

PROPOSED DOCKET



27th Stated Meeting of the EPC Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest October 9, 2026

Sierra Presbyterian Church
175 Ridge Road, Nevada City, CA 95959
530-265-3291

Please note: The Presbytery proceedings today are being recorded.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2026

- 8:00 Breakfast
- 9:00 am **Call to Order and Opening Prayer** TE Dave Constance, Moderator
Declaration of Quorum RE Mark Eshoff, Stated Clerk
- 9:10 **Welcome** TE Greg Flagg
Introduction of Guests Moderator Constance
- 9:25 **Presbytery Worship Service**
The POPS Worship Service will be led by TE Greg Flagg and the staff and leaders from Sierra Presbyterian Church. Preaching will be pastor, professor, and author Dr. James Edwards, who was the speaker for the POPS Pastors Retreat. Communion will be served, and an offering will be received for the General Church Planting Fund.
- 10:30 **Moderator's Time of Prayer** Moderator Constance
- 10:45 Break
- 11:05 **Stated Clerk's Report** Stated Clerk Eshoff
Presbytery Voting Guidelines
Absences without Excuse (May 14-15, 2026)
Changes to the Proposed Docket
Approval of the Docket
MOTION: To approve the Meeting Docket as presented
- 11:15 **Ministry Update – Covenant Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA** TE Patrick King
TE Patrick King will share an update on the ministry of Covenant Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA, including joys, challenges, and ways the Presbytery can pray for him and the church.
- 11:30 **Ministerial Committee Report** TE David Abdo, Chair
Examination of TE Douglas Webster
Doug Webster who recently retired from his position at Beeson University has moved to the San Diego area and is seeking to transfer his membership from the EPC Presbytery of the Central South to the Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest. His transfer has been approved by that Presbytery.

He has signed his Ministerial Obligation Form and Ethical Affirmation Form and has been examined by the members of the Ministerial Committee. He is recommended to the Presbytery for approval.

Doug's examination begins with a sermon on Matthew 7:13-14, a passage assigned by the Ministerial Committee. The Presbytery is to examine him on his views of Theology and Sacraments, the English Bible, the Book of Order, the history of the Church and the Reformed tradition, the nature of the office of Teaching Elder, and his experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth. Doug has two exceptions to the Westminster Standards. (*Attachment 1 - pgs. A2 – A20*)

Two to three questions in each category in the following order:

- Views of Theology, Sacraments, English Bible
- Views of the Book of Order, history of the Church and the Reformed tradition
- Christian experience, progress in spiritual growth, and the nature of the office of Teaching Elder
- Exceptions to the Westminster Standards

Representative speaking on behalf of Douglas Webster

TBD

MOTION: To approve the examination of Douglas Webster including his exceptions to the Westminster Standards, and receive him into full membership in the EPC Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest as an Active-Retired member.

12:15	Mission Lunch Invitation	TE Dave Fenska, Mission Chair
12:20	Lunch	
1:15	Appreciation to the Volunteers and Staff of the Host Church	Moderator Constance
1:20	Mission Committee Report	TE Dave Fenska, Chair
	TE Fenska and TE Sam Knottnerus, Engage Home Team Chair, will bring updates about global church planting and share resources to help each church stay engaged with reaching unreached people groups, including the POPS-sponsored Pashtun people group. Andrea Craddock, World Outreach Mobilizer, will introduce World Outreach workers present at the meeting and give an update on those in the pipeline.	
1:40	Church Planting Report	TE Shawn Robinson, POPS Church Planting Coordinator
	TE Robinson will update the Presbytery on the Tejon Ranch church plant and other possible plants on the horizon.	
2:00	Session Minutes Review Committee	RE Janet Goodman, Chair
	RE Goodman will report on the reviews from the May 2026 meeting and update the Presbytery on how to improve the effectiveness of Session Minutes.	
	Churches scheduled for Session Minutes Reviews at the October 2026 meeting:	
	Covenant Presbyterian Church, Orange, CA	Heritage EPC, Santa Maria, CA
	Covenant Presbyterian Church, San Diego	Kingman Presbyterian Church, Kingman, AZ
	Easton Presbyterian Church, Fresno, CA	Valley Community Church, San Jacinto, CA
	First Presbyterian Church, Bakersfield, CA	Cornerstone Woodlake, Woodlake, CA
	First Presbyterian Church, Hanford, CA	Wintersburg Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, CA

2:10 **Ministry Update – POPS Next Gen Ministry** Geraud Brumfield
Geraud will update the Presbytery on efforts to provide connection resourcing and support for Next Gen workers in POPS.

2:20 **Ministerial Committee Report** (continued)

Dissolution of Pastoral Relationships

TE Abdo will bring requested actions to dissolve several pastoral relationships with churches in the Presbytery.

TE Mike Griffin and Sierra Presbyterian Church

TE Mike Griffin and the congregation of Sierra Presbyterian Church, Nevada City, CA have requested that the Presbytery dissolve their relationship.

MOTION: To dissolve the relationship between TE Mike Griffin and Sierra Presbyterian Church, Nevada City, CA effective June 14, 2026 and change his status to Without a Call.

TE Ryan Teramoto and Wintersburg Presbyterian Church

TE Ryan Teramoto and the congregation of Wintersburg Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, CA have requested that the Presbytery dissolve their relationship.

MOTION: To dissolve the relationship between TE Ryan Teramoto and Wintersburg Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, CA effective October 4, 2026 and change his status to Without a Call.

TE Meagan Kroeker and First Presbyterian Church, Fresno, CA

Meagan has been called as Associate Pastor for Student Ministries at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, NC. The Session of First Presbyterian Church, Fresno, CA has requested that the Presbytery dissolve their relationship.

MOTION: To dissolve the relationship between TE Meagan Kroeker and First Presbyterian Church, Fresno, CA effective August 9, 2026 and transfer her to the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) Presbytery of North Carolina upon notification of her approval by that Presbytery.

2:35 **Transfer of TE Joe Tolin**

Joe Tolin has moved to Alabama and is requesting transfer of his ordination to the Presbyterian Church in America Gulf Coast Presbytery.

MOTION: To approve the transfer of TE Joe Tolin to the Gulf Coast Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in America, pending approval of his reception into that presbytery.

2:40 **Introduction of TE George Dakin**

George Dakin has been called by the Session of Sierra Presbyterian Church, Nevada City, CA as Transitional Pastor. George is a member of the EPC Pacific Northwest Presbytery. Transitional Pastors called from another Presbytery will ordinarily maintain membership in

their home presbytery. Upon approval of the Ministerial Committee, Transitional Pastors are enrolled as corresponding members of the Presbytery (voice but not vote).

MOTION: To receive the report of the Ministerial Committee to approve TE George Dakin as Transitional Pastor of Sierra Presbyterian Church, Nevada City, CA effective September 1, 2026 and enroll him in the Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest as a Corresponding Member.

2:55 Break

3:15 **Church Health Report** TE Mike Griffin, POPS Church Health Coordinator
TE Ken Ferguson, Pastor of San Ramon Presbyterian Church, will share with the Presbytery the impact of the recent POPS Church Health Evangelism Seminar at his church.

3:30 **Treasurer's Report** Stated Clerk Eshoff
Stated Clerk Eshoff will brief the Presbytery on the 2026 YTD Financials and Askings Reports. (Attachment 2 - pgs. A21-A23)

3:35 **Nominating Committee Report** RE Chris Rhodes, Chair
RE Rhodes will present candidates for positions on POPS committees.

MOTION: To approve the following nominations for POPS Committees:

RE Diane Billharz from Covenant Presbyterian Church, Reno, NV as a member of the Care of Candidates Committee (Class of 2029);

TE Scott Larson from Covenant Presbyterian Church, Orange, CA as a member of the Ministerial Committee (Class of 2029);

TE Dave Fenska (Active Retired) as a member of the Mission Committee (Class of 2029);

RE Chris Rhodes from Covenant Presbyterian Church, Reno, NV as Chair of the Nominating Committee (Class of 2029) and member of the Presbytery Council.

3:45 **Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly – First Reading** Stated Clerk Eshoff
Stated Clerk Eshoff will present the overtures from the recent 46th General Assembly meeting in June. **These overtures are provided for reading only** in anticipation of a formal vote at the January 2027 POPS Meeting. (Attachment 3 – pgs. A24–A73)

3:55 **Omnibus Motion** Moderator Constance

1. That the Minutes of the Twenty Sixth Stated Meeting of the EPC Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest on May 14-15, 2026 be approved as posted (these minutes are available on the POPS website).
2. That the Minutes of the Called Meeting of the EPC Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest on May 29, 2026 be approved as posted (these minutes are available on the POPS website).
3. That Grace Babayan be removed as Candidates Under Care of the Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest.

4. To approve the extension of the Outside the Bounds calls of TE Ryan Suzuki at 3Crosses Church in Castro Valley, CA, TE Kurt Teng at Bakersfield Reformed Gospel Church, TE Mgrdich Melkonian at the Evangelical Church of Armenia, Fresno, CA, TE Melaku Mekuria at Maranatha Ethiopian Christian Fellowship, San Diego, CA for one year.

MOTION: To approve the Omnibus actions

Important Upcoming Dates

January 22-23, 2027	Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest Meeting (#28) Location: Covenant Presbyterian Church, Orange, CA
March 3-4, 2027	West Coast Church Planters Retreat Location: Oaks Retreat Center, San Diego, CA
May 13-14, 2027	Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest Meeting (#29) Location: TBD
June 22-24, 2027	47 th EPC General Assembly Location: Second Presbyterian Church, Memphis, TN
October 5-7, 2027	POPS Pastors Retreat Del Oro Conference Center, Nevada City, CA
October 8-9, 2027	Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest Meeting (#30) Location: TBD

Hosting Opportunities

Member churches are reminded that opportunities are available to host the Presbytery at its 2027 meetings in May and October. A church in the Sacramento area for the October meeting would be most convenient since the Pastors Retreat will be in Nevada City just prior to the meeting. Contact the Stated Clerk if you are interested in offering an invitation.

We are looking for churches to host **Discovery Workshops** in 2027. Contact the Stated Clerk if you are interested in offering an invitation.

