

1 **OVERTURE 5** from Tidewater Presbytery (to MNA, OC)  
2 “Change *BCO* 8-6 Regarding Chaplain Administration of Sacraments”  
3

4 **Whereas**, a teaching elder feeds the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of  
5 God and administering the Sacraments.  
6

7 **Whereas**, Chaplains are teaching elders called to serve with an organization outside the  
8 jurisdiction of the Presbyterian Church in America.  
9

10 **Whereas**, military Chaplains serve in a wide variety of settings including chapels within the  
11 United States, chapels abroad, aboard naval vessels, deployed abroad, and in a  
12 multitude of units and training environments both within the continental United States  
13 and abroad. Civilian Chaplains serve in a wide variety of settings including, but not  
14 limited to, chapels, hospitals, VA centers, jails, prisons, and corporations. In these  
15 settings chaplains have the opportunity to preach the Word of God and administer the  
16 sacraments.  
17

18 **Whereas**, *BCO* chapters 56, 57, and 58 have full constitutional authority.<sup>1</sup>  
19

20 **Whereas**, *BCO* 58-4 allows for open or closed communion. Closed communion is serving  
21 communion only to those approved by Session. Open communion is serving  
22 communion to those who meet the following two criteria:  
23

- 24 (1) The person confesses the true religion, and
- 25 (2) Is a communicant in good standing at an evangelical church.  
26

27 **Whereas**, a communicant is a church member who is authorized to receive communion. In  
28 the PCA this authorization comes from the Session when the individual is received as  
29 a member.  
30

31 **Whereas**, Chapels are not churches. The difference between a chapel and church is  
32 membership. Chapels are not able to receive members and have no formal church  
33 discipline.  
34

35 **Whereas**, the vast majority of those attending military Chapels within the United States are  
36 military retirees, or those who have the ability to leave the military base and attend a  
37 local congregation, but choose not to.  
38

39 **Whereas**, most military bases in the United States have a PCA church within a reasonable  
40 driving distance.  
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<sup>1</sup> In 1981, the 9th General Assembly (GA) adopted a resolution giving full constitutional authority to the *Book of Church Order*, chapters 56, 57, and 58 (available: [https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/9th\\_pcaga\\_1981.pdf](https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/9th_pcaga_1981.pdf), p. 137).

1 **Whereas**, a Chaplain who serves communion at a military chapel within the United States is  
2 serving communion to a group of people that are likely not members at any church, are  
3 choosing to not attend a local church, or are choosing not to become members at a  
4 local church. There are exceptions to this, but the vast majority of those regularly  
5 attending chapels are choosing to act as if the chapel is a church. Chapels have no  
6 ecclesiastical discipline, no elders, no session, and no accountability. Many chapels  
7 even rotate weekly which Chaplain presides over the service. This means that serving  
8 communion at most military chapels within the United States necessarily entails  
9 serving communion to a group of people who are not “communicants in good standing  
10 at any evangelical church” (*BCO* 58-4). Additionally, closed communion is not an  
11 option at a chapel because there is no session to approve those who may participate in  
12 the ordinance.  
13

14 **Whereas**, Chaplains do not have a session to admit people to the Lord’s Table or for baptism.  
15 When an adult is baptized, they take vows to the church and become communicant  
16 members of the church (*BCO* 57-5). Chaplains administering baptism have no method  
17 of receiving the new convert into the visible church through membership.  
18

19 **Whereas**, *BCO* 56-58 ties accountability, through membership and a session, for admittance  
20 to the Sacraments. Because of this, Chaplains are ecclesiastically unable to administer  
21 the sacraments without the powers of an evangelist.  
22

23 **Whereas**, there is currently no requirement that chaplains be appointed to the work of an  
24 evangelist. For civilian chaplains, or those who are part-time Chaplains (military  
25 reservists, law enforcement, etc.), it is feasible that they do not need the powers of an  
26 evangelist because they will never be in a situation where they are called upon to  
27 administer the sacraments apart from a Session and a local congregation. However,  
28 for an active duty military Chaplain, and some civilian Chaplains, the powers of an  
29 evangelist are necessary.  
30

