

On behalf of the Presbyteries' Cooperative Committee on Examinations for Candidates (PCC), we want to thank you for sharing your concerns about the use of Judges 19:1-30 as the scriptural basis for the Winter 2023 Bible Exegesis exam. Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), we speak of the preparation for ministry process as "being under care" of the presbytery and a session, and we recognize these expressions of concern as being fundamentally a desire to care for all those involved in the examination process as both candidates and readers. As a committee of the presbyteries, the PCC always seeks to be a caring partner with CPMs and sessions in this important work of preparation and discernment with inquirers and candidates.

The Executive Committee met on Wednesday, February 1, 2023, to consider the concerns and requests that have been communicated about this Exegesis exam. Exam scenarios that address issues of sexual abuse and trauma can and have appeared in several of the subject areas of the standard ordination exams (for example, relating to mandatory reporting under the church's polity). Whenever this is the case, the PCC carefully considers the appropriateness of the topic to the examination at every stage of the three-year process of developing the specific questions and the evaluation resources prepared for the readers. While exam security issues (relating to the general area and specific content of questions) preclude providing advance notice to presbytery committees when these or other sensitive areas will be addressed, the PCC does work to handle such topics with care. As an example, in this current case the following paragraph was included at the very outset of the reader training resources:

Note to Readers: The members of the PCC are aware that the selected passage for this exam (Judges 19:1-30), like many other passages in Scripture, is difficult to read and may elicit a wide range of personal emotions and reactions in both the exam takers and the exam readers. We also recognize that a necessary skill in ministry is to develop an awareness of the emotions that some passages bring to the surface in our lives and hold those in tension with the academic exercise of interpreting and presenting these ancient texts to a modern world. Readers need to be alert to how this passage may affect you personally, as well as, how the exam's responses address the emotions that this story may have raised in the candidate's life and in the hypothetical lives of the participants in the Bible study. More than some other exegesis exams, this is an exam where pastoral care and sensitivity needs to be demonstrated throughout the responses but especially in the Section III application. We also expect pastoral care and sensitivity to be demonstrated in reader's comments.

The PCC takes the raising of such sensitive matters very seriously while also recognizing that not everyone will agree as to when or even if including them within the context of the standard ordination exams is appropriate.

There are several logistical reasons why it is not possible in this case to provide an alternative Exegesis exam during the current testing cycle. At the point when concerns were communicated to the PCC on Monday, January 30, approximately a third of the writing period for the Exegesis exam had already passed and readers had begun their training relating to the specific questions of this test. Because readers are only available during the specific dates assigned for exam evaluations (the reading week of February 6-10), it is not possible to set a

new set of starting and submission deadlines for the test that would extend beyond that period.

Recognizing, however, that this particular exam has raised a level of concern that has not been expressed relating to previous Exegesis exams dealing with scriptural passages presenting extreme violence or other exams addressing issues of sexual trauma, the PCC Executive Committee has approved the following action:

If any candidate is unable to complete the Winter 2023 Bible Exegesis exam because of the passage that is assigned, the PCC will automatically enroll them for the Spring 2023 Bible Exegesis exam without additional registration fees.

Because there are always some candidates who simply do not submit exams for any number of reasons (as is already the case in this cycle with exams in other areas past their submission deadlines), a request for this deferral will need to be sent to Tim Cargal, who administers the exam program on behalf of the PCC, so that these special registrations can be processed. The communication of that request may come either from the candidate or the candidate's presbytery.

All communications of concern sent to the PCC are being gathered and will be reviewed and discussed by the full membership of the PCC during its Annual Meeting in March. In keeping with the denomination's policies relating to open meetings, arrangements will be made for those who wish to observe those deliberations.

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Moderator, PCC

Reverend Beth Garrod-Logsdon
Chair, PCC Bible Exams Task Group