

THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

of First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church

Including:

the Form of Government

the Rules of Discipline of the Church (or Book of Church Discipline),

the Handbook of Liturgy (or Directory for the Public Worship of God),

Annexes and Appendices

(2026 Edition)

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Preface to the Book of Church Order

I. The King and Head of the Church

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the church rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7); having all power given unto Him in heaven and on earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Saviour, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion. It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thereby exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, for the establishment and glory of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church the Holy Scriptures, officers, and ordinances; and has ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or, by necessary inference, may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them nothing be taken away.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Ghost.

II. Preliminary Principles

First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church (hereinafter “the church”), in setting forth the form of government founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, sets forth the following great principles which have governed the formation of the plan:

1. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil authorities further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others.
 2. Every Christian church, union, or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ has appointed. In the exercise of this right, it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.
 3. Our blessed Saviour, for the edification of the visible Church, which is His body, has appointed officers not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty. It is incumbent upon these officers and upon the whole Church in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous, unrepentant, and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God.
 4. Godliness is founded on truth. A test of truth is its power to promote holiness according to our Saviour's rule, “Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:20). There is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty.
 5. While, under the conviction of the above principle, it is necessary to make effective provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. In all these it is the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual tolerance, patience, and compassion toward each other. (See 2.2)
 6. Though the character, qualifications and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any church resides in that church's members.
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7. All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or by representation, is only *ministerial and declarative* since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church governing body may make laws to bind the conscience. All church authorities may err through human frailty, yet it rests upon them to uphold the laws of Scripture though this obligation be lodged with fallible men.
8. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approval of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church.

If the preceding scriptural principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of government and discipline, applied with pastoral prudence and Christian love, will contribute to the glory and well-being of the Church.

III. The Church Standards and the Church Constitution Defined

The church is governed by its primary, secondary, and tertiary standards.

The primary standard of the Church is the Holy Bible,¹ contained in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is “the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him” (*Shorter Catechism*, Q/A 2). The Holy Bible is the *norma normans* or “the norming norm,” the ultimate ruling standard used to measure all rules and beliefs.

The secondary standard, subject to and subordinate to the Word of God, is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, together with the ecumenical creeds (*Apostles Creed*, *Nicene Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*) and confessions (*The Three Forms of Unity*).

The tertiary standard, also subject to and subordinate to the Word of God, is the *Church Book of Order*, also known as the *Constitution of First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church*. The *Book of Church Order* includes the *Form of Government*, the *Book of Church Discipline*, and the *Directory for Public Worship of God*; all as adopted by the Church.

The secondary and tertiary standards are the *normae normatae* or the “normed norms.” They align with, and receive authority from, the Scriptures.

¹ The terms “Holy Bible,” “Bible,” “Holy Scriptures,” “Scriptures,” and the “Word of God” shall be used interchangeably herein.

IV. For the Well-Being of the Church²

For the reader: the book that you hold in your hand contains the tertiary standards of the church: its *Form of Government*, the *Book of Church Discipline*, and *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. While printed separately from the secondary standards, they are not conceived, nor should they be used, in isolation from them. Several sections of the doctrinal standards refer directly or indirectly to worship and ecclesiology, such as those dealing with the sufficiency of Scripture, Christian liberty and liberty of conscience, religious worship and the Sabbath day, the civil magistrate, the church, the sacraments, and church censures, as well as on synods and councils.

The Presbyterian church government, according to which the church operates, appreciates the value of the tertiary standards. They do not replace or compete with the Scriptures. Rather, they set forth rules and procedures by which the church corporately interprets and applies the Word of God. That is, this *Book of Church Order* provides the effective means by which the teaching of Scripture is applied to the church's government, discipline, and worship. As Presbyterians have put this in the past, a book that rightly orders the church is not necessary for the *being* of the church (since there are true churches that do not follow these rules and procedures) but is necessary for the *well-being* of the church. The rules and procedures set forth in this book will promote and encourage the spiritual health of the church.

The differences in authority among the primary, secondary, and tertiary standards come to expression in two important respects. First, the language of the church officer ordination vows takes into account the relative weight of these standards. Ministers, elders, and deacons in the church are required to *believe* the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, to *sincerely receive and adopt* the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in Scripture, and to *approve of* the government, discipline, and worship of this Church. There is a lessening of the required commitment to the lower levels of these standards. Second, the standards are distinguished by the processes by which amendments may be made to them. The primary standard of Scripture cannot be altered, the secondary standards of doctrine may be amended only with difficulty and rarely, and the tertiary standards of church order may be more easily and frequently revised.

This *Book of Church Order* has been prepared with provisions for future amendments as adjudged necessary by the Presbytery.

Richard Neil Chua, *stated clerk*
Association of Reformed Presbyterian Churches
Quezon City, Philippines, 2026

² Adapted from the *Book of Church Order* of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (2020).

Part 1: Form of Government

Chapter 1: The Visible Church Defined

- 1.1 Jesus Christ, being now exalted far above all principality and power, has erected in this world a kingdom, which is His Church.
- 1.2 The visible Church before the law, under the law, and now under the Gospel, is one and the same and consists of all those who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, together with their children.³
- 1.3 The members of this visible and universal Church are all those persons in every nation, together with their children, who make profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and promise submission to His laws.
- 1.4 In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, the many members of this church universal are to be organized in local and regional churches, confessing a common faith and submitting to a common form of government.
- 1.5 The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness. The means appointed by Christ through which the church does this work include the confession of the name of Christ before men; the exercise of fellowship in encouraging one another; the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God; praying; singing; fasting; administering baptism and the Lord's Supper; collecting and distributing offerings; showing mercy; exercising discipline; and blessing the people.

³ Since the earliest centuries of the church, an important distinction has been made between the *church militant* and the *church triumphant*.

The church militant is so called as they are still engaged in warfare with the world (John 15:19; Rev. 17:14), the flesh (Rom. 8:7; Gal. 5:17), and the devil (Eph. 6:12; 1 Pet. 5:8). The life of the church on earth is a life of warfare (Eph. 6:10–20).

The church triumphant are believers who have finished their earthly battle and are now enjoying rest and the blessedness of being in the presence of God (Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8).

Chapter 2: The Doctrine of Church Government

- 2.1 We believe that the scriptural form of church government is Presbyterian, and is comprehended under three heads: a) the Church; b) its members; and c) its officers.

The word Presbyterian comes from the Greek *presbuteros* (“elder”). A Presbyterian church is one that is “ruled by elders;” it does not refer to doctrines but to a particular form of representative church governance. Presbyterian churches trace their roots back to the 16th century Protestant Reformation and to the teachings of theologians like John Calvin.

- 2.2 The Church, which the Lord Jesus Christ has erected in this world for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, is His visible kingdom of grace and is one and the same in all ages.
- 2.3 The officers of the Church, by whom all its powers are administered, are, according to the Scriptures, teaching and ruling elders and deacons.
- 2.4 Ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the local church is not a several, but a joint power, to be exercised by presbyters in session (see *BCO* 10.2). Presbyteries may have jurisdiction over one or many churches, but they sustain such mutual relations as to realize the idea of the unity of the Church.
- 2.5 The ordination of officers is ordinarily by a court, except in the case of ordination by a presbytery's evangelist (see *BCO* 8.7 and 8.8).
- 2.6 This scriptural doctrine of Presbytery is necessary to the perfection of the order of the visible Church but is not essential to its existence.
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Chapter 3: The Nature and Extent of Church Jurisdiction

- 3.1 The power which Christ has committed to His Church vests in the whole body, the rulers and those ruled, constituting it a spiritual community. This power, as exercised by the people, extends to the choice of those officers whom He has appointed in His Church.
- 3.2 Ecclesiastical power, which is wholly spiritual, is two-fold. The officers exercise it sometimes severally, as in preaching the Gospel, administering the Sacraments, reproving the erring, visiting the sick, and comforting the afflicted, which is the power of order; and they exercise it sometimes jointly in Church sessions, according to the procedures of the church.
- 3.3 The sole functions of the Church, as a kingdom and government distinct from civil authorities, are to proclaim, to administer, and to enforce the law of Christ revealed in the Scriptures.
- 3.4 All church power is wholly moral or spiritual. No church officer possesses any civil jurisdiction; they may not inflict any civil penalties, nor may they seek the aid of the civil power in the exercise of their jurisdiction further than may be necessary for civil protection and security. “Therefore, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's” (Matthew 22:21, ESV).⁴
- 3.5 The Church, with its ordinances and officers and courts, is the means which Christ has ordained for the edification and government of His people, for the propagation of the faith, and for the evangelization of the world.
- 3.6 The exercise of ecclesiastical authority, whether joint or several, has the divine sanction when in conformity with the commands of Christ, the Lawgiver, and when put forth by officers appointed thereunto in His Word.

⁴ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version (Crossway, 2001)

Chapter 4: The Particular Church

- 4.1 A particular church or local assembly consists of professing Christians, with their children, associated together for divine worship and godly living, agreeable to the Scriptures, and submitting to the lawful government of Christ's kingdom.
- 4.2 Its officers are its teaching and ruling elders and its deacons.
- 4.3 Its jurisdiction, being a joint power, is lodged in the church Session, which consists of its pastor, pastors, associate pastor(s) and the ruling elders.
- 4.4 The ordinances established by Christ, the Head, in His Church are prayer; singing praises; reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God; administering the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; fasting and thanksgiving; catechizing; making offerings for the relief of the poor and for other pious uses; and exercising discipline; the taking of solemn vows, and the ordination to sacred office.
- 4.5 Churches without teaching elders ought not to forsake the assembling of themselves together but should be convened by a Session or Provisional Session or temporary system of church government on the Lord's Day, and at other suitable times, for prayer, praise, the presenting and expounding of the Holy Scriptures, and exhortation, or the reading of a sermon of some approved minister. In like manner, Christians whose lot is cast in destitute regions ought to meet regularly for the worship of God.
- 4.6 Sessions without the required number of ruling elders may request assistance from partner sessions, subject to approval by the Presbytery.⁵ The ruling elders who assist shall serve *in an advisory capacity only*, until the required number of ruling elders are met.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, "Presbytery" herein shall refer to, and shall be used interchangeably with, the *Association of Reformed Presbyterian Churches*.

Chapter 5: The Organization of a Particular Church

A. Mission Churches

- 5.1 A mission church may be properly described in the same manner as the particular church is described in *BCO* 4.1. It is distinguished from a particular church in that it has no permanent governing body, and thus must be governed or supervised by others. However, its goal is to mature and be organized as a particular church as soon as this can be done decently and in good order.
- 5.2 Ordinarily, the responsibility for initiation and oversight of a mission church lies with the Presbytery, exercised through its Committee on Mission, or by a Session, in cooperation with Presbytery's Committee on Mission. In case of mission churches located outside the bounds of Presbytery, or in the case of already existing congregations seeking membership in the Presbytery, the responsibility may be exercised through a commission from said congregation, under the oversight of the Presbytery. (See 5.3.c, below.)
- 5.3 The mission church, because of its transitional condition, requires a temporary system of government. Depending on the circumstances and at its own discretion, Presbytery may provide for such government in one of several ways:
- a. Appoint an evangelist as prescribed in *BCO* 8.7.
 - b. Cooperate with the Session of a particular church in arranging a mother-daughter relationship with a mission church. The Session may then serve as the temporary governing body of the mission church.
 - c. Appoint a commission to serve as a temporary Session of the mission church.
 - d. At the discretion of the temporary governing body, members may be received into the mission church as prescribed by the Session. These persons then become communicant or non-communicant members of the church.
 - e. Should it become necessary, the Presbytery may dissolve the mission church. Church members enrolled should be cared for according to the procedures of *BCO* 13.11.

The temporary system of government shall record and submit its records to Presbytery for annual review in the same manner as Sessions of particular churches.

- 5.4 Pastoral ministry for the mission church may be provided:
- a. by a minister of the Presbytery called by same Presbytery to serve as pastor, or,
 - b. by stated, student, or ruling elder supply (BCO 22.5 and 22.6), or,
 - c. by a series of qualified preachers approved by the temporary government (BCO 12.5.e).
- 5.5 Mission churches and their members shall have the right of administrative process of the Session exercising oversight of their temporary governing body.
- 5.6 Mission churches shall maintain a roll of communicant and non-communicant members, in the same manner as, but separate from, other particular churches.
- a. All men of the mission church (unless they decline) shall receive instruction in the qualifications and work of the office of ruling elder by the organizing commission or the evangelist.
 - b. These men shall be examined by the organizing commission or the evangelist concerning their Christian experience, their knowledge and acceptance of the constitutional standards of the church, and their willingness to assume the responsibility of the office of ruling elder according to the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The organizing commission or the evangelist shall present a list of all who are found qualified to be nominated.
 - c. Not less than thirty (30) days prior to the date of election, petitioners shall submit, from the list of all those found qualified, nominations of members for the office of ruling elder to the Presbytery-designated organizing commission or evangelist. (Compare *BCO* 24.1)
 - d. The congregation will determine the number of ruling elders following procedures outlined in *BCO* 24.3 and 24.1.
 - e. At the organizing meeting, ordination and installation shall follow the procedure set forth in *BCO* 24.6.
 - f. Those elected, ordained, and installed ruling elders should meet as soon as is practicable to elect a moderator and a clerk. The moderator may be one of their own number or any teaching elder of the Session with Session's approval.
- 5.7 It is the intention of the Presbytery that mission churches enjoy the same status as particular churches in relation to civil government.
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B. The Organization of a Particular Church

- 5.8 A new church can be organized only by the authority of the Presbytery. The Session may proceed with the organization directly, or through an especially appointed commission, or through an evangelist to whom the Presbytery has entrusted the power to organize churches. In the organization of a church, whatever be the way in which the matter originated, the procedure shall be as follows:
- a. The Presbytery shall receive and approve a petition subscribed to by those persons seeking to be organized into a congregation of the Presbytery, appointing a time and date for a service of organization.
 - b. At the service and following the preaching of the Word, testimonials shall be presented to the Presbytery by such persons as are members of the church, if there be any, and applicants for admission to the church on profession of faith in Christ shall, on satisfactory examination, be received.
 - c. These persons shall be required to enter into covenant, by answering the following question affirmatively, with uplifted hand:

“Do you, in reliance on God for strength, solemnly promise and covenant that you will walk together as an organized church, on the principles of the faith and order of the Presbytery` and that you will be zealous and faithful in maintaining the purity and peace of the whole body?”
 - d. The presiding minister shall then say:

“I now pronounce and declare that you are constituted a church according to the Word of God and the faith and order of the First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”
 - e. Action shall be taken to secure, as soon as practicable, the regular administration of the Word and Sacraments.
- 5.9 If deacons are elected, follow the procedures of (a) through (e) above. If deacons are not elected, the duties of the office shall be assumed by the ruling elders.
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- 5.10 The following procedures may be used in the selection of a pastor in a newly organized congregation:
- a. Not less than thirty (30) days prior to the date of organization the petitioners shall elect from their own body a Pulpit Nominating Committee. This election shall take place at a meeting of the petitioners announced at least one (1) week in advance. Only those who have made a written commitment to membership in the new church are eligible to vote at this meeting.
 - b. The Pulpit Committee may report at the organizational meeting of the congregation, or any subsequent congregational meeting called for that purpose.
 - c. If at the organizational meeting a pastor is called who is a member of the organizing Session, he may be installed at that time by the Session or a Commission authorized by the congregation to do so. If the pastor elect is not a member of the organizing Session, his call must be made under the provisions of the Session.
- 5.11 Upon organization, the newly elected Session should meet as soon as is practicable to elect a stated clerk and formulate a budget. If there is no pastor, the session may elect as moderator one of their own number or any teaching elder of the Presbytery with the Presbytery's approval. Further, if there is no pastor, action shall be taken to secure, as soon as practicable, the regular administration of Word and Sacraments.
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Chapter 6: Church Members

A. Membership in General

- 6.1 Communing members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table.
- 6.2 The children of believers are, through the covenant and by right of birth, non-communing members of the church. Hence, they are entitled to Baptism, and to the pastoral oversight, instruction and government of the church, with a view to their embracing Christ and thus possessing personally all benefits of the covenant.
- 6.3 All baptized persons, including those who have undergone infant baptism are entitled to the watchful care, instruction and government of the church, even if, as in the case of baptized infants, they have made no profession of their faith in Christ.
- 6.4 Those only who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table, are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church.

B. Requirements and Procedures for Membership

- 6.6 Before a public profession of faith can be made (*see BCO 6-1 and 6-4*), a person must undergo the following procedures before profession and membership can be given:
 - 1. Candidate must have attended church consistently for at least 6 months prior to submission of application.
 - 2. Candidate must submit a written application or letter of intent to the Session of the church, stating their desire to become a member and abide by all Church rules. Said application must be submitted before membership classes begin.
 - 3. Candidate must provide a Release Letter *duly received* by their former church clearly stating:
 - a. The applicant's intent to sever membership from said former church (submission same as item 2 above);
 - b. The former church's having no compelling objection against applicant/candidate (e.g., in cases where applicant is under church discipline).
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4. Approval of the Application through letter where applicant signs the *conforme* to agree to comply with the guidelines for membership class/catechism and attendance, otherwise, the application will not be approved.

It is understood that applications are only accepted when physical gatherings of worship are permitted and regularly taking place.

- 6.7
 1. Catechism classes are scheduled once a candidate qualifies for inculcation – compliance with items A (1) and A (4) – and only within the first three (3) months of the year. The duration of classes shall depend upon the discretion of the teaching elder. An applicant that missed the first three (3) classes shall join the next teaching cycle, provided he/she remains qualified.
 2. No candidate may be absent, *without justifiable reason*, from the catechism classes for more than two (2) times, otherwise, the candidate shall discontinue the current teaching cycle and join the succeeding one. Absences must be subjected to make-up class or exam, or both, at the discretion of the teacher.
 3. The same standard that must be observed in A (1) shall abide during the time a candidate is undergoing catechism classes and worship service until his/her official induction as a full member, and they shall be as follows:
 - a. An applicant / candidate shall not have more than two (2) consecutive unexcused absences;
 - b. An applicant / candidate shall not have more than three (3) absences (excused or unexcused) in any given month;
 - c. An applicant / candidate shall not have more than six (6) absences (excused or unexcused) within six months prior to application;
 - d. Attendance is understood to be actual physical attendance. Tardiness of more than 15 minutes is considered an absence;

Digression in any of the above parameters shall disqualify the applicant/candidate for that present year, and he/she may try again the succeeding year without re-submitting the items in B.2 and B.3 if these have already been complied.

C. Formalizing Membership

- 6.8 To formalize the candidate's membership:
- a. He/she must have completed the foregoing requirements to the satisfaction of the elders of the church to become an official and full church member;
 - b. Such candidate must be baptized, or, if already baptized, must satisfactorily prove his/her baptism to the church elders;
 - c. Such candidate must make a profession of faith in Christ in the presence of the congregation;
 - d. Only persons admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the Church.
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Chapter 7: Church Officers: General Consideration

- 7.1 Under the New Testament, our Lord at first collected His people out of different nations, and united them to the household of faith by the ministry of extraordinary officers who received extraordinary gifts of the Spirit and who were agents by whom God completed His revelation to His Church. Such officers and gifts related to new revelation have no successors since God completed His revelation at the conclusion of the Apostolic Age.
 - 7.2 The ordinary and perpetual classes of office in the Church are elders and deacons. Within the class of elder are the two orders of teaching elders and ruling elders. The elders jointly have the government and spiritual oversight of the Church, including teaching. Only those elders who are specially gifted, called and trained by God to preach may serve as teaching elders. The office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people.
 - 7.3 No one who holds office in the Church ought to usurp authority therein, or receive any official titles of spiritual pre-eminence, except such as are employed in the Scriptures. Furthermore, non-ordained people shall not be referred to as, or given the titles of, the ordained offices of pastor/elder, or deacon.
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Chapter 8: Church Officers: The Elder

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1–7)

- 8.1 In accordance with the Scriptures, the office of Elder shall be open to *qualified men* only.
 - 8.2 This office is one of dignity and usefulness. The man who fills it has in Scripture different titles expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed *bishop* or *pastor*. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and Kingdom of Christ, he is termed *presbyter* or *elder*. As he expounds the Word, and by sound doctrine both exhorts and convinces the gainsayer, he is termed *teacher*. These titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office.
 - 8.3 He that fills this office should possess a competency of human learning and be blameless in life, sound in the faith and apt to teach. He should exhibit a sobriety and holiness of life becoming the Gospel. He should rule his own house well and he should have a good reputation even to those outside the church.
 - 8.4 It belongs to those in the office of elder, both severally and jointly, to watch diligently over the flock committed to his charge, that no corruption of doctrine or of morals enter therein. They must exercise government and discipline, and take oversight not only of the spiritual interests of the particular church, but also the Church generally when called thereunto. They should visit the people at their homes, especially the sick. They should instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, nourish and guard the children of the Church. They should set a worthy example to the flock entrusted to their care by their zeal to evangelize the unconverted and make disciples. All those duties which private Christians are bound to discharge by the law of love are especially incumbent upon them by divine vocation, and are to be
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discharged as official duties. They should pray with and for the people, being careful and diligent in seeking the fruit of the preached Word among the flock.

