

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

2 “Amend *BCO* 23-1 To Require that the Presbytery of Jurisdiction Conduct
3 an Exit Interview Prior to Dissolution of Call”

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5 **Whereas**, the Presbyterian ecclesiastical system provides beneficial oversight, accountability,
6 and protection in the relationship between churches and ministers; and

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8 **Whereas**, such a system requires transparency and participation on the part of both the church
9 and its ministers; and

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11 **Whereas**, PCA *BCO* 23-1 states that the “...Presbytery needs to determine if the dissolution
12 of the pastoral relationship with the senior pastor was brought about in Christian love
13 and good order on the part of the parties concerned,” but this pertains only to the
14 narrow situation of a senior pastor and provides no mechanism for explaining how the
15 Presbytery is to do this; and

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17 **Whereas**, some PCA churches use non-disclosure and non-disparagement agreements when
18 dissolving a pastoral call with the effect of avoiding the oversight required by *BCO*
19 23-1; and

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21 **Whereas**, due to such agreements, in some cases ministers may be unwilling to speak with
22 the Presbytery concerning the reason for their dissolution of call, thereby functioning
23 to both conceal and perpetuate unhealthy church situations; and

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25 **Whereas**, the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault,”
26 in “Section Six: The Misuse of Spiritual Authority” warns multiple times (p. 2441,
27 line 13; p. 2443, line 41) of non-disclosure agreements as a form of spiritual abuse;
28 and

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30 **Whereas**, the glory of Christ, the peace and purity of the church, and the well-being of her
31 undershepherds, warrant better care and greater transparency for both the teaching
32 elder and the congregation;

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34 **Therefore, be it resolved** that *Book of Church Order* 23-1 be amended by the lettering of its
35 paragraphs (23-1.a, b, and c), the rewording of its second paragraph (23-1 [b]), and the
36 addition of a fourth section (23-1.d). (Additions underlined, deletions ~~struck through~~):

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38 **23-1**

39 **a.** When any minister shall tender the resignation of his pastoral charge to his
40 Presbytery, the Presbytery shall cite the church to appear by its
41 commissioners, to show cause why the Presbytery should or should not
42 accept the resignation. If the church fails to appear, or if its reasons for
43 retaining its pastor be deemed insufficient, his resignation shall be accepted
44 and the pastoral relation dissolved. If any church desires to be relieved of
45 its pastor, a similar procedure shall be observed.

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b. ~~But~~ Whether the minister or the church initiates proceedings for a dissolution of the relation, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation called and conducted in the same manner as the call of the pastor. In any case, the minister must not physically leave the field until ~~the Presbytery or its commission empowered to handle uncontested requests for dissolution has dissolved the~~ pastoral relationship has been dissolved.

c. The associate or assistant pastors may continue to serve a congregation when the pastoral relation of the senior pastor is dissolved, but they may not normally succeed the senior pastor without an intervening term of service in a different field of labor. However, a congregation by a secret ballot with four-fifths (4/5) majority vote may petition Presbytery for an exception which by a three-fourths (3/4) majority vote Presbytery may grant. Presbytery needs to determine if the dissolution of the pastoral relationship with the senior pastor was brought about in Christian love and good order on the part of the parties concerned.

d. Before any pastoral call may be dissolved by the Presbytery, the teaching elder whose call is in question shall participate in an exit interview conducted by the Presbytery or a committee thereof. This interview shall address the circumstances of the departure, the spiritual and emotional health of the teaching elder and his family, and any concerns for the health of the church from which the minister is departing. Furthermore, no church may hinder any teaching elder from speaking freely and openly with the appointed representatives of the Presbytery. No Presbytery shall omit this interview except in extraordinary cases, and then only with two-thirds (2/3) approval of the Presbytery, and it shall always make a record of the reasons for its omission.

Should this exit interview reveal an important delinquency or grossly unconstitutional proceeding by, or raise concerns of moral failing among the church or session, the Presbytery shall address this revelation or concern through General Review and Control (BCO 40). Should the exit interview reveal potential offense(s) by the departing minister, the Presbytery shall deal with him according to the applicable Rules of Discipline (BCO 31-35), and may retain him on the rolls while any potential offense is investigated and any process deemed necessary is completed (BCO 38-3.a).

So that the amended section 23-1 will read as follows:

1 **23-1.**

- 2 a. When any minister shall tender the resignation of his pastoral charge to his
3 Presbytery, the Presbytery shall cite the church to appear by its
4 commissioners, to show cause why the Presbytery should or should not
5 accept the resignation. If the church fails to appear, or if its reasons for
6 retaining its pastor be deemed insufficient, his resignation shall be accepted
7 and the pastoral relation dissolved. If any church desires to be relieved of
8 its pastor, a similar procedure shall be observed.
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- 10 b. Whether the minister or the church initiates proceedings for a dissolution
11 of the relation, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation called
12 and conducted in the same manner as the call of the pastor. In any case, the
13 minister must not physically leave the field until the pastoral relationship
14 has been dissolved.
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- 16 c. The associate or assistant pastors may continue to serve a congregation
17 when the pastoral relation of the senior pastor is dissolved, but they may
18 not normally succeed the senior pastor without an intervening term of
19 service in a different field of labor. However, a congregation by a secret
20 ballot with four-fifths (4/5) majority vote may petition Presbytery for an
21 exception which by a three-fourths (3/4) majority vote Presbytery may
22 grant. Presbytery needs to determine if the dissolution of the pastoral
23 relationship with the senior pastor was brought about in Christian love and
24 good order on the part of the parties concerned.
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- 26 d. Before any pastoral call may be dissolved by the Presbytery, the teaching
27 elder whose call is in question shall participate in an exit interview
28 conducted by the Presbytery or a committee thereof. This interview shall
29 address the circumstances of the departure, the spiritual and emotional
30 health of the teaching elder and his family, and any concerns for the health
31 of the church from which the minister is departing. Furthermore, no church
32 may hinder any teaching elder from speaking freely and openly with the
33 appointed representatives of the Presbytery. No Presbytery shall omit this
34 interview except in extraordinary cases, and then only with two-thirds (2/3)
35 approval of the Presbytery, and it shall always make a record of the reasons
36 for its omission.

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38 unconstitutional proceeding by, or raise concerns of moral failing among
39 the church or session, the Presbytery shall address this revelation or
40 concern through General Review and Control (BCO 40). Should the exit
41 interview reveal potential offense(s) by the departing minister, the
42 Presbytery shall deal with him according to the applicable Rules of
43 Discipline (BCO 31-35), and may retain him on the rolls while any
44 potential offense is investigated and any process deemed necessary is
45 completed (BCO 38-3.a).
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47 *Adopted unanimously by Lowcountry Presbytery at its stated meeting, January 27,*
48 *2024, and unanimously amended and adopted at a called meeting, March 25, 2024.*

49 *Attested by /s/ RE David Walters, stated clerk.*