4:05

Adjournment and Closing Prayer



Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest
5770 Carlson Drive
Sacramento, CA 95819
(916) 452-7132

Presbytery Meeting Docket
October 9, 2026

ATTACHMENTS

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1. Douglas Webster Personal Information and Statement of Faith	A2-A20
2. POPS Year-to-Date Financials and Askings Report	A21-A23
3. Descending Overtures from the 46 th General Assembly	A24-A73
46-A To amend the Book of Government 11-2G to change the educational requirements for ordination (A24)	
46-B To amend the Book of Government 11-2H to change the educational requirements for ordination (A26)	
46-C To amend the Book of Government 12-2 to change the examination process for ordination (A28)	
46-D To amend the Book of Government 9-3 to codify biblical and confessional character requirements for ordination of EPC officers (A30)	
46-E To amend Book of Government Chapter 12 to require that candidates be examined to see not only that they are growing spiritually, but are faithful in their conformity to Jesus as Lord (A32)	
46-F To amend the Book of Government 9-5 to clarify the nature of the work of called teaching elder administrators (A33)	
46-G To amend the Book of Government to strengthen and clarify the process for congregations seeking dismissal from the EPC (A34)	
46-H To amend the Book of Government to clarify the language for election of Presbytery Officers (A36)	
46-I To amend the Book of Discipline in total (A37)	

Name:

Part 2: Personal Information

1. Name: Webster Douglas Donald
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Preferred Address: 3367 Granada Ave. San Diego, CA 92104

Preferred Phone: 205-789-5712

☐ Cell ☐ Work ☐ Home

Alternate Phone:

☐ Cell ☐ Work ☒ Home

Email: dwebster@samford.edu

2. Work History:

Current and Previous Positions (ministry or otherwise)	Dates
Prof. of Preaching & Pastoral Theology - Beeson Div. Sch.	2007-2026
Teaching Pastor, Church of the Cross, EPC	2022-2025
Teaching Pastor, Church of the Advent, Birmingham	2016-2021
Pastor, Central Pres. Ch. New York City, EPC	2010-2014
Pastor, First Pres. San Diego PCUSA	1993-2007
Pastor of Adult Ministries, CCPC, Denver, EPC	1991-1993
Pastor, Christ Community Church, Bloomington, IN	1987-1991
Prof. of Theology, Tyndale Sem. Toronto, CA	1981-1987

Name:

Dates

3. Volunteer Experience (applicable to a pastoral role)

4. Ordination Status

Ordained by (church/city/state): Cherry Creek Pres. Church, Denver, CO

Ordination Date: 1991

If not ordained:

Church Membership (church, city, state):

Candidate Under Care of (denomination and presbytery):

since (date):

Name:

5. Educational Background:

a. Name of Institution

University of Toronto, TST

Wheaton Grad. School

Wheaton College

Dates Attended

1976-1981

1974-1975

1969-1973

Degree

Ph.D.

M.A.

b. Continuing Education/Professional Development

Dates

6. Other Experience:

a. Types of professional supervision and personal accountability you have found helpful in your life and ministry:

Name:

b. Community and Civic Activities:

c. Presbytery and General Assembly Activities:

d. Ecumenical Activities:

e. Special Interests, Hobbies:

Running (now walking), reading, writing

f. Languages (other than English) you can speak, and level of proficiency:
English (low proficiency in multiple languages that I have taken Greek, Latin,
Spanish, German)

Name: _____

Part 3: Narrative

- 1. Life Story:** In one page, describe your life's journey. Include key incidents (such as how you came to faith in Christ) that were significant in your formation as a person and your call to ministry.

I came to Christ at the age of five and was discipled beautifully by my parents. As a teenager I loved to read God's word daily and journal my questions and thoughts. I had cancer in 1969, the year I graduated from high school. My faith in Christ was my own before that event, but it strengthened my identity in Christ. Two years later my father died from cancer and that was probably my biggest challenge.

In 1975 I married Virginia Long, an m.k. who grew up in the Congo and Brazil. We met at Wheaton and have enjoyed 51 years of marriage. We have had a team ministry wherever we have gone. We moved my mother to each place we have served until her death in 2006. We have three grown married children and five grandchildren.

I'm thankful to the Lord for a long obedience in the same direction.

Name: _____

2. Self-Appraisal:

a. Briefly describe your leadership style:

I enjoy working with a team and sharing responsibility. I believe in the priesthood of all believers and in every-member ministry.

- How you go about making decisions:

I see it as a prayed through process that involves the wisdom of others.

- Your administrative style:

I am team oriented and trust other people.

b. Talk about how you handled a recent conflict. What did you do well? What areas of conflict resolution do you need to be more effective at?

I am increasingly less confrontive, although I don't feel I was ever very confrontational. I'm not passive aggressive but I often practice willful passivity. I am more willing to pray and see if people come around.

c. What do you enjoy about working as part of a team? What is challenging to you?

I like being with others and experiencing the shared responsibility. I get along best with people who share a strong work ethic.

Name: _____

- d. Briefly describe your worship preferences: (*preaching style, preferred worship style [e.g., liturgical, modern, traditional, blended, etc.]*)

I believe my theology of a household of faith colors my conversational/exegetical preaching style and my desire for liturgical / reverent yet relational / blended worship.

- e. Describe your approach to evangelism, both personally and as a pastor in a local church.

I want to talk freely about what is most important in life. I'm truly interested in other people's stories and I find that those conversations often lead to sharing the gospel.

- f. Share your sense of your call to ministry:

I believe I have a profound sense of being engaged in gospel ministry at all times for as long as I can remember dating back to my teenage years.

- What type of ministry role are you called to? And what would effectiveness look like in that role?

I have been called to pastoral ministry with a discipling / preaching emphasis. I desire to build-up the household of faith by introducing seekers to the gospel, nurturing new Christians, and strengthening all believers.

- What are your personal ideals and long-term goals?

Name: _____

- g. What are the ways you are nurturing your relationship with God in everyday life?

Worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, and writing are all part of the regular rhythms of grace in my life.

- h. What are your character strengths?

I pray that they are love, honesty, truth, and compassion.

- i. What are five key gifts/skills/abilities you would bring to a ministry position?

1. a love for God's word.
2. experience in nurturing and discipling others.
3. faithful proclamation of God's word.
4. a certain degree of diligence and devotion
5. reflection on living for Christ in our culture.

- j. The New Testament teaches us that no one Christian—not even the pastor—possesses every spiritual gift, but we are meant to work together as members of Christ's one body (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12). What are the spiritual gifts you will need other team members to bring in order to complement your leadership and make the church effective in its ministry?

I'm always helped by brothers and sisters in Christ who are gifted in music, administration, and compassion for others.

3. Views:

- a. What opportunities do you see for the church to reflect the reality of Christ's Kingdom in our present context?

We have a great opportunity to be a caring, loving, resilient counter-culture that lives the gospel, loves the ethics of the kingdom, and shows the love of Christ. I believe 1 Peter is a great guide to being resident aliens in our culture today.

- b. What are your views on charismatic expression in worship?

I have not experienced tongues and I believe that if they are present in public worship they need to be interpreted so that everyone understands what is going on.

- c. What are your views on women in ordained office?

I am completely for men and women ministering in all aspects of the church.

- d. What are your views on human sexuality and gender?

Biblical sexuality, that is fidelity in marriage and chastity in singleness, is of the utmost importance in the Christian counter-culture today. Gender is determined at birth and the distinctiveness of male and female is important. With that said, we have to be ready and willing to minister to people in love and truth who do not share a biblical perspective on these issues.

- e. What are your views on eschatology (last things)?

The end times began with Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and ascension. During this church age the Holy Spirit is restraining the power of evil until the end. I believe Christ could come back at any time.

- f. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian form of government?

I believe the checks and balances of the Presbyterian form of government are important and serve to balance and guide pastoral authority. There is always a tension of keeping a clear focus on Christ and his word rather than on an organization and its structure.



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Name:

Part 4: Denominational Alignment

1. Do you affirm the “Essentials of Our Faith” without exception? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If “No” please briefly explain:

2. Do you agree with and can you submit to the system of government of the
Evangelical Presbyterian Church? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If “No” please briefly explain:

3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Westminster Confession of Faith*
and *Catechisms* of this Church as containing the system of doctrine
taught in the Holy Scriptures? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If “No” please briefly explain:

(Complete Westminster Subscription Form)

My only exception is the interpretation of Genesis as 6, 24 hour days and a strict 16th
century Sabbatarian expectation of the Lord's Day.

4. Do you willingly offer the sacrament of infant baptism to Christian parents?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If “No” please briefly explain:

Westminster Subscription

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) is a confessional statement of orthodox Presbyterianism. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church subscribes to the WCF and its associated Larger (WLC) and Shorter (WSC) Catechisms as our sole subordinate standard of doctrine according to Scripture. The WCF constitutes a system of biblical truth that an officer of the EPC is required to subscribe to. By subscription, the Teaching Elder affirms not only general approbation, but also vows to teach in accord with the doctrinal positions of the WCF (G.13-2A.3; 25-2). Individual Courts of the Church have freedom to allow exceptions that do not infringe upon the system of doctrine in the WCF.

The Candidate or transferring Teaching Elder shall provide a written statement of any exceptions to Westminster (G.12-4). The Presbytery shall act to acknowledge subscription, and allow or disallow any exceptions submitted. Following ordination, should the Teaching Elder develop exceptions to Westminster, they shall report those exceptions to the Ministerial Committee, and the Presbytery shall act to allow or disallow these exceptions (G.12-4; 13-2A.4).

If the Candidate or Teaching Elder wishes to take an exception to Westminster, they should first consult with their Ministerial Committee Advisor to determine if the concern is truly an exception or a misunderstanding. Particular concern over something in WCF may be the result of a lack of knowledge, content, context, or usage, and should be pursued to the Teaching Elders satisfaction. If concern remains, they should record an exception. An exception requires both a statement of disagreement and an alternative biblical position. The exception should reference relevant portions of the Confessions and associated Catechism questions.

Name: Douglas D. Webster

Date: 9/21/2026

Please **initial** one of the following statements:

 I subscribe to Westminster without exception.

DW I subscribe to Westminster with the following exception(s).

If you have an exception please attach a written record using the following form for each instance.

WCF, WLC, WSC Citations:

Statement of Disagreement:

Alternative Biblical Position:

Westminster Confession - two small exceptions:

Chapter 4:1, Of Creation – “to create . . . in the space of six days”

The Hebrew term for day (yom) does not necessarily mean six, 24-hour days (John 8:56; Isa. 49:8; Hosea 2:15; Ps. 110:3; Job 15:23).

Chapter 21:7-8, Of Christian Liberty: Sabbath –

I obey the Sabbath principle and I believe it is necessary for the rhythms of grace in the believer’s life – my life. My understanding and teaching of the Sabbath principle would not necessarily fit the *wording* of the WC: “an holy rest all day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.” I prioritize the body life of the household of faith (Acts 2:42), but in the afternoon, a long walk, a good run, an NFL game or 60 minutes fits within my “prayer and play” Sabbath principle.



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Candidates Statement of Faith

Provide a brief statement in your own words for each item. Return to the Chair of the Candidates or Ministerial Committee before you are scheduled for your oral ordination exam.

Candidate's Name **Doug Webster** Date **09/12/2020**

1. The Bible (Bibliology)

I believe that the Bible is God's special revelation to all people and is completely trustworthy and fully authoritative in all matters it addresses. My desire is not only to affirm an Evangelical and Reformed doctrine of Scripture, but to live and minister under the authority of God's revealed word, by the grace of God and to the glory of God. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21).