- 8.5 As the Lord has given different gifts to men and has committed to some special gifts and callings, the Church is authorized to call and appoint some to labor as teaching elders in such works as may be needful to the Church. When a teaching elder is called to such needful work, it shall be incumbent upon him to make full proof of his ministry by disseminating the Gospel for the edification of the Church. He shall make a report to the Presbytery at least once a year.
- 8.6 When a man is called to labor as a teaching elder, it belongs to his order, in addition to those functions he shares with all other elders, to feed the flock by reading, expounding and preaching the Word of God and to administer the Sacraments. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed *ambassador*. As he bears glad tidings of salvation to the ignorant and perishing, he is termed *evangelist*. As he stands to proclaim the Gospel, he is termed *preacher*. As he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed *steward* of the mysteries of God.
- 8.7 When a teaching elder is appointed to the work of an evangelist in foreign countries or where there are no other association churches within a reasonable distance, he is commissioned for a renewable term of twelve months to preach the Word, to administer the Sacraments, to receive and dismiss members of mission churches, and to train potential officers. By separate actions the Presbytery may in extraordinary situations commission him to examine, ordain and install ruling elders and deacons and organize churches.
- 8.8 The Presbytery may, at its discretion, approve the call of a teaching elder to work with an organization outside the jurisdiction of the Presbytery, provided that he be engaged in preaching and teaching the Word, that the Presbytery be assured he will have full freedom to maintain and teach the doctrine of our Church, and that he report at least annually on his work. As far as possible, such a teaching elder shall be a member of the Presbytery within whose bounds he labors. (See BCO 20-1.)
- 8.9 The Presbytery may, at its discretion, approve the call of a teaching elder to work as a Chaplain whether military or civilian, with an organization outside the jurisdiction of the Presbytery, provided that he be engaged in preaching and teaching the Word, that the Presbytery be assured he will have full freedom to maintain and teach the doctrine of our Church, and that he reports at least annually on his work. The Chaplain may be appointed to the work of an evangelist when
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serving as a Chaplain. Teaching elders ministering as paid or volunteer chaplains are strongly encouraged to seek and obtain their endorsement from the endorsing agency authorized by the Presbytery for such purpose.

- 8.10 As there were in the Church under the law, elders of the people for the government thereof, so in the Gospel Church, Christ has furnished others besides ministers of the Word with gifts and commission to govern when called thereunto, who are called *ruling elders*.

Elders being of one class of office, ruling elders possess the same authority and eligibility to office in the Session as teaching elders. They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so.

Chapter 9: Church Officers: The Deacon

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 3:8–13).

- 9.1 The office of deacon is set forth in the Scriptures as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.
 - 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, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders.
 - 9.3 To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.
 - 9.4 The deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The Board shall elect a chairman and a secretary from their number and a treasurer to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the church. It shall meet separately at least once a quarter and whenever requested by the Session. The Board of each church shall determine the number necessary for a quorum.
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The Board shall keep a record of its proceedings, and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its minutes to the Session regularly, and at other times upon request of the Session.

It is desirable that the Session and the Board of Deacons meet in joint session once a quarter to confer on matters of common interest.

- 9.5 The deacons may, with much advantage, hold conference from time to time for the discussion of the interests committed to them. Such conferences may include representatives of churches covering areas of smaller or larger extent. Any actions taken by these conferences shall have only an advisory character.
- 9.6 In accordance with Scripture, the office of Deacon, similar to that of the Elder (*BCO* 8.1), shall be filled by *qualified men only*. For the sake of expediency, the deacons, or in certain cases the Session of the church, may select and appoint godly men and women from 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).
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Chapter 10: Church Courts: General Considerations

10.1 The Church is governed by various courts, in regular gradation, which are all, nevertheless, Presbyteries, as being composed exclusively of presbyters.

10.2 These courts are the Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and the General Assembly.

Sessions are church courts constituted of the rulers of a particular congregation (i.e., teaching elders and ruling elders). Sessions are to meet quarterly (see 12.6).

Presbyteries are church courts constituted of different pastors/teaching elders and ruling elders from different congregations. Presbyteries are to meet twice a year.

*Synods and General Assemblies*⁶ are synonymous terms for the highest court of Presbyterian polity. Synods and general assemblies are regional and are constituted of several presbyteries. As the highest court, they are the final governing and legislative court for the denomination, regulating affairs and reviewing sentences when necessary, and to regulate affairs which are too hard for presbyteries. Synods and general assemblies are to meet annually.

10.3 The pastor is, for prudential reasons, moderator of the Session. He, or in case of his absence the last moderator present or the oldest minister longest a member of the Session, shall open the next meeting with a sermon unless it is impracticable, and shall hold the chair until a new moderator be chosen.

The moderator has all authority necessary for the preservation of order and for the proper and expeditious conduct of all business before the Session, and for convening and adjourning the Session according to its own ruling. In any emergency, he may by sufficient communication change the time or place, or both, of meeting to which the Session stands adjourned, giving reasonable notice thereof.

⁶ The definitions for synods and general assemblies are provided on the condition that they are for reference only. Upon forming of such courts, proper amendments to the BCO shall be amended to reflect their existence. Any mention of a synod or a general assembly hereinafter shall be governed by this condition.

- 10.4 A clerk or clerks shall be elected by the Session and the Presbytery (also by Synod or General Assembly as the case may be) to serve for a definite period, determined by the court.

It is the duty of the clerk, besides recording the transactions, to preserve the records carefully, and to grant extracts from them whenever properly required. Such extracts under the hand of the clerk shall be evidence to every part of the Church.

- 10.5 Every meeting of the Session and the Presbytery (also of the Synod and General Assembly, as the case may be) shall be opened and closed with prayer, and in closing the final session a psalm or hymn may be sung and the benediction pronounced.
- 10.6 The expenses of ministers and ruling elders in their attendance shall be defrayed by the bodies which they respectively represent.
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Chapter 11: Church Courts: Jurisdiction

11.1 These assemblies are altogether distinct from the civil courts and have no jurisdiction in political or civil affairs. They have no power to inflict temporal pains and penalties, but their authority is in all respects moral or spiritual.

11.2 The jurisdiction of Church courts is only ministerial and declarative, and relates to the doctrines and precepts of Christ, to the order of the Church, and to the exercise of discipline.

First, they can make no laws binding the conscience; but may frame symbols of faith, bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, within or without the Church, and decide cases of conscience.

Secondly, they have power to establish rules for the government, discipline, worship, and extension of the Church, which must be agreeable to the doctrines relating thereto contained in the Scriptures, the circumstantial details only of these matters being left to the Christian prudence and wisdom of Church officers and elders.

Thirdly, they possess the right to require obedience to the laws of Christ. Hence, they admit those qualified to sealing ordinances and to their respective offices, and they exclude the disobedient and disorderly from such offices or from sacramental privileges. The highest censure to which their authority extends is to cut off the insubordinate and unrepentant from the congregation of believers. Moreover, they possess all the administrative authority necessary to give effect to these powers.

11-3 All Church courts are one in nature, constituted of the same elements, possessed inherently of the same kinds of rights and powers, and differing only as the Constitution may provide. When, however, according to Scriptural example, and needful to the purity and harmony of the whole Church, disputed matters of doctrine and order arising in the lower courts are referred to the higher courts for decision, such referral shall not be so exercised as to impinge upon the authority of the lower court.

11-4 For the orderly and efficient dispatch of ecclesiastical business, it is necessary that the sphere of action of each court should be distinctly defined. The Session exercises jurisdiction over a single church, the Presbytery over what is common to the ministers, Sessions, and churches within a prescribed district, and the General Assembly over such matters as concern the whole Church. The jurisdiction of these courts is limited by the express provisions of the Constitution.

Every court has the right to resolve questions of doctrine and discipline seriously and reasonably proposed, and in general to maintain truth and righteousness, condemning erroneous opinions and practices which tend to the injury of the peace, purity, or progress of the Church. Although each court exercises exclusive original jurisdiction over all matters especially belonging to it, the lower courts are subject to the review and control of the higher courts, in regular gradation. These courts are not separate and independent tribunals, but they have a mutual relation, and every act of jurisdiction is the act of the whole Church performed by it through the appropriate organ.

Chapter 12: The Church Session

- 12.1 The church Session consists of the pastor, associate pastor(s),⁷ if there be any, and the ruling elders of a church. If there are four or more ruling elders, the pastor and two ruling elders shall constitute a quorum. If there are fewer than four ruling elders, the pastor and one ruling elder shall constitute a quorum. Should the need arise for assistant pastors, they shall not be considered members of the Session, but may be invited to attend and participate in discussion *without vote*.

When a church has no pastor and there are five or more ruling elders, three shall constitute a quorum; if there are less than five ruling elders, two shall constitute a quorum; if there is only one ruling elder, he does not constitute a Session, but he should take spiritual oversight of the church, should represent it, and should report to the congregation any matter needing the action of a Church.

Any Session, by a majority vote of its members, may fix its own quorum, provided that it is not smaller than the quorum stated in these paragraphs.

- 12.2 The pastor is, by virtue of his office, the moderator of the Session. In the pastor's absence, if any emergency should arise requiring immediate action, the Session may elect one of its members to preside, the quorum for such emergency meeting being as in the case of a church with no pastor in 12.1. Should prudential reasons at any time make it advisable for a minister other than the pastor to preside, the pastor may, with the concurrence of the Session, invite a minister of the same Presbytery to perform this service.
- 12.3 When a church is without a pastor, the moderator of the Session may be either a minister appointed for that purpose by the Presbytery, with consent of the Session, or one invited by the Session to preside on a particular occasion, or one of its own members elected to preside. In judicial cases, the moderator shall be a minister of the Presbytery to which the church belongs.
- 12.4 Associate or assistant pastors may substitute for the pastor as moderator of the Session at the discretion of the pastor and Session.

⁷ See "Chapter 22: The Pastoral Relations," for the definitions of Associate Pastor and of Assistant Pastor.

- 12.5 The church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the church, for which purpose it has power:
- a. To inquire into the knowledge, principles and Christian conduct of the church members under its care; to censure those found delinquent; to see that parents do not neglect to present their children for Baptism; to receive members into the communion of the Church; to remove them for just cause; to grant letters of dismissal to other churches, which when given to parents, shall always include the names of their non-communing, baptized children;
 - b. To examine, ordain, and install ruling elders and deacons on their election by the church, and to require these officers to devote themselves to their work; to examine the records of the proceedings of the deacons; to approve and adopt the budget;
 - c. To approve actions of special importance affecting church property;
 - d. To call congregational meetings when necessary; to establish and control Sunday schools and Bible classes with special reference to the children of the church; to establish and control all special groups in the church such as Men in the Church, Women in the Church and special Bible study groups; to promote world missions; to promote obedience to the Great Commission in its totality at home and abroad; to order collections for pious uses;
 - e. To exercise, in accordance with the Directory for Worship, authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put; to take the oversight of the singing in the public worship of God; to ensure that the Word of God is preached only by such men as are sufficiently qualified (*BCO* 8.1, 17.3, 20.3, and 1 Timothy 2:11-12); to assemble the people for worship when there is no minister; to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the church and congregation;
 - f. To observe and carry out the lawful injunctions of the higher courts; and to appoint representatives to the higher courts, who shall, on their return, make report of their diligence.
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- 12.6 The Session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly. Moreover, the pastor has power to convene the Session when he may judge it requisite; and he shall always convene it when requested to do so by any two of the ruling elders. When there is no pastor, it may be convened by two ruling elders. The Session shall also convene when directed so to do by the Presbytery. The Session, in its discretion, may for itself and its subordinate committees, commissions, adopt rules determining when videoconference or tele-communication arrangements may be used for meetings and regulating how meetings using telecommunications arrangements shall be conducted.
- 12.7 Every Session shall keep an accurate record of its proceedings, which record shall be submitted at least once in every year to the inspection of the Presbytery.
- 12.8 Every Session shall keep an accurate record of baptisms, of communing members, of non-communing members, and of the deaths and dismissions of church members.
- 12.9 Meetings of the Sessions shall be opened and closed with prayer.
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Chapter 13: The Presbytery

- 13.1 The Presbytery consists of all the teaching elders and churches within its bounds that have been accepted by the Presbytery. When the Presbytery meets as a court it shall comprise all teaching elders and ruling elders as elected by their Session. Each congregation is entitled to two (2) ruling elder representatives for the first 350 communing members or fraction thereof, and one additional ruling elder for each additional 500 communing members or fraction thereof.
- 13.2 A minister shall be required to hold his membership in the Presbytery within whose geographical bounds he resides, unless there are reasons which are satisfactory to his Presbytery why he should not do so. When a minister labors outside the geographical bounds of, or in a work not under the jurisdiction of his Presbytery, at home or abroad, it shall be only with the full concurrence of and under circumstances agreeable to his Presbytery, and to the Presbytery within whose geographical bounds he labors, if one exists.
- 13.3 A minister without call shall make or file a report to his Presbytery at least once each year.
- 13.4 Every ruling elder not known to the Presbytery shall produce a certificate of his regular appointment from the Session of the church which he represents.
- 13.5 Any three ministers belonging to the Presbytery, together with at least three ruling elders, being met at the time and place appointed (which may include a teleconference or videoconference place), shall be a quorum competent to proceed to business. However, any Presbytery, by a majority vote of those present at a stated meeting, may fix its own quorum provided it is not smaller than the quorum stated in this paragraph.
- The Presbytery, in its discretion, may for itself and its subordinate committees, commissions, adopt rules determining when videoconference or telecommunication arrangements may be used for meetings and regulating how meetings using telecommunications arrangements shall be conducted.
- 13.6 Ordinarily, only a minister who receives a call to a definite ecclesiastical work within the bounds of a particular Presbytery may be received as a member of that Presbytery except in cases where the minister is already honorably retired, or in those cases deemed necessary by the Presbytery. In such cases deemed
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necessary, which may include the case of a minister without call whose circumstances appear to require relocation within the bounds of that Presbytery.

13.7 Ministers Transferring into the Presbytery

- a. A Minister seeking admission to a Presbytery from another Presbytery shall be examined on Christian experience (including personal character and family management), and his views in theology, the Sacraments, and church government. If the examining Presbytery does not accept the Minister seeking admission, it shall record this fact along with its rationale, if one is adopted, in the minutes, and shall communicate its rationale to his current Presbytery.
- b. If an applicant comes from another denomination, the Presbytery shall examine him thoroughly and require him to answer in the affirmative the questions put to candidates at their ordination. Ordained ministers from other denominations being considered by Presbyteries for reception may come under the extraordinary provisions set forth herein.
- c. In every case, the Presbytery shall require each ordained minister entering the Presbytery to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions, which differences the court shall judge.

13.8 The Presbytery shall cause to be transcribed, in some convenient part of the book of records, the obligations required of ministers at their ordination, which shall be subscribed by all admitted to membership, in the following form:

I, <Name of Minister>, do sincerely receive and subscribe to the above obligation as a just and true exhibition of my faith and principles, and do resolve and promise to exercise my ministry in conformity thereunto.

13.9 The Presbytery, before receiving into its membership any church, shall designate a commission to meet with the church's ruling elders to make certain that the elders understand and can sincerely adopt the doctrines and polity of the Presbytery as contained in its Constitution. In the presence of the commission, the ruling elders shall be required to answer affirmatively the questions required of officers at their ordination.

13.10 The Presbytery has power to receive and issue⁸ appeals, complaints, and references brought before it in an orderly manner. In cases in which the Session

⁸ Editor's note: Issue means "settling the issue of the case."

cannot exercise its authority, it shall have power to assume original jurisdiction. It has power:

- a. To receive under its care candidates for the ministry; to examine and license candidates for the holy ministry; to receive, dismiss, ordain, install, remove and judge ministers;
- b. To review the records of church Sessions, redress whatever they may have done contrary to order and take effectual care that they observe the Constitution of the Church;
- c. To establish the pastoral relation and to dissolve it at the request of one or both of the parties, or where the interest of religion imperatively demands it;
- d. To set apart evangelists to their proper work; to require ministers to devote themselves diligently to their sacred calling and to censure the delinquent;
- e. To see that the lawful injunctions of the higher courts are obeyed;
- f. To condemn erroneous opinions which injure the purity or peace of the Church; to visit churches for the purpose of inquiring into and redressing the evils that may have arisen in them; to unite or divide churches, at the request of the members thereof; to form and receive new churches; to take special oversight of churches without pastors; to dissolve churches; to dismiss churches with their consent;
- g. To devise measures for the enlargement of the Church within its bounds; in general, to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care;
- h. And, finally, to propose to the Assembly such measures as may be of common advantage to the Church at large. (This last is done in the case of the existence of a General Assembly.)

- 13.11 When a Presbytery determines to dissolve a church, it shall give no less than sixty (60) days' notice of such dissolution to the local church. With such notice, Presbytery shall communicate to the members their responsibility to transfer their membership to other particular or mission churches. In addition, Presbytery shall:
1. transfer membership to existing churches, with the consent of the individuals and the Sessions of the receiving churches; *or*
 2. grant a letter of dismissal to an individual so requesting, testifying that the individual was a member in good standing of the local church at the date of
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dissolution. Until such time as the person is received by a church the Presbytery shall continue to provide pastoral oversight; *or*

3. place individuals under the oversight of a commission of Presbytery acting as a session (*BCO* 15.2), for up to one year, renewable, until such time as either a new congregation can be formed or such persons are dismissed to membership in another church.

- 13.12 The Presbytery shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings.

(Upon establishment of a General Assembly: The Presbytery shall keep a full and accurate record of its proceedings, and shall send it up to the General Assembly annually for review. It shall report to the General Assembly every year, all the important changes which may have taken place, such as licensures, ordinations, the receiving or dismissing of members, the removal of members by death, the union and the division of churches, and the formation of new ones.)

- 13.13 The Presbytery shall meet at least twice a year on its own adjournment. The Moderator shall call a special meeting at the request or with the concurrence of three teaching elders and three ruling elders from at least three different churches. Should the Moderator be for any reason unable to act, the Stated Clerk shall, under the same requirements, issue the call. If both Moderator and Stated Clerk are unable to act, any three teaching elders and three ruling elders of at least three different churches shall have power to call a meeting. However, any Presbytery may prescribe in its rules its own requirements for calling a special meeting, provided that those requirements are not less than those stated in this section. Notice of the special meeting shall be sent not less than seven days in advance to each teaching elder and to the Clerk of Session of every church. In the notice, the purpose of the meeting shall be stated, and no business other than that named in the notice is to be transacted. The Presbytery also shall convene when directed to do so by the General Assembly, for the transaction of designated business only.

- 13.14 Ministers in good standing in other Presbyteries, or in any evangelical church, being present at any meeting of Presbytery, may be invited to sit as visiting brethren. It is proper for the moderator to introduce these brethren to the Presbytery. This provision shall also apply to the General Assembly.
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Chapter 14: The General Assembly

Editor's Note: The contents of this chapter are included in the Appendices of the *Book of Church Order*, until such time as when a General Assembly has been formed and convened.

