

MOTION: That the Presbytery of _____ file a joinder in support of the complaint of *Eric Parnell et al v Presbytery of San Francisco*, to the Synod of the Pacific Permanent Judicial Commission.

REQUEST AND EXPLANATION FROM COMPLAINANTS AND THEIR COUNSEL:

A 23-year story leads up to the November 10 action of San Francisco Presbytery to declare Lisa Larges ready for ordination, summarized under the document “Time Table of Case Events” on the website www.PCUSASStandards.org. The most recent history involved the consideration of Ms. Larges’ “departure” from G-6.0106b (the ‘fidelity and chastity’ requirement of church officers) on January 15, 2008 (two years ago). At that time the presbytery, in anticipation of an examination for ordination, created a two-step process to consider the candidate’s departure at one meeting of presbytery and then proceed to the full examination at the next meeting. At the first meeting, the presbytery voted that the departure did not render the candidate ineligible for ordination. A remedial case was filed, as this was perceived by the complainants to be a violation of the PCUSA *Book of Order*. The case was heard by the Synod of the Pacific PJC in March of 2009, and an appeal by the GA-PJC in late October 2009. In their decisions, both commissions ruled on the procedural issue, to say that the only time the departure could be considered was within the context of a full “examination for ordination” (G-14.0482). In other words, the presbytery had acted prematurely and had to consider Ms. Larges’ departure again and only when she appeared for her “final trials of ordination.”

A week after the GA-PJC’s decision was delivered, Ms. Larges appeared before the San Francisco Presbytery with the Committee on Ministry’s recommendation that her ministry with That All May Freely Serve be validated and that her ordination be approved. After lengthy debate on both issues—during which an esteemed minister member actually said, “I don’t *care* what the Constitution says . . .”—by a vote of 156 to 138, San Francisco Presbytery approved the ordination of this self-avowed and unrepentant lesbian.

The complainants believe that the vote of San Francisco Presbytery to approve Ms. Larges for ordination violates the provision of G-6.0106b, which says that persons who do not satisfy the “fidelity and chastity” requirement “shall not be ordained or installed to office.” A slim majority of San Francisco members defiantly disregarded this important provision and have violated their own ordination vows by refusing to be governed by the church’s polity. This is indeed a sad state of affairs, the outcome of which must be challenged.

Filing a remedial case is the constitutionally given means by which we can express our conscience, honor our own vows and get a correction from higher governing bodies. We have the opportunity to go back to our judicial commission(s) and hope for a clear answer to the question, “Can a presbytery be permitted to ignore or waive a church-wide mandatory ordination standard?” As a first step in this long process, we immediately collected 103 signatures to secure a Stay of Enforcement, which means that Lisa Larges will not be ordained any time soon. We have seven individuals and one session as named complainants, but we feel it advantageous to identify at least one, if not a few, presbyteries to add their names as well. This is where you come in.

There are risks to this course of action, of course. There is no guarantee that the GA-PJC won't find some other flaw in our process or some other way to dodge the real question. Financing the effort also carries risks, but we agree Round 2 will not cost nearly as much, because most of the work has been done in Round 1. Some question whether a victory in Round 2 would actually solve anything. To be honest, we do not know the answer to this question, but anticipate that life is going to be difficult for biblically faithful and constitutional Presbyterians in the foreseeable future regardless of our choice now. At this point, the consensus of evangelical leaders in San Francisco Presbytery is that if we are going to have a hard life, we'd rather suffer for doing the right thing than for rolling over and giving up. "For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:17). Nobody said this would be quick or easy.

So here is how we expect the matter to proceed:

The Stay of Enforcement is filed (and granted), generously meeting our 45-day deadline for doing so. The "Complaint" specifying the presbytery's error is due at the same time. Then we wait for the presbytery's counsel to reply to the Complaint and for the Synod of the Pacific Permanent Judicial Commission to accept the case for trial. The Synod of the Pacific PJC meets only twice a year; in 2010 those dates are March 19 and September 24. The Stated Clerk is not hopeful that we can get this case on the March 19 docket, so a trial is probably several months in the future. In the meantime, we are hoping to secure your support as a presbytery, in time to add your name to the complainants' list by February 8, 2010.

In order to use much less money very carefully, the evangelical leadership in San Francisco Presbytery has agreed to have me represent the Complainants, write the briefs, and prepare for trial, using our attorney Bruce McIntosh as consultant and calling on "legal eagle" friends to help edit, draft letters, or do whatever smaller tasks are required. Now that we have been through one remedial case—and in the process acquired quite an education, as well as a passion—we can foresee Round 2 will be much easier to pull together. Our legal advisors around the country affirm this decision and have offered their support when needed. Perhaps you have legal talent in your presbytery that wouldn't mind reviewing a document or two; but we have the legal effort covered in the main, so you are not really expected to do anything.

On one hand, I am so sorry that things have turned out this way and that we must persevere through another period of uncertainty. But on the other hand, whether victory is assured or not, we have the opportunity to stand for God, for God's revealed will in his Scripture, and for the great heritage to which we all said "yes" at our ordination. And after everything has been done, to stand (Ephesians 6:13).

Thank you for your prayerful consideration,

(The Rev.) Mary Holder Naegeli
Minister Member, San Francisco Presbytery
Counsel for the Complainants