

1 **OVERTURE 14** from the Southwest Florida Presbytery (to CCB, OC)  
2 “Amend *BCO* 7-3, 7-4, 9-2, and 9-7 Regarding Titles and Offices for Unordained  
3 People”  
4

5 **Be it resolved** that the 53<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly amend *BCO* 7-3, 7-4, 9-2, and 9-7 as follows  
6 (underlining for additions; ~~striketrough~~ for deletions):  
7

8 **7-3.** No one who holds office in the Church ought to usurp authority therein, or  
9 receive any official titles of spiritual preeminence, except such as are employed  
10 in the Scriptures. ~~Furthermore, u~~Unordained people shall not be referred to as, or  
11 given the titles of, the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon. Furthermore,  
12 unordained people, whether publicly or privately, shall neither be elected,  
13 commissioned, appointed, installed, designated, or otherwise given the title of  
14 pastor, elder, or deacon, nor shall they be denominated with any synonymous title  
15 including but not limited to shepherd/shepherdess, eldress, pastorell, minister,  
16 deaconess, or other designation which might reasonably communicate or imply  
17 the holding of the office of pastor, elder, or deacon, or their having the authority  
18 to exercise any of the functions thereof.  
19

20 **7-4.** No churches shall invent new types or classes of church offices or officers  
21 which are not either pastors/elders, or deacons. Moreover, no churches may,  
22 through congregational action, elect, commission, appoint, install, ordain, or  
23 designate any unordained individuals into any ecclesiastical roles or offices, or  
24 confer titles of church authority besides those of pastors/elders, or deacons,  
25 particularly roles that appear to exercise a general authority over adults in the  
26 congregation. Any other appointed administrative or ministry support roles (such  
27 as other church staff or volunteer positions) shall be appointed by the Session,  
28 and their given titles must not be subject to confusion with the titles or unique  
29 responsibilities of the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon, or any variation  
30 or synonym thereof.  
31

32 **9-2.** It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick,  
33 to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop  
34 the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods  
35 of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects  
36 to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the  
37 congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church  
38 edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special  
39 importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action  
40 without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation.  
41

42 In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority  
43 of the Session. In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure  
44 deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders. It is highly  
45 undesirable for churches to persist without ordained deacons, and Presbyteries

1 should be diligent to assist all their churches in ordaining qualified deacons. If  
2 deacons cannot be ordained, then the ruling elders must directly execute the  
3 responsibilities of the deacons defined herein and may not delegate these  
4 responsibilities entirely to unordained staff or volunteers.  
5

6 **9-7.** It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint  
7 godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the  
8 sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any  
9 distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church  
10 (*BCO* 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (*BCO* 17). Therefore, these  
11 assistants may not be referred to as deacons or deaconesses or full members of  
12 the diaconate (or any translation or variation thereof), and in any communications  
13 of the church, care should be taken in order that they are clearly distinguished  
14 from the ordained deacons. It is also not allowable to appoint persons formally to  
15 be assistants to the deacons if there are no regularly ordained and installed  
16 deacons actively serving in the congregation.  
17

18 So that the amended passages would read:

19  
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21 receive any official titles of spiritual preeminence, except such as are employed  
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23 of, the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon. Furthermore, unordained  
24 people, whether publicly or privately, shall neither be elected, commissioned,  
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13 should be diligent to assist all their churches in ordaining qualified deacons. If  
14 deacons cannot be ordained, then the ruling elders must directly execute the  
15 responsibilities of the deacons defined herein and may not delegate these  
16 responsibilities entirely to unordained staff or volunteers.

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20 sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any  
21 distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church  
22 (*BCO 7-2*) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (*BCO 17*). Therefore, these  
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24 the diaconate (or any translation or variation thereof), and in any communications  
25 of the church, care should be taken in order that they are clearly distinguished  
26 from the ordained deacons. It is also not allowable to appoint persons formally to  
27 be assistants to the deacons if there are no regularly ordained and installed  
28 deacons actively serving in the congregation.

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30  
31 **RATIONALE**

32  
33 The existing sections of the *BCO* related to polity of officers have historically intended to  
34 limit the ordained offices of the church to the two types of officers, pastors/elders and deacons,  
35 and that these offices are limited to men only. However, there appear to be a number of  
36 churches within the PCA that are causing confusion regarding church offices by creating new  
37 positions for women with similar titles (such as “eldress”) and/or utilizing a similar process  
38 to have congregations elect and install women into various leadership roles, thereby  
39 functionally creating a second class of offices specifically for women (sometimes referred to  
40 as “functional female officers”). There have been several recent public efforts to document  
41 the type and extent of these practices in PCA congregations. According to that research, it  
42 appears that this is not simply a matter confined to a handful of churches, but rather practices  
43 that have spread to a significant minority of congregations, likely between 5-10% of PCA  
44 member churches.

1 Based on the Scriptures and the historic practices of the Reformed churches, the conviction of  
2 the PCA has always been, since its founding, to limit roles of congregational leadership over  
3 adults only to ordained men, in the two offices of pastor/elder and deacon, and not to allow  
4 women to hold these offices. It seems unfortunate to have to impose specific additional  
5 language in our *BCO* around this topic, but the reality is that the existing language is obviously  
6 insufficient to prevent some churches from coming up with creative ways to install women in  
7 positions of general leadership that our polity intends to prohibit. This overture is being  
8 introduced as a measure to improve clarity of the intention of the existing language within the  
9 *BCO* surrounding the unique leadership roles of the ordained offices, and as a measure to  
10 increase accountability to allow our denominational courts to ensure that local churches are  
11 practicing their polity in conformity with these requirements.