Chapter 15: Ecclesiastical Commissions

- 15.1 A commission differs from an ordinary committee in that while a committee is appointed to examine, consider and report, a commission is authorized to deliberate upon and conclude the business referred to it. A commission shall keep a full record of its proceedings, which shall be submitted to the Session appointing it. Upon such submission, this record shall be entered on the minutes of the Session. When a commission is appointed to serve as an interim Session, its actions are the actions of the Presbytery. Every commission of the Presbytery must submit complete minutes and a report of its activities at least once annually.
- 15.2 Among the matters that may be properly executed by commissions are the taking of the testimony in dispute/discipline cases, the ordination of ministers, the installation of ministers, the visitation of portions of the church affected with disorder, oversight of former members of a dissolved church, and the organization of new churches.
- Every commission appointed by the Presbytery shall consist of at least two elders, and the Session at the time of the appointment of the commission shall determine what the quorum shall be. When the ordination of a minister is committed to a commission, the Session itself shall conduct the previous examination.
- 15.3 The Presbytery may try a dispute/discipline case (including the right to refer any strictly constitutional issue to a study committee with options listed below), or it may of its own motion commit any case to a commission. Such a commission shall be appointed by the Session from its members. The commission shall try the case in the manner presented by the Rules of Discipline and shall submit to the Session a full statement of the case and the judgment rendered. The Session without debate shall approve or disapprove of the judgment, or may refer, (a debatable motion), any strictly constitutional issue(s) to a study committee. In case of referral, the Session shall either dismiss some or all of the specific charges raised in the case or decide the case only after the report of the study committee has been heard and discussed. If Session approves, the judgment of the commission shall be final and shall be entered on the Minutes as the action. If Session disapproves, it shall hear the case as a whole, or appoint a new commission to hear the case again.
- 15.4 The Presbytery shall elect a Judicial Commission to which it shall commit all matters governed by the Rules of Discipline, except for the annual review of Session records, which may come before the congregation. The Presbytery shall determine the number of members and elders to be appointed to this Commission,
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along with their terms. Nominations and vacancies shall be filled according to the rules herein provided, with nominations allowed from the floor.

- a. In the cases committed to it, the Judicial Commission shall have the judicial powers and be governed by the judicial procedures of the Presbytery. The decision of the Judicial Commission shall be the final decision of the Presbytery except as set forth below, to which there may be no complaint or appeal. Members of the Judicial Commission may file concurring or dissenting opinions, or a minority report as set forth in (c) below. The Presbytery may direct the Judicial Commission to retry a case if, upon the review of its minutes, exceptions are taken with respect to that case.
 - b. In each case the Judicial Commission shall issue a summary of the facts, a statement of the issues, its judgment and its reasoning, together with any concurring or dissenting opinions, all of which shall be entered on the minutes of the Session and shall be reported by the Clerk to the congregation. The judgment shall be effective from the time of its announcement to the parties.
 - c. Particulars:
 - i. If, within twenty-four (24) hours of the time of adjournment of a Judicial Commission meeting at which a final decision was rendered in a case, at least one-third (1/3) of the voting members of the Judicial Commission file written notice of their intention to file a minority decision with the Clerk of the Presbytery, and within twenty (20) days from the adjournment do file such a minority decision, such minority decision shall be considered a minority report and shall be referred, with the report of the Judicial Commission, to the Presbytery. In each instance “file” shall be understood as defined by the Operating Manual for Judicial Commission.
 - ii. No such reference from the Judicial Commission shall be considered by the Session unless the report of the Judicial Commission and the minority report have been given to the clerk of Presbytery at least thirty (30) days prior to the meeting of the Presbytery.
 - iii. The Assembly shall act upon such a reference Judicial Commission, in each case without question, discussion, debate, or amendment, as follows:
 - The Judicial Commission shall have 30 minutes to present its decision to the Presbytery.
 - The minority shall have 30 minutes to present its decision to the Presbytery.
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- The Judicial Commission shall have 10 minutes to reply to the minority report.
 - The decision of the minority shall be proposed and the Presbytery shall, without question, discussion, debate, or amendment approve or disapprove of the minority report.
 - If the Presbytery disapproves the minority report, the Presbytery shall take up the decision of the Judicial Commission and without question, discussion, debate, or amendment, approve or disapprove of the decision of the Judicial Commission.
- iv. If the Presbytery approves of a proposed decision, it shall be the formal decision of the Presbytery, and printed in its minutes. There may be no complaint or appeal from such a final decision of the Presbytery. If the Session finally disapproves of both proposed decisions, it must set the case for hearing before the Session or a special commission appointed by it, and in either instance the case shall be tried on the record as delivered to the Clerk. Any such special commission shall then proceed to consider the case and shall report its decision, in like manner, to the Session for its approval or disapproval. In any event, the full record of the case, including written testimony of witnesses, all documents, exhibits and papers shall be delivered to the Clerk for permanent preservation.
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Chapter 16: Church Orders – The Doctrine of Vocation

- 16.1 Ordinary vocation to office in the Church is the calling of God by the Spirit, through the inward testimony of a good conscience, the manifest approbation of God's people, and the concurring judgment of a lawful court of the Church.
 - 16.2 The government of the Church is by officers gifted to represent Christ, and the right of God's people to recognize by election to office those so gifted is inalienable. Therefore no man can be placed over a church in any office without the election, or at least the consent, of that church.
 - 16.3 Upon those whom God calls to bear office in His Church He bestows suitable gifts for the discharge of their various duties. And it is indispensable that, besides possessing the necessary gifts and abilities, natural and acquired, everyone admitted to an office should be sound in the faith, and his life be according to godliness. Wherefore every candidate for office is to be approved by the church by which he is to be ordained.
 - 16.4 Officers in the Presbytery must be above reproach in their walk and Christlike in their character. While office bearers will see spiritual perfection only in glory, they will continue in this life to confess and to mortify remaining sins in light of God's work of progressive sanctification. Therefore, to be qualified for office, they must affirm the sinfulness of fallen desires, the reality and hope of progressive sanctification, and be committed to the pursuit of Spirit-empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions.
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Chapter 17: Doctrine of Ordination

- 17.1 Those who have been called to office (i.e., elders and deacons) in the Church are to be inducted by ordination of a court.
 - 17.2 Ordination is the authoritative admission of one duly called to an office in the Church of God, accompanied with prayer and the laying on of hands, to which it is proper to add the giving of the right hand of fellowship.
 - 17.3 As every ecclesiastical office, according to the Scriptures, is a special charge, no man shall be ordained unless it be to the performance of a definite work.
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Chapter 18: Candidates for the Gospel Ministry

18.1 A candidate for the ministry is a member of the Church in full communion who, believing himself to be called to preach the Gospel, submits himself to the care and guidance of the elders in his course of study and of practical training to prepare himself for this office.

18.2 Every applicant for the ministry must put himself under the care of elders of the church which he is a member. The endorsement of his candidacy must be given to the Presbytery, consisting of testimonials regarding his Christian character and promise of usefulness in the ministry. The endorsement should also describe the activities of ministry the applicant has participated in with brief evaluation.

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

Every applicant must file his application with the clerk of the Presbytery at least one month before the meeting of the Presbytery. An applicant for care may not be received under care and examined for ordination at the same meeting of the Session, since he must serve a period of at least one year of internship prior to ordination. An applicant for internship is obliged to be under care and may be licensed to preach the Gospel; further, one who is not already under care may be taken under care, be licensed to preach the Gospel, and become an intern at the same meeting of the Presbytery.

18.3 The applicant shall appear before the Presbytery in person, and shall be examined on experiential religion and on his motives for seeking the ministry. If the testimonials and the examination prove satisfactory, the Presbytery shall receive him under its care after the following manner:

The moderator shall propose to the applicant these questions:

1. Do you promise in reliance upon the grace of God to maintain a becoming Christian character, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for the sacred ministry?
 2. Do you promise to submit yourself to the proper supervision of the Church Elders in matters that concern your preparation for the ministry?
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If these questions be answered in the affirmative, the moderator, or someone appointed by him, shall give the candidate a brief charge; and the proceeding shall close with prayer.

The name of the applicant is then to be recorded on the Presbytery's roll of candidates for the ministry.

- 18.4 The candidate continues to be a private member of the church and subject to the jurisdiction of the Presbytery, but as respects his preparatory training for the ministry he is under the oversight of the Presbytery. It shall be the duty of the elders to show a kindly and sympathetic interest in him, and to give him counsel and guidance in regard to his studies, his practical training, and the institutions of learning he should attend. In no case may a candidate omit from his course of study any of the subjects prescribed in the Form of Government as tests for ordination without obtaining the consent of the Presbytery; and where such consent is given the Presbytery shall record the fact and the reasons therefore.
 - 18.5 For the development of his Christian character, for the service he can render, and for his more effective training, the candidate, when entering on his theological studies, should be authorized and encouraged by the Presbytery to conduct public worship, to expound the Scriptures to the people, and to engage in other forms of Christian work. These forms of service should be rendered under the direction of Presbytery, and with the sanction and under the guidance of the candidate's instructors during the time of his being under their instruction. A candidate should not undertake to serve a church which is without a pastor as regular supply unless he has been licensed and approved for that supply by the Presbytery having jurisdiction of the church (see *BCO* 19.1).
 - 18.6 The Presbytery shall require every candidate for the ministry under its care to make a report to it at least once a year; and it shall secure from his instructors an annual report upon his deportment, diligence, and progress in study.
 - 18.7 The Presbytery may, upon application of the candidate, give a certificate of dismission to another Presbytery. The candidate may be allowed to retain membership in his home church upon the request of his Session and the approval of both Presbyteries involved. A candidate shall, at his request or at the request of his Session, be allowed to withdraw from the care of the Presbytery. But in such a case sufficient reasons (and any actions taken) must be reported to the Presbytery. The Presbytery may also, for sufficient reasons, remove the name of the candidate from its roll of candidates; but in such a case it shall report its actions and the reasons therefore to the candidate and to the Session of his church. In all cases of
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a removal or withdrawal of a candidate, the sufficient reason for the action shall be recorded in the minutes of Presbytery.

- 18.8 An applicant coming as a candidate from another denomination must present testimonials of his standing in that body and must become a member of a congregation in a presbyterian denomination. He shall then fulfill the requirements of applicants listed under *BCO* 18.2, as well as requirements placed upon those desiring to be licensed or to become an intern as set forth in *BCO* 19.
- 18.9 In cases of a non-ordained individual who has received and completed seminary training and is occasionally called to pulpit ministry in other churches, said individual shall be referred to as “gospel minister” and his preaching ministry shall be subject to the supervision and authority of the Session. Licensure for the gospel minister will follow the licensure for candidates for gospel ministry (see *BCO* 19) except it shall be held at Session level.
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Chapter 19: Licensure and Internship

A. Licensure

- 19.1 To preserve the purity of the preaching of the Gospel, no man is permitted to preach in the pulpit of the sessions of the Association of Reformed Churches on a regular basis without proper licensure from the Presbytery. An ordained minister who is a member in good standing of another Presbyterian Church may be licensed after being examined as to his views, according to the provision of BCO 13.6. This license shall immediately become void if the minister's own church administers against him a censure of suspension from office or the sacraments, or deposition from office, or of excommunication. A ruling elder, a candidate for the ministry, a minister from some other denomination, a gospel minister, or some other man may be licensed for the purpose of regularly providing the preaching of the Word upon his giving satisfaction to the Session of his gifts and passing the licensure examination.
- 19.2 Examination for Licensure
- The examination for licensure shall be as follows:
- a. Give a statement of his Christian experience and inward call to preach the Gospel in written form and/or orally before the Presbytery.
 - b. Be tested with a written and/or oral examination by the Presbytery for his:
 1. Basic knowledge of Biblical doctrine as outlined in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*.
 2. Practical knowledge of Bible content.
 3. Basic knowledge of the government of the Church, as defined in *The Book of Church Order*.
 - c. Be examined orally before the Presbytery for his views in the areas outlined in (b) above.
 - d. Provide his written sermon on an assigned passage of Scripture embodying both explanation and application, and present orally his sermon or exhortation before Session or before a committee of the Session.
 - e. While our Constitution does not require the applicant's affirmation of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the applicant is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to
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receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. *BCO* 19.3, Q.2).

- f. Therefore, in examining an applicant for licensure, the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the Confession of Faith and Catechisms in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the applicant's declared difference is not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.

No omission shall be made of any of these parts of examination except in extraordinary cases; and whenever the Presbytery shall omit any of these parts, it shall always make a record of the reasons therefor, and of the trial parts omitted.

- 19.3 Questions for Licensure: If the Session be satisfied with the trials of the applicant, it shall then proceed to license him in the following manner:

The moderator shall propose to him the following questions, namely:

- a. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - b. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scripture?
 - c. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?
 - d. Do you promise to submit yourself, in the Lord, to the government of this body of elders, or of any other into the bounds of which you may be called?
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- 19.4 The applicant having answered these questions in the affirmative, the moderator shall offer a prayer suitable for the occasion, and shall address the applicant as follows:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by that authority which He has given to the Church for its edification, we do license you to preach the Gospel in this Church wherever God in His providence may call you; and for this purpose may the blessing of God rest upon you, and the Spirit of Christ fill your heart. Amen.

Record shall be made of the licensure in the following or like form:

At <Date>, the body of church elders having received testimonials commending, proceeded to submit him to the prescribed examination for licensure, which was met to the approval of the elders. Having satisfactorily answered the questions for licensure, <Licensure Applicant> was licensed by the Session to preach the Gospel within the bounds of this Church.

B. Internship

- 19.5 The Holy Scriptures require that some trial be previously made of those who are to be ordained to the ministry of the Word, both concerning their gifts and concerning their ability to rule as teaching elders, in order that this sacred office may not be degraded by being committed to weak or unworthy men, and that the Church may have an opportunity to form a better judgment respecting the gifts of those to whom this sacred office is to be committed.

To provide for such a period of trial, a candidate for ordination must serve an internship. This period of internship shall be at least one year in length and may be longer at the discretion of the Presbytery so as to give sufficient time for the Presbytery to judge the candidate's qualifications and service. This period of internship may occur during or after the candidate's formal theological education. When it occurs during his formal theological education, it may include an intern year in addition to his time of academic training, or it may run concurrent with his academic training.

The nature of the internship shall be determined by the Presbytery, but it should involve the candidate in full scope of the duties of any regular ministerial calling approved by the Presbytery. It is to be both a time of practical instruction and testing by the Presbytery, and may be in any work which the Presbytery deems

to be a suitable ministry to test the intern's gifts. The intern should be closely supervised by the Presbytery throughout this trial period.

19.6 Examination for Internship

Before the applicant begins his period of internship, he shall give to the Presbytery a written and/or an oral statement (at the discretion of the Session) of his inward call to the ministry of the Word.

19.7 When an applicant is approved for internship, the moderator of the Presbytery shall offer a prayer suitable for the occasion, and shall address the applicant, if present, as follows:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by that authority which He has given to the Church for its edification, we do declare you to be an intern of this church as a means of testing your gifts for the holy ministry wherever God in His providence may call you; and for this purpose may the blessing of God rest upon you, and the Spirit of Christ fill your heart. Amen.

Record shall be made of the internship in the following or like form, namely:

At <Date> the First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church, having received testimonials commending <Name of Intern>, having received him as a candidate for the ministry, has placed him under internship at his request in order to test his gifts for the holy ministry.

19.8 The Church should require interns to devote themselves diligently to the trial of their gifts; and no one should be ordained to the work of the ministry of the Word until he has demonstrated the ability both to edify and to rule in the Church. Reports on every intern should be presented at each stated meeting of the Presbytery by the committee charged with the oversight of interns, and these reports shall become a part of the minutes of the Presbytery. The Presbytery shall also require every intern himself to make a report to it at least once a year describing his ministerial experiences. If the intern is still in school, the Presbytery shall secure from his instructors an annual report upon his deportment, diligence, and progress in study.

19.9 At the end of the period set by the Presbytery for his internship, an intern shall have his internship either approved or disapproved. Even if it is approved, he cannot be ordained without a call to some specific work. If the internship is disapproved, the Presbytery may either extend it for another definite period of time or it may completely rescind his intern status and may revoke his

internship. If the intern shall devote himself unnecessarily to such pursuits as interfere with a full trial of his gifts, it shall be the duty of the Presbytery to rescind his intern status, and to record its reasons therefor in the Minutes.

- 19.10 An intern, who, during his internship, is to serve a congregation in the capacity of the minister of the Word must be called by the congregation in the same way that a regular minister is called. A congregation may later call such a man as its pastor. This call must be approved by Presbytery prior to the time of ordination. In the event a congregation does not desire to call such a man as its pastor as determined by a congregational vote, notice should be given as early as possible. Interns may be called to serve as assistants to ministers during their internship with approval of the call by the Presbytery.

- 19.11 Restrictions.

The intern may be asked by the moderator of a Session temporarily to chair the meeting of the Session. In such cases the moderator shall supervise this activity and may overrule the intern or re-assume the chair at will. The intern is not a member of Session and may not vote in the meetings unless he has previously been ordained a Ruling Elder and elected to the Session by the congregation. Normally, he shall serve in an advisory capacity to the Session and Diaconate when he has been called to work out his internship. He shall have the right to conduct funerals. An intern may not administer the Sacraments. He may serve on committees of the church he serves.

- 19.12 Where circumstances warrant, a Session may approve previous experience which is equivalent to internship. This equivalency shall be decided by a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the Session at any of its regular meetings. Such equivalent experience shall be decided only after the Session's internship committee has determined and reported that the candidate has met the following requirements:
- a. He has had at least one (1) year of experience in comparable ministry;
 - b. He has satisfactorily performed the full scope of ministerial duties;
 - c. He has the manifest approbation of God's people in a local church as having the requisite gifts for the pastoral ministry.
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Chapter 20: The Election of Pastors

- 20.1 Before a candidate, or licentiate, can be ordained to the office of the ministry, he must receive a call to a definite work. Ordinarily the call must come from a church, Presbytery, or the General Assembly of this denomination. If the call comes from another source, the Presbytery shall always make a record of the reasons why it considers the work to be a valid Christian ministry. (See also *BCO* 8.7, 8.9, and 21-1).

A proper call must be written and in the hands of the Presbytery prior to being acted upon by a Presbytery. It must include financial arrangements (such as salary, vacation, insurance, retirement, etc.) between those calling and the one called, and assurance that the definite work will afford the liberty to proclaim and practice fully and freely the whole counsel of God, as contained in the Scriptures and understood in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. It shall be in accord with the *BCO* 8.

- 20.2 Every church should be under the pastoral oversight of a minister, and when a church has no pastor it should seek to secure one without delay.

Recommendation of Candidate

- 20.3 A church shall proceed to elect a pastor in the following manner:
1. The Session shall call a congregational meeting to elect a pulpit committee which may be composed of members from the congregation at large or the Session, as designated by the congregation. The pulpit committee shall, after consultation and deliberation, recommend to the congregation a pastoral candidate who, in its judgment, fulfills the Constitutional requirements of that office and is most suited to be profitable to the spiritual interests of the congregation.
 2. The Session shall order a congregational meeting to convene at the regular place of worship. Public notice of the time, place, and purpose of this meeting shall be given at least one week prior to the time of the meeting.
 3. When a congregation is convened for the election of a pastor it is important that they should elect a minister of the Presbyterian denomination. The Session shall appoint one of their number to call the meeting to order and to
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preside until the congregation shall elect their presiding officer. All communing members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled to vote.

Method of Voting

- 20.4 The voters being convened, and prayer for divine guidance having been offered, the moderator shall put the question:

Are you ready to proceed to the election of a pastor?

If they declare themselves ready, the moderator shall call for nominations, or the election may proceed by ballot without nominations. In every case, a majority of all the voters present shall be required to elect.

Dispute

- 20.5 On the election of a pastor, if it appears that a large minority of the voters are averse to the candidate who has received a majority of votes, and cannot be induced to concur in the call, the moderator shall endeavor to dissuade the majority from prosecuting it further; but if the electors be nearly or quite unanimous, or if the majority shall insist upon their right to call a pastor, the moderator shall proceed to draw a call in due form, and to have it subscribed by them, certifying at the same time in writing the number of those who do not concur in the call, and any facts of importance, all of which proceedings shall be laid before the Session, together with the call.

Form of Call

- 20.6 The terms of the call shall be approved by the congregation in the following or like form:

The Church being on sufficient grounds well satisfied of the ministerial qualifications of you, <Name of Candidate>, and having good hopes from our knowledge of your labors that your ministrations in the Gospel will be profitable to our spiritual interests, do earnestly call you to undertake the pastoral office in said congregation, promising you, in the discharge of your duty, all proper support, encouragement and obedience in the Lord. That you may be free from worldly cares and avocations, we hereby promise and oblige ourselves to pay you the sum of <Amount> a year in regular monthly payments, and other benefits, such as, holiday

pay, retirement, insurance, vacations, moving expenses etc., during the time of your being and continuing the regular pastor of this church.

In testimony whereof we have respectively subscribed our names this day of, < Date > .

Attest: I, having moderated the congregational meeting which extended a call to for his ministerial services, do certify that the call has been made in all respects according to the rules laid down in the *Book of Church Order*, and that the persons who signed the foregoing call were authorized to do so by vote of the congregation.

< Signed >

Moderator of the Meeting

- 20.7 If any church shall choose to designate its ruling elders and deacons, or a committee to sign its call, it shall be at liberty to do so. But it shall, in such case, be fully certified to the Presbytery by the minister or other person who presided, that the persons signing have been appointed for that purpose by a public vote of the church, and that the call has been in all other respects prepared as above directed.