2. God the Father (Theology proper)

My theology is Trinitarian, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There is one God in three persons, who is almighty, all knowing, and all sufficient; who lives in holy community without want or need. (Hebrews 11:3; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Peter 1:3-4).

3. Jesus Christ (Christology)

I affirm the Nicean and Chalcedonian Creeds which state that Jesus is God's one and only Son, truly God and truly man. And that Jesus's atoning substitutionary sacrifice on the cross is, by God's redemptive provision, essential for the salvation of all people who believe (Acts 4:12). My hope in life and death is in our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



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4. The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

The third member of the Trinity is God's gift through the Father and the Son to the people of God to guide them in all truth. I believe the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit is manifest in the full range of gifts described in the New Testament.

5. Mankind (Anthropology)

Man, male and female, is made in the image of God and is created for fellowship with God. We were given the capacities for worship, love, thought, and relationship that only God could give us. These capacities reflect humankind's Creator. However, we have sinned and like Adam and Eve we have chosen our own will and way. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24).

6. Sin (Hamartiology)

I believe in the total depravity of humankind and the evidence of God's image even in the vilest of sinners. The Law shows us our sin and our need for redemption and sends us to Christ for his forgiveness, and then Christ sends us back to the Law so that by his grace we can obey the law and grow in our sanctification. We are all sinners who are saved by God's grace through Christ. We continue to wrestle with sin, but through Christ and by his Spirit, sin's power over us is broken and we have this assurance that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

7. Salvation (Soteriology)

I believe we are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ. By God's grace, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us through faith. We have been set free to obey God's will through the power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8-10). Salvation frees us from the burden of sin and guilt and death, and frees us for obedience, meaning, and purpose.



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8. Satan

Satan is a real being who the Bible describes as a fallen angel who rebelled against God and is known as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), the prince of this world (John 12:31), the God of this age (2 Cor. 4:4), and the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2). Satan deceives, tempts, and accuses, and is always seeking to destroy God's purposes.

9. Angels and Demons

I believe in angels and demons, but our understanding of them is very limited. As Christ-followers it is better to focus on God than to live in fear of the demonic, because greater is he that is in the believer than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

10. The Church (Ecclesiology)

The church is the body of believers who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation. They are devoted to God's word, to fellowship, to worship and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The church is on mission making disciples, living Jesus's kingdom ethic, and bringing glory to God. The church holds resident alien status in a world that is hostile to the gospel.

11. The Spiritual Life of the Believer

In the Spirit, we seek to be shaped by God's word, the fellowship of believers, genuine worship, and a life of prayer. We are all called to salvation, service, sacrifice, and simplicity. We are all called to bring glory to God.



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12. Future Things (Eschatology)

We live with a sense of urgency in fulfilling God's mission and with a sense of the immediacy of Christ's return. We live as if Christ might return tomorrow and we plan as if Christ may not come in our lifetime. The Book of Revelation is an important book for preparing Christians to face a hostile culture in the meantime. When Christ returns those who have rejected his mercy and grace will be judged and separated from God forever. Those who have received God's grace through trusting in Christ alone will be given new glorified bodies and everlasting life.

13. Evangelism

We seek to share the gospel of salvation with all people. We have a better story -- the true story, and that gospel needs to be shared and lived in authentic ways personally, locally, and globally. We pray in the Spirit for open doors and for God to go before opening minds and hearts to the good news of Jesus Christ.

14. Spiritual Gifts

I believe in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit and in the manifestation of the full range of gifts described in the New Testament. I depend upon the Spirit of Christ to prepare myself and my brothers and sisters in Christ for works of service. I seek to be filled with the Spirit and to live a life dependent upon the Father, transformed by Christ, and alive in the Spirit.



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Answer the following integration questions:

15. State your view of the Scriptures and the place the Scriptures will have in your ministry.

I believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and is fully authoritative in all matters that it addresses. It has always been central to my life and ministry and I am committed to believing in and living out the power of God's word in all that I do from now to eternity.

16. What distinctions of the Reformed faith appeal to you?

I rest in the emphasis on the sovereignty of God; I celebrate our complete dependence on the grace and mercy of God in Christ and through his Spirit; I benefit from the focus on God's word as the singular source of God's clear and abiding personal and redeeming revelation.

17. What/Who is the Holy Spirit and how important is His ministry?

I take seriously Jesus's upper room discourse and his description of the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth and our Advocate. The Spirit is the shy member of the Trinity in that the Spirit is always leading us to Christ (John 14:25-27; 16:7-11).



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18. What is your position on women in leadership roles in the church?

I do not believe that the gifts of the Spirit are gender specific. Men and women, who are in Christ are called to serve the church in everyway for his glory.

19. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Presbyterian form of government?

The strength of Presbyterian polity is its checks and balances and connectional system. Sometimes I wish that we were more connectional so that a person's testimony in one Presbytery would provide the necessary introduction to another Presbytery. I will have been examined over the course of my ministry by four Presbyteries (West, Central South, East, and now Pacific Southwest).

20. Explain your philosophy of ministry.

Colossians 1:28-29 has been my mission statement for years. I elaborate on a theology of the church and pastoral ministry in several of my works (Living in Tension: a theology of ministry, vol. 1-2) and Pastoral Identity: True Shepherds in the Household of Faith.



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21. Describe your approach to evangelism, both personally and as a pastor in a local church.

I hope and pray that my personal life, my family life, my pastoring, my preaching and my teaching are always commending the gospel of Jesus Christ, and hopefully inspiring others to do the same.

22. As you reflect on your life, explain your sense of call to ministry.

I felt led to focus on God's word since I was a teenager. God's word has shaped all of my education and vocational life. It has shaped my marriage and my family, my hopes and dreams.

23. Elaborate on your convictions about personal accountability in your life and in the lives of Christians to whom you might minister.

The apostle Paul sums it up for me, "Therefore since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God." 2 Corinthians 7:1

One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 73 because it describes the arc of devotion from a platitudinous kind of mindless adherence to the faith, through the throes of moral pain and disillusionment, to the otherside, to pain-tested bedrock faith and trust: "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Someone asked me once, who was my pastor? They didn't appreciate my answer, when I said, "my wife." No one knows me better than Virginia and her life and mind are filled with the wisdom, love, and joy of the Lord.



Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest

Income and Expenses

August 31, 2026

CATEGORY	CURRENT MONTH			YEAR-TO-DATE			ANNUAL BUDGET
	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE	ACTUAL	BUDGET	VARIANCE	
INCOME							
POPS Church Support	\$14,132	\$12,500	\$1,632	\$112,563	\$100,000	\$12,563	\$148,500
Other Income -Church Planting Subsidy	0	250	(250)	1,500	2,000	(500)	1,500
Other Income- Church Health Subsidy	0	1,000	(1,000)	6,000	8,000	(2,000)	12,000
Other Income - Miscellaneous	0	167	(167)	0	1,333	(1,333)	2,000
Total Income	14,132	13,917	215	120,063	111,333	8,730	164,000
EXPENSES							
Personnel	\$9,882	\$10,125	\$243	\$78,590	\$81,000	\$2,410	\$121,200
Travel	403	1,692	1,289	11,528	13,533	2,005	17,300
Presbytery Office	44	175	131	1,754	1,400	(354)	3,500
Moderator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Care of Candidates	0	50	50	0	400	400	600
Church Planting	0	0	0	384	0	(384)	0
Church Health	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mission	0	417	417	2,786	3,333	548	5,000
Nominating Committee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Session Minutes Review Committee	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Presbytery Meetings	0	792	792	4,455	6,333	1,878	7,000
Leadership and Training	0	325	325	0	2,600	2,600	5,300
Accounting and Finance	342	342	(1)	4,321	2,733	(1,588)	4,100
Total All Expenses	\$10,672	\$13,917	\$3,245	\$103,818	\$111,333	\$7,515	\$164,000
NET INCOME	\$3,460	(\$0)	\$3,460	\$16,244	\$0	\$16,244	\$0



Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest

Balance Sheet

8/31/2026

DESCRIPTION	BALANCE at 8/31/26	BALANCE at 12/31/25
ASSETS		
Cash	\$99,092	\$97,821
Investments	\$130,773	130,773
Other Assets	0	0
Accounts Receivable	0	3,000
TOTAL ASSETS	\$229,865	\$231,594
FUNDS		
Designated Funds		
Pastor's Care & Support	\$3,080	\$3,141
Church Planting	87,082	107,699
Educational Assistance Fund	3,945	3,945
Chaplains Fund	21,880	22,308
World Outreach E2025	4,708	3,766
Pastors Retreat	4,923	0
Church Health	6,321	6,915
Women's Ministries	2,117	2,279
Total Designated Funds	134,055	150,052
Reserve/Undesignated Funds	78,642	79,730
Current Income (Loss)	16,244	1,811
TOTAL FUNDS	\$228,941	\$231,594



Presbytery of the Pacific Southwest
Percentage of Income (POI)
 August 2026

CHURCH	REPORTED 2024 INCOME	REQUESTED POI	ACTUAL GIVING	% of TOTAL
Centerpoint	\$2,055,943	\$10,280	\$23,670	230%
Centerville PC	1,218,972	\$6,095	2,618	43%
Christ Church East Bay	1,442,165	\$7,211	5,500	76%
Christ Community Church	2,261,743	\$11,309	5,610	50%
Clayton Community	650,000	\$3,250	3,415	105%
CPC Danville	7,103,560	\$35,518	20,648	58%
Cornerstone Woodlake	231,343	\$1,157	0	0%
Covenant PC - Orange	677,548	\$3,388	761	22%
Covenant PC - Reno	484,364	\$2,422	1,454	60%
Covenant PC - San Diego	543,116	\$2,716	1,960	72%
Covenant Community Vacaville	573,292	\$2,866	1,911	67%
Easton PC	299,014	\$1,495	0	0%
Fair Oaks	2,227,810	\$11,139	7,426	67%
First Armenian PC	617,490	\$3,087	0	0%
First PC - Bakersfield	1,400,030	\$7,000	4,657	67%
First PC - Fresno	1,729,045	\$8,645	8,645	100%
First PC - Hanford	296,983	\$1,485	971	65%
Fowler PC	306,929	\$1,535	0	0%
Fremont PC**	2,320,929	\$9,205	8,000	87%
Heritage EPC	69,425	\$347	188	54%
Hope PC	332,907	\$1,665	1,665	100%
Kingman PC	194,678	\$973	0	0%
Millbrook PC	73,705	\$369	0	0%
Moraga Valley PC	1,967,351	\$9,837	7,365	75%
New Life, Covelo	37,609	\$188	0	0%
San Ramon PC	706,196	\$3,531	3,192	90%
Sierra PC	520,521	\$2,603	1,735	67%
St. John's Assyrian PC	148,226	\$741	673	91%
Valley Community	167,631	\$838	500	60%
Wintersburg PC	1,543,927	\$7,720	0	0%
TOTAL	\$32,202,452	\$158,612	\$112,563	71%

**Presbytery Office

Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-A

That the *Book of Government* 11-2.G be amended.

