

Preparation for the Vote in Presbytery of the James

This year the vote on the “fidelity and chastity” standard for officers of the Church is much closer than the previous vote in 2001-2002. The Presbytery of the James recently voted to defeat the amendment (125-192). It may be helpful for you to know something of the preparations of those seeking the amendment’s defeat. It’s our hope that the information will be an aid to your own preparations.

We wanted every church to know the date and place of the vote

- Two letters were sent from a cooperating group of clergy and sessions to every pastor/clerk of session in the presbytery. The first letter in October alerted people to the vote on Feb. 21 with a brief explanation of the effect of the amendment if it passes. The second letter, sent a month before the vote, included a one-page attachment with the current G-6.0106b alongside Amendment B, sentence by sentence. At the bottom of the page were three succinct points on why Amendment B should be defeated.
- Friends called friends to talk about the amendment and its effect were it to pass and to encourage them to have a full contingent of voting commissioners present.

Our discernment process avoided small groups and used four prepared speakers, pro and con, so that the whole body heard the arguments

- The Administrative Council decided to allow four speakers ten minutes each—two pro and two con. Those who were for the amendment met and chose their two speakers. Those opposed met and chose their two speakers. The speakers agreed on a process for deciding who would speak first, and how a fair vote could be assured. Name tags were color-coded for those commissioned to vote and they were seated in a separate section at the front of the sanctuary.

We discussed the best arguments and demeanor ahead of the day

- A group met well ahead of the vote to discuss the most important talking points that should be presented and how to respond to talking points from those supporting the amendment. As a result, some who had prepared to speak did not go to a microphone because speakers against the amendment already outnumbered those in support .

We focused on good process for the meeting

- The local newspaper published an article the day before the presbytery meeting alerting people to the important vote the next day.
- The vote was taken at a regularly scheduled presbytery meeting on a Saturday, which increased the likelihood that elder commissioners would be present.
- Copies of G-6.0106b alongside Amendment B sentence by sentence with an explanation of the result of a Yes or No vote were handed out at the presbytery meeting. The concern was that presbytery commissioners might either not come prepared with a copy of the current G6 and Amendment B or they would use the copy from the packet sent down by GA that shows G6.0106b crossed out, thus making a comparison of the two difficult to read and understand.
- The published proposed agenda scheduled the four pro and con speakers in the morning followed by business, lunch, unfinished business and finally the debate and vote on the amendments. Rather than approve the agenda as proposed, a motion was made to test the will of the body to have the vote be an “order of the day” immediately after an ordination sermon at 1:30. The motion passed. The effect was

to move unfinished business from the morning to later in the afternoon. If that motion had not been made and passed, the vote would have taken place very late in the afternoon.

We prayed and asked for prayer

- The process was covered in prayer. The day before the presbytery meeting a minister drove around the church where the meeting was to be held, praying for the events the next day. Sessions and congregations were called upon to pray during the hours of the debate and vote.

The day, the words, the vote belonged to the Lord. To him belongs the praise and glory.