Prosecution of Call

- 20.8 One or more commissioners shall be appointed by the church to present and prosecute the call before the Presbytery.
- 20.9 When a pastor desires to accept a call to another church, he must be examined and approved by the Session for the pastorate to which he is being called, and must be released for transfer by his present church from his pastorate.
- 20.10 A congregation desiring to call a pastor to the church, shall, by its commissioners to the Presbytery, petition the call before its Presbytery. The Presbytery, after hearing all the parties, may either recommend them to desist from pursuing the call; or may order it to be delivered to the minister to whom it is addressed, with or without advice; or may decline to place the call in his hands; as it shall appear most beneficial for the peace and edification of the Church at large.

No pastor shall be transferred without his own consent, if the parties are not ready to have the matter decided at the meeting then in progress, a written citation shall be given the minister and his church to appear before the Presbytery at its next

meeting, which citation shall be read from the pulpit during a regular service, at least two weeks before the intended meeting.

- 20.11 If the congregation or other field of labor to which a minister, licentiate, or candidate is called, be under the jurisdiction of a different Presbytery, on his acceptance of a call he shall be furnished with the proper testimonials, and required to repair immediately to the Presbytery, in order that he may be regularly inducted into his office. (See *BCO* 21).
 - 20.12 A candidate or licentiate found fit and called (in accordance with *BCO* 20-1) for missionary service by a missionary agency or Session shall be examined by Session for ordination. If approved, the Session shall proceed to his ordination.
 - 20.13 A missionary who is an ordained teaching elder in another denomination found fit and called (in accordance with *BCO* 20-1) for missionary service by a missionary agency or Presbytery shall be examined by Presbytery for admission to Presbytery in accordance with *BCO* 13-6. If approved he shall be enrolled as a member of Presbytery.
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Chapter 21: The Ordination and Installation of Ministers

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

Ordinarily a candidate or licentiate may not be granted permission by the Presbytery to move on to the field to which he has been called, prior to his examination for licensure or ordination. Likewise an ordained minister from another Presbyterian church another denomination, ordinarily shall not move on to the field to which he has been called until examined and received by the Presbytery.

- 21.2 When an intern has completed his internship to the satisfaction of the Presbytery, and has accepted a call, the Presbytery shall take immediate steps for his ordination.
- 21.3 No Presbytery shall ordain any intern to the office of minister of the Word with reference to his laboring within the bounds of another Presbytery, but shall furnish him with the necessary testimonials, and require him to repair to the Presbytery within whose bounds he expects to labor, that he may submit himself to its authority, according to the Constitution of the Church.

Ordination Requirements and Procedures

The following are the requirements and procedures for ordination:

- a. An intern applying for ordination shall be required to present a diploma Master of Divinity (M.Div.) or higher from an approved theological institution, or authentic testimonials of having completed a regular course of theological studies, or a certificate of completion of, and endorsement from a theological study program as approved by the Presbytery. No Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements except in extraordinary cases, and then only with a three-fourths (3/4) approval of the Presbytery. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these educational requirements, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omission and the parts omitted. The intern shall also present satisfactory testimonials as to the completion and approval of his internship in the practice of the ministry.
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- b. Every candidate for ordination shall ordinarily have met the requirements of the Assembly's approved curriculum. Ordinarily, the intern shall have been examined in most of the following trials when he was licensed. If the Presbytery previously approved all parts of the licensure examination, it need not re-examine the intern in those areas at this time. If there were areas of weakness, which the Presbytery noted, or if any member of the Presbytery desires to do so, the intern may be examined on particular points again. Additionally, the intern shall be examined on any parts required for ordination which were not covered in his examination for licensure. In all cases, he should be asked to indicate whether he has changed his previous views concerning any points in the *Confession of Faith*, the *Catechisms*, and *Book of Church Order* of the Presbytery.
- c. Trials for ordination shall consist of:
- i. A careful examination as to:
 - his acquaintance with experiential religion, especially his personal character and family management (based on the qualifications set out in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:6-9),
 - his knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages,
 - Bible content,
 - theology,
 - the Sacraments,
 - Church history,
 - the history of the Presbyterian Church in America, and
 - the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the church.

A Presbytery may accept a seminary degree which includes study in the original languages in lieu of an oral examination in the original languages.
 - ii. He shall prepare a thesis on some theological topic assigned by Presbytery.
 - iii. The candidate shall prepare an exegesis on an assigned portion of Scripture, requiring the use of the original language or languages.
 - iv. He shall further be required to preach a sermon before the Presbytery or committee thereof, upon three-fourths (3/4) vote.
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No Presbytery shall omit any of these parts of trial for ordination except in extraordinary cases, and then only with three-fourths (3/4) approval of Presbytery.

- d. Whenever a Presbytery shall omit any of these parts, it shall always make a record of the reasons for such omissions and of the trial parts omitted.
- e. In the examination of the candidate's personal character, the presbytery shall give specific attention to potential notorious concerns.

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, when confessing sins and sinful temptations publicly, the candidate must exercise great care not to diminish the seriousness of those sins in the eyes of the congregation, as though they were matters of little consequence, but rather should testify to the work of the Holy Spirit in his progress in holiness (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

- f. While our Constitution does not require the candidate's affirmation of every statement and/or proposition of doctrine in our *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms*, it is the right and responsibility of the Presbytery to determine if the candidate is out of accord with any of the fundamentals of these doctrinal standards and, as a consequence, may not be able in good faith sincerely to receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures (cf. BCO 21-5, Q.2; 24-6, Q.2).
 - g. Therefore, in examining a candidate for ordination, the Presbytery shall inquire not only into the candidate's knowledge and views in the areas specified above, but also shall require the candidate to state the specific instances in which he may differ with the *Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* in any of their statements and/or propositions. The court may grant an exception to any difference of doctrine only if in the court's judgment the candidate's declared difference is not out of accord with any fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.
 - h. The Presbytery, being fully satisfied of his qualifications for the sacred office, shall appoint a day for his ordination, which ought, if practicable, to be in that church of which he is to be the pastor.
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- i. The extraordinary clauses should be limited to extraordinary circumstances of the church or proven extraordinary gifts of the man. Presbyteries should exercise diligence and care in the use of these provisions in order that they not prevent the ordination of a candidate for whom there are truly exceptional circumstances, nor ordain (nor receive from other denominations *BCO* 13-6) a person who is inadequately prepared for the ministry.

The day appointed for the ordination having come, and the Presbytery being convened, a sermon suitable for the occasion shall be preached by a person appointed or invited by the Session. The Presbytery member appointed to preside shall afterwards briefly recite from the pulpit the proceedings of the Presbytery preparatory to the ordination; he shall point out the nature and importance of the ordinance, and endeavor to impress the audience with a proper sense of the solemnity of the transaction.

Ordination: Questions for the Candidate⁹

Then, addressing himself to the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to the Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Church, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?
4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?

⁹ For an assistant minister, only questions 1-7 shall be used.

6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?
8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Ordination: Questions for the Congregation¹⁰

The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the presiding minister shall propose to the church the following questions:

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive <Name of Candidate>, whom you have called to be your pastor?
2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?
3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?
4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

¹⁰ For assistant minister, address the Session omitting the last phrase of questions 1 and 2.

The people having answered these questions in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the candidate shall kneel, and the presiding minister shall, with prayer and the laying on of hands of the Presbytery, according to the apostolic example, solemnly set him apart to the holy office of the Gospel ministry. Prayer being ended, he shall rise from his knees; and the minister who presides shall first, followed by all members of the Presbytery, take him by the right hand, saying, in words to this effect:

We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part in this ministry with us.

The presiding minister shall then say:

I now pronounce and declare that < Name of Candidate > has been regularly elected, ordained, and installed pastor of this congregation, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of Grace Covenant Evangelical Church; and that as such he is entitled to all support, encouragement, honor, and obedience in the Lord:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After which the minister presiding, or some other teaching or ruling elder appointed for the purpose, shall give a solemn charge to the pastor and to the congregation, to persevere in the discharge of their reciprocal duties, and then after prayer and the singing of a psalm, or hymn, the congregation shall be dismissed with the benediction. The Presbytery shall duly record its proceedings.¹¹

After the installation, the heads of families of the congregation then present, or at least the ruling elders and deacons, should come forward to their pastor, and give him their right hand, in token of cordial reception and affectionate regard.

¹¹ For assistant minister, add the word 'assistant' before 'pastor', and charge the Session rather than the congregation.

Installation: Questions for the Candidate¹²

In the installation of an ordained minister, the following questions are to be substituted for those addressed to a candidate for ordination, namely:

1. Are you now willing to take charge of this congregation as their pastor, agreeable to your declaration in accepting its call?
2. Do you conscientiously believe and declare, as far as you know your own heart, that, in taking upon you this charge, you are influenced by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God and the good of the Church?
3. Do you solemnly promise that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavor faithfully to discharge all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a deportment in all respects becoming a minister of the Gospel of Christ, agreeable to your ordination engagements?

Installation: Questions for the Congregation¹³

The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the presiding minister shall propose to the church the following questions:

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive <Name of Candidate>, whom you have called to be your pastor?
2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?
3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?
4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

¹² For assistant minister, substitute the word “serve” for “take charge of,” and add the word “assistant” before “pastor.”

¹³ For assistant minister, address the Session omitting the last phrase of questions 1 and 2.

In the ordination of interns as evangelists the same questions are to be propounded as in the ordination of pastors, with the exception of the eighth, for which the following shall be substituted:

Do you now undertake the work of an evangelist, and do you promise, in reliance on God for strength, to be faithful in the discharge of all the duties incumbent on you as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Chapter 22: The Pastoral Relations

- 22.1 The various pastoral relations are pastor, associate pastor, and assistant pastor.
 - 22.2 The pastor and associate pastor are elected by the congregation using the form of call in *BCO* 20-6. Being elected by the congregation, they become members of the Session.
 - 22.3 An assistant pastor is called by the Session, by permission and approval under the provisions of *BCO* 20-1. He is not a member of the Session, but may be appointed on special occasions to moderate the Session.
 - 22.4 The relationship of the associate pastor to the church is determined by the congregation. The relationship of the assistant pastor to the church is determined by the Session. The dissolution of the relationship of both is governed by the provision of the *BCO*.
 - 22.5 In order to provide necessary changes in pastorates, a temporary relation may be established between a church and a particular minister. If a church is unable to secure a regular pastor, then the Session with approval of the of the Presbytery may establish a temporary relation between the church and a licentiate.
 - 22.6 Such temporary relationships can take place at the invitation of the church Session to the minister of the Word, the licentiate, or the ruling elder. The length of the relationship will be determined by the Session and the minister, the licentiate, or the ruling elder, with the approval of the congregation.
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Chapter 23: The Dissolution of the Pastoral Relation and the Procedure for Honorable Retirement

- 23.1 When any minister shall tender the resignation of his pastoral charge to his Presbytery, the Presbytery shall cite the church to appear by its commissioners, to show cause why the Presbytery should or should not accept the resignation. If the church fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining its pastor be deemed insufficient, his resignation shall be accepted and the pastoral relation dissolved.

If any church desires to be relieved of its pastor, a similar procedure shall be observed. But whether the minister or the church initiates proceedings for a dissolution of the relation, there shall always be a meeting of the congregation called and conducted in the same manner as the call of the pastor. In any case, the minister must not physically leave the field until the Presbytery or its commission empowered to handle uncontested requests for dissolution has dissolved the relation.

The associate or assistant pastors may continue to serve a congregation when the pastoral relation of the senior pastor is dissolved, but they may not normally succeed the senior pastor without an intervening term of service in a different field of labor. However, a congregation by a secret ballot with four-fifths (4/5) majority vote may petition Presbytery for an exception which by a three-fourths (3/4) majority vote Presbytery may grant. Presbytery needs to determine if the dissolution of the pastoral relationship with the senior pastor was brought about in Christian love and good order on the part of the parties concerned.

- 23.2 The Presbytery may designate a minister as honorably retired when the minister by reason of age wishes to be retired, or as medically disabled when by reason of infirmity is no longer able to serve the church in the active ministry of the Gospel. A minister medically disabled or honorably retired shall continue to hold membership in his Presbytery. He may serve on committees or commissions if so elected or appointed.
- 23.3 A minister, being medically disabled or honorably retired, may be elected pastor emeritus by a congregation which seeks to honor his past earnest labors among them.
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Chapter 24: Election, Ordination and Installation of Ruling Elders and Deacons

Election

- 24.1 Every church shall elect persons to the offices of ruling elder 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 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 First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church (*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.
- 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 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 officers to be elected shall be determined by the congregation after hearing the Session's recommendation.
- 24.2 The pastor is, by virtue of his office, moderator of congregational meetings. If there is no pastor, the Session shall appoint one of their number to call the meeting to order and to preside until the congregation shall elect their presiding officer, who may be a minister of the church or any male member of that particular church.
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24.3 All communing members in good and regular standing, but no others, are entitled to vote in the election of church officers in the churches to which they respectively belong. A majority vote of those present is required for election.

24.4 The voters being convened, the moderator shall explain the purpose of the meeting and then put the question:

Are you now ready to proceed to the election of additional ruling elders (or deacons) from the slate presented?

If they declare themselves ready, the election may proceed by private ballot without nomination. In every case a majority of all the voters present shall be required to elect.

24.5 On the election of a ruling elder or deacon, if it appears that a large minority of the voters are averse to a candidate, and cannot be induced to concur in the choice, the moderator shall endeavor to dissuade the majority from prosecuting it further; but if the electors are nearly or quite unanimous, or if the majority insist upon their right to choose their officers, the election shall stand.

Ordination and Installation

24.6 The day having arrived, and the Session being convened in the presence of the congregation, a sermon shall be preached after which the presiding minister shall state in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office of ruling elder, or deacon, together with the character proper to be sustained and the duties to be fulfilled. Having done this, he shall propose to the candidate, in the presence of the church, the following questions, namely:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
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3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?

24.7 The ruling elder or deacon elect having answered in the affirmative, the minister shall address to the members of the church the following question:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder (or deacon), and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

The members of the church having answered this question in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the candidate shall then be set apart, with prayer by the minister or any other Session member and the laying on of the hands of the Session, to the office of ruling elder (or deacon). Prayer being ended, the members of the Session (and the deacons, if the case be that of a deacon) shall take the newly ordained officer by the hand, saying in words to this effect:

We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part in this office with us.

The minister shall then say:

I now pronounce and declare that < Name of Elder or Deacon Candidate > has been regularly elected, ordained and installed a ruling elder (or deacon) in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of the First Grace Covenant Evangelical Church; and that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After which the minister or any other member of the Session shall give to the ruling elder (or deacon) and to the church an exhortation suited to the occasion.

24.8 Other considerations:

1. Ordination to the offices of ruling elder or deacon is perpetual; nor can such offices be laid aside at pleasure; nor can any person be degraded from either office but by deposition after regular trial; yet a ruling elder or deacon may have reasons which he deems valid for being released from the active duties of his office. In such a case the Session, after conference with him and careful consideration of the matter, may, if it thinks proper, accept his resignation and dissolve the official relationship which exists between him and the church.
 2. The ruling elder or deacon, though chargeable with neither heresy nor immorality, may become unacceptable in his official capacity to the majority of the church which he serves. In such a case the church may take the initiative by a majority vote at a regularly called congregational meeting and request the Session to dissolve the official relationship between the church and the officer without censure. The Session, after conference with the ruling elder or deacon, and after careful consideration, may use its discretion as to dissolving the official relationship. In either case the Session shall report its action to the congregation. If the Session fails or refuses to report to the congregation within sixty (60) days from the date of the congregational meeting or if the Session reports to the congregation that it declined to dissolve such relationship, then any member or members in good standing may file a complaint against the Session in accordance with the provisions of the BCO.
 3. When a ruling elder or deacon who has been released from his official relation is again elected to his office in the same or another church, he shall be installed after the above form with the omission of ordination.
 4. When a ruling elder or deacon cannot or does not for a period of one year perform the duties of his office, his official relationship shall be dissolved by the Session and the action reported to the congregation.
 5. When a deacon or ruling elder by reason of age or infirmity desires to be released from the active duties of the office, he may at his request and with the approval of the Session be designated deacon or elder emeritus. When so designated, he is no longer required to perform the regular duties of his office but may continue to perform certain of these duties on a voluntary basis, if requested by the Session or a higher court. He may attend Diaconate or Session meetings, if he so desires, and may participate fully in the discussion of any issues but may not vote.
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Chapter 25: Congregational Meetings

- 25.1 The congregation consists of all the communing members of a particular church, and they only are entitled to vote.
- 25.2 Whenever it may seem for the best interests of the church that a congregational meeting should be held, the Session shall call such meeting and give public notice of at least one week. No business shall be transacted at such meeting except what is stated in the notice. The Session shall always call a congregational meeting when requested in writing to do so:
- a. by one-fourth ($1/4$) of the communing members of a church of not more than one hundred (100) such members,
 - b. by one-fifth ($1/5$) of the communing members of a church of more than one hundred (100) and not more than three hundred (300) such members,
 - c. by one-sixth ($1/6$) of the communing members of a church of more than three hundred (300) and not more than five hundred (500) such members,
 - d. by one-seventh ($1/7$) of the communing members of a church of more than five hundred (500) members but not more than seven hundred (700) such members,
 - e. by one hundred (100) of the communing members of a church of more than seven hundred (700) such members.
- Upon such a proper request, if the Session cannot act, fails to act or refuses to act, to call such a congregational meeting within thirty (30) days from the receipt of such a request, then any member or members in good standing may file a complaint in accordance with the provisions of *BCO*.
- 25.3 The quorum of the congregational meeting shall consist of one-fourth ($1/4$) of the resident communing members, if the church has not more than one hundred (100) such members.
- 25.4 The pastor shall be the moderator of congregational meetings by virtue of his office. If it should be impracticable or inexpedient for him to preside, or if there is no pastor, the Session shall appoint one of their number to call the meeting to order and to preside until the congregation shall elect their presiding officer, or any male member of that particular church.
- 25.5 A clerk shall be elected by the congregation to serve at that meeting or for a definite period, whose duty shall be to keep correct minutes of the proceedings
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and of all business transacted and to preserve these minutes in a permanent form, after they have been attested by the moderator and the clerk of the meeting. He shall also send a copy of these minutes to the Session of the church.

- 25.6 If a particular church is incorporated, the provisions of its charter and by-laws must always be in accord with the Constitution of the church. All the communing members on the roll of that church shall be members of the corporation. The officers of the corporation, whether they be given the title *trustee* or some other title, shall be elected from among the members of the corporation in a regularly constituted congregational meeting. The powers and duties of such officers must not infringe upon the powers and duties of the Session or the Board of Deacons.

All funds collected for the support and expense of the church and for the benevolent purposes of the church shall be controlled and disbursed by the Session and the Board of Deacons as their relative authorities may from time to time be established and defined.

To the officers of the corporation may be given by the charter and bylaws of the corporation any or all of the following responsibilities:

- a. the buying, selling and mortgaging of property for the church,
- b. the acquiring and conveying title to such property, the holding and defending title to the same,
- c. the managing of any permanent special funds entrusted to them for the furtherance of the purposes of the church, provided that such duties do not infringe upon the powers and duties of the Session or of the Board of Deacons.

In buying, selling, and mortgaging real property such officers shall act solely under the authority of the corporation, granted in a duly constituted meeting of the corporation.

- 25.7 The corporation of a particular church, through its duly elected trustees or corporation officers, (or, if unincorporated, through those who are entitled to represent the particular church in matters related to real property) shall have sole title to its property, real, personal, or mixed, tangible or intangible, and shall be sole owner of any equity in any real estate, or any fund or property of any kind held by or belonging to any particular church, or any board, society, committee, Sunday school class or branch thereof. The superior courts of the Church may receive monies or properties from a local church only by free and voluntary action of the latter.
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- 25.8 All particular churches shall be entitled to hold, own and enjoy their own local properties, without any right of reversion whatsoever to any member of the congregation.
- 25.9 The provisions of this *BCO* are to be construed as a solemn covenant whereby the Church, as a whole, promises never to attempt to secure possession of the property of any congregation against its will, whether or not such congregation remains within or chooses to withdraw from this body. All officers of the Church are hereby prohibited from making any such attempt.

Chapter 26: Amending the Book of Church Order

- 26.1 The *Book of Church Order*, which includes the “Form of Church Government,” the “Book of Church Discipline” and the “Directory for the Public Worship of God;” all as adopted by the Church, is the constitution of the Church. The *BCO* is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures, the inerrant Word of God.