Rationale: Due to changes in the accreditation of the Masters of Divinity degree over the years, the degree is no longer standard among seminaries. Some seminaries still maintain the traditional 90+ credit hour degree while others have reduced the required credit hours to the minimum 72+ credit hour threshold. This results in a significant variance when it comes to the preparation and training of our Candidates. Furthermore, we have many Candidates who have already achieved a graduate level theological degree and simply need to add a few more classes rather than pursue a different degree. Additionally, we recognize the need for a uniform standard which is why we are proposing a standard “Criteria for Ordination Requirements and Education” that all Candidates must meet. The new criteria will include 72 hours of transcribed, graduate level coursework, including original languages. It will also include a new assessment process for Candidates modeled after our current church planter and world outreach worker assessments. Finally, it will include some kind of demonstration of pastoral competencies and skills in a local ministry context.

Current Language: G.11-2.G	Proposed Language: G. 11-2.G <u><i>additions</i></u> , noted in <i>bold italics</i> , deletions
11-2.G A Candidate shall pursue a course of study that leads to a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary approved by the Presbytery and such other standards as may be determined by Acts of the General Assembly. Academic work that is equivalent to a Master of Divinity degree may be completed by those means designed for Candidates under extraordinary status (G.11-2I).	11-2.G A Candidate shall pursue a course of study that leads to a <u><i>graduate theological</i></u> Master of Divinity degree from an accredited <u><i>institution</i></u> seminary approved by the Presbytery and such other <u><i>requirements</i></u> standards as may be determined by Acts of the General Assembly. Academic work that is equivalent to a Master of Divinity degree may be completed by those means designed for Candidates under extraordinary status (G.11-2I). <u><i>11-2.H The Candidate shall present evidence of satisfactory completion of the Criteria for Ordination Requirements and Education to the Presbytery. This evidence shall include:</i></u> 1. <u><i>Graduate coursework substantiated by a transcript</i></u> 2. <u><i>Participation in the EPC candidate assessment</i></u> 3. <u><i>Demonstration of pastoral competencies</i></u>
11-2.H Ordinarily, a Candidate must be under care for a minimum of one year prior to ordination. A Candidate, for reasons acceptable to the Presbytery, may request transfer to another Presbytery. The Candidate’s membership must also be transferred to an EPC congregation within that Presbytery.	11-2.H <u><i>I</i></u> Ordinarily, a Candidate must be under care for a minimum of one year prior to ordination. A Candidate, for reasons acceptable to the Presbytery, may request transfer to another Presbytery. The Candidate’s membership must also be transferred to an EPC congregation within that Presbytery.
11-2.I Currently descending from GA45 to STRIKE] A Presbytery, for reasons it judges adequate, may receive a Candidate under extraordinary circumstances for whom it may waive part or all of the total educational requirements for ordination. This action requires a two-thirds vote by the Presbytery. When such a Candidate is received, it	11-2.I <u><i>I</i></u> [Currently descending from GA45 to AMEND] A Candidate from another Reformed denomination who has been under care for at least one year in that denomination, has met EPC educational requirements for ordination, and is pursuing a call from an EPC congregation shall be examined in the manner prescribed in G.12-2. Any

**Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly
Evangelical Presbyterian Church**

is appropriate to assign courses of independent study or study under some appropriate person. 11-2.I [Currently descending from GA45 to AMEND] A Candidate from another Reformed denomination who has been under care for at least one year in that denomination, has met EPC educational requirements for ordination, and is pursuing a call from an EPC congregation shall be examined in the manner prescribed in G.12-2. Any Candidates from outside the Reformed Tradition follow the procedures of G.11-2.	Candidates from outside the Reformed Tradition follow the procedures of G.11-2.
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Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-B

That the *Book of Government* 11-2.H be amended.

Rationale: Due to changes in the accreditation of the Masters of Divinity degree over the years, the degree is no longer standard among seminaries. Some seminaries still maintain the traditional 90+ credit hour degree while others have reduced the required credit hours to the minimum 72+ credit hour threshold. This results in a significant variance when it comes to the preparation and training of our Candidates. Furthermore, we have many Candidates who have already achieved a graduate level theological degree and simply need to add a few more classes rather than pursue a different degree. Additionally, we recognize the need for a uniform standard which is why we are proposing a standard “Criteria for Ordination Requirements and Education” that all Candidates must meet. The new criteria will include 72 hours of transcribed, graduate level coursework, including original languages. It will also include a new assessment process for Candidates modeled after our current church planter and world outreach worker assessments. Finally, it will include some kind of demonstration of pastoral competencies and skills in a local ministry context.

Current Language: G.11-2.G	Proposed Language: G. 11-2.G <i>additions</i> , noted in <i>bold italics</i> , deletions
11-2.G A Candidate shall pursue a course of study that leads to a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited seminary approved by the Presbytery and such other standards as may be determined by Acts of the General Assembly. Academic work that is equivalent to a Master of Divinity degree may be completed by those means designed for Candidates under extraordinary status (G.11-2I).	11-2.G A Candidate shall pursue a course of study that leads to a <i>graduate theological</i> Master of Divinity degree from an accredited <i>institution</i> seminary approved by the Presbytery and such other <i>requirements</i> standards as may be determined by Acts of the General Assembly. Academic work that is equivalent to a Master of Divinity degree may be completed by those means designed for Candidates under extraordinary status (G.11-2I). <i><u>11-2.H The Candidate shall present evidence of satisfactory completion of the Criteria for Ordination Requirements and Education to the Presbytery. This evidence shall include:</u></i> 4. <i><u>Graduate coursework substantiated by a transcript</u></i> 5. <i><u>Participation in the EPC candidate assessment 3.</u></i> 6. <i><u>Demonstration of pastoral competencies</u></i> 11-2.H I Ordinarily, a Candidate must be under care for a minimum of one year prior to ordination. A Candidate, for reasons acceptable to the Presbytery, may request transfer to another Presbytery. The Candidate’s membership must also be transferred to an EPC congregation within that Presbytery.
11-2.I Currently descending from GA45 to STRIKE]	

Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

A Presbytery, for reasons it judges adequate, may receive a Candidate under extraordinary circumstances for whom it may waive part or all of the total educational requirements for ordination. This action requires a two-thirds vote by the Presbytery. When such a Candidate is received, it is appropriate to assign courses of independent study or study under some appropriate person.

11-2.I [Currently descending from GA45 to AMEND]

A Candidate from another Reformed denomination who has been under care for at least one year in that denomination, has met EPC educational requirements for ordination, and is pursuing a call from an EPC congregation shall be examined in the manner prescribed in G.12-2. Any Candidates from outside the Reformed Tradition follow the procedures of G.11-2.

11-2.IJ [Currently descending from GA45 to AMEND]

A Candidate from another Reformed denomination who has been under care for at least one year in that denomination, has met EPC educational requirements for ordination, and is pursuing a call from an EPC congregation shall be examined in the manner prescribed in G.12-2. Any Candidates from outside the Reformed Tradition follow the procedures of G.11-2.

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-C

Rationale: Due to the confusion that often surrounds our examination process at the Presbytery level, we believe it important to clarify in detail what the EPC requires. Much of what is listed here is already found in various places such as the Procedure Manual for Ministerial and Candidates Committees, but we believe the expectations are best spelled out in the Book of Government for the sake of consistency and clarity across presbyteries. One important change to note is the elimination of the written exegesis exam. Should our recommendations pass, we believe a passing grade in Biblical Languages and Biblical Exegesis from an accredited seminary is sufficient to meet our standard.

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C. The Candidate shall be examined in writing and orally in the following areas: Theology and Sacraments, the English Bible, the Book of Order, the history of the Church and the Reformed tradition, and the nature of the office of Teaching Elder. D. The Candidate shall preach a sermon to the Presbytery to demonstrate the ability to expound the Word of God effectively. E. If the Presbytery has previously received a Candidate and has not required the stipulated work of college and/or seminary, the requirements for language shall be omitted. However, every other part of the examination shall be given. The examination must be approved by a two-thirds majority of the Presbytery.	<u>God in Jesus Christ, and progress in spiritual growth and holiness, with attention to the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.</u> <u>b. Articulation of the motives for seeking ordination, including the Candidate's sense of inward call.</u> <u>c. Demonstration of knowledge of Christian doctrine according to the following categories:</u> <u>i. Bible content</u> <u>ii. Reformed Theology</u> <u>iii. Sacraments</u> <u>iv. Church History with emphasis on the Reformed Tradition.</u> <u>v. Office of Teaching Elder</u> <u>vi. EPC Polity</u> <u>vii. Westminster Standards</u> <u>3. The Committee shall report its findings and recommendation to the Presbytery.</u> <u>C. Presbytery Floor Examination</u> <u>1. The Candidate shall preach a sermon before the Presbytery, on a text assigned by the appropriate committee, demonstrating ability to expound and apply the Word of God.</u> <u>2. The Candidate shall be examined orally before the Presbytery to demonstrate knowledge of Christian doctrine according to the same categories outlined above.</u> <u>The examination must be sustained by a two-thirds majority of the Presbytery.</u>
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Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-D

That the *Book of Government* 9-3 (9-3A, 9-3B) be amended.

Rationale: These recommendations, drawn from the PCA with some modifications, specify that officers are to have godly, biblical character as summarized in the EPC's confessional standards, particularly in terms of chastity and sexual purity. While officers of the church are still sinners growing in sanctification, they must be examples to the church in holiness and Spirit-empowered victory over sin. These recommendations codify biblical and confessional character requirements for EPC officers.

Current Language: G.9-3.A and B	Proposed Language: G. 9-3.A and B <u>additions, in bold italics</u> <u>deletions</u>
A. According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. A congregation preparing to elect persons to this holy office should carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the Ruling Elder and be very prayerful in selecting persons to this office. B. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all.	A. According to Scripture, those who bear office in the Church <u>shall</u> should exhibit certain characteristics of life. This includes being above reproach, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Persons who fill this office should <u>shall</u> exhibit a lifestyle that is an example to all, both in and outside the Church. <u>Whether single or married, officers must conform to the biblical requirement of chastity and sexual purity (see Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 138-139) in their descriptions of themselves, their convictions, character, and conduct.</u> A congregation preparing to elect persons to this <u>these</u> holy offices should <u>shall</u> carefully study appropriate passages of Scripture relating to the these offices <u>Ruling Elder</u> and be very prayerful in selecting persons to them <u>this office.</u> B. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, Church Officers are especially bound by their calling to fulfill them and to be an example to all. <u>Officers in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church 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</u>

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	<u><i>committed to the pursuit of Spirit empowered victory over their sinful temptations, inclinations, and actions.</i></u>
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Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-E

That the *Book of Government* 12 (12-2B, 12-3A, 12-3.B.1, 12-6) be amended.

