

OVERTURE 2 from Southwest Florida Presbytery (to CCB, OC) “Amend <i>BCO</i> 9-2 & 9-7 to Restrict Diaconal Titles and Authority to Ordained Officers”

Be it resolved that the 54th General Assembly amend sections 9-2 & 9-7 of the *BCO* as follows (~~striketrough~~ for deletion, and underlining for additions):

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

In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. In a church in which it is impossible ~~for any reason to secure deacons, to secure the appointment of a sufficient number of deacons due to the absence of spiritually qualified men (BCO 9-3),~~ the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders, and not upon unordained persons within the church. It is highly undesirable for churches to persist without ordained deacons, and Presbyteries should be diligent to assist all their churches in ordaining qualified deacons.

9-7. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (*BCO* 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (*BCO* 17). Such women and unordained men shall not exercise independent authority in these matters, or be commissioned, appointed, or installed in any manner that implies parity with or equivalence to ordained deacons. Therefore, these assistants may not be referred to as deacons or deaconesses, and in any communications of the church, care should be taken in order that they are clearly distinguished from the ordained deacons. It is also not allowable to appoint unordained persons formally to be assistants to the deacons if there are no regularly ordained and installed deacons serving actively in the local church.

So that the amended passages would read:

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1 congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice
2 and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance
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21 installed in any manner that implies parity with or equivalence to ordained deacons.
22 Therefore, these assistants may not be referred to as deacons or deaconesses, and in
23 any communications of the church, care should be taken in order that they are clearly
24 distinguished from the ordained deacons. It is also not allowable to appoint unordained
25 persons formally to be assistants to the deacons if there are no regularly ordained and
26 installed deacons serving actively in the local church.
27

28 **RATIONALE**

29
30 The existing sections of the *BCO* related to polity of officers have historically intended to
31 limit the ordained offices of the church to the two types of officers, pastors/elders and deacons,
32 and that these offices are limited to men only. The longstanding provision of *BCO* 9-7 to allow
33 unordained assistants (either male or female) to the deacons was never intended to allow
34 churches to create *de facto* female deacons, or to encourage churches to position women
35 serving in such capacity as equivalent to ordained deacons. However, there appear to be a
36 number of churches within the PCA that are causing confusion regarding church offices by
37 utilizing this provision to install women into diaconal roles that blur these distinctions, or by
38 using the unauthorized title “deaconess” to describe female deacon assistants. There have been
39 several recent public efforts (such as that at <https://www.savethepca.com/>) to document the
40 type and extent of these practices in PCA congregations. According to that research, it appears
41 that this is not simply a matter confined to a handful of churches, but rather practices that have
42 spread to a significant minority of congregations, likely between 5-10% of PCA member
43 churches.
44

1 Consequently, a number of separate overtures were passed by multiple Presbyteries in 2025
2 in order to address these practices (although some were in favor of loosening existing
3 restrictions, and some were designed to eliminate such practices). Unfortunately, the
4 Overtures Committee of the 53rd General Assembly declined to debate any of these overtures,
5 other than to recommend against a single overture (#37) which proposed to allow women to
6 become ordained deacons. All other relevant overtures were answered in reference to this one
7 overture, which was subsequently defeated by a large margin on the floor of General
8 Assembly. This outcome left many presbyters frustrated, as the set of overtures so handled
9 were often mutually exclusive and related to topics far broader than the simple question of
10 whether or not to ordain women as deacons,

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12 It seems unfortunate to have to impose specific additional language in our *BCO* around this
13 topic, but the reality is that the existing language is obviously insufficient to prevent some
14 churches from coming up with creative ways to install women into diaconal positions that our
15 polity intends to prohibit. This overture is being introduced as a measure to improve clarity
16 and as a measure to increase accountability to allow our denominational courts to ensure that
17 local churches are practicing their polity in conformity with these requirements. This overture
18 has been crafted utilizing many of the ideas contained in the multiple overtures sent to the
19 53rd General Assembly on this topic and is focused specifically on the question of the
20 operation of the diaconal ministry.

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

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

43
44 There may be PCA members or even churches that are under the conviction that women
45 should be able to serve, either in name or in function, as pastors, elders, and deacons alongside

the ordained men which our polity reserves for those positions. It would be better to proclaim these convictions openly and honestly and not cause internal division, rather than to covertly undermine the existing, settled polity of the PCA with respect to women in leadership, either through practices that rely on technicalities or deception. If that is the case, it would be healthier for those churches to affiliate with another branch of the visible church that already allows for such practices, such as the ECO, the EPC, or the ARP, and go with our blessing.

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

Adopted by the Southwest Florida Presbytery at its stated meeting, September 12, 2026

Attested by TE Freddy Fritz, Stated Clerk