Of the three standards of the church, only the *Book of Church Order* may be amended by the Session or Presbytery.

- 26.2 Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* may be made only in the following manner:

1. Approval of the proposed amendment by majority of those present and voting in the congregation, and its recommendation to the Session.
2. The advice and consent of two-thirds (2/3) of the Session.
3. The approval and enactment by a subsequent assembly of the congregation by a majority of those present and voting.

- 26.3 The Session, after incorporation, may draft, propose, enact, revise or modify a code embodying the Rules of Discipline of the Church. These Rules shall be ratified in like manner by the congregation by a majority of those present and voting.
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Part 2: The Rules of Discipline of the Church

Chapter 27: Church Discipline

- 27.1 Discipline is the exercise of authority given to the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. The term has two senses: a. first is the governance, training, guardianship and control which the church maintains over its members, officers and processes; and b. the other is in a technical sense, signifying judicial process dealing with complaints or offenses.
- 27.2 All baptized persons, being members of the Church are subject to its discipline and entitled to the benefits thereof.
- 27.3 The exercise of discipline is necessary, as it maintains:
- a. the glory of God
 - b. the purity of His Church
 - c. the keeping and reclaiming of disobedient sinners.

Discipline is for the purpose of godliness (1 Timothy 4:7); and it demands a self-examination under Scripture. The purposes of discipline are the rebuke of offenses, the removal of scandal, the vindication of the honor of Christ, the promotion of the purity and general edification of the Church, and the spiritual good of offenders themselves.

- 27.4 The power which Christ has given the Church is for building up, and not for destruction. It is to be exercised as under a dispensation of mercy and not of wrath. Discipline is systematic training under the authority of God's Scripture. No communing or non-communing member of the Church should be allowed to stray from the Scripture's discipline. Therefore, teaching elders must:
- a. instruct the officers in discipline,
 - b. instruct the congregation in discipline,
 - c. jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and church courts.
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27.5 Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline because it is the revelation of God's Holy will. Proper disciplinary principles are set forth in the Scriptures and must be followed. They are:

- a. Instruction in the Word;
- b. Individual's responsibility to admonish one another (Matthew 18:15, Galatians 6:1);
- c. If the admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matthew 18:16);
- d. If rejection persists, then the Church must act through her court unto admonition, suspension, excommunication and deposition.

Steps (a) through (d) must be followed in proper order for the exercise of discipline.

Chapter 28: Offenses

- 28.1 An offense is anything in the doctrines or practice of a Church member professing faith in Christ which is contrary to the Word of God.

The *Confession of Faith* and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly, together with the formularies of government, discipline, and worship are accepted by the Church as standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice, shall be usable reference in determining offenses. Nothing, therefore, ought to be considered by any court as an offense, or admitted as a matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such from Scripture.

- 28.2 Offenses are either personal or general, private or public; but all of them being sins against God, are therefore grounds of discipline.
- 28.3 Personal offenses are violations of the divine law, considered in the special relation of wrongs or injuries to particular individuals. General offenses are heresies or immoralities having no such relation or considered apart from it.
- 28.4 Private offenses are those which are known only to a few persons. Public offenses are those which are notorious.
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Chapter 29: Church Censures

- 29.1 The censures, which may be inflicted by church courts, are admonition, suspension from the Sacraments, excommunication, suspension from office, and deposition from office. The censures of admonition or definite suspension from office shall be administered to an accused who, upon conviction, satisfies the court as to his repentance and makes such restitution as is appropriate. Such censure concludes the judicial process. The censures of indefinite suspension or excommunication shall be administered to an accused who, upon conviction, remains impenitent.
- 29.2 Admonition is the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning him/her of his/her guilt and danger, and exhorting him/her to be more circumspect and watchful in the future.
- 29.3 Suspension from Sacraments is the temporary exclusion from those ordinances.
- Suspension from office is the exclusion of a church officer from his office. This may be definite or indefinite as to its duration. With respect to church officers, suspension from Sacraments shall always be accompanied by suspension from office. But suspension from office is not always necessarily accompanied with suspension from Sacraments.
- Definite suspension from office is administered when the credit of religion, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it, even though the delinquent has given satisfaction to the court.
- Indefinite suspension is administered to the impenitent offender until he exhibits signs of repentance, or until by his conduct, the necessity of the greatest censure be made manifest. In the case of indefinite suspension from office imposed due to scandalous conduct, the procedure outlined in this shall be followed.
- 29.4 Excommunication is the removal of an offender from the communion of the Church. This censure is to be inflicted only on account of gross crime or heresy and when the offender shows himself incorrigible and unrepentant. The design of this censure is to operate on the offender as a means of reclaiming him, to deliver the church from the scandal of his offense, and to inspire all with fear by the example of his discipline.
- 29.5 Deposition is the degradation of an officer from his office and may or may not be accompanied with the infliction of other censure.
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Chapter 30: The Process

- 30.1 Original jurisdiction (the right first or initially to hear and determine) in relation to ministers of the Gospel shall be in the Presbytery of which the minister is a member, except in cases as provided in the BCO. Such original jurisdiction in relation to church members shall be in the Session of the church of which he/she is a member, except in cases as provided in this BCO.
- 30.2 It is the duty of all church Sessions and Presbyteries to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall with due diligence and great discretion demand from such persons the satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting their Christian character. This duty is more imperative when those who deem themselves aggrieved by injurious reports shall ask an investigation.
- If such investigation, however originating, should result in raising a strong presumption of the guilt of the party involved, the court shall institute process, and shall appoint a prosecutor to prepare the indictment and to conduct the case. This prosecutor shall be a member of the court, except that in a case before the Session, he may be any communing member of the same congregation with the accused.
- 30.3 An investigation shall be initiated by a written complaint signed by the injured party or on his/her behalf and submitted before any officer of the Church or Session or within the any church of the Presbytery.
- 30.4 The accuser is always the Session or the Presbytery, whose honor and purity are to be maintained. The prosecutor, whether voluntary or appointed, is always the representative of the Church, and as such has all its rights in the case.
- 31.5 Every indictment shall begin: “In the name of the < Church > ,” and shall conclude, “against the peace, unity and purity of the Church, and the honor and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the King and Head thereof.”
- In every case the Church is the injured and accusing party, against the accused.
- 30.6 An injured party must first attempt means of reconciliation and of reclaiming the offender, required by Christ. “Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother but if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matthew 18:15-16).
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A church court, however, may judicially investigate personal offenses when the interest of religion seem to demand it. So, also, those to whom private offenses are known cannot become prosecutors without having previously endeavored to remove the scandal by private means.

- 30.7 When the offense is general, the case may be conducted either by any person appearing as prosecutor or by a prosecutor appointed by the court.
 - 30.8 When the prosecution is instituted by the court, the previous steps required by our Lord in the case of personal offenses are not necessary. There are many cases, however, in which it will promote the interests of religion to send a committee to converse in a private manner with the offender, and endeavor to bring him to a sense of his guilt, before instituting actual process.
 - 30.9 Great caution ought to be exercised in receiving accusations from any person who is known to indulge a malignant spirit towards the accused; who is not of good character; who is himself under censure or process; who is deeply interested in any respect in the conviction of the accused; or who is known to be litigious, rash or highly imprudent.
 - 30.10 Every voluntary prosecutor shall be previously warned, that if he fail to show probable cause of the charges, and yet persists in issuing an indictment, he may himself be censured as a slanderer of the brethren.
 - 30.11 When a member of a church court is under process, all his official functions may be suspended at the court's discretion and to preserve impartiality.
 - 30.12 Process against an offender shall not be commenced unless some person or persons undertake to make out the charge; or unless the court finds it necessary, for the honor of religion, itself to take the step provided for in BCO 31-2.
 - 30.13 When a charge is laid before the Session or Presbytery, it shall be reduced to writing, and nothing shall be done at the first meeting of the court, unless by consent of parties, except: 1. to appoint a prosecutor, 2. to order the indictment drawn and a copy, along with names of witnesses who support it, served on the accused, and 3. to cite the accused to appear and be heard at another meeting which shall not be sooner than ten days after such citation. At the second meeting of the court the charges shall be read to the accused, if present, and he shall be called upon to say whether he be guilty or not. If the accused confesses, the court may deal with him according to its discretion; if he plead and take issue, the trial shall be scheduled and all parties and their witnesses cited to appear. The trial shall
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not be sooner than fourteen (14) days after such citation. Accused parties may plead in writing when they cannot be personally present. Parties necessarily absent should have counsel assigned to them. Compliance with these requirements shall be deemed to have been fulfilled if a party cannot be located after diligent inquiry or if a party refuses to accept delivery.

- 30.14 When an accused person shall appear and refuse to plead, or otherwise refuse to cooperate with lawful proceedings, he shall be dealt with for his contumacy.
 - 30.15 When the complainant or injured party refuses to cooperate with the prosecutor or orders of the court or Session or Presbytery, after one warning, the court or Session may deem the charge as withdrawn and in turn discipline the complainant or person as necessary.
 - 30.16 In every process, if deemed expedient there may be a committee appointed, which shall be called the Judicial Committee, and whose duty it shall be to digest and arrange all the papers, and to prescribe, under the direction of the court, the whole order of the proceedings. The members of this committee shall be entitled, notwithstanding their performance of this duty, to sit and vote in the case as members of the court. Either party may, for cause, challenge the right of any member to sit in the trial of the case, which question shall be decided by the other members of the court. The Committee shall function from beginning to end unless any member be disqualified on the grounds of partiality or conduct which tends to prejudice either the accuser or accused, or himself become subject to a charge or under process of church discipline; in which case, a substitute from the Session or from a church within the Presbytery shall be unanimously agreed upon by the Session / Committee.
 - 31.17 When the trial is about to begin, it shall be the duty of the moderator solemnly to announce from the chair that the court is about to pass to the consideration of the case, and to enjoin on the members to recollect and regard their high character as judges of a court of Jesus Christ, and the solemn duty in which they are about to engage. Proceedings should be recorded by the church secretary or by a recording (audio or video with audio) in order to preserve what transpired and subject for review by the Committee or Session.
 - 30.18 In order that the trial may be fair and impartial, the witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused, unless accused waives attendance. Witnesses may be cross-examined by both parties, and any questions asked must be pertinent to the issue. Members sitting in the Committee or Session may ask clarificatory
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questions, but must still maintain semblance of impartiality and not reflect any bias or make any statements for or against one party as if to stand as a witness.

30.19 When a court proceeds to the trial of a case, the following order shall be observed:

1. The moderator or chair of the Committee shall charge the court.
2. The indictment shall be read, and the answer of the accused heard.
3. The witnesses for the prosecutor and then those for the accused shall be examined.
4. The parties shall be heard: first, the prosecutor, and then the accused, and the prosecutor shall close.
5. The roll shall be called, and the members may express their opinion in the case.
6. The vote shall be taken (whether in closed session or open session), but the verdict shall always be announced in the presence of both accused and complainant (after they are given opportunity or notice) and the judgment entered on the records.

30.20 During the pendency of any case, any member of the court who expresses his opinion of its merits to either party, or to any person not a member of the court, or who shall absent himself from any proceeding without permission of the Committee or court without satisfactory reasons, shall be disqualified.

30.21 The court or committee may prescribe modes of discovery—such as written interrogatories or request for admissions—to be availed of by either party during the case, and the manner and period in which they shall be availed. Failure to respond to a timely request for admissions shall be deemed an admission by the receiving party, or an implied admission against his/her interest/benefit had it been answered. All pleadings, submissions, or other evidence submitted by one party shall also be furnished to the other party. The court or committee shall ensure fair-play, and no independent investigation into any relevant matter shall be undertaken without the knowledge of all parties concerned and an opportunity to observe and participate therein. The parties shall be allowed additional copies of the Record of the Case at their own expense if they demand them.

Chapter 31: Special Rules Before the Session

- 31.1 Process against all church members, other than ministers of the Gospel, shall be entered before the Session of the church to which such members belong, except in cases of appeal, which shall be handled by the Presbytery. However, if the Session refuses to act in doctrinal cases or instances of public scandal and two other Sessions of churches in the same Presbytery request the Presbytery of which the church is a member to initiate proper or appropriate action in a case of process and thus assume jurisdiction and authority, the Presbytery shall do so.
 - 31.2 When an accused person is found insubordinate, he shall be immediately suspended from the sacraments (and if an officer from his office) for his contumacy. Record shall be made of the fact and of the charges under which he was arraigned, and the censure may be made public, should this be deemed expedient by the Session. The censure shall in no case be removed until the offender has not only repented of his insubordination but has also given satisfaction in relation to the charges against him.
 - 31.3 If after further endeavor by the court to bring the accused to a sense of his guilt, he persists in his rebellion, he shall be excommunicated from the Church.
 - 31.4 When it is impracticable immediately to commence process against an accused church member, the Session may, if it thinks the edification of the Church requires it, prevent the accused from approaching the Lord's Table until the charges against him can be examined.
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Chapter 32: Special Rules Pertaining to Process Against a Minister (Teaching Elder)

- 32.1 Process against a minister shall be entered before the Presbytery of which he is a member. However, if the Presbytery refuses to act in doctrinal cases or cases of public scandal and two other Presbyteries request the General Assembly to assume original jurisdiction (to first receive and initially hear and determine), the General Assembly, if existing, shall do so.
- 32.2 As no minister ought, on account of his office, to be screened in his sin, or slightly censured, so scandalous charges ought not to be received against him on slight grounds.
- 32.3 If anyone knows a minister to be guilty of a private offense, he should warn him in private. But if the offense be persisted in, or become public, he should bring the case to the attention of the elders of his Session or ministers of the Presbytery.
- 32.4
- a. When a minister accused of an offense is found contumacious, he shall be immediately suspended from the sacraments and his office for his contumacy. Record shall be made of the fact and of the charges under which he was arraigned, and the censure shall be made public. The censure shall in no case be removed until the offender has not only repented of his contumacy, but has also given satisfaction in relation to the charges against him.
 - b. If after further endeavor by the court to bring the accused to a sense of his guilt, he persists in his contumacy, he shall be deposed and excommunicated from the Church.
- 32.5 Heresy and schism may be of such a nature as to warrant deposition; but errors ought to be carefully considered, whether they strike at the vitals of religion and are industriously spread, or whether they arise from the weakness of the human understanding and are not likely to do much injury.
- 32.6 If the Presbytery find on trial that the matter complained of amounts to no more than such acts of infirmity as may be amended, so that little or nothing remains to hinder the minister's usefulness, it shall take all prudent measures to remove the scandal.
- 32.7 When a minister, pending a trial, shall make confession, if the matter be base and flagitious, such as drunkenness, uncleanness, or crimes of a greater nature,
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however penitent he may appear to the satisfaction of all, the court shall without delay impose definite suspension or depose him from the ministry.

- 32.8 A minister under indefinite suspension from his office or deposed for scandalous conduct shall not be restored, even on the deepest sorrow for his sin, until he shall exhibit for a considerable time such an eminently exemplary, humble and edifying life and testimony as shall heal the wound made by his scandal.

A deposed minister shall in no case be restored until it shall appear that the general sentiment of the Church is strongly in his favor, and demands his restoration; and then only by the court inflicting the censure, or with that court's consent. The removal of deposition requires a three-fourths ($3/4$) vote of the court inflicting the censure, or a three-fourths ($3/4$) vote of the court to which the majority of the original court delegates that authority.

- 32.9 When a minister is deposed, his pastoral relation shall be dissolved; but when he is suspended from office it shall be left to the discretion of the Presbytery whether the censure shall include the dissolution of the pastoral relation.

- 32.10 Whenever a minister of the Gospel shall habitually fail to be engaged in the regular discharge of his official functions, it shall be the duty of the Presbytery, at a stated meeting, to inquire into the cause of such dereliction and, if necessary, to institute judicial proceedings against him for breach of his covenant engagement. If it shall appear that his neglect proceeds only from his lack of acceptance to the Church, Presbytery may, upon the same principle upon which it withdraws license from a licentiate for lack of evidence of the divine call, divest him of his office without censure, even against his will, a majority of two-thirds ($2/3$) being necessary for this purpose.

In such a case, the clerk shall under the order of the Presbytery forthwith deliver to the minister concerned a written note that, at the next stated meeting, the question of his being so dealt with is to be considered. This notice shall distinctly state the grounds for this proceeding. The party thus notified shall be heard in his own defense; and if the decision pass against him he may appeal, as if he had been tried after the usual forms. This principle may apply, with any necessary changes, to ruling elders and deacons.

Chapter 33: Evidence

- 33.1 All persons of proper age and intelligence are competent witnesses, except such as do not believe in the existence of God. The accused party may be allowed, but shall not be compelled to testify; but the accuser shall be required to testify and to be examined, on the demand of the accused.

Either party has the right to challenge a witness whom he believes to be incompetent, and the court shall examine and decide upon his competency. It belongs to the court to judge the degree of credibility to be attached to all evidence.

- 33.2 A husband or wife shall not be compelled to bear testimony against one another in any court.

- 33.3 The testimony of more than one witness shall be necessary in order to establish any charge; yet if, in addition to the testimony of one witness, corroborative evidence be produced, the offense may be considered to be proved.

- 33.4 No witness afterwards may be re-examined if either party object, unless a member of the court who missed the examination requires it.

- 33.5 Witnesses shall be examined first by the party introducing them; then cross-examined by the opposite party; after which any member of the court, or either party, may put additional interrogatories. The court shall not permit questions frivolous or irrelevant to the charge at issue.

- 33.6 The oath or affirmation to a witness shall be administered by the Moderator or Chair of the Committee in the following or like terms:

Do you solemnly promise, in the presence of God, that you will declare the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, according to the best of your knowledge in the matter in which you are called to witness, as you shall answer it to the great Judge of the living and the dead?

If, however, at any time a witness should present himself before a court, who for conscientious reasons prefers to swear or affirm in any other manner, he should be allowed to do so.

- 33.7 All testimony shall be recorded (transcription, audiotape, videotape, or some other electronic means) and witnesses informed of such prior to testifying. Such recording becomes part of the Record of the Case. However, in order to be
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referenced in written or oral briefs, such recording must be transcribed and the transcription authenticated by the court. The court of final appeal may assess the cost of transcription equitably among the parties.

- 33.8 The records of a court or any part of them, whether original or transcribed, if regularly authenticated by the clerk or Chair of the Committee shall be deemed good and sufficient evidence in every other court.
 - 33.9 In like manner, testimony taken by one court and regularly certified shall be received by every other court as no less valid than if it had been taken by itself.
 - 33.10 When it is not convenient for a court to have the whole or perhaps any part of the testimony in any particular case taken in its presence, a commission shall be appointed, or coordinate court requested, to take the testimony in question, which shall be considered as if taken in the presence of the court. Due notice of the commission or coordinate court, and of the time and place of its meeting, shall be given to the opposite party, that he may have an opportunity of attending. Testimony may be taken on written interrogatories by filing the same with the clerk of the court having jurisdiction of the case, and giving two weeks' notice thereof to the adverse party, during which time he may file cross-interrogatories, if he desire it. Testimony shall then be taken by the commission or coordinate court in answer to the direct and cross-interrogatories, if such are filed, and no notice need be given of the time and place of taking the testimony.
 - 33.11 Electronic evidence must be authenticated and validated by means of actual physical verification in the presence of the court or Committee, with or without the assistance of an independent third party knowledgeable in the system, application, or technology involved.
 - 33.12 A member of the court who has given testimony in a case becomes disqualified for sitting as a judge if either party makes objection.
 - 33.13 An officer or private member of the church refusing to testify may be censured for insubordination.
 - 33.14 If after trial before any court new testimony be discovered, which the accused believes important, it shall be his right to ask a new trial and it shall be within the power of the court to grant his request.
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- 33.15 If, in the prosecution of an appeal, new evidence be offered which, in the judgment of the appellate court, has an important bearing on the case, it shall be competent for that court to refer the case to the lower court for a new trial; or, with the consent of parties, to admit the evidence and proceed with the case. If no General Assembly is yet constituted, then the court convened by the Presbytery is the highest court, and no further appeal may be made.

