

1 **OVERTURE 12** from the Chesapeake Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Amend *BCO* 21-4.a to Allow Alternatives to a Bachelor’s Degree for Ordination”
3

4 **Whereas**, *BCO* 21-4.a currently requires a degree of Bachelor or Master from an approved
5 college or university as part of the qualifications for ordination to the gospel ministry,
6 in addition to a degree of Bachelor or Master from an approved theological seminary;
7 and
8

9 **Whereas**, the average inflation-adjusted cost of undergraduate tuition and fees at four-year
10 public institutions has increased by over 160% since 1990, and at private nonprofit
11 four-year institutions by over 120% during the same period, creating significant
12 financial barriers for many otherwise qualified candidates;¹ and
13

14 **Whereas**, national enrollment trends show that Associate’s degree programs and other non-
15 traditional pathways now account for over 40% of undergraduate enrollment in the
16 United States, reflecting the changing educational landscape;² and
17

18 **Whereas**, over 55% of current pastors in the United States had a prior career before entering
19 ministry,³ and approximately 35% of U.S. congregations are served by bi-vocational
20 pastors,⁴ indicating a significant presence of second-career and non-traditional
21 ministry pathways within the church; and
22

23 **Whereas**, many candidates demonstrate a “competency of human learning” (*BCO* 8-2),
24 pastoral maturity, leadership, and communication skills through full-time vocational
25 work, which may serve as a valuable part of their ministerial formation; and
26

27 **Whereas**, this overture seeks only to broaden the acceptable academic foundation for
28 ministry, not to diminish the requirement for theological education or the rigorous
29 Presbytery examinations already required in *BCO* 21-4; and
30

31 **Whereas**, the PCA maintains rigorous theological examination standards for ordination
32 candidates, including assessments in theology, the English Bible, original languages,
33 church history, and church government (*BCO* 21-4), thereby ensuring ministerial
34 competence regardless of academic background; and
35

36 **Whereas**, maintaining the requirement for a theological seminary degree or its equivalent
37 ensures the PCA continues to train ministers who are theologically sound and
38 pastorally equipped;
39

¹ National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, Table 330.10.
https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_330.10.asp

² Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2023. <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

³ Barna Group, *The State of Pastors*. <https://www.barna.com/research/half-pastors-prior-career/>

⁴ Faith & Leadership, “Bivocationalism Has Historical Roots and Modern Benefits.”
<https://faithandleadership.com/bivocationalism-has-historical-roots-and-modern-benefits>

1 **Therefore, be it resolved** that *BCO* 21-4.a be amended to read as follows (underlining for
2 additions):

- 3
- 4 a. An intern applying for ordination shall be required to present:
- 5 1) a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved college or university,
6 a diploma of Associate from some approved college or university together
7 with credible evidence of not less than three (3) years of full-time
8 vocational work experience, demonstrating maturity, leadership, and
9 communication skills relevant to gospel ministry, or a General Education
10 Diploma together with credible evidence of not less than (10) ten years of
11 full-time vocational work experience, demonstrating maturity, leadership,
12 and communication skills relevant to gospel ministry; and also
- 13
- 14 2) a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved theological seminary
15 or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of
16 theological studies, or a certificate of completion of and endorsement from
17 a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly and one
18 of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America.

19

20 No Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements except in
21 extraordinary cases, and then only with a three-fourths (3/4) approval of the
22 Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these educational
23 requirements, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omission
24 and the parts omitted. The intern shall also present satisfactory testimonials
25 as to the completion and approval of his internship in the practice of the
26 ministry.

27

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29 *Adopted by the Chesapeake Presbytery at its stated meeting, 9 September, 2025*

30 *Attested by TE Donald M. Dove, stated clerk*