Rationale: There is currently no requirement in the Book of Government that candidates for ordained office be examined in their Christian character. These recommendations require that candidates be examined to see not only that they are growing spiritually, but are faithful in their conformity to Jesus as Lord.

Current Language: G.12-2, 3, 6	Proposed Language: G. 12-2, 3, 6 <u>additions, in bold italics</u> <u>deletions</u>
G.12-2.B The Candidate shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth.	G.12-2.B The Candidates shall be examined in Christian experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, <u>faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord,</u> and <u>steady</u> progress in spiritual growth.
G.12-3.A Examination of an EPC Teaching Elders seeking to transfer into a Presbytery EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2 and they shall relate their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth.	G.12-3.A Examination of an EPC Teaching Elders seeking to transfer into a Presbytery EPC Teaching Elders shall be examined on views of the areas indicated in G.12-2 and they shall relate their experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, <u>faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord,</u> and <u>steady</u> progress in spiritual growth.
G.12-3.B.1 Examination of an ordained Minister from another Reformed denomination: A Minister seeking to become a Teaching Elder in a Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from another denomination from within the Reformed family shall present credentials of education required by those seeking ordination in the EPC. The Minister shall be examined on views and beliefs and may be examined on knowledge.	G.12-3.B.1 Examination of an ordained Minister from another Reformed denomination: A Minister seeking to become a Teaching Elder in a Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from another denomination from within the Reformed family shall present credentials of education required by those seeking ordination in the EPC. The Ministers shall be examined on views and beliefs and may be examined on knowledge <u>and shall relate experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ, faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord, and steady progress in spiritual growth.</u>
G.12-6 The Session shall confer with each person elected to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ and progress in spiritual growth, 2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected.	G.12-6 The Session shall confer with each person elected <u>nominated</u> to office in the local church to determine if that person feels called to office and is willing to serve faithfully. The Session shall examine candidates for ordination to the office of Ruling Elder or Deacon on 1) personal experience of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ <u>their faithful conformity to his character, obedience to him as Lord,</u> and <u>steady</u> progress in spiritual growth, 2) theology and Sacraments of the Church, 3) the government, discipline, worship, and history of the Church, and 4) an understanding of the office to which one is elected.

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DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-F

That the *Book of Government* 9-5 be amended.

Rationale: From the “Notes For The 2024-2025 Edition” of the EPC Constitution: Volume One, “Church – when capitalized, refers to the universal church (defined in Book of Government, Chapter 1). The reference in G.9-5.D seems to be to the Universal Visible Church and should be ‘church’ rather than ‘Church.’ There may be additional instance of this terminological inconsistency (ex: G.9-5.E; G.9-6.A) that should be sought out.

The proposed revision condenses the three spheres of Administrative work: EPC church courts and agencies, or an organization deemed proper by the Presbytery.

The proposed addition mirrors the language of G.10-8.B.2.a – calls approved by the Presbytery from a church or agency outside the bounds of the Presbytery.

Current Language: G. 9-5	Proposed Language: G. 9-5 <u>additions, in bold</u> <u>italics</u> <u>deletions</u>
G. 9-5 The office of Teaching Elder D. Administrator A court of the Church or one of its agencies may call a Teaching Elder to serve in some administrative capacity. An organization deemed proper by the Presbytery may also issue a similar call. In such cases, it is always the responsibility of the Administrator to seek opportunity to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. E. Chaplain A court of the Church, a hospital, the military, institutions, universities, or other appropriate fields of service may call a Teaching Elder as Chaplain if the Presbytery deems it appropriate. In such cases, the Chaplain shall always have as a primary responsibility the sharing of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.	G. 9-5 The office of Teaching Elder D. Administrator A court of the Church <u>church</u> or one of its agencies, or an organization deemed proper by the Presbytery may call a Teaching Elder to serve in some administrative capacity <u>provided that the nature of the work is appropriate to the gospel ministry and requiring ordination.</u> In such cases, it is always the responsibility of the Administrator to seek opportunity to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments. E. Chaplain A court of the Church <u>church,</u> a hospital, the military, institutions, universities, or other appropriate fields of service may call a Teaching Elder as Chaplain if the Presbytery deems it appropriate. In such cases, the Chaplain shall always have as a primary responsibility the sharing of the Good News of God in Jesus Christ.

Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-G

That the *Book of Government* 5-10 be amended.

Rationale: Proposed addition section “A” clarifies that under no circumstances may a congregation renounce jurisdiction since that is inconceivable in a presbyterian form of government; it must follow the procedures established in G.5-10.

The addition of the Active Roll (G.8-3.B) has the mutual benefit of encouraging the Session to ensure the rolls of the congregation are in order prior to the request for dismissal, as is their responsibility (G.8-1, 3; 18-3), and allowing the Presbytery knowledge of who has standing to vote in the congregational meeting, and who may need to be assigned to other congregations of the church in application of current provision §C and proposed provision §D.

The G.5-10 process is an initial congregational meeting, followed by a time period of 3-6 months, concluding with a meeting in continuation of the initial meeting. In the updated 12th Edition of Roberts Rules of Order Newly Revised (RONR) this is considered an “Adjourned Meeting” (RONR 9:17-19). The present parliamentary verbiage of “recess” is in conflict for procedures for adjourned meetings. The proposed language would bring our procedures into conformity with parliamentary procedure.

Current Language: G. 5-10	Proposed Language: G. 5-10 <u>additions, in bold</u> <u>italics</u> <u>deletions</u>
G.5-10 The dismissal of a local church to another body or to independence. A. The Church Session shall notify the Presbytery of its desire to be dismissed. Once a Church Session has notified the Presbytery of its desire under this section, the Presbytery shall take no action to dismiss, dissolve, or divide the local church and its elders until all proceedings under this section 5-10 are fully completed. This provision shall not be construed to prohibit the Presbytery from reasonable means of access to the Session or church members in order to present its position. Nor shall this provision be construed to prohibit the presbytery from taking action under the Book of Discipline on matters unrelated to the request for dismissal.	G.5-10 The dismissal of a local church to another body or to independence A. <u>No congregation shall be dismissed to another body or to independence except by the procedures set forth in this section G.5-10.</u> B. The Church Session shall notify the Presbytery of its desire to be dismissed; <u>this notice shall include the Active Roll of the congregation as an attachment.</u> Once a Church Session has notified the Presbytery of its desire under this section, the Presbytery shall take no action to dismiss, dissolve, or divide the local church and its elders until all proceedings under this section 5-10 are fully completed. This provision shall not be construed to prohibit the Presbytery from reasonable means of access to the Session or church members in order to present its position. Nor shall this provision be construed to prohibit the presbytery from taking action under the

Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

B. At a duly called meeting of the congregation, with representatives from the Presbytery present and having the privilege of the floor, the motion to request dismissal shall be put and discussed. The meeting shall recess for no less than three months and no more than six months, to a date determined at the meeting. C. At the time set, the congregation shall reconvene, with representatives from the Presbytery present and having the privilege of the floor, and the request to dismiss shall again be put to the congregation and the floor opened for discussion. The congregation shall then vote on the motion by written ballot. If it passes by a two-thirds majority, the Presbytery shall dismiss the congregation as requested with all of its property and assets. Those not desiring to participate in the dismissal shall notify the Presbytery, which will assign them to other congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. D. If a request for dismissal fails to achieve the required two-thirds majority,⁴¹ the process of dismissal (G.5-10) may not be repeated until at least 12 months have elapsed following the vote.	<i>Book of Discipline</i> on matters unrelated to the request for dismissal. C. At a duly called meeting of the congregation, with representatives from the Presbytery present and having the privilege of the floor, the motion to request dismissal shall be put and discussed. The meeting shall recess for <i>adjourn until</i> no less than three months and no more than six months, to a date determined at the meeting. D. At the time set, the congregation shall reconvene, with representatives from the Presbytery present and having the privilege of the floor, and the request to dismiss shall again be put to the congregation and the floor opened for discussion. The congregation shall then vote on the motion by written ballot, <i>provided that only those listed on the Active Roll attached to the notice given in G.5-10.B may vote.</i> If it passes by a two-thirds majority, the Presbytery shall dismiss the congregation as requested with all of its property and assets. Those not desiring to participate in the dismissal shall notify the Presbytery, which will assign them to other congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. E. If a request for dismissal fails to achieve the required two-thirds majority, the process of dismissal (G.5-10) may not be repeated until at least 12 months have elapsed following the vote.
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Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-H

That the *Book of Government* 19-3 be amended.

Rationale: This eliminates and clarifies a present redundancy.

Current Language: G. 19-3	Proposed Language: G. 19-3 <u>additions, in bold</u> <u>italics</u> deletions
G.19-3 Officers of the Presbytery A. Moderator The Moderator of the Presbytery shall be elected by that court. The person elected must be a Ruling or Teaching Elder. A Ruling Elder, once elected, shall be a member of the court for the length of term to which elected. 1. Length of Term Election may be for that stated meeting of the court or, at the discretion of the Presbytery, for one year. A Ruling Elder, once elected as Moderator, shall be a member of the court for the length of term to which elected.	G.19-3 Officers of the Presbytery A. Moderator The Moderator of the Presbytery shall be elected by that court. The person elected must be a Ruling or Teaching Elder. A Ruling Elder, once elected <u>as Moderator,</u> shall be a member of the court for the length of term to which elected. 1. Length of Term Election may be for that stated meeting of the court or, at the discretion of the Presbytery, for one year. A Ruling Elder, once elected as Moderator, shall be a member of the court for the length of term to which elected.

Descending Overtures from the 46th General Assembly Evangelical Presbyterian Church

DESCENDING OVERTURE 46-I

That the *Book of Discipline* be amended.

Book of Discipline Approved Revision (June 2026) General Notes

The first draft of a proposed revision to the *Book of Discipline* was presented to the 45th General Assembly and made available in October 2025 to all who wanted to review and comment. The Task Force received responses from 44 people and carefully reviewed over 325 individual comments. Many were incorporated in this draft submitted to the National Leadership Team and then to the Permanent Judicial Commission as required by *Book of Government* 21-3D.2. The proposed revision was approved by the 46th General Assembly. A “clean copy” of the approved revision of the *Book of Discipline* is being sent to the Presbyteries as a Descending Overture. If approved by $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Presbyteries the *Book of Discipline* will come to the 47th General Assembly for ratification.

The following approved revision of the EPC *Book of Discipline* is presented in a [3-column format](#) and is available on our website www.epconnect.org to any Presbyter who wants to see the details behind the changes in the approved revision. The left-hand column is the current text of the *Book of Discipline*. The middle column is the proposed revision. The right-hand column has the rationale for the proposed changes.