Chapter 34: Infliction of Church Censures

- 34.1 When any member or officer of the Church shall be found guilty of an offense the court shall proceed with all tenderness and shall deal with its offending brother in the spirit of meekness, the members considering themselves lest they also be tempted.
- 34.2 Church censures and the modes of administering them should be suited to the nature of the offenses. For private offenses, censure should be administered in the presence of the court alone, or in private by one or more members of the court. In the case of public offenses, the degree of censure and mode of administering it shall be within the discretion of the court, acting in accordance with paragraphs below which deal with particular censures.
- 34.3 The Censure of Admonition should be administered in private by one or more members of the court if the offense is known only to a few and is not aggravated in character. If the offense is public the Admonition should be administered by the moderator or committee chair in the presence of the court and may also be announced in public should the court deem it expedient.
- 34.4 Definite suspension from office should be administered in the presence of the court alone or in open session of the court, as it may deem best, and public announcement thereof shall be at the court's discretion.
- 34.5 Indefinite suspension from office or the Sacraments should be administered after the manner prescribed for definite suspension, but with added solemnity, that the indefinite suspension may be the means of impressing the mind of the delinquent with a proper sense of his danger. Indefinite suspension should also be administered under the blessing of God of leading him to repentance. When the court has resolved to pass this sentence, the moderator or Committee Chair shall address the offending brother to the following purpose:

Whereas, you, <here describe the person as a teaching elder, ruling elder, deacon, or private member of the church> are convicted by sufficient proof (or are guilty by your own confession) of the sin of <here insert the offense>, we the <Church Session or Presbytery>, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, do now declare you suspended from the Sacraments of the Church (and from the exercise of your office), until you give satisfactory evidence of repentance.

To this shall be added such advice or admonition as may be judged necessary, and the whole shall be concluded with prayer to almighty God that He would follow this act of discipline with His blessing.

- 34.6 Excommunication is to be administered according to one or other of the two modes laid down for indefinite suspension, or to be inflicted in public as the court may decide. In administering this censure the moderator of the Session or Committee Chair shall make a statement of the several steps which have been taken with respect to the offending brother, and of the decision to cut him off from the communion of the church. He shall then show from Matthew 18:15-18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members, and shall explain the nature, use and consequences of this censure. He shall then administer the censure in the words following:

Whereas, <Name of Offender>, a member of this church has been by sufficient proof convicted of the sin of <Offense>, and after much admonition and prayer, obstinately refuses to hear the Church, and has manifested no evidence of repentance: Therefore, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, we, the Session of <Name of Church?> do pronounce him to be excluded from the Sacraments, and cut off from the fellowship of the Church.

Prayer shall then be made that by God's blessing this solemn action of the court may issue in the repentance and restoration of the offender, and in the establishment of all true believers.

- 34.7 The censure of deposition shall be administered by the moderator of the Session or Committee Chair in the following words:

Whereas, <Name of Offender>, a teaching elder of this Presbytery (or ruling elder or deacon of this church), has been proved, by sufficient evidence to be guilty of the sin of <Offense>, we, the <Presbytery or Church Session>, do adjudge him disqualified for the office of the Christian ministry (or ruling eldership, or deaconship), and therefore we do hereby, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, depose from the office of a teaching elder (or ruling elder or deacon) the said <Name of Offender>, and do prohibit him from exercising any of the functions thereof.

If the censure includes suspension or excommunication, the moderator shall proceed to say:

We do moreover, by the same authority, suspend the said <Name of Offender> from the Sacraments of the Church, until he shall exhibit satisfactory evidence of sincere repentance,

or

We do moreover, by the same authority, exclude the said <Name of Offender> from the Sacraments, and cut him off from the fellowship of the Church.

The sentence of deposition ought to be inflicted with solemnities similar to those already prescribed in the case of excommunication.

Chapter 35: Removal of Censure

- 35.1 A person who has been definitely suspended from office shall be restored by the court at the end of the term of his suspension by declaring words of the following import to him:

Whereas, you <Name> have been debarred from the office of teaching elder, (or ruling elder, or deacon), but have now fulfilled the time of your censure, we, of the <Session or Presbytery> do hereby, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, absolve you from the sentence of suspension and do restore you to the exercise of your said office, and all the functions thereof.

- 35.2 After any person has been indefinitely suspended from the Sacraments, it is proper that the rulers of the church should frequently converse with him as well as pray with him and for him, that it would please God to give him repentance.

- 35.3 When the court shall be satisfied as to the reality of the repentance of an indefinitely suspended offender, he shall be admitted to profess his repentance, either in the presence of the court alone or publicly. At this time the offender shall be restored to the Sacraments of the Church, and/or to his office, if such shall be the judgment of the court. The restoration shall be declared to the penitent in the words of the following import:

Whereas, you, <Name>, have been debarred from the Sacraments of the Church (and/or from the office of teaching elder, or ruling elder, or deacon), but have now manifested such repentance as satisfies the church, we, the < Session or Presbytery >, do hereby, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, absolve you from the said sentence of suspension from the Sacraments (and/or your office) and do restore you to the full communion of the Church (and/or the exercise of your said office, and all the functions thereof).

After which there shall be prayer and thanksgiving.

- 35.4 When an excommunicated person shall be so affected with his state as to be brought to repentance, and to desire to be readmitted to the communion of the church, the Session, having obtained sufficient evidence of his sincere penitence, shall proceed to restore him. This may be done in the presence of the court, or of the congregation as seems best to the Session.
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On the day appointed for his restoration, the minister shall call upon the excommunicated person and propose to him in the presence of the court or the congregation the following questions:

1. Do you, from a deep sense of your great wickedness, freely confess your sins in thus rebelling against God, and in refusing to hear His Church; and do you acknowledge that you have been in justice and mercy cut off from the communion of the Church?

Answer, I do.

2. Do you now voluntarily profess your sincere repentance and contrition for your sin and obstinacy; and do you humbly ask the forgiveness of God and His Church? **Answer, I do.**

3. Do you sincerely promise, through divine grace, to live in all humbleness of mind and circumspection; and to endeavor to adorn by a holy life the doctrine of God our Saviour? **Answer, I do.**

Here the minister shall give the penitent a suitable exhortation, encouraging and comforting him. Then he shall pronounce the sentence of restoration in the following words:

Whereas, you <Name>, have been shut out from the communion of the church, but now have manifested such repentance as satisfies the Church; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His authority, we, the Session of this church, do declare you absolved from the sentence of excommunication formerly pronounced against you, and we do restore you to the communion of the Church, that you may be a partaker of all the benefits of the Lord Jesus to your eternal salvation.

The whole shall be concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.

- 35.5 The restoration of a deposed officer, after public confession has been made in a manner similar to that prescribed in the case of the removal of censure from an excommunicated person, shall be announced to him by the Moderator in the following form, namely:

Whereas, you, <Name>, formerly a teaching elder of this Presbytery (or a ruling elder or deacon of this church), have been deposed from your office, but have now manifested such repentance as satisfies the Church; in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by His authority, we, the <Session or Presbytery> do declare you absolved from the said sentence of deposition formerly pronounced

against you; and we do furthermore restore you to your said office, and to the exercise of all the functions thereof, whenever you may be orderly called thereto.

After this there shall be prayer and thanksgiving, and the members of the court shall extend to him the right hand of fellowship.

- 35.6 When a ruling elder or deacon has been absolved from the censure of deposition, he cannot be allowed to resume the exercise of his office in the church without re-election by the people. The removal of deposition requires a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the court inflicting the censure, or a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the court to which the majority of the original court delegates that authority.
- 35.7 When a person under censure shall reside at such a distance from the court by which he was sentenced as to make the continued exercise of spiritual oversight impractical, it shall be lawful for the court, with the consent of the offender and the concurrence of the receiving court, to transmit a certified copy of its proceedings to the court where the delinquent resides, which shall assume jurisdiction, take up the case, and proceed with it as though it had originated with itself.
- 35.8 In the restoration of a minister who is under indefinite suspension from the Sacraments, and/or his office, or has been deposed, it is the duty of the Session or the Presbytery to proceed with great caution. It should first admit him to the Sacraments, if he has been debarred from them. Afterwards it should grant him the privilege of preaching on probation for a time, so as to test the sincerity of his repentance and prospect of his usefulness. When satisfied in these respects, the Session or the Presbytery shall take steps to restore him to his office. But the case shall always be under judicial consideration until the declaration of restoration has been pronounced.
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- 35.9 In the case of the removal of censures from, or the restoration of, a minister, jurisdiction shall be as follows:
- a. If the censure(s) does not include excommunication, the presbytery inflicting the censure(s) shall retain the authority to remove the censure(s) and, at its discretion, restore him to office. This authority is retained by the Presbytery even when a divested or deposed minister is assigned to a session.
 - b. If the censure includes excommunication, the penitent may only be restored to the communion of the church through a session. Once the penitent is restored, and therefore a member of a local church, the authority to remove any other censure(s) in respect to office, concurrently imposed with that of excommunication shall belong to the court originally imposing such censure(s).
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Chapter 36: Cases without Process

- 36.1 When any person shall come forward and make his offense known to the court, a full statement of the facts shall be recorded and judgment rendered without process. In handling a confession of guilt, it is essential that the person intends to confess and permit the court to render judgment without process. Statements made by him in the presence of the court must not be taken as a basis of a judgment without process except by his consent. In the event a confession is intended, a written Confession (i.e., a sufficient summary of the facts, the person's specific confession, and any expression or evidence of repentance) must be approved by the accused, and by the court, before the court proceeds to a judgment, and the co-signed document shall be appended to the minutes (regular or executive session). No other information may be presented without written consent from the accused and the court, and this prohibition includes individuals, prosecutors, committees, and commissions. A censured person has the right to appeal. The person has the right to be assisted by counsel at any point, in accord with the stipulations of *BCO* 30.13.

In any instances involving a personal offense (*BCO* 28.3), the court shall attempt to inform the offended person(s) of that part of the Confession the court deems pertinent to the offense against him or her. The court shall invite the offended person to provide the court comment on the Confession prior to final approval of the Confession by the confessor and the court. The court shall encourage the offended person to enlist the help of an advisor in preparing any such comments. In all instances, the court shall report the way such offended persons were informed of the parts of the Confession pertinent to them.

- 36.2 A minister of the Gospel against whom there are no charges, if fully satisfied in his own conscience that God has not called him to the ministry, or if he has satisfactory evidence of his inability to serve the Church with acceptance, may report these facts at a stated meeting of Presbytery. At the next stated meeting, if after full deliberation the Presbytery shall concur with him in judgment, it may divest him of his office without censure. This provision shall in like manner apply with any necessary changes to the case of ruling elders and deacons; but in all such cases the Session of the church to which the ruling elder or the deacon who seeks demission belongs shall act as the Presbytery acts in similar cases where a minister is concerned.
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36.3 Withdrawal of communion from the Session or Presbytery, or in cases where there is intent to permanently affiliate with a false church.

- a. When a member or officer in the church attempt to withdraw from the communion of this branch of the visible Church by affiliating with some other branch, if at the time of the attempt to withdraw he is in good standing, the irregularity shall be recorded, his new membership acknowledged, and his name removed from the roll.
 - b. If at the time of the attempt to withdraw there is a record of an investigation in process, or there are charges concerning the member or minister, the court of original jurisdiction may retain his name on the roll and conduct the case, communicating the outcome upon completion of the proceedings to that member or minister. *If the court does not conduct the case, his new membership shall be acknowledged, his name removed from the roll, and, at the request of the receiving branch, the matters under investigation or the charges shall be communicated to them.*
 - c. When a member or minister of the Church shall attempt to withdraw from the communion of this branch of the visible Church by affiliating with a body judged by the court of original jurisdiction as failing to maintain the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity (i.e., a recognized false church), that member or minister shall be warned of his danger, and if he persists, his name shall be erased from the roll, thereby, so far as the Church is concerned, he is deemed no longer to be a member in any body which rightly maintains the Word and Sacraments in their fundamental integrity, and if an officer, thereby withdrawing from him all authority to exercise his office as derived from this Church. *When so acting the court shall make full record of the matter and shall notify the offender of its action.*
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36.4 When a member of a particular church has willfully neglected the church for a period of one year, or has made it known that he has no intention of fulfilling the church vows, then the Session, continuing to exercise pastoral discipline in the spirit of Galatians 6:1, shall remind the member, if possible both in person and in writing, of the declarations and promises by which he entered into a solemn covenant with God and His Church, and warn him that, if he persists, his name shall be erased from the roll.

If after diligently pursuing such pastoral discipline, and after further inquiry and due delay, the Session is of the judgment that the member will not fulfill his membership obligations in this or any other branch of the Visible Church (cf. BCO 2-2), then the Session shall erase his name from the roll. This erasure is an act of pastoral discipline without process. The Session shall notify the person, if possible, whose name has been removed.

Chapter 37: Court Proceedings, Appeals, and Jurisdictions

- 37.1 The acts and decisions of a lower court are brought under the supervision of a higher court in one or another of the following modes: Review and Control; Referral; Appeal; and Complaint.
- 37.2 When the proceedings of a lower court are before a higher court, the members of the lower court shall not lose the right to sit, deliberate and vote in the higher court, except in cases of appeal or complaint.
- 37.3 While affirming that Scripture is “the supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined” (*WCF* 1.10), and that the Constitution of the Church is “subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word of God” (*BCO* Preface, III), and while affirming also that this Constitution is fallible (*WCF* 31.3), the Church affirms that this subordinate and fallible Constitution has been “adopted by the church” “as standard expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation to both faith and practice” (*BCO* 28.1) and as setting forth a form of government and discipline “in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity” (*BCO* 21.3). To ensure that this Constitution is not amended, violated, or disregarded in judicial process, any review of the judicial proceedings of a lower court by a higher court shall be guided by the following principles:
1. A higher court, reviewing a lower court, should limit itself to the issues raised by the parties to the case in the original (lower) court. Further, the higher court should resolve such issues by applying the Constitution of the church, as previously established through the constitutional process.
 2. A higher court should ordinarily exhibit great deference to a lower court regarding those factual matters which the lower court is more competent to determine, because of its proximity to the events in question, and because of its personal knowledge and observations of the parties and witnesses involved. Therefore, a higher court should not reverse a factual finding of a lower court, unless there is clear error on the part of the lower court.
 3. A higher court should ordinarily exhibit great deference to a lower court regarding those matters of discretion and judgment which can only be addressed by a court with familiar acquaintance of the events and parties. Such matters of discretion and judgment would include, but not be limited to: the moral character of candidates for sacred office, the appropriate censure to impose after a disciplinary trial, or judgment about the
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comparative credibility of conflicting witnesses. Therefore, a higher court should not reverse such a judgment by a lower court, unless there is clear error on the part of the lower court.

4. The higher court does have the power and obligation of judicial review, which cannot be satisfied by always deferring to the findings of a lower court. Therefore, a higher court should not consider itself obliged to exhibit the same deference to a lower court when the issues being reviewed involve the interpretation of the Constitution of the Church. Regarding such issues, the higher court has the duty and authority to interpret and apply the Constitution of the Church according to its best abilities and understanding, regardless of the opinion of the lower court.
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Part 3: Handbook of Liturgy

Chapter 38: The Principles of Public Worship

- 38.1 The principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. The Scriptures forbid the worshipping of God by images.
- 38.2 A service of public worship is a meeting of the triune God with His chosen people. God is present in public worship by virtue of His divine omnipresence, and as a faithful covenant savior.
- 38.3 The primary goal of public worship is to glorify God, and this is done by a body of believers (His covenant people). Covenant children should be present along with adults, and no member may be shown any favoritism, but each shall esteem others better than Himself.
- 38.4 The worshippers must recognize that Christ alone is the Mediator by Whom they can come unto God; hence, worship should be an expression of faith in Christ and of our love for Him.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

- 38.5 Public worship must be performed in Spirit and in truth. There is no room for hypocrisy or any manner of self-interest. Only those whose hearts have been renewed by the Holy Spirit are capable of such true worship and devotion.

“Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24).

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:4-6).

- 38.6 The Lord Jesus Christ has prescribed no fixed forms of public worship. However, all things must be done decently and in order, with reverence from beginning of service up to its end, observing simplicity and sincerity.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Chapter 39: The Sanctification of the Lord's Day

- 39.1 The fourth commandment requires the observance of the Sabbath Day, to be set apart as holy by His people.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11).

- 39.2 It is the duty of every person to remember the Lord's Day; and to prepare for it before its approach. All worldly business should be laid aside.

- 39.3 The whole day is to be kept holy to the Lord; and to be employed in the public and private exercises of religion. Let the time not used for public worship be spent in prayer, in devotional reading, the study of Scriptures, mediation, catechizing, religious conversation, the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; visiting the sick, relieving the poor, teaching the ignorant, holy resting, and in performing duties of piety, charity, and mercy.
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Chapter 40: The Ordering of Public Worship

General

- 40.1 When the congregation is to meet for public worship, the people should come and join therein; not absenting themselves through negligence, or any false or worldly pretense.
- 40.2 Let the people assemble at the appointed time. No one shall unnecessarily depart until after the blessing is pronounced.
- 40.3 Let the people upon entering the church take their seats in a decent and reverent manner, engaging in silent prayer for a blessing upon themselves, the minister, and all present, as well as upon those who are unable to attend worship.
- 40.4 For the Lord's Day liturgy, refer to Annex A: Liturgy for the Lord's Day.

The Public Reading of the Holy Scriptures

- 40.5 The public reading of the Holy Scriptures is performed by the minister. Through it God speaks most directly to the congregation, even more directly than through the sermon. In the reading of the Scriptures by the minister, God addresses His people. In the responsive reading of certain portions of Scripture by the minister and the congregation, God's people give expression in the words of Scripture to their contrition, adoration, gratitude, and other holy sentiments. The psalms of Scripture are especially appropriate for responsive reading.
- 40.6 The reading of the holy Scriptures in the congregation is a part of the public worship of God and should be done by the minister or some other person.
- 40.7 The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be read from a good translation, not a paraphrase.¹⁴

¹⁴ Grace Covenant Evangelical Church currently uses the English Standard Version (ver. 2007, 2011, 2016) as its common version for congregational use.

- 40.8 How large a portion shall be read at once is left to the discretion of every minister; always having regard to the time, that neither reading, singing, praying, preaching, nor any other ordinance, be disproportionate the one to the other; nor the whole rendered too short.

The Singing of Psalms and Hymns

- 40.9 Praising God through the medium of music is a duty and a privilege and should have a part in public worship.
- 40.10 In singing the praises of God, we are to sing in the spirit of worship, and with understanding.

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land (Psalm 100).

- 40.11 It is recommended that Psalms be sung. Caution should be observed in the selection of hymns, that they be true to the Word. Hymns should have the note of praise, or be in accord with the spirit of the sermon.
- 40.12 The elders shall give careful thought to the character of those asked to lead in this part of the worship, and the singing of a choir should never displace congregational singing.

Public Prayer

- 40.13 It is proper to begin a worship service with a short prayer, expressing our unworthiness as sinners; and humbly imploring His gracious presence, thankful for His acceptance of us through the merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
- 40.14 It is proper that before the sermon, there shall be a full and comprehensive prayer:
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- a. Adoring the glory and perfections of God, and the full revelation he has made of Himself in His written words;
 - b. Giving thanks to Him for all His mercies of every kind, general and particular, spiritual and temporal, common and special; above all, for Christ Jesus, His unspeakable gift, the hope of eternal life;
 - c. Making humble confession of sin, both original and actual, acknowledging, and endeavoring to lead the heart of every worshipper with a deep sense of the evil of all sin as being a departure from the living God and as sins against God;
 - d. Making earnest supplication for the pardon of sin through the blood of the atonement; for the Spirit of sanctification, always remembering to view them through the covenant love;
 - e. Intercession and petition for others, including the whole world for mankind; for the peace, purity, and extension of the Church of God; for ministers and missionaries in all lands; for all who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for the particular church then assembled, and all other churches associated in one body with it; for the sick, dying, and bereaved; for the poor and destitute; for strangers, for prisoners, the aged and the young; for those who travel; for the community in which the church is situated; for civil rulers; and for whatever else may seem to be necessary or suitable to the occasion.
- 40.15 Ordinarily there should be prayer after the sermon having relation to the subject that has been treated in the discourse.
- 40.16 Ministers are not to be confined to fixed forms of prayer for public worship, yet it is the duty of the minister to prepare and qualify himself for this part of his work, as well as for preaching. He should, by a thorough acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures, by the study of the best writers on prayer, by meditation, and by a life of communion with God, endeavor to acquire both the spirit and the gift of prayer. Moreover, when he is to offer prayer in public worship, he should compose his spirit, and so order his thoughts, that he may perform this duty with dignity and propriety, with an aim to benefit the worshipers.
- 40.17 All prayer is to be offered in the language of the people.
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Preaching of the Word

- 40.18 The preaching of the Word is an ordinance of God for the salvation of men. Serious attention should be paid to the manner in which it is done. The minister should devote ample time, prayer, and meditation in the exposition of the Word and preparation of the sermon.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; *reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching*. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5, emphasis added).

