

1 **OVERTURE 27** from Platte Valley Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 "Amend *BCO* 36 to Require Public Excommunication"
3

4 **Whereas**, when the Apostle Paul administered the censure of excommunication against the
5 unrepentant Corinthian in sexual sin, he insisted that the censure be pronounced in the
6 midst of the assembled Corinthian church (1 Cor. 5:2–5); and
7

8 **Whereas**, the Apostle Paul also instructed that those who persist in sin should be rebuked “in
9 the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear” (1 Tim. 5:20; cf. *BCO* 30-4); and
10

11 **Whereas**, if the censure of excommunication is administered in private without public
12 announcement, it is impossible for the whole congregation to consider the
13 excommunicated offender “as a Gentile and a tax collector,” according to the words
14 of our Lord Jesus (Matt. 18:17), or to disassociate with such an excommunicated
15 offender, according to the instructions of the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 5:11); and
16

17 **Whereas**, concerning the excommunication considered in 1 Corinthians 5:2–5, John Calvin
18 commends Paul’s course of action as lawful for churches today, “provided the elders
19 do not do it by themselves alone, but with the knowledge and approval of the church;
20 in this way the multitude of the people does not decide the action but observes as
21 witness and guardian so that nothing may be done according to the whim of a few”
22 (*Institutes*, Book 4, ch. 12, §7); and
23

24 **Whereas**, administering the censure of excommunication privately, without public
25 announcement, deprives other members under the jurisdiction of the same court of
26 their right to file a complaint against one of the most significant actions taken by that
27 court (*BCO* 43-1); and
28

29 **Whereas**, nearly all other English-speaking NAPARC denominations require public
30 announcements and/or administrations before the congregation in cases of
31 excommunication, including the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC
32 Book of Discipline 7.6), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC Church Order,
33 Article 68), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC Church Order, Article 77),
34 the FRCNA (Church Order 2017, Article 77), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC
35 Book of Discipline, Chapter VI, C-1), the Reformed Church in the United States
36 (RCUS Constitution, Article 118), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North
37 America (RPCNA Book of Discipline, Chapter 4.1e), and the United Reformed
38 Churches in North America (URCNA Church Order, Ecclesiastical Discipline, Article
39 55); and
40

41 **Whereas**, the current language in our *BCO* permits, but does not require, the public
42 announcement or the public administration of excommunication before the
43 congregation; instead, the *BCO* allows excommunication to be administered
44 “according to one or other of the two modes laid down for indefinite suspension, or to
45 be inflicted in public as the court may decide” (*BCO* 36-6); in turn, our *BCO* explains

1 that indefinite suspension “should be administered after the manner prescribed for
2 definite suspension” (*BCO* 36-5); and, in turn, our *BCO* permits that definite
3 suspension “should be administered in the presence of the court alone, or in the open
4 session of the court, as it may deem best, and public announcement thereof shall be at
5 the court’s discretion” (*BCO* 36-4); and
6

7 **Whereas**, this chain of references in our *BCO* from excommunication to indefinite suspension
8 to definite suspension permits the administration of excommunication in the presence
9 of the court alone, with public announcement only at the court’s discretion, which is
10 contrary to the biblical instruction on excommunication and the normative Reformed
11 practice; and
12

13 **Whereas**, the historic language from the PCUS Rules of Discipline much more clearly
14 requires a public administration and/or announcement before the congregation of the
15 censure of excommunication, and may serve as a guide to reform the current language
16 in our *BCO* to align with the biblical requirement for public, congregational
17 administration and/or announcement of excommunication, albeit with some updated
18 language; and
19

20 **Whereas**, the fact that the *BCO* does not currently require the administration or announcement
21 of excommunications to be public may also open churches up to lawsuits when
22 churches choose to administer/announce the censure publicly, rather than doing so
23 privately;
24

25 **Therefore, Platte Valley Presbytery overtures** to amend *BCO* 36-2 to read (underlining for
26 new words):
27

28 36-2. Church censures and the modes of administering them should be suited
29 to the nature of the offenses. For private offenses, censure should be
30 administered in the presence of the court alone, or in private by one or more
31 members of the court. In the case of public offenses, the degree of censure
32 and mode of administering it shall be within the discretion of the court, acting
33 in accordance with paragraphs below which deal with particular censures.
34 When there are peculiar and special reasons, the court may visit public
35 offenses, not very gross in their character, with private admonition, or with
36 definite suspension in private; but the censures of excommunication and
37 deposition should be either administered before the church, or else announced
38 to it, at the discretion of the court.
39

40 So that it reads:
41

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5 definite suspension in private; but the censures of excommunication and
6 deposition should be either administered before the church, or else announced
7 to it, at the discretion of the court.
8

9 **And, therefore, Platte Valley Presbytery further overtures** to amend *BCO* 36-6 to read
10 (~~strike through~~ for deletions; underlining for new words):
11

12 36-6. ~~Excommunication is to be administered according to one or other of the~~
13 ~~two modes laid down for indefinite suspension, or to be inflicted in public as~~
14 ~~the court may decide.~~ When the sentence of excommunication has been
15 regularly passed, In administering this censure the moderator of the Session
16 shall make a public statement before the church of the several steps which
17 have been taken with respect to the offending brother, and inform them that it
18 has been found necessary ~~of the decision~~ to cut him off from the communion
19 of the church. He shall then show from Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians
20 5:1-5 the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members, and shall
21 explain the nature, use and consequences of this censure, warning the people
22 that they are to conduct themselves, in all their interactions with him as is
23 proper towards one who is under the heaviest censure of the Church. He shall
24 then administer the censure in the words following:
25

26 **Whereas, _____, a member of this church has been by**
27 **sufficient proof convicted of the sin of _____,**
28 **and after much admonition and prayer, obstinately refuses to hear**
29 **the Church, and has manifested no evidence of repentance:**
30 **Therefore, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ,**
31 **we, the Session of _____ church do pronounce**
32 **him to be excluded from the Sacraments, and cut off from the**
33 **fellowship of the Church.**
34

35 Prayer shall then be made that by God's blessing this solemn action of the
36 court may issue in the repentance and restoration of the offender, and in the
37 establishment of all true believers.
38

39 So that it reads:
40

41 36-6. When the sentence of excommunication has been regularly passed, the
42 moderator of the Session shall make a public statement before the church of
43 the several steps which have been taken with respect to the offending brother,
44 and inform them that it has been found necessary to cut him off from the
45 communion of the church. He shall then show from Matthew 18:15-18 and

1 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members,
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3 the people that they are to conduct themselves, in all their interactions with
4 him as is proper towards one who is under the heaviest censure of the Church.
5 He shall then administer the censure in the words following:
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14 **fellowship of the Church.**
15

16 Prayer shall then be made that by God’s blessing this solemn action of the
17 court may issue in the repentance and restoration of the offender, and in the
18 establishment of all true believers.
19

20 *Adopted by Platte Valley Presbytery at its stated meeting, November 7, 2020*

21 *Attested by /s/ TE Jacob Gerber, stated clerk*