For ease of comparison, the location of some sections of the current *Book of Discipline* has been changed. Those sections are indicated in italics in the “Current *Book of Discipline*” column.

In the proposed revision, all cross references to the **Book of Order** have been moved to footnotes. Amendments to the **Book of Order** sometimes necessitate changes to cross references. Footnotes may be easily changed in the editorial process without requiring additional amendments.

Abbreviations

- G** – Book of Government
- D** – Book of Discipline
- W** – Book of Worship

Book of Discipline

Revision approved by the 46th General Assembly and sent to the Presbyteries
as a Descending Overture

— 1 — DISCIPLINE: ITS NATURE, PURPOSE, AND SUBJECTS

1-1 Definition of Church Discipline

- A. There are two kinds of authority vested in the church:
 - 1. The Responsibility of Order¹
 - 2. The Authority of Jurisdiction²
- B. Both kinds of authority are given the church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide her members and to promote her purity and welfare. Discipline is the exercise of the Responsibility of Order, particularly regarding “reproving the erring.”³ As the exercise of such authority may adversely affect the membership rights⁴ of an individual who has been accused of an offense, the authority may require utilizing actions for discipline.
- C. The word “discipline,” when used in this *Book of Discipline* refers to actions for discipline.⁵
- D. Church discipline does not supersede or negate the legal responsibility to report cases of suspected abuse to civil authorities according to local and state requirements.

1-2 Definition of “Church”:

As used in this *Book of Discipline*, the word “church” shall refer to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, including her General Assembly, Presbyteries (including mission churches), and local churches.

1-3 Purpose of Discipline

The purpose of discipline is to:

- A. Maintain the honor of God.
- B. Restore the sinner.
- C. Protect those harmed by the sin of others.
- D. Remove offense from the church.

¹ G.3-2: “The officers’ Responsibility of Order includes especially the sharing of the gospel, reproving the erring, visiting the sick, and otherwise exhibiting to the world the fruit of the Spirit.” See G.3-2 for the full reference.

² G.3-3: “The Authority of Jurisdiction is the authority to rule and is exercised jointly in ascending Church courts.” See G.3-3 for the full reference.

³ G.3-2

⁴ Active members (G.8-3B) have the right to vote in congregational meetings (G.7-7), the right to receive the sacraments in a worthy manner (W.3-3), the right to hold office if elected and approved for ordination (G.10), and the benefits of discipline (D.1-5A). These rights could be removed by properly imposed sanctions (D.11).

⁵ See Book of Discipline Chapter 5.

Teaching Elders must instruct the officers and congregation in the use of discipline and jointly practice it in the context of the congregation and courts of the church.

1-4 Basis of Discipline

- A. As the revelation of God's holy will, Scriptural law is the basis of all discipline. Therefore, proper disciplinary principles as set forth in the Scriptures must be followed before any charge alleging a personal offense can be brought before a court of the church.
- B. When a charge of personal offense⁶ is brought before any court of the church, the party bringing the charge must ordinarily include a statement detailing how the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1 have been met. The court may waive this requirement if it deems that confronting the offender would be inappropriate or otherwise inadvisable.⁷
- C. If anyone has evidence to suggest that a Teaching Elder may be guilty of a private offense,⁸ the Teaching Elder should be warned privately. But if the offense persists, or becomes public, the matter should be brought to another Teaching Elder of the Presbytery or the Ministerial Committee.

1-5 Persons Subject to Discipline

- A. All active and inactive members of the church, confirmed, baptized, and affiliate, are entitled and subject to the benefits of discipline.
- B. All Teaching Elders are subject to discipline. Teaching Elders should not be shielded from discipline or lightly sanctioned on account of their office. Neither should serious charges be received against a Teaching Elder on insubstantial grounds.

1-6 Grounds for Discipline

Not everything displeasing to God is a ground for discipline. Additionally, all Christians are prone to acts of infirmity which should be amended but do not require discipline. The offenses that require discipline and are subject to actions for discipline are as follows:

- A. **Heresy:** the expressed or implied denial, openly taught and obstinately maintained, of one or more of the essential doctrines of Christianity.
- B. **Immorality:** conduct inconsistent with the biblical standards for conduct, including but not limited to bickering, brawling, debauchery, drunkenness, gossiping,⁹ hatred, abuse, idolatry, impurity, slander, and sexual immorality such as adultery, fornication, homosexual practice, and bestiality.
 - 1. Abuse is the sinful use of power to harm, intimidate, exploit, or dominate another person.¹⁰

⁶ D.4-2A

⁷ Waiving these requirements has in view a situation where a one-on-one meeting of the accuser with the accused may carry a high potential of physical harm, intimidation, or coercion of the accused or be otherwise inadvisable. The Court may make that determination as it sees fit. See also D.1-6B.2.

⁸ D.4-3A

⁹ The terms "bickering and "gossiping" as used herein are intended to deal with those acts that are disruptive to the peace and unity of the church.

¹⁰ See **Westminster Larger Catechism** questions 129, 130 & 151.

2. In cases charging possible abuse, a court may make reasonable accommodations to protect vulnerable parties from possible harm or distress provided that such accommodations do not interfere with the rights of the accused to present an unhindered defense. Any such accommodations may not be used as evidence of abuse in any trial, mediation, implementation of sanctions, or other action of the court.
- C. **Contempt:** willful conduct done in deliberate disrespect of a court of the church, the constitutional documents of the church, or the officers of the church acting in their official capacities.

1-7 Church Members Who Are Also Employees

The employer/employee relationship is not within the scope of the Book of Discipline. Church members who are also employees of the church shall be subject to discipline as an employee under whatever procedures may be established by the church for employees. They may also be subject to discipline as a member under the *Book of Discipline*.

— 2 — SPIRITUAL POWERS OF THE CHURCH

2-1 The Spiritual Power of the Church

The power of the Church is moral and spiritual, thus distinguishing the government of the Church from civil government. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church does not have civil authority.¹¹

2-2 Spiritual Nurture of Members

Among other duties, it is the duty of the church to provide for the nurture of its members and their families.¹²

2-3 Retention of Authority over Church Property

While possessing no civil authority over any person, the church does retain authority over its property and ministries. In providing a secure and nurturing atmosphere for worship and spiritual growth, the church retains the right to exclude anyone from its property, services, or ministries on such terms and conditions as it may desire. Thus, for example, a local church may require certain standards before permitting adults to teach, lead ministries, or otherwise participate in the life and ministry of the church.

¹¹ G.3-1

¹² G.4-4B

— 3 — JURISDICTION OF CHURCH COURTS

3-1 The Right of Private Judgment

Since “God alone is Lord of the conscience,”¹³ we consider the right of private judgment in religious matters to be universal and unalienable.¹⁴ Therefore, the church in disciplinary cases has jurisdiction only over her members.¹⁵

3-2 Definition of Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction is the authority of a church court to render a decision in a case requiring discipline. This is the exercise of the Responsibility of Order.¹⁶ A court must have jurisdiction over both the individual accused and the subject matter of the charge before it can issue an indictment or render a decision. This definition is not to be confused with the Authority of Jurisdiction. The Authority of Jurisdiction is the power to rule and is a joint power to be exercised in church courts in ascending order.¹⁷ The exercise of such power shall always reflect the essential unity of the church. The exercise of the Authority of Jurisdiction provides the court with the authority to decide issues of government, administration, or law as it pertains to the rule of the church.

3-3 Original Jurisdiction

In cases of original jurisdiction, the following rules apply:

- A. The Session
The Session has original jurisdiction in every disciplinary case involving members of that local church.
- B. The Presbytery
The Presbytery has original jurisdiction in every disciplinary case involving Teaching Elders of the Presbytery, appeals from actions for discipline decided by sessions,¹⁸ and complaints¹⁹ regarding actions or decisions of sessions within its designated area.²⁰
- C. The General Assembly
The General Assembly has original jurisdiction over complaints²¹ regarding actions or decisions of presbyteries and judicial cases referred to it by a lower court.²²
- D. Dissolved Churches
The Presbytery shall immediately assume jurisdiction in cases of discipline in process but interrupted by the dissolution of a local church or mission church.
- E. Transfer of Membership
A member of a local church or Presbytery whose membership is being transferred shall remain under the jurisdiction of the original court until received by the receiving court.

3-4 Assumption of Jurisdiction

¹³ Westminster Confession of Faith 20.2

¹⁴ G.25-2A

¹⁵ D.1-5

¹⁶ G.3-2

¹⁷ “Ascending order” is the same as “regular gradation” in G.2-1A, G.3-3, and G.9-10.

¹⁸ See D.13 on “Appeals” and D.3-4 and 3-5 on assumption of jurisdiction due to unwillingness or failure to act.

¹⁹ See D.14 on “Complaints.”

²⁰ See G.19-1

²¹ See D.14

²² See G.22-3

In the event a court shall be unable or unwilling to try a person or persons accused, the next higher court may assume jurisdiction after giving thirty days' written notice to the lower court of its intention to assume jurisdiction.

3-5 Failure to Act

When a court of original jurisdiction fails to act in an action for discipline within ninety days after receiving a written charge or notice of offense, upon request from:

- A. Any active member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church from within the same Presbytery,
- B. A member of the court of original jurisdiction,
- C. An accused or accuser in an out of bounds offense,²³

the next higher court may either instruct the lower court to act or assume jurisdiction to conclude the case itself.

3-6 Termination of Jurisdiction by Renunciation

Jurisdiction in judicial cases ends upon receipt from the accused of written notice of renunciation by the Clerk or Stated Clerk of the court of original jurisdiction. In the event an individual orally renounces jurisdiction, this fact shall be confirmed by letter from the court verifying the individual's intention to renounce jurisdiction. The letter shall be delivered in person or by form of mail requiring a written receipt. If the court receives no written response within ten days, the acknowledgement of renunciation of jurisdiction shall be deemed final. In such instances, a case already begun may be concluded only with the signed permission of the accused.²⁴

²³ See D.4-5 regarding "Out of Bounds Offenses."

²⁴ See G.14-2B.3 and 14-4C for the effect of renunciation of jurisdiction.

— 4 — OFFENSES

4-1 Offenses

Three kinds of offenses require discipline: Heresy, Immorality, and Contempt.²⁵ Nothing 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. **The Westminster Confession of Faith**, with the **Larger and Shorter Catechisms**, **The Essentials of Our Faith**, and the **Book of Order**, are the standards adopted by the church as expositions of the teachings of Scripture in relation to faith and practice.

4-2 Personal and General Offenses

- A. A personal offense is a wrong done to a person or persons, including one's own self.
- B. A general offense is a wrong that is not directed against any particular person.

4-3 Private and Public Offenses

- A. Private offenses are those known only to an individual or to a few persons.
- B. Public offenses are those that are known to more than a few persons.

