gifts, training, experience, and convictions might empower them to answer Christ's call in a particular congregation or other ministry setting. Do their gifts enable this candidate to lead this particular community to gather in love, serve with joy, and inspire transformed lives around them? These conversations are also an opportunity to ask whether there is anything in their gifts, training, experience or convictions that might limit their capacity to lead in a particular ministry or community?

These convictions and practices will continue to inform our examinations of candidates as 24C becomes part of the PCUSA constitution. Currently, our examination of candidates include questions such as:

- *Share an example of your relationship and conversations with someone who has several different theological views than you do.*
- *What is it about being a member of this denomination that you value? How do you understand accountability in the presbytery?*

As we live into the requirements of 24C we anticipate including questions such as:

*Talk about a time you have worked with someone with a different race or ethnicity from yourself, and how that affects your understanding of ministry.*

*What does it look like for you to "be a friend to your colleagues in ministry" who are LGBTQIA+?*

*Talk about a time someone with a different theological conviction changed your mind about something, and whether that was a good thing.*

**Amendment 24C is an opportunity for Sessions to prayerfully review their own practices regarding examination of nominees for Ruling Elder and Deacon as required in G-(need to look up reference). What are your congregation's current practices in this respect and how do those practices equip and empower your leaders for ministry in your community? How might having a robust conversation regarding theological commitments--including freedom of conscience and expanding concepts of welcome-- invigorate and renew your sense of mission? What questions might help you have those conversations? Presbytery staff and leadership are ready to assist in that discernment and in development of questions appropriate to your context.**

Our PCUSA constitution holds space for those from a broad range of theological perspectives. 24C requires that ordaining bodies must at least explore candidates' theological views

regarding the constitution's commitment to diversity and non-discrimination. Amendments 24A and 24C do not, however, compel or require any particular answer by a candidate, nor do they compel a session or presbytery to make a particular decision about ordaining or installing a candidate. Presbyteries and Sessions remain free to determine whether a candidate's theological commitments align with the needs of Christ's ministry in the context in which they are exploring a call to serve. Openness to the Holy Spirit and an earnest desire to seek God's will in each unique situation will be our primary concerns in North Central California Presbytery.