

OVERTURE 1 from Southwest Florida Presbytery “Amend <i>BCO</i> 7-3 & 7-4 regarding Titles, Offices, and Unordained Roles”	(to CCB, OC)
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Be it resolved, that the 54th General Assembly amend sections 7-3 & 7-4 of the *BCO* as follows (~~striketrough~~ for deletion, and underlining for additions):

7-3. No one who holds office in the Church ought to usurp authority therein, or receive any official titles of spiritual preeminence, except such as are employed in the Scriptures. Furthermore, unordained people shall not be referred to as, or given the titles of, the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon, including their feminized forms, or any other synonymous title that suggests ecclesiastical authority.

7-4. No churches shall invent new types of church offices or officers which are not either pastors/elders, or deacons. Moreover, no churches may elect, commission, or install any unordained individuals into any ecclesiastical roles or offices, or vest the church power granted to ordained officers in any unordained person, or intrude such persons upon the church or the consciences of its members, whether by means of popular election, or the use of vows not mandated by the Word of God and the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America. Any appointed administrative or ministry support roles (such as other church staff or volunteer positions) shall be appointed by the Session, and their given titles must not be subject to confusion with the titles or unique responsibilities of the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon.

So that the amended passage shall read:

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RATIONALE

The existing sections of the *BCO* related to polity of officers have historically intended to limit the ordained offices of the church to the two types of officers, pastors/elders and deacons,

1 and ensure that these offices are limited to men only. However, there appear to be a number
2 of churches within the PCA that are causing confusion regarding church offices by creating
3 new positions for women with similar titles (such as “shepherdess”) and/or utilizing a similar
4 process to have congregations elect and install women into various leadership roles, thereby
5 functionally creating a second class of offices specifically for women (sometimes referred to
6 as “functional female officers”). There have been several recent public efforts (such as that at
7 <https://www.savethepca.com/>) to document the type and extent of these practices in PCA
8 congregations. According to that research, it appears that this is not simply a matter confined
9 to a handful of churches, but rather practices that have spread to a significant minority of
10 congregations, likely between 5-10% of PCA member churches.

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12 Consequently, a number of separate overtures were passed by multiple presbyteries in 2025
13 in order to address these practices (although some were in favor of loosening existing
14 restrictions, and some were designed to eliminate such practices). Unfortunately, the
15 Overtures Committee of the 53rd General Assembly declined to debate any of these overtures,
16 other than to recommend against a single overture (#37) which proposed to allow women to
17 become ordained deacons. All other relevant overtures were answered in reference to this one
18 overture, which was subsequently defeated by a large margin on the floor of General
19 Assembly. This outcome left many presbyters frustrated, as the set of overtures so handled
20 were mutually exclusive and related to topics far broader than the simple question of whether
21 or not to ordain women as deacons, which was already explicitly contrary to existing church
22 law.

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24 It seems unfortunate to have to impose specific additional language in our *BCO* around this
25 topic, but the reality is that the existing language is obviously insufficient to prevent some
26 churches from coming up with creative ways to install women in positions of general
27 leadership that our polity intends to prohibit. This overture is being introduced as a measure
28 to improve clarity of the intention of the existing language within the *BCO* surrounding the
29 unique leadership roles of the ordained offices, and as a measure to increase accountability to
30 allow our denominational courts to ensure that local churches are practicing their polity in
31 conformity with these requirements. This overture has been crafted utilizing many of the ideas
32 contained in the multiple overtures sent to the 53rd General Assembly on this topic, and is
33 focused specifically on the question of the use of titles and offices.

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35 Therefore, the proposed amendments to sections *BCO* 7-3 and 7-4 are intended to further
36 clarify this understanding and to prohibit the invention of new offices for women (or
37 unordained men), or the use of feminized variants of existing titles (pastoress, eldress, or
38 deaconess), or the adoption of new titles (such as “shepherdess” or “woman shepherd” or
39 “spiritual director” etc.) implying authority over the general congregation in roles filled by
40 unordained people.

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

1 undermine the existing, settled polity of the PCA with respect to women in leadership, either
2 through practices that rely on technicalities or deception. If that is the case, it would be
3 healthier for those churches to affiliate with another branch of the visible church that already
4 allows for such practices, such as the ECO, the EPC, or the ARP, and go with our blessing.
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6 Historically, our denomination has valued both unordained men and women exercising their
7 gifts and serving in positions of ministry support in their local churches, and we believe that
8 there are a wide variety of ways that can happen and still be in conformity with our polity
9 regarding the leadership roles reserved for the ordained offices. We encourage churches to
10 pursue opportunities for service and recognition for unordained persons, but to do so in a
11 manner that preserves clarity around the unique nature of the ordained offices in the church.
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14 *Adopted by the Southwest Florida Presbytery at its stated meeting, September 12, 2026*

15 *Attested by TE Freddy Fritz, Stated Clerk*