

Biblical Languages: Learning Disabilities and an Alternative Course of Study

Policy Adopted by the Committee on Preparation for Ministry, Presbytery of New Brunswick on May 11, 1998.

All (educational) requirements of G-14.0310 shall be met except in the following extraordinary circumstances.

G-14.0313a (Extraordinary Circumstances: Educational Requirements)

If the inquirer's or candidate's presbytery judges that there are good and sufficient reasons why certain educational requirements of G-14.0310b(2) b(3) should not be met by an inquirer or candidate, it shall make an exception only by three-fourths vote of the members of presbytery present. A full account of the reasons for such an exception shall be included in the minutes of presbytery and shall be communicated to the presbytery to which the person may be transferred. The successful completion of the course of study specified in such an exception shall fulfill the requirements of G-14.0310b(3).

The Book of Order also states: (G-4.0403; Full Participation) "The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall give full expression to the rich diversity within its membership and shall provide means which will assure a greater inclusiveness leading to wholeness in its emerging life. Persons of all racial ethnic groups, different ages, both sexes, various disabilities, ... shall be guaranteed full participation and access to representation in the decision making of the church."

Our goal and mandate from the CPM was to propose a procedure for reviewing and assessing those inquirers and candidates under our care who have learning disabilities and, when deemed appropriate, outline an alternative course of study for fulfilling the language requirement.

Research/Investigation: What we did.

- Talked with PCUSA officials in Louisville: Jerry Houchens, Associate, Presbyteries' Cooperative Committees on Examination (OGA); Evelyn Hwang, Associate, Resourcing Committees on Preparation for Ministry (NMD); Patsy Godwin, associate, Theological School Support (CMD); Dottie Hedgepeth, coordinator, Theological Education
- Talked with PTS administrators: Kathryn Johnson, director of student relations; Carolyn Nicholson, Dean of Student Affairs, Judy Lang, Registrar, James Armstrong, Dean of Academic Affairs
- Talked with a learning disabilities specialist: Lois Young, executive director of Newgrange School
- Received materials regarding testing and assessment of persons with disabilities, particularly on dyslexia
- Researched Book of Order requirements, flexibility and forms of interpretation.
- Read recent articles and legal opinions regarding accommodations for those with learning disabilities in colleges and schools.
- Spoke with administrators and faculty from several area seminaries (Drew University, The Theological School; Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary; New Brunswick Theological Seminary) regarding biblical interpretation and exegesis courses. We also talked with Drew

and EBTS officials regarding accommodations in their courses for those with learning disabilities.

- Communicated, as needed, with Committees on Preparation for Ministry in other presbyteries.

What we discovered

There is a wide range of interpretation of the educational requirements from presbytery to presbytery. The denomination does not have specific guidelines or standards in developing an alternative course of study. The decisions reside totally with each presbytery as it assesses each individual. Although PCUSA officials gave some suggestions they were very hesitant to give any specific recommendations. It is also important to note that how CPM's interpret the educational requirements of Greek/Hebrew languages and exegesis varies both within the presbyteries and among the presbyterian and non-presbyterian seminaries.

We have learned that there is a wide range of differences for those diagnosed with learning disabilities, both in degree and types of dyslexia. Therefore, we are proposing the following assessment procedure.

Assessment

Recommendation for an alternative course of study for Greek or Hebrew (language and exegesis) will be based on existence of an identified, relevant learning disability to be assessed by a special committee as follows:

Assessment Committee

The assessment committee will consist of four members: (1) a person specialized in working with persons having various learning disabilities; (2) a psychologist; (3) a person specialized in teaching biblical language and exegesis; (4) a member of CPM.

If an inquirer or candidate believes himself or herself to have a learning disability that precludes effective study of one or both biblical languages, the inquirer/candidate shall submit, through the CPM chairperson, to the special assessment committee, any previous documentation of such disability, and a case history shall be taken in a meeting with the learning disability specialist. The learning disability specialist and the psychologist shall determine together whether any additional testing is required. After any additional testing (if needed), the assessment committee will meet to prepare a recommendation to CPM indicating what level of language work, if any, is realistic to require.

Notes to the above:

*It is likely that in most cases the inquirer/candidate will have adequate previous testing. If not, the cost of testing, and funding, will have to be investigated on a case-by-case basis.

*If the proposal be approved, Lois Young, founder and director of NewGrange School, member and elder of Nassau Church, former member of CPM, has agreed to serve on a volunteer basis as the person specializing in learning disabilities. She is qualified to read reports and do case histories, but not to do any testing.

*If the proposal be approved, Katharine Sakenfeld, CPM member and PTS biblical department

faculty, minister member of Presbytery, has agreed to serve on a volunteer basis as the biblical language specialist.

Recommended Alternative Course of Study

When the above committee recommends that the inquirer/candidate not pursue the usual Greek/Hebrew language requirements, the normal alternative course of study will include the following:

1. A course in exegetical method that does not require the languages. This should normally be B 504 Biblical Interpretation at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

B504 Biblical Interpretation: Through a survey of the history of Biblical interpretation, the principles of Biblical hermeneutics will be defined and illustrated. The aim is to assist the student in gaining an appreciation for exegetical method, to develop an awareness of interpretive principles, and to see how these principles and skills may be used in teaching and preaching.

2. A seminary course concentrating on a single Old Testament book, based on English text and concentrating on exegesis, to be chosen in consultation with member #3 of special assessment committee.
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The standard ordination examination must be taken, with notification given to the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Notes to the above:

- None of the three courses can be taken at Princeton Seminary, since Princeton does not offer courses in the categories described.
- If at all possible, decisions concerning course selection should be made on the basis of review of the course syllabus (or a past syllabus that may be slightly modified), rather than on the basis of catalog description alone.
- It will need to be made clear to the inquirer/candidate seeking the exception that any additional costs for tuition at other schools and/or any delays (whether in the ordination process itself or in graduation from seminary because of non-transferrable course work) must be the responsibility of the inquirer/candidate.
- The sub-committee has identified several appropriate courses at The Theological School at Drew University. Courses may also be taken at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary or another seminary to be agreed upon by CPM on recommendation of person #3 of assessment committee.