

1 **OVERTURE 25** from the Westminster Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 “Restructure and Amend *BCO* 21-1 through 21-4 for Clarity, Consistency, and Ease
3 of Reference”
4

5 **Whereas**, *BCO* Chapter 21 has been proposed for amendment thirty-six (36) times in the
6 history of the PCA, with seven (7) of those proposals being ratified; and
7

8 **Whereas**, *BCO* 21 clearly outlines the process for the ordination and installation of ministers,
9 yet over time it has become less clear in flow and organization due to multiple
10 amendments inserted in various places, resulting in overlapping content, repeated
11 clauses, and disjointed section order; and
12

13 **Whereas**, these accumulated changes have made it more difficult for Presbyteries, candidates,
14 and clerks to quickly locate and apply the relevant provisions; and
15

16 **Whereas**, the proposed amendment does not alter the substance of the ordination process but
17 simply restructures and renumbers the chapter for clarity, consistency, and ease of
18 reference; and
19

20 **Whereas**, such restructuring will reduce redundancy, improve logical flow, and aid in the
21 proper application of the *BCO*’s requirements for ordination and installation; and
22

23 **Therefore**, Westminster Presbytery overtures the 53rd General Assembly to amend Chapter
24 21 of the *Book of Church Order* by restructuring and renumbering it as set forth below,
25 and renumber the remaining of *BCO* 21 accordingly, and to amend any cross-
26 references to Chapter 21 in other portions of the *BCO*, *RAO*, and *OMSJC* accordingly
27 (underlining for additions; ~~striketrough~~ for deletions).
28

29 *Clarify: it appears candidate/intern are used fluently throughout this section, and it might be*
30 *better to update terminology to reflect a constant phrase throughout this portion, for it could*
31 *be an intern, a candidate (under care) completed his internship, licentiate, or an ordained*
32 *minister from another denomination.*
33
34

35 **21-1.** No minister, licentiate or candidate shall receive a call from a church but by
36 the permission of his Presbytery. When a call has been presented to the
37 Presbytery, if found in order and the Presbytery deems it for the good of the
38 Church, they shall place it in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed.
39

40 Ordinarily, a minister, licentiate, or candidate ~~or licentiate~~ may not be granted
41 permission by the Presbytery to move on to the field to which he has been called,
42 prior to his examination for licensure or ordination, or, in the case of a minister,
43 ~~Likewise an ordained minister from another Presbyterian Church in America~~
44 ~~Presbytery or another denomination, ordinarily shall not move on to the field to~~
45 ~~which he has been called~~ until examined and received by Presbytery. When a

1 church has called a man to serve as their pastor, Presbytery shall take immediate
2 steps for his ordination and/or installation.

3
4 ~~21-2. When an intern has completed his internship to the satisfaction of the~~
5 ~~Presbytery, and has accepted a call, the Presbytery shall take immediate steps for~~
6 ~~his ordination.~~

7
8 **21-23.** No Presbytery shall ordain any intern to the office of minister of the Word
9 with reference to his laboring within the bounds of another Presbytery, but shall
10 furnish him with the necessary testimonials, and require him to repair to the
11 Presbytery within whose bounds he expects to labor, that he may submit himself
12 to its authority, according to the Constitution of the Church.

13
14 **21-3.4. Ordination Requirements and Procedures**

- 15 a. An intern applying for ordination shall be required to present a diploma
16 of Bachelor or Master from some approved college or university, and also
17 a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved theological
18 seminary or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course
19 of theological studies, or a certificate of completion of and endorsement
20 from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly
21 and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America. No
22 Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements except in
23 extraordinary cases, and then only with a three-fourths (3/4) approval of
24 the Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these
25 educational requirements, it shall always make a record of the reasons for
26 such omission and the parts omitted. The intern shall also present
27 satisfactory testimonials as to the completion and approval of his
28 internship in the practice of the ministry.
- 29 b. Every candidate for ordination shall ordinarily have met the requirements
30 of the Assembly's approved curriculum. Ordinarily, the intern shall have
31 been examined in most of the following trials when he was licensed. If
32 the Presbytery previously approved all parts of the licensure examination,
33 it need not re-examine the intern in those areas at this time. If there were
34 areas of weakness, which the Presbytery noted, or if any member of the
35 Presbytery desires to do so, the intern may be examined on particular
36 points again. Additionally, the intern shall be examined on any parts
37 required for ordination which were not covered in his examination for
38 licensure. In all cases, he should be asked to indicate whether he has
39 changed his previous views concerning any points in the *Confession of*
40 *Faith*, *Catechisms*, and *Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church
41 in America.