- 40.19 The subject of the sermon should be some verse or verses of Scripture, and its object, to explain, defend and apply some part of the system of divine truth; or to point out the nature, and state the bounds and obligation, of some duty. A text should not be merely a motto but should fairly contain the doctrine proposed to be handled. It is proper also that large portions of Scripture be sometimes expounded for the instruction of the people.
- 40.20 Ministers should keep to the simplicity of the Gospel, and express themselves in language that can be understood by all. They should also by their lives adorn the Gospel which they preach, and be examples to believers in word and deed.
- 40.21 Ministers should be careful not to make their sermons so long as to interfere with or exclude the important duties of prayer and praise, but should preserve just a proportion in the several parts of public worship.
- 40.22 No person should be invited to preach without the consent of the Session.
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The Worship of God through Offerings

- 40.23 The Holy Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things; that God's ownership and our stewardship should be acknowledged; that this acknowledgement should take the form, in part, of giving at least a tithe of our income and other offerings to the work of the Lord through the Church of Jesus Christ, thus worshipping the Lord with our possessions.
- 40.24 It is both a privilege and a duty, plainly enjoined in the Bible, to make regular, weekly, systematic, and proportionate offerings for the support of religion and for the propagation of the Gospel in our own and foreign lands, and for the relief of the poor. This should be done as an exercise of grace and an act of worship.
- 40.25 It is appropriate that the offerings be dedicated by prayer.
- "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come (1 Corinthians 16:2)."
- "But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also" (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Confessing the Faith

- 40.26 It is proper for the congregation of God's people publicly to confess their faith, using creeds or confessions that are true to the Word, such as, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, or the Westminster Standards.
- "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).
- "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God" (1 John 4:15).
- "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession" (Hebrews 4:14).
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The Administration of Baptism

40.27 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

40.28 The Meaning of Baptism

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted baptism as a covenant sign and seal for His church. He uses it not only for the solemn admission of the person who is baptized into the visible church, but also to depict and to confirm His ingrafting of that person into Himself and His including that person in the covenant of grace.

The Lord uses baptism to portray to us that we and our children are conceived and born in sin and need to be cleansed.

He uses it to witness and seal to us the remission of sins and the bestowal of all the gifts of salvation through union with Christ. Baptism with water signifies and seals cleansing from sin by the blood and the Spirit of Christ, together with our death unto sin and our resurrection unto newness of life by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ. The time of the outward application of the sign does not necessarily coincide with the inward work of the Holy Spirit, which the sign represents and seals to us. Because these gifts of salvation are the gracious provision of the triune God, Who is pleased to claim us as His very own, we are baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In our baptism, the Lord puts His name on us, claims us as His own, and summons us to assume the obligations of the covenant. He calls us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to walk humbly with our God in devotion to His commandments.

40.29 Baptism is not to be unnecessarily delayed; and may only be administered by a minister.

40.30 Baptism should be administered publicly, in the presence of the congregation, under the supervision of an elder.

40.31 In the case of infant baptism, after previous notice is given to the minister, the child to be baptized is to be presented, by one or both parents, or some other responsible person.

40.32 Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction to explain this sacrament, showing:

- a. That it is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ;
- b. That it is a seal of the Covenant of Grace, of remission of sins, regeneration, adopted, and life eternal;
- c. That the water represents and signifies both the blood of Christ, which taketh away all guilt of sin, original and actual; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin, and the corruption of our sinful nature;
- d. That baptizing signifies a rising from sin to newness of life, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ.

In the case of infant baptism, the minister is to show:

- a. That the promise is made to believers and their children; and that the children of believers have an interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, no less than the children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the Covenant of Grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God more plentiful than before;
- b. That children are solemnly received into the bosom of the Visible Church, distinguished from the world and united with believers; and are bound to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh;
- e. That inward grace and virtue of Baptism is not tied to that very moment of time when it is administered; and that an outward baptism is not so necessary that, if lacking, the infant is in danger of damnation;
- f. That by virtue of being children of believing parents, they are, because of God's covenant, made members of the Church, but this is not sufficient to make them continue as members of the Church. When they have reached the age of discretion, they become subject to obligations of the covenant: faith, repentance, and obedience. They then make public confession of their faith in Christ, or become covenant breakers, and subject to the discipline of the Church.

The minister is to use his own godly wisdom to address the ignorance or errors in the doctrine of Baptism. He is also to admonish all that are present to look back to their Baptism, to repent of their sins against their covenant with God; to stir up their faith; and make right use of their covenant sealed between God and their soul.

In the case of infant baptism, he is to exhort the parent to consider the great mercy of God to him and his child; to bring up the child in the knowledge of the Christian faith, and in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and to let him know of God's wrath to himself and child, if he be negligent. Further, the minister is also to exhort the parents to the careful performance of their duty requiring:

- a. That they teach the child to read the Word of God;
- b. Instruct the child in the principles of our holy religion;
- c. Pray with and for him;
- d. Set an example of godliness and endeavor to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

40.33 Then the minister is to pray for a blessing to attend this ordinance, after which calling the Candidate by name, he shall say:

“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the Candidate with water, by pouring it on the head of the Candidate; and the whole shall be concluded with prayer.

40.34 For the complete liturgy for the baptism of adults and of covenant children, refer to Annex B. Liturgy for Baptism.

The Administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Table¹⁵

40.35 The Sacrament of the Lord's Table is to be observed regularly (e.g., monthly or weekly) as determined by the Session; the stated times to be determined as it may judge most for edification.

40.36 The scandalous are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Scandalous here refers to the unrepentant and profane individuals, involved in active adultery, fraud, or divisive public behavior.

40.37 In cases other than the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, public notice should be given to the congregation, at least the Sabbath before the

¹⁵ The following terms shall be used interchangeably herein: Sacrament of the Lord's Table, Lord's Supper, Supper of the Lord, and Holy Communion.

administration, and that the people be instructed in its nature, and a due preparation for it, that all may come in a suitable manner to this holy feast.

- 40.38 On the day of the observance of the Lord's Supper, when the sermon is ended, the minister shall show:
- a. That this is an ordinance of Christ; by reading the words of institution, either from one of the Evangelists, or from 1 Corinthians 11, which he may explain and apply;
 - b. That it is to be observed in remembrance of Christ, to show forth His death till He come; to strengthen His people against sin; to support them under troubles; to encourage them in duty; to inspire them with love and zeal; to increase their faith; and to beget peace of conscience, and comfortable hopes of eternal life.

Since by the Lord's appointment, this Sacrament sets forth the Communion of Saints, the minister, before the observance begins, should invite all those who profess the true religion, and members in good standing in any evangelical church, to participate in the ordinance.

It is proper also to give a special invitation to non-communicant members to remain during the service.

- 40.39 Since believers are to act personally in all their covenanting with the Lord, it is proper that a part of the time in the distribution of the elements is spent by all in silent communion, thanksgiving, intercession, and prayer.

- 40.40 The minister may, in a few words, put the communicants in mind of the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and of their obligation to be the Lord's; and may exhort them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; and, as they have professedly received Christ Jesus the Lord, that they be careful so to walk in him, and to maintain good works.

The minister may also give a word of exhortation to those who have been only spectators, reminding them of their duty, stating their sin and danger, by living in disobedience to Christ, in neglecting this holy ordinance; and calling upon them to be earnest in making preparation for attending upon it at the next time of its celebration.

Then the minister is to pray and give thanks to God,

For His rich mercy, and invaluable goodness, vouchsafed to them in that Sacred communion; to implore pardon for the defects of the whole service; and to pray for the acceptance of their persons and

performances; for the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable them, as they have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so to walk in Him; that they may hold fast that which they have received, that no man take their crown; that their conversation may be as becomes the Gospel; that they may bear about with them, continually, the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in their mortal body; that their light may so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven.

Now let a psalm or hymn be sung, and the congregation dismissed, with the following or some other Gospel benediction:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

- 40.41 For the Lord's Table liturgy, refer to Annex C: Liturgy for the Sacrament of the Lord's Table.
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Chapter 41: The Admission of Persons to Sealing Ordinances

- 41.1 Children, especially those dedicated to God in Baptism, are non-communing members under the care of the Church. They are to be taught to love God, and to obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. When they are able to understand the Gospel, they should be earnestly reminded that they are members of the Church, and that it is their duty to personally accept Christ, confess Him before me, and to seek admission to the Lord's Supper/Table.
- 41.2 The time when young persons come to understand the Gospel cannot be precisely fixed. This must be left to the discretion of the Elders, whose office is to judge the qualifications of those who apply for admission to sealing ordinances.
- 41.3 When unbaptized persons apply for admission into the Church, they shall, after giving satisfaction with respect to their knowledge and piety, make a public confession of their faith, and thereupon be baptized.
- 41.4 It is proper that baptized persons from another congregation, when admitted to the Lord's Supper, make a public confession of their faith in the presence of the congregation. But in all cases, there should be a clear recognition of their previous relation to the church as baptized members.
- 41.5 The time having come for the making of a public profession, and in the presence of the congregation, the minister may state that, of the number of those who were baptized in infancy as members of the Church of God by birthright, and as heirs of the covenant promises, the Elders have examined and approved (call them by name), who come now to assume for themselves the full privilege and responsibilities of their inheritance in the household of faith.

If there be present any candidates for Baptism, the minister may state that, as applicants for admission into the Church of God by Baptism, which is a sign and seal of our engrafting unto Christ, and of our engagement to be the Lord's, the Elders have examined and approved (call them by name), who are cordially welcomed into the fellowship of the household of faith.

The minister may then address those making a profession in the following terms:

(All of you) being here present to make a public profession of faith, are to assent to the following declaration and promises, by which you enter into a solemn covenant with God and His Church.

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath, without hope except in His mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as a follower of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church?

The minister may briefly admonish those making a profession of faith as to the importance of the solemn obligations they have assumed; then baptism may be administered, if there be present any candidates for the ordinance, and the whole concluded with prayer.

Chapter 42: The Solemnization of Marriage

- 42.1 Marriage is a sacred undertaking, though not a sacrament.
 - 42.2 Christians should marry in the Lord; and it is fitting that their marriage be solemnized by a lawful minister, that special instruction be given them, and suitable prayers offered, when they enter into this commitment.
 - 42.3 Marriage is to be between one man and one woman, in accordance with the Word of God.
 - 42.4 The parties should be of legal age and discretion as to be capable of making their own choice.
 - 42.5 Parents should neither compel their children to marry contrary to their inclinations, nor deny their consent without just and important reasons.
 - 42.6 Marriage is of a public nature. The welfare of civil society, the happiness of families, and the credit of Christianity, are deeply interested in it. Therefore, the purpose of marriage should be sufficiently announced previous to the solemnization. Ministers must be careful to obey the laws of the community to the extent that those laws do not run counter to the laws of God; and that no just objections lie against their marriage.
 - 42.7 The minister should keep a proper register of the names of all persons whom he marries, and of the time of their marriage, for the perusal of all whom it may concern.
 - 42.8 For the liturgy for the solemnization of marriage, refer to Annex E: Liturgy for Marriage.
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Chapter 43: Sundry Ministries

House and/or Office Blessing

- 43.1 It is a good reminder that all good things come from our Lord God, and on happy occasions such as the acquisition of a new home or the establishment of a business, a member may choose to give thanks to the Almighty Provider or dedicate such business endeavor to Him, in recognition of God's love and providence.
- 43.2 On such an occasion, a minister, if asked to render a dedication/blessing service, should first determine the propriety of the business or purpose; or that the house or premises does not display or depict anything that would be against any commandment of God or Scripture. The minister should also advise the member, host, or owner to observe restraint or moderation in serving alcoholic beverages, playing of excessively loud music, or other activities that would not be glorifying to the Christian faith and proper decorum (e.g., gambling, showing of inappropriate movies, or engaging in other reckless, dangerous, or unlawful activities).
- 43.3 Once the above is determined, and the Minister is convinced that the occasion would be glorifying to God, the sample program __ may serve as a simple guide.
- 43.4 Food and beverage may be served or provided after the Blessing Service.

Visitation of the Sick

- 43.5 The power of the prayer of faith is great, and Christians should pray for the sick and should also seek God's blessing upon all proper means which are being employed for their recovery. Moreover, when persons are sick, their minister, or some officer of the church, should be notified, that the minister, officers and members may unite their prayers in behalf of the sick. It is the privilege and duty of the pastor to visit the sick and to minister to their physical, mental, and spiritual warfare. In view of the varying circumstances of the sick, the minister should use discretion in the performance of this duty.

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:13-16).

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17-18).

Burial of the Dead

43.6 The services proper for such an occasion are:

1. The singing of appropriate psalms or hymns;
 2. The reading of some suitable portion of Scripture, with such remarks or message the minister deems proper to make;
 3. Prayer, in which the bereaved shall be especially remembered, and God's grace sought on their behalf, that they may be sustained and comforted in their sorrow, and that their affliction may be blessed to their spiritual good. The minister should always remember that the proper object of the service is the worship of God and the consolation of the living.
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Appendices

Appendix A: The General Assembly

AA.1. The General Assembly is the highest court of the Presbyteries and represents in one body all the churches thereof. It bears the title of The General Assembly [of the Presbyterian Church], and constitutes the bond of union, peace and correspondence among all its congregations and courts.

Principles for the Organization of the Assembly:

1. The Church is responsible for carrying out the Great Commission.
 2. The initiative for carrying out the Great Commission belongs to the Church at every court level, and the Assembly is responsible to encourage and promote the fulfillment of this ministry by the various courts.
 3. The work of the Church as set forth in the Great Commission is one work, being implemented at the General Assembly level through equally essential committees.
 4. It is the responsibility of every member and every member congregation to support the whole work of the denomination as they be led in their conscience held captive to the Word of God.
 5. It is the responsibility of the General Assembly to evaluate needs and resources, and to act on priorities for the most effective fulfillment of the Great Commission.
 6. The Church recognizes the right of individuals and congregations to labor through other agencies in fulfilling the Great Commission.
 7. The Assembly's committees are to serve and not to direct any Church judicatories. They are not to establish policy, but rather execute policy established by the General Assembly.
 8. The committees serve the Church through the duties assigned by the General Assembly.
 9. The Assembly's committees are to include proportionate representation of all presbyteries, wherever possible.
 10. The committees are to be established on the basis of an equal number between teaching and ruling elders.
 11. A Nominating Committee shall be comprised of one representative elected by each Presbytery in the following manner. Each Presbytery shall be assigned to a class by the stated clerk based on its date of formation. The members shall serve in classes of three-year terms, alternating between ruling and teaching elders. When necessary, unexpired terms shall be filled by an elder of the same class, teaching or ruling.
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This committee is to present all nominations for which it is responsible to the next meeting of the Assembly from a slate of men nominated by the Presbyteries. Presbyteries shall utilize the nominating forms provided by the stated clerk for their nominations. Each presbytery may present one teaching elder and one ruling elder for each committee or agency.

In addition to nominees for expired terms, the Committee shall nominate for each permanent committee one ruling and one teaching elder as alternates to fill any vacancies that may occur during the year. Each alternate should attend each meeting and fill any vacancy necessary to meet a quorum. In addition to the new nominees from the Presbyteries, alternates not assuming any vacancies during a year will be automatically considered by the Nominating Committee as candidates for nomination to that same committee.

12. The Assembly's permanent committees are the Administrative Committee of the General Assembly (AC), Committee on Discipleship Ministries, Committee on Missions, Committee on Mission to the World, and Committee on Reformed University Fellowship.

The AC shall consist of twenty (20) members:

- a. Eleven members in classes elected through the standard nomination and election procedure,
- b. One member each from the following program committees or agencies:
 - i. Committee/Agency 1
 - ii. Committee/Agency 2
 - iii. Committee/Agency 3

The eleven members at large shall serve a term of four years. The chairman of the Administrative Committee shall be one of its members at large.

Each program committee and agency shall designate its member each year at the last meeting of the committee or board before the meeting of General Assembly. The chief administrative officers of the program committees and agencies may attend any meeting of the Administrative Committee. They shall be entitled to the privilege of the floor but shall not have a vote and must be excluded when an executive session is called.

The committees on Discipleship Ministries and on Missions shall consist of fifteen (15) men divided into five classes of three men each, with two men being TEs and one RE or two men being REs and one TE on alternate years, elected to serve five-year terms. These committees shall have one ruling and one teaching elder as alternates to fill any vacancy that may occur during the year.

Persons who have served for a full term, or for at least two years of a partial term, on one of the Assembly's permanent committees or agencies shall not be eligible for re-election to an Assembly committee until one year has elapsed. (Exceptions may be permitted in agency bylaws approved by the Assembly.)

13. The General Assembly establishes personnel salaries after hearing recommendations from the appropriate committee.
14. The Assembly shall elect a six-man Theological Examining Committee (three teaching elders and three ruling elders of three classes of two men each). Nominations for this Committee will be presented by the Assembly's Nominating Committee.

This committee shall examine all first and second level administrative officers of committees, boards and agencies, and those acting temporarily in these positions who are being recommended for first time employment. They are to be examined in the areas of:

- a. Christian experience
- b. Theology
- c. The Sacraments
- d. Church government
- e. Bible content
- f. Church history, and the
- g. History of the Presbyterian Church.

No person will begin work or move on the field without prior examination and approval by the General Assembly's Theological Examining Committee. No first level administrative officer will be presented to the Assembly for election who has not met the approval of this committee.

15. All business shall ordinarily come to the floor of the Assembly for final action through committees of commissioners, except reports of the Standing Judicial Commission, the Committee on Constitutional Business, the Committee on Review of Presbytery Records, the Nominating Committee and Ad Interim committees, which shall come directly to the Assembly.

AA.2. The General Assembly, which is a permanent court, shall meet at least annually upon its own adjournment. It shall consist of all teaching elders in good standing with their Presbyteries, and ruling elders as elected by their Session. Each congregation is entitled to two ruling elder representatives for the first 350 communing members or fraction thereof, and one additional ruling elder for each additional 500 communing members or fraction thereof.

AA.3. When an emergency shall require a meeting of the General Assembly earlier than the time to which it stands adjourned, the moderator shall issue a call for a special meeting at the request or with the concurrence of ten percent (10%) of the commissioners who had seats in the Assembly at its preceding meeting, of whom at least ten shall be teaching elders and at least ten ruling elders, representing at least one-third (1/3) of the Presbyteries. Should the moderator be for any reason unable to act, the stated clerk shall under the same requirements issue the call.

The members of the special meeting shall be the commissioners elected to the preceding meeting of the Assembly or their alternates. A Session, however, shall have the right to elect a commissioner or alternate in the stead of one who had died since the last meeting of the Assembly, or of one who has notified the moderator of the Session of his inability to serve. Notice of the special meeting shall be sent not less than twenty (20) days in advance to each commissioner and to the moderator of each Presbytery. In the notice the purpose of the meeting is to be stated and no other business is to be transacted.

AA.4. Each commissioner, before his name shall be enrolled as a member of the Assembly, shall produce appropriate credentials.

AA.5. Any one hundred (100) of these commissioners, of whom half shall be teaching elders and half ruling elders, representing at least one-third (1/3) of the Presbyteries, being met on the day and at the place appointed, shall be a quorum for the transaction of business.

AA.6. The General Assembly shall have power:

- a. To receive and issue¹⁶ all appeals, references, and complaints regularly brought before it from the lower courts; to bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, injuriously affecting the Church; to decide in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline;
- b. To give its advice and instruction, in conformity with the Constitution, in all cases submitted to it;
- c. To review the records of the Presbyteries, to take care that the lower courts observe the Constitution; to redress whatever they may have done contrary to order;
- d. To devise measures for promoting the prosperity and enlargement of the Church;
- e. To erect new Presbyteries, and unite and divide those which were erected with their consent;

¹⁶ Editor's note: "Issue" means "settling the issue of the case".

- f. To institute and superintend the agencies necessary in the general work of evangelization; to appoint ministers of such labors as fall under its jurisdiction;
- g. To suppress contentions and disputations which may lead to schisms, according to the rules provided therefor;
- h. To receive under its jurisdiction, with the consent of three-fourths (3/4) of the Presbyteries, other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrine and order of this Church; to authorize Presbyteries to exercise similar power in receiving bodies suited to become constituents of those courts, and lying within their geographical bounds respectively;
- i. To superintend the affairs of the whole Church;
- j. To correspond with other churches; to unite with other ecclesiastical bodies whose organization is conformed to the doctrines and order of this Church, such union to be effected by a mode of procedure defined in *BCO* 25; and
- k. In general to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care.