4-4 Temporary Suspensions

When an action for discipline is commenced²⁶ is against an accused church member, the Session may, if it thinks the peace and purity²⁷ of the church requires it, temporarily suspend the accused from the sacraments and/or bar the accused from church property²⁸ until the action for discipline has been concluded.

4-5 Out-of-Bounds Offenses

When an offense is alleged to have taken place in a manner or location unknown to and/or outside the bounds of the court of original jurisdiction, it shall be the duty of the court within whose bounds the alleged offense occurred, after satisfying itself there is compelling evidence warranting a trial, to send notice of pending charge(s) to the court having jurisdiction, which shall at once proceed against the accused; or the whole case may be transferred for trial and imposition of sanctions, if any, to the coordinate court within whose bounds the offense is alleged to have been committed.

²⁵ See D.1-6 for explanations of offenses that require discipline.

²⁶ See Book of Discipline chapter 5.

²⁷ See G.4-1, 5-5A, 5-6A, D.8-3A and vows taken by members and officers.

²⁸ Proposed D.2-3

— 5 — COMMENCING ACTIONS FOR DISCIPLINE

5-1 Care over the Church

It is the duty of all church courts to exercise care over those subject to their authority. They shall, with care and discretion, investigate reports concerning alleged offenses that require discipline. This duty is imperative when a person claiming to be aggrieved files a written charge with the court.²⁹

5-2 Commencement of Actions for Discipline

Actions for discipline are commenced by one of three means:

A. By a Person or Persons

When a person or persons file a written charge with the Clerk of the court of original jurisdiction.³⁰

B. By the Court

When the court having jurisdiction³¹ determines that a charge is in order.

C. By Confession

When any person comes forward and makes his or her offense known to the court or commission of original jurisdiction,³² a statement of the facts shall be recorded, and judgment may be rendered and sanctions may be imposed with or without further actions for discipline, formal trial, or mediation.

5-3 Cautions Against Biased Accusations and Testimony

Great caution should be exercised by the court or commission in receiving accusations and testimony from any person:

A. Who is known to hold a malignant spirit towards the accused.

B. Who is not of good character.

C. Who is under sanction or who is the subject of an action for discipline.

D. Who is deeply interested in any respect in the conviction of the accused.

E. Who is known to be litigious, contentious, rash, or highly imprudent.

F. Who is offering a confession for an offense which may be incomplete or not fully accurate.

5-4 Limitation on Actions

An action for discipline must commence within three years after the acts constituting the offense were committed, with certain exceptions:

A. The acts were unknown and were not reasonably knowable by the offended person or court.

B. The offended person is under the age of 18, in which case the action for discipline must commence before that person's twenty-first birthday unless the offense includes abuse.³³

²⁹ The aggrieved party should use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

³⁰ D.3-3

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ See D.1-1D regarding reporting to civil authorities.

5-5 Private Reconciliation

There are cases of personal offenses in which it will be advisable for the court to send a committee to converse in a private manner with the accused and endeavor to bring the accused to a sense of repentance before instituting actions for discipline. The committee may then make recommendations to the court or commission concerning further prosecution of the case.

5-6 Investigation of a Charge

- A. After an action for discipline is commenced by a person (persons) and when private reconciliation is either not advisable or has been unsuccessful:
 - 1. The Clerk of the court, or a duly appointed body, shall determine if the action for discipline is in order.
 - 2. If the action for discipline is determined to be out of order, the Clerk or a duly appointed body shall advise the accusers of the decision and its grounds. The decision shall be reported to the court, which shall sustain or not sustain the decision.
- B. If the action for discipline is determined to be in order or if the court has initiated the action for discipline, the court shall form a judicial investigative committee to conduct an investigation into charges filed.³⁴ The judicial investigative committee shall have no authority to act for the court other than as an investigative body. The judicial investigative committee shall report its findings and recommendations to the court.
- C. After the investigation is concluded, the court shall decide whether there is compelling evidence to warrant a trial.
- D. If the court does not find compelling evidence of guilt to warrant a trial, the charge will be dismissed.

5-7 Proceedings upon a Determination of Compelling Evidence Warranting a Trial

- A. The court shall appoint a prosecutor.
 - 1. In actions before the Presbytery, the prosecutor shall be a Teaching Elder who is a member of the Presbytery or a Ruling Elder who is an active member in a local church of the Presbytery.
 - 2. In actions before the Session, the prosecutor need not be a Ruling Elder of that congregation but shall be an active member of that church.^{35 36}
 - 3. In the case of a personal offense, no offended person or a potential witness having personal knowledge of an offense shall become a prosecutor.
- B. The prosecutor shall prepare an indictment³⁷ and proceed to trial.

³⁴ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

³⁵ **G.8-3B**

³⁶ See **D.3-4** and **D.3-5** in the event a local church is unwilling, unable, or fails to act on an action for discipline.

³⁷ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

1. The parties in actions for discipline are the accuser and the accused. The accuser is always the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, whose honor and purity are to be maintained. The prosecutor is always the representative of the church.
 2. Every indictment shall begin: "In the name of the Evangelical Presbyterian 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."
 3. The indictment shall clearly state the times, places, circumstances, and names of witnesses of the actions alleged to require an action for discipline, including the names of witnesses then known to support it so that the accused will be given adequate notice of the charges and the opportunity to make a defense.
 4. The prosecutor shall serve a copy of the indictment either in person or by means requiring a written receipt.
- C. Actions of the Court upon appointment of a prosecutor
1. The court shall decide whether it will try the case or refer the case for trial and decision to a judicial commission³⁸ appointed by the court.
 2. If the court tries the case, it may elect one of its members to serve as Temporary Moderator for the case with the consent of the Moderator. The Temporary Moderator shall exercise the duties of a Moderator³⁹ only with respect to the particular action for discipline. Neither the Moderator nor the Temporary Moderator may serve if they have a conflict of interest in the case.
 3. If the case is referred to a judicial commission, the commission has the full authority of the court to act on the matter referred. Ordinarily the judicial commission will be dissolved at the stated meeting of the court following the conclusion of the trial.
 4. Composition of judicial commissions
 - a. Judicial commissions of the shall be composed of no fewer than three and no more than seven members elected by the court.
 - b. Judicial commissions of the Presbytery shall be composed of a ratio of one Teaching Elders to two Ruling Elders to the extent possible unless the court appoints the Ministerial Committee as the judicial commission.
 - c. Judicial commissions of the Session shall be composed of Ruling Elders of the congregation and may include the Teaching Elders of the congregation.⁴⁰ At least one member of the Commission must be a Ruling Elder actively serving on the Session.
 - d. Members of a judicial investigative committee should ordinarily not serve on a judicial commission to avoid any appearance of bias.

³⁸ G.21-1A, B. Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

³⁹ G.18-2A; G.19-3A

⁴⁰ Teaching Elders of the congregation are pastors and associate pastors. Assistant pastors are called by the Session, not the congregation, and therefore are not eligible to serve on a judicial commission of a local church.

- e. The court shall appoint the Moderator of the judicial commission. The Moderator is a member of the judicial commission with voice and vote.
 - f. The prosecutor is not eligible to be a member of the judicial commission.
- 5. Ordinarily the court will set a date for trial upon the appointment of the prosecutor.
 - 6. If the accused is a member of the court, the court may temporarily suspend any or all the official functions of the accused. This shall not be considered a sanction.⁴¹

⁴¹ See D.11-2A regarding temporary suspensions, which are not sanctions.

— 6 — *EX PARTE* COMMUNICATIONS

6-1 Definition of *Ex Parte* Communications

- A. An *ex parte* communication is any form of communication to the presiding court or commission or Officer of the presiding court by one party in an action for discipline in the absence of the other party to that action that relates to the merits of the action. It includes but is not limited to verbal, written, electronic, or any other form of communication.
- B. Once a court begins an action for discipline,⁴² *ex parte* communications are prohibited.
- C. This prohibition against *ex parte* communication does not include questions on procedural matters that may be addressed to the Clerk of the court or Moderator of the commission.

6-2 Actions in the event of *ex parte* communication

- A. Any attempt at *ex parte* verbal communication shall be immediately interrupted by the member of the court to whom the communication is directed.
- B. The member of the court shall:
 - 1. Make a record of the attempted communication.
 - 2. Place the record in a separate file.
 - 3. Communicate to the other party the attempted *ex parte* communication.
- C. The record of the attempted communication shall include:
 - 1. The name of the person(s) attempting to so communicate.
 - 2. The date of the attempted communication.
- D. Under no circumstances shall the content of any *ex parte* communication be added to the case file of the subject of an action for discipline.
- E. Any form of *ex parte* communication, including notes from a verbal communication, shall be placed in a separate file and communicated to the other party and members of the presiding court or commission.

6-3 Proper communication with a court, commission, or its officers

If a party desires communication with a court or a judicial commission, that party shall request a meeting in person or by audio or video conference with the court or commission. The court or commission, or its designee, shall determine if the meeting is in order, and, if so, shall schedule the meeting. The party desiring communication shall be responsible for arranging the meeting.

⁴² See Book of Discipline Chapter 5

— 7 — MEDIATION

7-1 Assignment of mediation

- A. At the sole discretion of a court or judicial commission, an action for discipline once commenced may be assigned to a qualified mediator(s) agreed upon by both parties prior to the commencement of a trial. A matter so assigned may only proceed with the written consent of all necessary individuals as determined by the assigning court or commission. The court may assign all or part of the action for discipline, allowing a portion of the charge(s) to go into mediation while remaining charges continue to trial.
- B. At least one voting member of the court or commission prosecuting the case shall represent the court or commission at mediation.⁴³ If the assigned mediator(s) is a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the mediator(s) shall not be eligible to serve as a member of the court or judicial commission should it prove necessary for the matter to be brought to trial.
- C. Prior to the commencement of mediation, the mediator(s) shall obtain the written agreement of both parties, by which both parties shall be bound by the following:
 - 1. All discussions are considered confidential unless both parties and the mediator(s) agree otherwise.
 - 2. Any admissions and settlement offers made shall not be cited in any further proceeding concerning any other matter before the court, should the matter not be resolved in mediation. No participant in the mediation will call a mediator(s) as a witness to the mediation in any subsequent hearing and/or in any other forum.
 - 3. Any person who violates the terms of this agreement may be charged with contempt and subject to sanction.
 - 4. A mediator(s) may only report to the court or judicial commission whether the matter has been settled, or not settled, or partially settled. If settled, the terms of any settlement shall be disclosed to the court or judicial commission. However, no settlement can be entered into which conflicts with any provision of the Constitution of the EPC.⁴⁴ Any such settlement will be considered null and void. Written settlements are to be sealed and kept by the Clerk of the court separate from the minutes of the court or judicial commission.
 - 5. No formal record of any settlement discussions shall be made. This prohibition includes the use of any recording device or a stenographer.