42
43 ~~21-4e. Presbytery shall conduct a careful examination of the trials for ordination,~~
44 ~~or transfer from another denomination, which shall consist of:~~

- 45 (1) ~~A careful examination as to:~~

1 a. Experiential religion

2 (1a) his acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his personal
3 character and family management (based on the qualifications set
4 out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9),

5 (i) In the examination of the candidate's personal character, the
6 presbytery shall give specific attention to potential notorious
7 concerns. Careful attention must be given to his practical
8 struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful
9 desires. The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance
10 upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the
11 Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress
12 over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit
13 (Psalm 1:3, Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain,
14 when confessing sins and sinful temptations publicly, the
15 candidate must exercise great care not to diminish the
16 seriousness of those sins in the eyes of the congregation, as
17 though they were matters of little consequence, but rather
18 should testify to the work of the Holy Spirit in his progress in
19 holiness (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

20 b. His knowledge of:

21 (1b) ~~his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages,~~

22 (i) Presbytery may accept a seminary degree that includes study
23 in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the
24 original languages.

25 (2e) Bible content,

26 (3d) theology,

27 (4e) the Sacraments,

28 (5f) Church history,

29 (6g) the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, and

30 (7h) the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the
31 church.

32 ~~A Presbytery may accept a seminary degree which includes study in the~~
33 ~~original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original~~
34 ~~languages.~~

35 c. His views

36 (1) While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation
37 of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our *Confession*
38 *of Faith* and *Catechisms*, it is the right and responsibility of the
39 Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any
40 of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a
41 consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and
42 adopt the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* of this Church as
43 containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf.
44 *BCO* 21-6, Q.2; 24-6, Q.2).

1 (2) Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery
2 shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in
3 the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to
4 state the specific instances in which he may differ with the
5 Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of their statements
6 and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any
7 difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the
8 candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with any
9 fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is
10 neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.

11 d. Practical and theological competence

12 (12) He shall prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by
13 Presbytery.

14 (23) The candidate shall prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of
15 Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.

16 (34) He shall further be required to preach a sermon before the Presbytery
17 or committee thereof, upon three-fourths (3/4) vote.

18 No Presbytery shall omit any of these parts of trial for ordination except
19 in extraordinary cases, and then only with three-fourths (3/4)
20 approval of Presbytery.

21 ~~d. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these parts, it shall always make~~
22 ~~a record of the reasons for such omissions and of the trial parts omitted.~~

23 ~~e. In the examination of the candidate's personal character, the presbytery~~
24 ~~shall give specific attention to potential notorious concerns. Careful~~
25 ~~attention must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as~~
26 ~~well as to persistent sinful desires. The candidate must give clear~~
27 ~~testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof~~
28 ~~by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress over~~
29 ~~sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3, Gal. 5:22-~~
30 ~~23). While imperfection will remain, when confessing sins and sinful~~
31 ~~temptations publicly, the candidate must exercise great care not to~~
32 ~~diminish the seriousness of those sins in the eyes of the congregation, as~~
33 ~~though they were matters of little consequence, but rather should testify~~
34 ~~to the work of the Holy Spirit in his progress in holiness (1 Cor. 6:9-11).~~

35 ~~f. While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation of~~
36 ~~every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our *Confession of Faith*~~
37 ~~and *Catechisms*, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to~~
38 ~~determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals~~
39 ~~of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in~~
40 ~~good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and~~
41 ~~*Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in~~
42 ~~the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21-5, Q.2; 24-6, Q.2).~~

43 ~~g. Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery shall~~
44 ~~inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas~~
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1 instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and
2 *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may
3 grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court's
4 judgment the candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with any
5 fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither
6 hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.

