

1 **OVERTURE 37** from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Amend *BCO* 21-4 and 24-1 Clarifying Moral Requirements for Church Office”
3
4 **Whereas** the character of a candidate for ordination is as important as his doctrine (1 Tim.
5 3:1-13; Titus 1: 6-9) and specific areas and means of inquiry into doctrine, views,
6 and ability are enumerated in the *BCO* (*BCO* 21-4; 24-1); yet little emphasis or
7 elaboration is given to the examination of the candidate’s character (*BCO* 21-4.a.1;
8 24-1.a); and
9
10 **Whereas** the qualifications for a church officer particularly require that he be above reproach
11 and blameless (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Tit. 1:7); and
12
13 **Whereas** scripture itself singles out sexual immorality as being worthy of particular note in
14 the context of the church operating in the world (Acts 15:20); and
15
16 **Whereas** the Presbyterian Church in America has sought consistent and clear responses to
17 questions of homosexuality throughout its history; and
18
19 **Whereas** recently the language of sexual and gender identification has caused much confusion,
20 leading to the formation of a study committee and its helpful report; and
21
22 **Whereas** still other forms of actual sin and desire raise similar concerns, and new issues will
23 likely arise in the future; and
24
25 **Whereas** the Christian’s identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a “new creation” in Him, his
26 identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to the Holy
27 Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-conception (“This
28 is who I am”) and remaining indwelling sin (“This is what I must daily mortify”)
29 (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-5); and
30
31 **Whereas** some men may have experienced various struggles with sin in a manner that would
32 have disqualified them from church office, yet through God’s work of sanctification
33 they have been faithfully and consistently, although imperfectly, mortifying this sin
34 with its desires to the point where they may be qualified; and
35
36 **Whereas** all Christians should expect to experience progress in the Christian life (*WLC* 75;
37 *WSC* 35) as a work of grace by the Holy Spirit and in time to be enabled more and
38 more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; and
39
40 **Whereas** the mortifying of sin includes not only actual sins committed but also the battling
41 of all sinful passions and desires that remain (*WLC* 78; *WSC* 35); and
42
43 **Whereas** the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” offers the clarifying
44 distinction that “we name our sins, but are not named by them”; and

1 **Whereas** the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and confessional
2 language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which cause confusion;
3 and

4
5 **Whereas** there is precedent for amending the *BCO* to address emerging cultural issues;

6
7 **Therefore be it resolved** that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, *BCO* 21-4 be amended
8 to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4.e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-paragraphs
9 [21-4.e-h] re-lettered [to be 21-4.f-i]:

10
11 **BCO 21-4.**

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

30
31 **Be it further resolved** that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, *BCO* 24-1
32 be amended by the addition of a second paragraph (addition underlined):

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

- 43 a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and
44 family management (based on the qualifications set out in
45 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9),

- 1 b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- 2 c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government,
- 3 discipline contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian
- 4 Church in America (*BCO* Preface III, The Constitution
- 5 Defined),
- 6 d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
- 7 e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for
- 8 ordination (*BCO* 24-6).

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

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

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

36
37 *Adopted by Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery at its stated meeting, April 20, 2021*

38 *Attested by TE Thomas Keane, stated clerk*