AA.7. Actions of the General Assembly, such as deliverances, resolutions, overtures, and judicial decisions are to be given due and serious consideration by the Church and its lower courts when deliberating matters related to such action. Judicial decisions shall be binding and conclusive on the parties who are directly involved in the matter being adjudicated, and may be appealed to in subsequent similar cases as to any principle which may have been decided. (See *BCO* 3.5 and 6, and *WCF* 31:3.)

AA.8. The whole business of the Assembly being finished, and the vote taken for final adjournment, the moderator shall say from the chair:

By virtue of the authority delegated to me by the Church, I do now declare that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America is adjourned, to convene at < Venue and Address > on the < Date > day of < Year > AD.

After which he shall pray and return thanks, and pronounce or cause to be pronounced on those present the apostolic benediction.

Annexes

Annex A: Liturgy for the Lord's Day

Grace Covenant Evangelical Church holds two worship services every Lord's Day: The Morning Worship, from 9:30 to 11:15 PM, and the Afternoon Worship, from 4:00 to 5:00 PM.

Morning Worship Service

Prelude

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord's Greeting and Invocation

Psalms

Opening Hymn

from the *Trinity Hymnal* or *Psalter*

CONFESSION AND CLEANSING

Call to Confession

The Decalogue

Corporate Prayer of Confession

Assurance of Pardon and Absolution

Confessing the Faith

The Apostles Creed

CELEBRATING THE WORD

Old Testament Reading, New Testament

Reading, Sermon Passage Reading

Sermon

Sacrament of the Lord's Table

Offerings

Pastoral Prayer, the Pater Noster

& the Doxology

COMMISSIONING

Closing Hymn

from the *Trinity Hymnal* or *Psalter*

Benediction

Afternoon Service

Prelude

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord's Greeting and Invocation

Psalms

Opening Hymn

from the *Trinity Hymnal* or *Psalter*

CONFESSION AND CLEANSING

Prayer of Confession &

Assurance of Pardon and Absolution

CELEBRATING THE WORD

Scripture (Sermon Passage) Reading

Sermon

Offerings & Doxology

COMMISSIONING

Closing Hymn

from the *Trinity Hymnal* or *Psalter*

Benediction

The liturgist may remind the congregation to prepare themselves prior to the prelude. Announcements are made at the end of the worship service, following a brief moment of reflection.

Annex B: Liturgy for the Administration of Baptism

Liturgy for the Baptism of Infants (Covenant Children)

The Institution of the Sacrament

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Exhortation to the Members of the Congregation to Improve Their Baptism

MINISTER (to the congregation)

As solemn vows are about to be made before you, and baptism is now to be administered, you who are baptized will do well to take this occasion to reflect on our own baptism. Christ put his name and claim on you. He calls you to be repentant for your sins against your covenant God, to confess your faith before me, and to live in newness of life to God, who sealed his covenant with you by the blood of his own Son.

For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household (Acts 2:39; Gen. 17:7; Acts 16:31).

Exhortation to the Parents

The minister shall then propose the following questions:

MINISTER (to the Parents)

Do you acknowledge your child’s need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER

Do you claim God’s covenant promises in his/her behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for his/her salvation, as you do for your own?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER

Do you now dedicate your child to God, unconditionally, and promise that you will endeavor to set before him/her a godly example, that you will pray with and for him/her, that you will teach him/her the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive in earnest to bring him/her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER (to the Congregation)

Do you as congregation/godparents undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?

CONGREGATION

We do.

The Covenant Commitment of the Parents

MINISTER (to the Parents)

Do you acknowledge that although our children are conceived and born in sin and therefore are subject to condemnation, they are holy in Christ by virtue of the covenant of grace, and as children of the covenant are to be baptized?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER

Do you promise to teach diligently to [Child] the principles of our holy Christian faith, revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER

Do you promise to pray regularly with and for < Name of Child > , and to set an example of piety and godliness before him/her?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER

Do you promise to endeavor, by all the means that God has appointed, to bring [Child] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, encouraging him/her to appropriate for himself/herself the blessings and fulfill the obligations of the covenant?

PARENT/S

I/We do.

MINISTER (to the Child)

[Child] I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Covenant Commitment of the Congregation

MINISTER

As [Name of Child] is baptized into Christ and becomes a member of His visible church, the whole congregation is obligated to love him/her and receive him/her as a member of the body of Christ. For “we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body,” and therefore are members of one another. Christ claims this little child as his own and calls you to receive him/her in love and commitment. Therefore you ought to commit yourself before God to assist [Child] and his/her parents in his/her Christian nurture by godly example, prayer, and encouragement in our most precious faith.

Charge to Parents

MINISTER

Beloved in Christ Jesus, we Give thanks to God for this child that he has given you, and for your expressed desire for him/her to know the Lord and to follow him all his/her days. Along with the great blessing to the gift of this child have come responsibilities which you have just acknowledge and to which you have solemnly committed yourselves, and I charge you to continue steadfastly in the commitments that you made today before God and these witnesses, humbly relying upon the grace of God in the diligent use of the means of grace—especially the Word of God, the sacraments, and prayer.

Liturgy for the Baptism of Adults

The Institution of the Sacrament

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Exhortation to the Members of the Congregation to Improve Their Baptism

MINISTER (to the congregation)

As solemn vows are about to be made before you, and baptism is now to be administered, you who are baptized will do well to take this occasion to reflect on our own baptism. Christ put his name and claim on you. He calls you to be repentant for your sins against your covenant God, to confess your faith before me, and to live in newness of life to God, who sealed his covenant with you by the blood of his own Son.

MINISTER (to the Candidate)

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, we thank our God for the grace that was given you, in that our Savior has sought and found you and through faith you have become a partaker of the covenant of grace. We rejoice that in his grace he has brought you to this congregation and given you the desire to profess your faith before us and to unite with us. We ask that you testify before us to the faith that you profess by giving assent to the following questions.

The Covenant Commitment of the One Receiving Baptism

MINISTER (to the CANDIDATE)

Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?

CANDIDATE FOR BAPTISM

I do.

MINISTER

Do you believe in one live and true God, in whom eternally there are three distinct persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—who are the same in being and equal in power and glory, and that Jesus Christ is God the Son, come in the flesh?

CANDIDATE

I do.

MINISTER

Do you confess that because of your sinfulness you abhor and humble yourself before God, that you repent of your sin, and that you trust for salvation not in yourself but in Jesus Christ alone?

CANDIDATE

I do.

MINISTER

Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your sovereign Lord, and do you promise that, in reliance on the grace of God, you will serve him with all that is in you, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and lead a godly life?

CANDIDATE

I do.

MINISTER

Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship and service, to submit in the Lord to its government, and to heed its discipline, even in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life?

CANDIDATE

I do.

MINISTER (To the Candidate)

[Name of Candidate] I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Covenant Commitment of the Congregation

MINISTER

As [Name of Candidate] is baptized into Christ and becomes a member of his visible church, the whole congregation is obligated to receive him/her. For "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body," and therefore are members of one another. Christ claims this brother/sister as his own and calls you to serve him/her in love. Therefore, you ought to commit yourself before God to assist [Candidate] in his/her Christian nurture by godly example, prayer, and encouragement in our most precious faith and in the fellowship of believers.

Annex C: Liturgy for the Sacrament of the Lord's Table

The Institution of the Sacrament

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for[b] you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:13-26).

Charge to the Congregation

MINISTER (to the Congregation)

In order to maintain the holiness of Communion, which we celebrate the first Sunday of each month, we invite visitors to partake with us only if they are baptized and professing members of a true Christian Church where they are not under church discipline. It follows from the Apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 5:6-13, 10:17, and 11:27-29 that this is a meal for penitent believers who are under the spiritual care of church leaders.

As part of our preparation, let us have a responsive reading of the Decalogue. I shall read the commandments, please respond with the italicized words.

(Minister) And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

(Congregation) *Lord, have mercy on us and keep us from the sin of idolatry.*

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Lord, enable us to worship you aright according to your Word. Reveal to us where we err and bring reformation to your Church.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Father, sanctify our tongues so that we would hallow rather than abuse your name.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your day of rest and worship. Cause us to honor and rejoice in it. Restore its observance to a restless and weary people.

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Thank you, heavenly Father, for our parents and for other authorities which you have established over us. Restore fathers to their rightful roles, honor to motherhood, and respect for lawful authority. Defend the family against the assaults of unbelief and give to your people godly magistrates.

You shall not murder.

Almighty God, author and finisher of life, have mercy upon the unborn and the aged, convict the callous among us, restrain your people from lawless rage, and restore the voice of your Church and her witness.

You shall not commit adultery.

Father, we beseech you to make divorce unthinkable among us; to guard the eyes of your ministers, missionaries, and men; and to protect our wives and children from a lewd and degenerate culture.

You shall not steal.

Lord, free your church from the shame of embezzlement and greed, our hearts from the covetousness that leads to theft, and our lips from words that rob others of their good name.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Heavenly Father, make the word of your people their bond.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Lord, have mercy on us and make us content with what we have; for you are our security and our sustenance.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, mind and strength.

Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, in your grace you have promised to write your laws upon our hearts and upon our minds by your Spirit. Enable us to obey these your commandments with a glad and cheerful heart. Amen!

Annex D: Sample Liturgy for House or Office Blessing

Scripture Reading

Psalm 24

The earth is the Lord's
and the fullness thereof,
the world and those
who dwell therein,

⁶Such is the generation
of those who seek him,
who seek the face
of the God of Jacob. Selah

²for he has founded it
upon the seas
and established it
upon the rivers.

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory
may come in.

³Who shall ascend
the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand
in his holy place?

⁸Who is this King of glory?
The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle!

⁴He who has clean hands
and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul
to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up,
O ancient doors,
that the King of glory
may come in.

⁵He will receive blessing
from the Lord
and righteousness from
the God of his salvation.

¹⁰Who is this King of glory?
The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory!
Selah

Hymn Singing

Great is Thy Faithfulness

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Meditation

The Litany

(e.g., Blessing of a Law Office)

MINISTER

Dearly beloved and friends, for as much as it has pleased God to put
into the heart of his servants to establish a law office, let us now fulfill

the Godly purpose for which we are here assembled, the dedication of this place to the honor of God's most holy name.

LAWYERS

We humble ourselves in His presence for this act of dedication. To the glory of God our Father, whose we are and whom we serve; to the advancement of the knowledge of Christ our Lord, who loved the church and gave himself for her; to the Holy Spirit that He may come into our lives, to empower us and to guide us; and to the good of our neighbors, whom we seek to love as we love ourselves, we come now to dedicate.

MINISTER

We thank the Lord for faithful servants who possess a hunger for the nourishment of the Word: for the blessing of inheriting a living faith which feeds and grows on the Living Word.

LAWYERS

We thank the Lord for the faithful labors of all who have planned and worked so that this law office can be useful for the faithful stewardship of talents and possessions from which so much has been given.

MINISTER

We dedicate this law office.

LAWYERS

We now commit ourselves to the unfinished task of ministering God's truth and the gospel for the salvation of the lost and for the increasing of faith in the lives of his people.

ALL

May our work be seen by your servants, and your splendor by their children. May the favor of the Lord our God be on us; establish for us the work of our hands—establish the work of our hands (Ps. 90:17).

Prayer of Dedication and Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you
and give you peace (Num. 6:24-26).

Annex E: Sample Liturgy for the Solemnizing of Marriage

The following is a sample liturgy for marriage.

Procession

OFFICIANT
 BEST MAN
 PARENTS OF GROOM
 GROOM
 VEIL SPONSORS
 CORD SPONSORS
 RING BEARER
 BIBLE BEARER
 COIN BEARER
 FLOWER GIRL
 PARENTS OF THE BRIDE
 BRIDE

God gave us marriage for the well-being of human society, for the ordering of family life, and for the birth and nurture of children. God gave us marriage as a holy mystery in which a man and a woman are joined together, and become one, just as Christ is one with the church.

In marriage, husband and wife are called to a new way of life, created, ordered, and blessed by God. *This way of life must not be entered into carelessly, or from selfish motives, but responsibly, and prayerfully.*

We rejoice that marriage is given by God, blessed by our Lord Jesus Christ, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let marriage be held in honor by all.”

Opening Remarks

OFFICIANT
 Brothers and sisters, guests, and friends, we gather in the presence of God to give thanks for the gift of marriage, to witness the joining together of GROOM and BRIDE, to surround them with our prayers, and to ask God's blessing upon them, so that they may be strengthened for their life together and nurtured in their love for God.

God created us male and female, and gave us marriage so that husband and wife may help and comfort each other, living faithfully together in plenty and in want in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, throughout all their days. Marriage is for the full expression of the love between a man and a woman. In marriage a woman and a man belong to each other, and with affection and tenderness freely give themselves to each other.

Invocation/Prayer

OFFICIANT (Cont'd.)
 Let us all stand for our prayer.

Almighty and everlasting God, the source of life and love, whose mercy and steadfast love toward His children is without end, we offer you this wedding ceremony, for we acknowledge that you instituted this honorable estate.

Heavenly Father and God of love, you have established marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. In your holy word you have said, “it is not good for a man to live alone...I will make a helper suitable for him.” Our joys increase, for today we bear witness to this comforting revelation.

Bless GROOM. Make him provider for the needs of those he loves and sustain him in all the struggles of life. Grant that his strength be BRIDE'S protection, that his character be her joy and assurance.

Bless BRIDE with tenderness and great faith in You. Give her that inner beauty of soul that never fades, eternal youth that is found in holding fast to the things that never age. May she so live that GROOM may be pleased always to reverence and adore her.

Bless us as we witness two lives coming together in marital union, representing the mystery of our Savior and his church. As we participate and witness in this celebration, guide and inspire us to make this service meaningful in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Intent

OFFICIANT (To Groom)

GROOM, understanding that God has created, ordered, and blessed the covenant of marriage, do you affirm your desire and intention to enter this covenant?

GROOM

I do.

OFFICIANT (To Bride)

BRIDE, understanding that God has created, ordered, and blessed the covenant of marriage, do you affirm your desire and intention to enter this covenant?

BRIDE

I do.

OFFICIANT (To the Families)

To the respective families of the bride and groom, do you give your blessing to BRIDE and GROOM, and promise to do everything in your power to uphold them in their marriage?

FAMILIES

We do.

OFFICIANT (To the Sponsors)

Sponsors, will you take the blessed responsibility for BRIDE and GROOM, to encourage and to counsel them, to take personal interest in their needs, to give them guidance and words of wisdom?

SPONSORS

We will.

OFFICIANT (To the Congregation)

Will all of you witnessing these vows do everything in your power to uphold BRIDE and GROOM in their marriage?

CONGREGATION

We will.

Scripture Reading

Exhortation

Exchange of Vows

GROOM

"I, GROOM, take you, BRIDE, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge my faith to you."

BRIDE

"I, BRIDE, take you, GROOM, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge my faith to you."

Symbols of Marriage

Rings

OFFICIANT

[May we ask the RING BEARER to come forward with the rings, please.]

These rings, by their make and shape, represent the purity and the everlasting nature of marital commitment. They are the outward signs of the grace signifying the uniting of BRIDE and GROOM through Christ our Lord.

[Prayer: By your blessing, O God, may these rings be to BRIDE and GROOM symbols of unending love and faithfulness, reminding them of the covenant they have made this day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.]

GROOM

I, GROOM give you, BRIDE, this ring as a sign of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

BRIDE

I, BRIDE, give you, GROOM, this ring as a sign of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you; in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Bible

OFFICIANT

[BIBLE BEARER, please bring the Bible forward.]

The Bible will show you the will of God and will guide you in your life together. Constantly read and meditate on this book, asking God to show you anew His ways so you may establish your home and family deeply rooted in His Word. And may God's Word always be "a lamp unto your feet and light unto your path" (Psalm 119:105).

Veil

OFFICIANT

[VEIL SPONSORS, please cover the couple with the veil.]

(To BRIDE and GROOM)

The veil will clothe you as one as you enter your new life in Christ, not that the other is superior, but rather the two of you shall become One as you enter your new life together with Christ. Wear it and let the joy of the spirit shine forth through all your children and everyone whom the Lord's loving desire will into your life.

Cord

OFFICIANT

[CORD SPONSORS, please unite the couple with the cord.]

(To BRIDE and GROOM)

The cord is a symbol of unity. It reflects the bond between a man and his wife, a bond that shall never be broken. May your love for each other grow stronger and bind you closer through the years.

Coins

OFFICIANT

[COIN BEARER, please bring the coins forward.]

The coins are not merely tokens of God's blessing but are also symbols of good stewardship—that GROOM and BRIDE would mutually support each other, their children, and the world around them.

Signing of the Contract

Announcement of Marriage & Charge to the Couple

OFFICIANT (To the Couple)

As God's own, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, and patience, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, and crown all these things with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

OFFICIANT (To the Congregation)

Brothers and sisters, before God and in the presence of this congregation, BRIDE and GROOM have made their solemn vows to each other. They have confirmed their promises by the joining of their hands and by the receiving of the rings.

Therefore, as Minister of the Word and Sacrament, and by the authority vested upon me, I now proclaim BRIDE and GROOM husband and wife. Those whom God has put together, let no man separate.

Benediction

OFFICIANT

Let us all rise to receive the good word from the Lord.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

*The Lord make his face to shine upon you
and be gracious to you.*

*The Lord lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.*

*In the name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit.*

Brothers and sisters, friends and family, it is my honor and privilege to present to you Mr. and Mrs. GROOM!

GROOM, you may kiss the BRIDE.

Picture Taking

Recessional

Annex F: A Sample Process for Offenses

1. Whenever there is an offense that falls under the definition of Chapter 29 of the *BCO*, a written complaint shall be submitted to the designated Clerk of the Session or to the Presbytery in cases falling under Chapter 33.
 2. The complaint shall identify the person/s charged with the offense; the specific acts or omissions complained of as constituting the offense; the name/s of the offended party/ies if any; the approximate date of the commission of the offense (and time if known); and the place where the offense was committed.
 3. Once a Session is given copies of the Complaint by the Clerk, a meeting shall be convened within 48 hours by a majority of the members of the Session to promulgate the Rules for this case depending on the gravity of the charges. Less serious offenses may be given a shorter period to deliberate and decide the case; but in no case shall the matter be unresolved/undecided by the Session for more than forty-five (45) days. More grave charges and complex cases shall be given a longer period to dispose the case, but in no case longer than six (6) months from initial submission of complaint; while always bearing in mind that utmost expediency in disposition of cases should be a paramount objective of the Session to avoid prolonged scandal.
 4. The compliant need not be initially under oath; However, if the charges are denied by the accused in writing, the accuser must verify under oath the written complaint, and if called to testify upon the complaint, the accuser and corroborating witnesses must testify under oath before the Session (or Presbytery). Failure or refusal by the accuser to testify under oath on his/her complaint shall cause the immediate dismissal of the complaint as a false accusation, and subject the accuser to appropriate disciplinary action under Chapter 30.
 5. For less serious offenses, both parties shall be given 6 days each to submit their respective written allegations, and additional 3 days to counter or rebut the allegations of the other party and their witnesses, with one party allowed up to two (2) submissions per person/witness, and the accused the same number of submissions for every witness brought forth by the accuser.
 6. For grave charges or complex cases, the period provided above shall be extended as the Session/Presbytery deems appropriate.
 7. The Session/Presbytery shall carefully consider all relevant evidence presented by both sides, acting impartially and without undue influence. The decision of the majority shall prevail if it be in accord with the evidence and with Scripture. Every decision shall be in writing, delegated by the Session/Presbytery to one of its members; and including the grounds mentioned by every member in arriving at the decision. Whether the verdict is innocent or guilty of the offense/s charged, the accused shall be informed with a copy of
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the Decision, and shall be allowed one opportunity to move for a reconsideration or appeal the same, and a succeeding resolution shall be final.

8. The Session/Presbytery shall determine whether the offense or scandal is of such a nature that requires a public announcement of the verdict/decision. If it be for the benefit of the congregation that no scandal or uncertainty hang over the church and her reputation, or to serve as a caution or warning in cases that involve excommunication or other grave censures, the decision in its entirety shall be publicly announced; otherwise, the matter can be treated with discretion so as to avoid further gossip or scandal as contemplated in Chapter 35.3.
 9. Rules promulgated by the Session/Presbytery shall be made known to both accused and accuser in writing. Such rules shall not be subject to amendments or change unless for reasonable grounds agreed upon by 2/3 of the Session/Presbytery.
 10. All elders shall act honestly, without bias, and confidentially during and after the case, without favoring either party and only pursuing the truth of the matter in good and Holy conscience.
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