7 h.—The Presbytery, being fully satisfied of his qualifications for the sacred
8 office, shall appoint a day for his ordination, which ought, if practicable,
9 to be in that church of which he is to be the pastor.

10 i. ~~The extraordinary clauses should be limited to extraordinary circumstances~~
11 ~~of the church or proven extraordinary gifts of the man. Presbyteries~~
12 ~~should exercise diligence and care in the use of these provisions in order~~
13 ~~that they not prevent the ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly~~
14 ~~exceptional circumstances, nor ordain (nor receive from other~~
15 ~~denominations BCO 13-6) a person who is inadequately prepared for the~~
16 ~~ministry.~~

17
18 21-5. No Presbytery shall omit any of these parts of the above trials or
19 examinations for ordination except in extraordinary cases, and then only with
20 three-fourths (3/4) approval of Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any
21 of these parts, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omissions and
22 of the trial parts omitted.

23
24 The extraordinary clauses should be limited to extraordinary circumstances of the
25 church or proven extraordinary gifts of the man. Presbyteries should exercise
26 diligence and care in the use of these provisions in order that they not prevent the
27 ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly exceptional circumstances, nor
28 ordain (nor receive from other denominations (BCO 13-6) a person who is
29 inadequately prepared for the ministry.

30
31 So that the amended *BCO* 21-1 through 21-5 would read as follows, with the subsequent
32 paragraphs of *BCO* 21 renumbered accordingly:

33
34 **21-1.** No minister, licentiate or candidate shall receive a call from a church but by
35 the permission of his Presbytery. When a call has been presented to the
36 Presbytery, if found in order and the Presbytery deems it for the good of the
37 Church, they shall place it in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed.

38
39 Ordinarily, a minister, licentiate, or candidate may not be granted permission by
40 the Presbytery to move on to the field to which he has been called, prior to his
41 examination for licensure or ordination, or, in the case of a minister,—until
42 examined and received by Presbytery. When a church has called a man to serve
43 as their pastor, Presbytery shall take immediate steps for his ordination and/or
44 installation.

1 **21-2.** No Presbytery shall ordain any intern to the office of minister of the Word
2 with reference to his laboring within the bounds of another Presbytery, but shall
3 furnish him with the necessary testimonials, and require him to repair to the
4 Presbytery within whose bounds he expects to labor, that he may submit himself
5 to its authority, according to the Constitution of the Church.
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7 **21-3. Ordination Requirements and Procedures**

8 a. An intern applying for ordination shall be required to present a diploma
9 of Bachelor or Master from some approved college or university, and also
10 a diploma of Bachelor or Master from some approved theological
11 seminary or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course
12 of theological studies, or a certificate of completion of and endorsement
13 from a theological study program as approved by the General Assembly
14 and one of the Presbyteries of the Presbyterian Church in America. No
15 Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements except in
16 extraordinary cases, and then only with a three-fourths (3/4) approval of
17 the Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these
18 educational requirements, it shall always make a record of the reasons for
19 such omission and the parts omitted. The intern shall also present
20 satisfactory testimonials as to the completion and approval of his
21 internship in the practice of the ministry.

22 b. Every candidate for ordination shall ordinarily have met the requirements
23 of the Assembly's approved curriculum. Ordinarily, the intern shall have
24 been examined in most of the following trials when he was licensed. If
25 the Presbytery previously approved all parts of the licensure examination,
26 it need not re-examine the intern in those areas at this time. If there were
27 areas of weakness, which the Presbytery noted, or if any member of the
28 Presbytery desires to do so, the intern may be examined on particular
29 points again. Additionally, the intern shall be examined on any parts
30 required for ordination which were not covered in his examination for
31 licensure. In all cases, he should be asked to indicate whether he has
32 changed his previous views concerning any points in the *Confession of*
33 *Faith, Catechisms, and Book of Church Order* of the Presbyterian Church
34 in America.
35

36 **21-4.** Presbytery shall conduct a careful examination of the trials for ordination, or
37 *transfer* from another denomination, which shall consist of:

38 a. Experiential religion

39 (1a) his acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his personal
40 character and family management (based on the qualifications set
41 out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9),

42 (i) In the examination of the candidate's personal character, the
43 presbytery shall give specific attention to potential notorious
44 concerns. Careful attention must be given to his practical
45 struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful

1 desires. The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance
2 upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the
3 Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress
4 over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit
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7 candidate must exercise great care not to diminish the
8 seriousness of those sins in the eyes of the congregation, as
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10 should testify to the work of the Holy Spirit in his progress in
11 holiness (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

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14 (i) Presbytery may accept a seminary degree that includes study
15 in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the
16 original languages.
17 (2) Bible content,
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20 (5) Church history,
21 (6) the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, and
22 (7) the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the
23 church.

24 c. His views

- 25 (1) While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation
26 of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our Confession
27 of Faith and Catechisms, it is the right and responsibility of the
28 Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any
29 of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a
30 consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and
31 adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as
32 containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf.
33 *BCO* 21-6, Q.2; 24-6, Q.2).
34 (2) Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery
35 shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in
36 the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to
37 state the specific instances in which he may differ with the
38 Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of their statements
39 and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any
40 difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the
41 candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with any
42 fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is
43 neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.

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- 1 (1) He shall prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by
2 Presbytery.
- 3 (2) The candidate shall prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of
4 Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.
- 5 (3) He shall further be required to preach a sermon before the Presbytery
6 or committee thereof, upon three-fourths (3/4) vote.

7 The Presbytery, being fully satisfied of his qualifications for the sacred office,
8 shall appoint a day for his ordination, which ought, if practicable, to be in that
9 church of which he is to be the pastor.

10
11 **21-5.** No Presbytery shall omit any of these parts of the above trials or
12 examinations for ordination except in extraordinary cases, and then only with
13 three-fourths (3/4) approval of Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any
14 of these parts, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omissions and
15 of the trial parts omitted.

16
17 The extraordinary clauses should be limited to extraordinary circumstances of the
18 church or proven extraordinary gifts of the man. Presbyteries should exercise
19 diligence and care in the use of these provisions in order that they not prevent the
20 ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly exceptional circumstances, nor
21 ordain (nor receive from other denominations (*BCO* 13-6) a person who is
22 inadequately prepared for the ministry.

23
24
25 Below are the cross-references found in the *BCO* and *RAO* that would be amended with the
26 restructuring of Chapter 21.

27
28 *BCO* 5-5.a

29 If there is a minister approved by Presbytery to serve the mission church as its pastor (*BCO*
30 5-4.a), each member so received shall be understood to assent to the call of that minister and
31 to affirm the promises made to the pastor in *BCO* ~~21-10~~ 21-11.

32
33 *BCO* 13-6.b-c

34 b. If an applicant comes from another denomination, the Presbytery shall examine him
35 thoroughly as required by the trials listed in *BCO* ~~21-4~~ 21-3, 21-4 and require him to
36 answer in the affirmative the questions put to candidates at their ordination. Ordained
37 ministers from other denominations being considered by Presbyteries for reception may
38 come under the extraordinary provisions set forth in ~~21-4~~ 21-3, 21-4.

39
40 c. In every case, Presbyteries shall require each ordained minister entering the Presbytery
41 to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the Confession of Faith and
42 Catechisms in any of their statements and/or propositions, which differences the court
43 shall judge in accordance with *BCO* ~~21-4.f-g~~ 21-4.c (see also *RAO* 16-3.e.7.a-d).

44
45 NOTE: If both this overture and Overture 18 pass, the references to *BCO* 21-4 in *BCO* 13-6

1 will be adjusted accordingly:

2	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.a	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-3.a
3	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.c(1)	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.b
4	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.c(4)	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.d(3)
5	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.e	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-4.a
6	<i>BCO</i> 21-5	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-6
7	<i>BCO</i> 21-4	becomes	<i>BCO</i> 21-5

8
9 *BCO* 18-2

10 Every applicant for the ministry must put himself under the care of Presbytery, which should
11 ordinarily be the Presbytery that has jurisdiction of the church of which he is a member. The
12 endorsement of his Session must be given to the Presbytery, consisting of testimonials
13 regarding his Christian character and promise of usefulness in the ministry. The endorsement
14 should also describe the activities of ministry the applicant has participated in with brief
15 evaluation.

