

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

28 **Whereas** the Christian’s identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a “new creation” in Him, his
29 identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to the Holy
30 Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-conception (“This
31 is who I am”) and remaining indwelling sin (“This is what I must daily mortify”)
32 (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3: 1-5); and
33

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

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

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

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

4 **Whereas** the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and confessional
5 language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which cause confusion;
6 and
7

8 **Whereas** there is precedent for amending the *BCO* to address emerging cultural issues;
9

10 **Therefore be it resolved** that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, *BCO* 21-4 be amended
11 to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4.e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-paragraphs
12 [21-4.e-h] re-lettered [to be 21-4.f-i]:
13

14 **BCO 21-4.**

15 e. In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the
16 presbytery should give specific attention to potentially notorious
17 concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality
18 (including homosexuality, fornication, and pornography), addictions,
19 abusive behavior, and financial mismanagement. Careful reflection
20 should be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as
21 well as persistent sinful desires. The candidate shall give clear
22 testimony of his reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits
23 thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make
24 progress over sin (Psalm 103: 2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit
25 (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5: 22-23). While imperfection will remain, he
26 should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to
27 his remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit
28 in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6: 9-11). In order to maintain discretion and
29 protect the honor of the pastoral office, the presbytery may empower
30 a committee to conduct detailed examination into these matters and
31 to give prayerful support to candidates.
32

33 **Be it further resolved** that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, *BCO* 24-1 be
34 amended by the addition of a second paragraph (addition underlined):
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36 **24-1.** Every church shall elect persons to the office of ruling elders
37 and deacon in the following manner: At such times as determined
38 by the Session, communicant members of the congregation may
39 submit names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective
40 officer should be an active male member who meets the
41 qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. After the close
42 of the nomination period nominees for the office of ruling elder
43 and/or deacon shall receive instruction in the qualifications and
44 work of the office. Each nominee shall then be examined in:

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

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

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

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

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

Attested by RE Richard H. Wylly, stated clerk