

1 **OVERTURE 30** from Lowcountry Presbytery (to CCB, OC)

2 **Revised** by addition of footnotes

3 “Amend *BCO* 21 & 24 to Clarify Moral Requirements for Church Office”

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

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

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

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

20 **Whereas** the Presbyterian Church in America has sought consistent and clear responses to  
21 questions of homosexuality throughout its history<sup>1</sup>; and  
22

23 **Whereas** recently the language of sexual and gender identification has caused much  
24 confusion, leading to the formation of a study committee and its helpful report<sup>2</sup>; and  
25

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

29 **Whereas** the Christian’s identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a “new creation” in Him, his  
30 identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to the Holy  
31 Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-conception (“This  
32 is who I am”) and remaining indwelling sin (“This is what I must daily mortify”)  
33 (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3: 1-5); and  
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<sup>1</sup> In 1977, the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (GA) adopted a resolution on homosexuality (available <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-398.pdf>); in 1993, the 21<sup>st</sup> GA adopted a “Declaration of Conscience” on homosexuality (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/2-399.pdf>); in 1996, the 24<sup>th</sup> GA adopted a resolution on homosexual marriage (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/3-025.pdf>); and, in 1999, the 27<sup>th</sup> GA adopted a resolution on the “homosexual agenda” (available at <https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/digest/studies/27GA-Ov22.pdf>).

<sup>2</sup> “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>).

1 **Whereas** some men may have experienced various struggles with sin in a manner that would  
2 have disqualified them from church office, yet through God’s work of sanctification  
3 they have been faithfully and consistently, although imperfectly, mortifying this sin  
4 with its desires to the point where they may be qualified; and  
5

6 **Whereas** all Christians should expect to experience progress in the Christian life (*WLC* 75;  
7 *WSC* 35) as a work of grace by the Holy Spirit and in time to be enabled more and  
8 more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; and  
9

10 **Whereas** the mortifying of sin includes not only actual sins committed but also the battling  
11 of all sinful passions and desires that remain (*WLC* 78; *WSC* 35); and  
12

13 **Whereas** the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” offers the clarifying  
14 distinction that “we name our sins, but are not named by them”<sup>3</sup>; and  
15

16 **Whereas** the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and confessional  
17 language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which cause confusion;  
18 and  
19

20 **Whereas** there is precedent for amending the *BCO* to address emerging cultural issues<sup>4</sup>;  
21

22 **Therefore be it resolved** that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, *BCO* 21-4 be amended  
23 to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4.e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-paragraphs  
24 [21-4.e-h] re-lettered [to be 21-4.f-i]:  
25

26 **BCO 21-4.**

27 e. In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the  
28 presbytery should give specific attention to potentially notorious  
29 concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality  
30 (including homosexuality, fornication, and pornography), addictions,  
31 abusive behavior, and financial mismanagement. Careful reflection  
32 should be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as  
33 well as persistent sinful desires. The candidate shall give clear  
34 testimony of his reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits  
35 thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make  
36 progress over sin (Psalm 103: 2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit  
37 (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5: 22-23). While imperfection will remain, he  
38 should not be known by reputation or self-profession according to  
39 his remaining sinfulness, but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit  
40 in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6: 9-11). In order to maintain discretion and

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

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Forty-Seventh GA approved amendments to *BCO* 59-3, and granted it full constitutional authority (see the Minutes of the 47<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, p 19, available at [https://pcahistory.org/pca/ga/47th\\_pcaga\\_2019.pdf](https://pcahistory.org/pca/ga/47th_pcaga_2019.pdf)).

1 protect the honor of the pastoral office, the presbytery may empower  
2 a committee to conduct detailed examination into these matters and  
3 to give prayerful support to candidates.  
4

5 **Be it further resolved** that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, *BCO* 24-1 be  
6 amended by the addition of a second paragraph (addition underlined):  
7

8 **24-1.** Every church shall elect persons to the office of ruling elders  
9 and deacon in the following manner: At such times as determined  
10 by the Session, communicant members of the congregation may  
11 submit names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective  
12 officer should be an active male member who meets the  
13 qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. After the close  
14 of the nomination period nominees for the office of ruling elder  
15 and/or deacon shall receive instruction in the qualifications and  
16 work of the office. Each nominee shall then be examined in:

- 17 a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and  
18 family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1  
19 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9),
- 20 b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- 21 c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government,  
22 discipline contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian  
23 Church in America (*BCO* Preface III, The Constitution  
24 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  
27 ordination (*BCO* 24-6).

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

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

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

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

13 *Footnotes added by action of Lowcountry Presbytery at its stated meeting, January 23, 2021*

14 *Attested by RE Richard H. Wylly, stated clerk*