16
17 Every applicant for care shall be a member of the congregation whose session provides an
18 endorsement for at least six months before filing his application, except in those cases deemed
19 extraordinary by the Presbytery.

20
21 Every applicant must file his application with the clerk of the Presbytery at least one month
22 before the meeting of the Presbytery. An applicant for care may not be received under care
23 and examined for ordination at the same meeting of the Presbytery, since he must serve a
24 period of at least one year of internship prior to ordination (see *BCO* 19-7 and ~~21-4~~ 21-3). An
25 applicant for internship is obliged to be under care and may be licensed to preach the Gospel;
26 further, one who is not already under care may be taken under care, be licensed to preach the
27 Gospel, and become an intern at the same meeting of Presbytery.

28
29 *BCO* 18-4

30 The candidate continues to be a private member of the church and subject to the jurisdiction
31 of the Session, but as respects his preparatory training for the ministry he is under the oversight
32 of the Presbytery. It shall be the duty of the Presbytery to show a kindly and sympathetic
33 interest in him, and to give him counsel and guidance in regard to his studies, his practical
34 training, and the institutions of learning he should attend. In no case may a candidate omit
35 from his course of study any of the subjects prescribed in the Form of Government as tests for
36 ordination without obtaining the consent of Presbytery (see *BCO* ~~21-4~~ 21-3); and where such
37 consent is given the Presbytery shall record the fact and the reasons therefore.

38
39 *BCO* 39-3

40 While affirming that the Scripture is “the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion
41 are to be determined” (*WCF* 1.10), and that the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in
42 America is “subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word
43 of God” (*BCO* Preface, III), and while affirming also that this Constitution is fallible
44 (*WCF* 31.3), the Presbyterian Church in America affirms that this subordinate and fallible
45 Constitution has been “adopted by the church” (*BCO* Preface, III) “as standard expositions of

1 the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice” (*BCO* 29-1) and as setting
2 forth a form of government and discipline “in conformity with the general principles of
3 biblical polity” (*BCO* ~~21-5.3~~ 21-6.3). To insure that this Constitution is not amended, violated
4 or disregarded in judicial process, any review of the judicial proceedings of a lower court by
5 a higher court shall be guided by the following principles:

6
7 *RAO* 16-3.e.6-7

8 6. Minutes of Presbytery examinations for ordination (*BCO* 21-4) and/or transfer (*BCO*
9 13-6) must record that Presbytery accomplished the requirements of *BCO* ~~21-4.e~~ 21-
10 4.a(1). A statement such as “The examination in experiential religion (*BCO* ~~21-4.e.(1)(a)~~
11 21-4.a.(1)) covered all the items specified in section e(1) of *BCO* 21-4.a” would be
12 sufficient.

13
14 7. Minutes of presbytery shall record that each candidate being examined for licensure,
15 ordination, or transfer from another denomination was required to “state the specific
16 instances in which he may differ with the Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of
17 their statements and/or propositions” (*BCO* 13-6.c; 19-2; 21-4.c). Presbytery minutes shall
18 record ministers’ and ministerial candidates’ stated differences with our Standards in their
19 own words. Each presbytery shall also record whether:

- 20 a) the candidate stated that he had no differences; or
21 b) the court judged the stated difference(s) to be merely semantic; or
22 c) the court judged the stated difference(s) to be more than semantic, but “not out
23 of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine” (*BCO* 19-2; 21-4.c); or
24 d) the court judged the stated difference(s) to be “out of accord,” that is, “hostile
25 to the system” or “strick[ing] at the vitals of religion” (*BCO* 19-2; 21-4.c).

26
27
28 *Adopted by Westminster Presbytery at its stated meeting, November 8th, 2025*

29 *Attested by /s/ TE Thomas E. Rickard, Stated Clerk*