

1 **OVERTURE** 30 from Lowcountry Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 "Amend BCO 21 & 24 to Clarify Moral Requirements for Church Office"
3

4 Note: This overture from Lowcountry Presbytery concerning the examination of a
5 candidate's character is informed by the work of the report of The Forty-Seventh
6 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America Ad Interim Committee on
7 Human Sexuality.

8
9 **Whereas** the character of a candidate for ordination is as important as his doctrine
10 (1 Tim. 3: 1-13; Titus 1: 6-9) and specific areas and means of inquiry into
11 doctrine, views, and ability are enumerated in the BCO (BCO 21-4; 24-1); yet
12 little emphasis or elaboration is given to the examination of the
13 candidate's character (BCO 21-4-a-1; 24-1-a); and

14
15 **Whereas** the qualifications for a church officer particularly require that he be
16 above reproach and blameless (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Tit. 1: 7); and

17
18 **Whereas** scripture itself singles out sexual immorality as being worthy of particular
19 note in the context of the church operating in the world (Acts 15:20); and

20
21 **Whereas** the Presbyterian Church in America has sought consistent and clear
22 responses to questions of homosexuality throughout its history¹; and

23
24 **Whereas** recently the language of sexual and gender identification has caused
25 much confusion, leading to the formation of a study committee and its helpful
26 report²; and

27
28 **Whereas** still other forms of actual sin and desire raise similar concerns, and new
29 issues will likely arise in the future; and

30
31 **Whereas** the Christian's identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a "new creation" in
32 Him, his identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to
33 the Holy Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-
34 conception ("This is who I am") and remaining indwelling sin ("This is what I must

¹ In 1977, the 5th General Assembly (GA) adopted a resolution on homosexuality (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-398.pdf>); in 1993, the 21st GA adopted a "Declaration of Conscience" on homosexuality (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-399.pdf>); in 1996, the 24th GA adopted a resolution on homosexual marriage (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/3-025.pdf>); and, in 1999, the 27th GA adopted a resolution on the "homosexual agenda" (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/27GA-Ov22.pdf>).

² "Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality" (available at <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20-1.pdf>).

35 daily mortify”) (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3: 1-5); and

36
37 **Whereas** some men may have experienced various struggles with sin in a manner that
38 would have disqualified them from church office, yet through God’s work of
39 sanctification they have been faithfully and consistently, although imperfectly,
40 mortifying this sin with its desires to the point where they may be qualified; and

41
42 **Whereas** all Christians should expect to experience progress in the Christian life (WLC
43 75; WSC 35) as a work of grace by the Holy Spirit and in time to be enabled more and
44 more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; and

45
46 **Whereas** the mortifying of sin includes not only actual sins committed but also the
47 battling of all sinful passions and desires that remain (WLC 78; WSC 35); and

48
49 **Whereas** the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” offers the
50 clarifying distinction that “we name our sins, but are not named by them”³; and

51
52 **Whereas** the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and
53 confessional language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which
54 cause confusion; and

55
56 **Whereas** there is precedent for amending the BCO to address emerging cultural
57 issues⁴;

58
59 **Therefore be it resolved** that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, BCO 21-4 be
60 amended to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4-e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-
61 paragraphs re-lettered:

62 **21-4-e** In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the presbytery
63 should give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but
64 not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality,
65 fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, and financial
66 mismanagement. Careful reflection should be given to his practical struggle
67 against sinful actions, as well as persistent sinful desires. The candidate shall
68 give clear testimony of his reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits
69 thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress
70 over sin (Psalm 103: 2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5: 22-
71 23). While imperfection will remain, he should not be known by reputation or
72 self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work

³ “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality,” p 11, lines 22-23.

⁴ For example, the Forty-Seventh GA approved amendments to BCO 59-3, and granted it full constitutional authority (see the Minutes of the 47th General Assembly, p 19, available at https://pcahistory.org/pca/ga/47th_pcaga_2019.pdf).

73 of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6: 9-11). In order to maintain discretion
74 and protect the honor of the pastoral office, the presbytery may empower a
75 committee to conduct detailed examination into these matters and to give
76 prayerful support to candidates.

77

78 **Be it further resolved** that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, BCO 24-1
79 be amended as follows (additions are underlined):

80 **24-1.** Every church shall elect persons to the office of ruling elders and deacon in
81 the following manner: At such times as determined by the Session, communicant
82 members of the congregation may submit names to the Session, keeping in mind
83 that each prospective officer should be an active male member who meets the
84 qualifications set forth in 1 Tim. 3 and Tit. 1. After the close of the nomination
85 period nominees for the office of ruling elder and/or deacon shall receive
86 instruction in the qualifications and work of the office. Each nominee shall then
87 be examined in:

- 88 a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and financial
89 management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Tim. 3: 1-7 and Tit. 1: 6-9),
- 90 b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- 91 c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, discipline
92 contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (BCO
93 Preface III, The Constitution Defined),
- 94 d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
- 95 e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination (BCO 24-6).

96 In the examination of each nominee's personal character, the Session should
97 give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but not limited to
98 relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, fornication, and
99 pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, and financial mismanagement.
100 Careful reflection should be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as
101 well as persistent sinful desires. Each nominee shall give clear testimony of his
102 reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit,
103 depending upon this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103: 2-5;
104 Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5: 22-23). While imperfection will
105 remain, he should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his
106 remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1
107 Cor. 6: 9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of church
108 office, the Session may empower a committee to conduct detailed examinations
109 into these matters and prayerful support to nominees.

110 If there are candidates eligible for the election, the Session shall report to the
111 congregation those eligible, giving at least thirty (30) days prior notice of the time
112 and place of a congregational meeting for the elections.

113 If one-fourth (1/4) of the persons entitled to vote shall at any time request the
114 Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing additional

115 officers, it shall be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on the above
116 procedure. The number of officers to be elected shall be determined by the
117 congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation.

Adopted by the Lowcountry Presbytery at its stated meeting, November 5th, 2020.

Attested by RE _____, stated clerk

_____ Richard H. Wylly _____