12  
13 Therefore, the proposed amendments to sections *BCO* 7-3 and 7-4 are intended to further  
14 clarify this understanding and to ban the invention of new offices for women (or unordained  
15 men), or the use of variants of existing titles for pastors/elders (such as “shepherdess”) or new  
16 confusing titles implying authority over the general congregation for appointed roles filled by  
17 unordained staff.

18  
19 With special respect to the deacons, some churches are utilizing the provisions of *BCO* 9-7 to  
20 install female assistants to the deacons of their church, and they refer to these female assistants  
21 as “deaconess” (or in some cases simply list them as members of an undifferentiated  
22 “diaconate” with no distinction between ordained deacons and these female assistants). While  
23 the existing language of *BCO* 7-3 would already seem to prohibit this, it is argued by some of  
24 these churches that technically the existing language only prohibits calling any unordained  
25 person a “deacon” but not a “deaconess” (although these are actually the same English word,  
26 only in gendered variants, such as waiter/waitress, actor/actress, etc.). The proposed  
27 amendment to 9-7 clarifies this issue and prohibits the use of “deaconess” or “member of the  
28 diaconate” for unordained deacons’ assistants.

29  
30 In other cases, churches simply dispense with ordained deacons and instead create “diaconal  
31 ministry” or “mercy ministry” or “care” teams, which take on the traditional functions of the  
32 diaconate, and are then staffed entirely by unordained men and women. In all such cases, it  
33 seems obvious that this is at best a confusing practice and is often designed either to blur the  
34 distinction between the ordained offices and unordained assistants, or again to create a new  
35 type of office specifically so women can fill it. The proposed amendments to *BCO* 9-2 and 9-  
36 7 clarify that it is not possible to dispense with ordained deacons in favor of an unordained set  
37 of diaconal assistants, but that the Session itself must fulfill the responsibilities of the deacons  
38 (as already defined in *BCO* 9-2) until deacons can be secured, and that deacons’ assistants  
39 may not be appointed if there are no ordained deacons.

40  
41 There may be PCA members or even churches that are under the conviction that women  
42 should be able to serve, either in name or in function, as pastors, elders, and deacons alongside  
43 the ordained men which our polity reserves for those positions. It would be better to proclaim  
44 these convictions openly and honestly and not cause internal division, rather than to covertly  
45 undermine the existing, settled polity of the PCA with respect to women in leadership, either

1 through practices that rely on technicalities or deception. If that is the case, it would be  
 2 healthier for those churches to affiliate with another branch of the visible church that already  
 3 allows for such practices, such as the ECO, the EPC, or the ARP, and go with our blessing.

4  
 5 Historically, our denomination has valued both unordained men and women exercising their  
 6 gifts and serving in positions of ministry support in their local churches, and we believe that  
 7 there are a wide variety of ways that can happen and still be in conformity with our polity  
 8 regarding the leadership roles reserved for the ordained offices. We encourage churches to  
 9 pursue opportunities for service and recognition for unordained persons, but to do so in a  
 10 manner that preserves clarity around the unique nature of the ordained offices in the church.

11  
 12 Note: all current BCO text taken from: [https://www.pcaac.org/book-of-church-order/part-1-](https://www.pcaac.org/book-of-church-order/part-1-the-form-of-government/)  
 13 [the-form-of-government/](https://www.pcaac.org/book-of-church-order/part-1-the-form-of-government/)

14  
 15 **Appendix**

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 17 For reference, here are some of the relevant titles given to unordained women on PCA church  
 18 public websites (as documented at the <https://www.savethepca.com/> website). Not all of these  
 19 titles are necessarily problematic, but many are questionable:

20

Title	# Instances
Deaconess	372
Worship Director/Leader	114
Women's Councilmember	98
Women's Leadership Team/Council	64
Women Shepherd	42
Elder Advisor	41
Shepherdess	34
Women's Shepherding Team	33
Women's Care Team	18
Women's Board	15
Director of Community	14
Director of Ministry	11
Director of Missions	10
Pastor Assistant	10

Overture 14, Southwest Florida Presbytery

Director of Discipleship	8
Director of Spiritual Formation	8
Director/Coordinator of Church Life	8
Ministry Coordinator	7
Director of Congregational Care	6
Hospitality Director/Leader	6
Servant Leader	6
Serve Team	6
Co-Laborer	5
Discipleship Committee	5
Executive Director	5
Leadership	5
College Minister	4
Director of Christian Education	4
Inreach Team	4
Pastoral Intern	4
Biblical Counselor	3
Director of Care	3
Ezer	3
Ministry Intern	3
Prayer Ministry Leader/Coordinator	3
Director of Assimilation	2
Director of Family Ministry	2
Director of Soul Care	2
Women's Leader	2
CG Strategy Manager	1
Circle Chair	1
Community Engagement Specialist	1
Director of Integration	1
Director of Justice and Mercy Ministries	1

Overture 14, Southwest Florida Presbytery

Director of Latino Ministries	1
Director of Parish Formation	1
Faithful Presence Coordinator	1
First Lady	1
Lead Pastor	1
Lead Planter	1
Leadership Coordinator	1
Ministry Leader	1
Senior Adults Ministry Director	1
Small Group Coordinator	1
Strategic Implementation Director	1
Supply Preacher	1
Team Leader	1
Trustee	1
Wise Counselor	1

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*Adopted by the Southwest Florida Presbytery at its stated meeting, November 11, 2025*  
*Attested by /s/ TE Freddy Fritz, Stated Clerk*