

1 **OVERTURE 18** from Pacific Northwest Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Amend *BCO* 24-1 to Clarify that a Session Has Discretion on the
3 Timing of Some Parts of the Exam of Officer Nominees”
4

5 **Be it resolved** that *BCO* 24-1 be amended by the deletion of one word (“then” in the first
6 paragraph) and the addition of one sentence (after 24-1.e), as follows (strike-though
7 for deletions; underlining for addition):
8

9 ***BCO 24-1.*** Every church shall elect persons to the offices of ruling elder and
10 deacon in the following manner: At such times as determined by the Session,
11 communicant members of the congregation may submit names to the Session,
12 keeping in mind that each prospective officer should be an active male member
13 who meets the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. After the
14 close of the nomination period, nominees for the office of ruling elder and/or
15 deacon shall receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the office.
16 Each nominee shall ~~then~~ be examined in:

- 17
- 18 a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and family
19 management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and
20 Titus 1:6-9),
 - 21 b. his knowledge of Bible content,
 - 22 c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, discipline contained
23 in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (*BCO* Preface III,
24 The Constitution Defined),
 - 25 d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
 - 26 e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination.
27 (*BCO* 24-6)
- 28

29 The Session may render a decision on Christian experience at any point in
30 the process, and based on that decision, may judge him ineligible for that
31 election.

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

35 If one-fourth (1/4) of the persons entitled to vote shall at any time request
36 the Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing
37 additional officers, it shall be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on
38 the above procedure. The number of officers to be elected shall be determined
39 by the congregation after hearing the Session’s recommendation.
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41 **Rationale:**

- 42
- 43 1. Striking the word, "then," in our current *BCO* 24-1 more clearly allows Sessions some
44 flexibility to sequence their examinations as they deem most prudent. Specifically, some
45 Sessions may desire to do the exam on Christian experience prior to instruction.

1 Removing the word, “then,” more clearly allows this to happen. Otherwise, a man could
2 go through the entire instruction, only to be disqualified at the end for something his
3 Session knew about before he started receiving instruction.
4

- 5 2. An October 2019 SJC Decision seemed to interpret *BCO* 24-1 as prohibiting *any* portion
6 of an officer nominee exam to be conducted prior to completion of all training - even the
7 evaluation of personal character or family management. Below is excerpt from the
8 Decision in *Case 2019-03: Crouse v. Northwest Georgia*
9

10 Barring clearly or grievously disqualified nominees, the procedures for
11 instruction and examining nominees outlined in *BCO* 24-1 should be followed.
12 That process *requires instruction* and examination *to precede* a session’s
13 determination of a nominee’s qualifications and eligibility. (Emphasis added.)
14

- 15 3. The *Crouse* Decision did not define its phrase, "clearly or grievously disqualified," or give
16 examples. While a non-member or a female nominee would be in the "clearly"
17 disqualified category, it's unclear whether the Decision would regard a man with
18 significant problems in "personal character" or "family management" to also be in that
19 category.
20
- 21 4. The SJC also offered the following suggestion in the *Crouse* Decision:
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23 Should anyone suppose that there should be greater flexibility in the process of
24 *BCO* 24-1, proposed amendment to the *BCO* would be in order.
25

- 26 5. History - Twenty-six years ago, in 1994, the 22nd GA in Atlanta added the following
27 sentence to *BCO* 24-1: "*Nominees for the office of ruling elder and/or deacon shall*
28 *receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the office.*" The 22nd GA also added
29 items and clarifications to what was to be examined. This resulted from Overture 5 the
30 year prior, filed by North Georgia Presbytery. But it doesn't appear Overture 5 was
31 intended to prohibit disqualifications prior to completion of all instruction. ([M21GA](#),
32 1993, p. 120 and [M22GA](#), 1994, p. 58)
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34 The last revision of *BCO* 24-1 was made 20 years ago in 2000 when the 28th GA in Tampa
35 made the changes shown below. This was prompted by Overture 25 from Central Carolina
36 Presbytery two years prior. That Overture sought to give Sessions more time to complete
37 exams before elections, but there was no indication Overture 25 was intended to require
38 Sessions to complete all instruction before *any* portion of the exam could be conducted.
39 Below is a summary of the changes adopted in 2000 resulting in our current version.
40

41 *BCO* 24-1. Every church shall elect persons to the offices of ruling elder and
42 deacon in the following manner: ~~Public notice shall be given of the time, place,~~
43 ~~and purpose of this meeting at least one month prior to the appointed time,~~
44 ~~during which time the congregation is asked to~~ At such times as determined by
45 the Session, communicant members of the congregation may submit names to

1 the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective officer should be an active
2 male member who meets the qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
3 After the close of the nomination period nominees for the office of ruling elder
4 and/or deacon shall receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the
5 office. ~~The Session shall examine those nominated and then report to the~~
6 ~~congregation on or before the Sunday prior to election day those eligible for~~
7 ~~election.~~ Each nominee shall then be examined in....If there are candidates
8 eligible for the election, the Session shall report to the congregation those
9 eligible, giving at least thirty (30) days prior notice of the time and place of a
10 congregational meeting for elections. [[M26GA](#), 1998, p. 208, [M27GA](#), 1999,
11 p. 58, [M28GA](#), 2000, pp. 54, 275]
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13 Below are the reasons Central Carolina Presbytery supplied for the Overture:
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15 Grounds: *BCO* 24-1 requires public notice of the time, place and purpose at
16 least one month prior to the appointed time of electing officers, during which
17 time the congregation is asked to submit names to the Session. *BCO* 24-1
18 requires the Session to examine those nominated and then report to the
19 congregation before election day those eligible for election. These two
20 requirements can place undue time constraints upon the Session to examine
21 candidates and report to the congregation before the election day.
22

23 While there might have been different reasons why Commissioners at the 26th and 28th
24 GA voted in favor of the proposed change, it's apparent from the Presbytery's grounds
25 that it did not intend to restrict a Session's freedom to do some parts of the exam prior to
26 instruction.
27

28 *Proposed to the Pacific Northwest Presbytery at its stated meeting on January 24, 2020*
29 *Final version adopted by an Administrative Commission of Presbytery on April 8, 2020*
30 *Attested by /s/ TE Nathan Chambers, interim stated clerk*