

Overture 37, Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery

OVERTURE 37 from Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
“Amend *BCO* 21-4 and 24-1 Clarifying Moral Requirements for Church Office”

Whereas the character of a candidate for ordination is as important as his doctrine (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1: 6-9) and specific areas and means of inquiry into doctrine, views, and ability are enumerated in the *BCO* (*BCO* 21-4; 24-1); yet little emphasis or elaboration is given to the examination of the candidate’s character (*BCO* 21-4.a.1; 24-1.a); and

Whereas the qualifications for a church officer particularly require that he be above reproach and blameless (1 Tim. 3:2, 10; Tit. 1:7); and

Whereas scripture itself singles out sexual immorality as being worthy of particular note in the context of the church operating in the world (Acts 15:20); and

Whereas the Presbyterian Church in America has sought consistent and clear responses to questions of homosexuality throughout its history; and

Whereas recently the language of sexual and gender identification has caused much confusion, leading to the formation of a study committee and its helpful report; and

Whereas still other forms of actual sin and desire raise similar concerns, and new issues will likely arise in the future; and

Whereas the Christian’s identity is rooted in Christ so that he is a “new creation” in Him, his identity cannot be defined by any desires or lifestyles that are contrary to the Holy Scripture; for the Christian there is a clear distinction between self-conception (“This is who I am”) and remaining indwelling sin (“This is what I must daily mortify”) (Rom. 6: 1-14; 1 Cor. 6: 9-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-5); and

Whereas some men may have experienced various struggles with sin in a manner that would have disqualified them from church office, yet through God’s work of sanctification they have been faithfully and consistently, although imperfectly, mortifying this sin with its desires to the point where they may be qualified; and

Whereas all Christians should expect to experience progress in the Christian life (*WLC* 75; *WSC* 35) as a work of grace by the Holy Spirit and in time to be enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness; and

Whereas the mortifying of sin includes not only actual sins committed but also the battling of all sinful passions and desires that remain (*WLC* 78; *WSC* 35); and

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Whereas the “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” offers the clarifying distinction that “we name our sins, but are not named by them”; and

Whereas the answer to contemporary debates is better made with biblical and confessional language rather than the introduction of contemporary terms which cause confusion; and

Whereas there is precedent for amending the *BCO* to address emerging cultural issues;

Therefore be it resolved that, for the examination of Teaching Elders, *BCO* 21-4 be amended to add a new sub-paragraph 21-4.e, as follows, with the subsequent sub-paragraphs [21-4.e-h] re-lettered [to be 21-4.f-i]:

BCO 21-4

e. In the examination of the candidate’s personal character, the presbytery shall give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, child sexual abuse, fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, racism, and financial mismanagement. Careful attention must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful desires. The candidate must give clear testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending on this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5, Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he must not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness (e.g., homosexual desires, etc.), but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of the pastoral office, Presbyteries are encouraged to appoint a committee to conduct detailed examinations of these matters and to give prayerful support to candidates.

Be it further resolved that, for the examination of Ruling Elders and Deacons, *BCO* 24-1 be amended by the addition of a second paragraph (addition underlined):

24-1. Every church shall elect persons to the office of ruling elders and deacon in the following manner: At such times as determined by the Session, communicant members of the congregation may submit names to the Session, keeping in mind that each prospective officer should be an active male member who meets the qualifications set

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forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. After the close of the nomination period nominees for the office of ruling elder and/or deacon shall receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the office. Each nominee shall then be examined in:

- a. his Christian experience, especially his personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9),
- b. his knowledge of Bible content,
- c. his knowledge of the system of doctrine, government, discipline contained in the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America (*BCO* Preface III, The Constitution Defined),
- d. the duties of the office to which he has been nominated, and
- e. his willingness to give assent to the questions required for ordination (*BCO* 24-6).

In the examination of each nominee's personal character, the Session shall give specific attention to potentially notorious concerns, such as but not limited to relational sins, sexual immorality (including homosexuality, child sexual abuse, fornication, and pornography), addictions, abusive behavior, racism, and financial mismanagement. Careful attention must be given to his practical struggle against sinful actions, as well as to persistent sinful desires. Each nominee must give clear testimony of reliance upon his union with Christ and the benefits thereof by the Holy Spirit, depending upon this work of grace to make progress over sin (Psalm 103:2-5; Romans 8:29) and to bear fruit (Psalm 1:3; Gal. 5:22-23). While imperfection will remain, he must not be known by reputation or self-profession according to his remaining sinfulness (e.g., homosexual desires, etc.), but rather by the work of the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 6:9-11). In order to maintain discretion and protect the honor of church office, Sessions are encouraged to appoint a committee to conduct detailed examinations into these matters and to give prayerful support to nominees.

If there are candidates eligible for the election, the Session shall report to the congregation those eligible, giving at least thirty (30) days prior notice of the time and place of a congregational meeting for the elections.

If one-fourth (1/4) of the persons entitled to vote shall at any time request the Session to call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing additional officers, it shall be the duty of the Session to call such a meeting on the above procedure. The number of

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officers to be elected shall be determined by the congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation.

Adopted by Eastern Pennsylvania Presbytery at its stated meeting, April 20, 2021

Attested by TE Thomas Keane, stated clerk