31 *BCO* 8-6 indicates that the powers of an evangelist must be renewed yearly. The  
32 renewal requirement makes sense for a teaching elder planting a church. Eventually  
33 the mission church particularizes and forms its own session. Because of this, the  
34 powers of an evangelist do not need to continue. However, for a military Chaplain, the  
35 renewal requirement is an unnecessary administrative burden on the Presbytery and  
36 the Chaplain. By nature of a Chaplain’s call, the powers of an evangelist should  
37 automatically be extended for the duration of the call.  
38

39 **Whereas**, changing *BCO* 8-6 to include the phrase “isolated military and institutional  
40 settings” clarifies that chaplains may administer the sacraments when they operate in  
41 locations where there are no other PCA churches within a reasonable distance, or when  
42 service members are unable to travel to a local congregation due to military service  
43 constraints. This change also clarifies that Chaplains are not to administer the  
44 sacraments when there are PCA churches within a reasonable distance, and the  
45 attendees are able to attend the local church.

1 **Whereas**, empowering Chaplains to receive and hold the membership of newly baptized  
2 Christians allows them to administer baptism when there are no alternatives. *BCO* 56-1  
3 says “baptism is not to be unnecessarily delayed.” During a military deployment, or  
4 some other situation in which there is no way for the new convert to be baptized in a  
5 local congregation, the Chaplain is able to administer the sacrament and “receive and  
6 hold” the individuals membership, much like a church planter, until it can be transferred  
7 to a local congregation. This transfer should happen at the earliest possible time.  
8

9 **Therefore, be it resolved** that the *Book of Church Order* 8-6 be amended as follows:  
10

11 **8-6.** When a teaching elder is appointed to the work of an evangelist, he is  
12 ministering in a specific setting unique to his call. These settings include ~~in~~  
13 foreign countries ~~or~~, isolated military and institutional settings, places where  
14 there is no access to PCA churches, and where there are no other PCA churches  
15 within a reasonable distance. Church planters appointed to the work of an  
16 evangelist are ~~he is~~ commissioned for a renewable term of twelve months to  
17 preach the Word, to administer the Sacraments, to receive and dismiss members  
18 of mission churches, and to train potential officers. Chaplains appointed to the  
19 work of an evangelist are commissioned for a permanent term lasting the  
20 duration of their approved call as a Chaplain. They are empowered to preach  
21 the Word, to administer the sacraments, and to receive and hold the membership  
22 of newly baptized Christians until they can be transferred to a local  
23 congregation. By separate actions the Presbytery may in extraordinary  
24 situations commission ~~him~~ an evangelist to examine, ordain, and install ruling  
25 elders and deacons and organize churches.  
26

27 So that *BCO* 8-6 as amended would read:  
28

29 **8-6.** When a teaching elder is appointed to the work of an evangelist he is  
30 ministering in a specific setting unique to his call. These settings include;  
31 foreign countries, isolated military and institutional settings, places where there  
32 is no access to PCA churches, and where there are no other PCA church within  
33 a reasonable distance. Church planters appointed to the work of an evangelist  
34 are commissioned for a renewable term of twelve months to preach the Word,  
35 to administer the Sacraments, to receive and dismiss members of mission  
36 churches, and to train potential officers. Chaplains appointed to the work of an  
37 evangelist are commissioned for a permanent term lasting the duration of their  
38 approved call as a Chaplain. They are empowered to preach the Word, to  
39 administer the sacraments, and to receive and hold the membership of newly  
40 baptized Christians until they can be transferred to a local congregation. By  
41 separate actions the Presbytery may in extraordinary situations commission an  
42 evangelist to examine, ordain and install ruling elders and deacons and organize  
43 churches.  
44

45 *Adopted by Tidewater Presbytery at its stated meeting, October 6, 2022*

46 *Attested by /s/ TE David Zavadil, stated clerk*