7-2 Legal counsel for mediation

If either party to mediation desires to have legal counsel, the other party shall be afforded the same opportunity.⁴⁵

⁴³ The prosecutor is not a voting member of the judicial commission (D.5-7C.4(f))

⁴⁴ The Constitution of the EPC consists of the **Westminster Confession of Faith**, **Westminster Larger Catechism**, **Westminster Shorter Catechism**, and the **Book of Order** in its three parts (*Book of Government*, *Book of Discipline*, and *Book of Worship*).

⁴⁵ See provisions regarding learned counsel in D.10-3

— 8 — HEARINGS IN ACTIONS FOR DISCIPLINE

8-1 Warning to All

Every member of a court or commission engaged in an action for discipline shall bear in mind the command of Scripture: “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”⁴⁶

8-2 Formal Summons

A. Issuance

The Moderator or Clerk shall issue formal summons⁴⁷ in the name of the court to the accused and to such witnesses as either party shall nominate to appear on its behalf.

B. Contents

The formal summons shall identify the parties to the trial, shall state the time and place of the trial, and shall warn the parties and witnesses of the sanctions for refusal to obey a formal summons.

C. Service of Summons and Indictment

The Clerk of the court or commission shall deliver a copy of the summons and the indictment to the defendant in person or by form of delivery requiring a signed receipt. The Clerk shall further deliver a summons to necessary witnesses in person or by form of delivery requiring a signed receipt.

D. Witness and Exhibits List

Both parties shall provide the other with a list of expected witnesses⁴⁸ and copies of all exhibits not later than 5 days before trial (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays) by personal delivery or by means requiring a written receipt.

8-3 Refusal to Obey a Formal Summons

A. Accused Person

When an accused person fails to respond to a formal summons, the accused shall be served with a second formal summons.

B. Second Summons

A second formal summons⁴⁹ shall be accompanied with a notice that if the accused does not appear at the time appointed (unless providentially hindered, which fact the accused shall make known to the court), or that if the accused appears and refuses to plead, the accused shall be considered in contempt.⁵⁰

C. Sanctions for Failure to Appear

When an accused person, having been twice formally summoned willfully fails to appear, the court or commission shall enter this fact into its records, together with a copy of the indictment, and shall treat the failure to appear as an act of contempt.

⁴⁶ Galatians 6:1 (New International Version, 2011)

⁴⁷ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See D.1-6C for definition of “contempt.”

1. For a member of the church, the court or commission shall suspend the accused person from the sacraments indefinitely. If the charge is of a serious nature, the court or commission may proceed to the sanction of excommunication.⁵¹
 2. For a Teaching or Ruling Elder, the court or commission shall suspend the Officer both from office and the sacraments indefinitely. If the charge is of a serious nature, the court or commission may proceed to the sanctions of removal from office or excommunication.⁵²
- D. Failure of a Witness to Appear
In the event a duly summoned officer or member of the church willfully fails to appear or refuses to testify, the court may treat the refusal of the witness as contempt and proceed to prosecution of the witness.

8-4 Time Periods

At least ten days must elapse between service of the first formal summons on the accused person, and the meeting of the court at which the accused is to appear. The time allotted for appearance following the second summons shall be left to the discretion of the court or commission, provided that it is sufficient for reasonable compliance.

⁵¹ See D.11-2 regarding sanctions.

⁵² Ibid.

— 9 — RULES FOR TESTIMONY

9-1 Competency of Witnesses

Competency means ability to testify. All persons, including both parties, who have sufficient ability to understand the obligation of a solemn promise,⁵³ are competent witnesses.

9-2 Testimony of the Accused

The accused party cannot be required to testify.⁵⁴ No inference of guilt may be drawn from failure to testify. The person or persons who filed the charges shall be required to testify on the demand of the accused.

9-3 Family Members

Husbands and wives, parents and children, shall not be required to testify against each other.

9-4 Dismissing Witnesses

The court or commission⁵⁵ shall have broad discretion as justice may require to dismiss any witness (other than the accused or accuser) from the room while another witness is testifying.

9-5 Disqualification of Witnesses

A member of the court or commission who has given testimony in a case shall be ineligible to vote on the case if either party objects.

9-6 Credibility of Witnesses

Credibility means the degree of credit which may be given to the testimony of a witness. In assessing the credibility of a witness, the court may consider relevant matters that bear on the credibility of the witness, including, but not limited to, the witness's:

- A. Relationship to either party or other witnesses.
- B. Personal interest in the result.
- C. Weakness of understanding.
- D. Demeanor while testifying.
- E. Character for honesty or truthfulness.
- F. Belief in the existence of God and a future state of rewards and punishments.

9-7 The Solemn Promise of the Witness

The Moderator (or Temporary Moderator) shall administer a solemn promise to a witness 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?"

9-8 Examination of Witnesses

⁵³ See D.9-7 regarding solemn promise.

⁵⁴ See D.2-1 regarding the spiritual power of the church.

⁵⁵ "Commission" means judicial commission throughout this chapter.

A. Examination and Cross-Examination

Witnesses shall be examined first by the party introducing them; then cross-examined by the opposite party, after which either party or any member of the court may ask additional questions. No question shall be asked or answered except by permission of the Moderator subject to an appeal to the court or commission. The court or commission shall not permit repetitive questions or questions which are frivolous or irrelevant to the charge at issue.

B. Witness Inconvenience

1. When the alleged offense took place at a distance, and it is inconvenient for the witnesses to appear before the court having jurisdiction, that court may either
 - a. Appoint a judicial investigative committee to take the testimony, or
 - b. Request the court within whose bounds the facts occurred to take the testimony on behalf of the court of original jurisdiction
2. Due notice of the time and place of the taking of testimony by the judicial investigative committee or the coordinate court shall be given to the opposite party. Testimony may be taken by questions asked to the witness with answers recorded in writing or recorded by electronic or other means. Both parties shall have the right to examine the witness.

9-9 Burden of Proof

The testimony of more than one witness shall be necessary in order to prove an allegation of the indictment. However, if in addition to the testimony of one witness, other supporting evidence is proved, the allegation may be considered to be proved.

— 10 — TRIAL PROCEEDINGS

10-1 Order of the trial

- A. Charge to the court or commission
The Moderator (or Temporary Moderator) shall exhort the members of the court or commission to remember and consider their high character as judges of a court of Jesus Christ and the solemn duty in which they are about to participate.
- B. Indictment
The Moderator (or Temporary Moderator) shall read the indictment, and the accused shall be called upon to plead either “guilty” or “not guilty.” If the accused pleads “guilty,” the court or commission shall act according to its discretion. If the accused pleads “not guilty,” the trial shall proceed. The accused party may plead in writing when unable to be personally present. If the accused party is necessarily absent, the court or commission may postpone the trial or allow the accused to name an active member of the church as a representative.
- C. Service of Summons
Before proceeding to trial, the court or commission shall ascertain that its summons has been duly served.
- D. Opening Statements
Each party shall be permitted to make a brief opening statement not longer than 15 minutes unless a longer time shall be granted by the court or commission. The prosecutor shall proceed, followed by the accused.
- E. Testimony
The witnesses for the prosecution and then those for the accused shall be examined.
- F. Exclusion of Prosecutor and the Accused Person
On all questions arising in the progress of a trial, the discussion shall first be between the prosecutor and the accused persons. When they have been heard, they may be required to withdraw from the court until the members deliberate upon and decide the question. The Moderator (or Temporary Moderator) shall announce the court’s or commission’s decision upon return of the prosecutor and the accused to the courtroom.
- G. Closing Argument
Each party shall be permitted to make a brief closing argument not longer than 15 minutes unless a longer time shall be granted by the court. The prosecutor shall proceed, followed by the accused. The prosecutor shall be permitted to close, but total amount of time allocated to each party shall be equal.
- H. Deliberations
The roll shall be called, and the members may express their opinions in the case. The prosecutor and the accused may be required to withdraw from the court until the members deliberate upon and decide the question.
- I. The Vote
The vote shall be by secret ballot, and all members of the court or commission shall vote “Guilty” or “Not Guilty” on each charge of the indictment. A verdict of guilty shall be rendered only upon a

two-thirds majority of the votes cast. The Moderator (or Temporary Moderator) shall announce the court's decision upon return of the prosecutor and the accused to the courtroom.⁵⁶

J. Imposition of Sanctions

Before sanctions are determined, the prosecutor and the accused found guilty shall be given the opportunity to present evidence or argument bearing on the administration of sanctions only.

Thereupon, the court or commission shall proceed to a determination of sanctions.⁵⁷ The prosecutor and the accused may be required to withdraw from the court until the members deliberate and determine sanctions. Sanctions may be rendered upon a simple majority of the votes cast. The Moderator shall announce the court's determination of sanctions, which shall be entered upon the records, upon return of prosecutor and the accused to the courtroom.

K. Motion for New Trial

If after the trial new testimony is discovered which the accused believes is important, the accused shall have the right to ask for a new trial. The court shall have the power to grant the request.

10-2 Challenges to the Court

Either party may, for cause hereinafter described, challenge the right of any member to sit in the trial of the case. The question shall be decided by other members of the court. A challenge for cause against a member of the court shall be granted when:

- A. A member of the court expresses an opinion about the guilt of either party to any person not a member of the court before the conclusion of the trial.
- B. A member of the court is absent from any sitting of the trial without the permission of the court, or satisfactory reasons rendered.
- C. A member of the court is found:
 - 1. To be related to the accused or other witnesses.
 - 2. To have a personal interest in the result. Or,
 - 3. To have similar impediment or conflict of interest.

10-3 Professional or Learned Counsel

A. No Paid Counsel

No person serving as counsel shall be permitted to receive compensation for services rendered to either party.⁵⁸ However, parties may reimburse counsel for reasonable expenses.

B. Professional or Learned Counsel

In the event either party shall be represented by a person who is a graduate of an accredited school of law, the other party shall be likewise permitted to be represented by learned or professional counsel. However, learned or professional counsel must be a member of the

⁵⁶ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

⁵⁷ See *Book of Discipline* Chapters 11-2 regarding sanctions.

⁵⁸ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

church.⁵⁹ A member of the court serving as counsel in the case shall not be allowed to sit in judgment on the case.

10-4 The Record of the Case

A. Importance of the Record

Keeping accurate records of actions for discipline is incumbent upon the Moderator and Clerk of the court or commission both for the history of the case and in the event of an appeal.

B. Contents of the Record

The Clerk or other person designated by the court or commission shall, within thirty days after the trial, make and maintain as part of the permanent records of the court or commission, a complete record of the proceedings, including the charges, the indictment, the answer (if any), all the testimony, whether transcribed or prepared in summary form, and all such acts, orders, and decisions of the court or commission relating to the case including the written ballots evidencing the decision and the determination of sanctions. These documents shall constitute the Record of the Case and should ordinarily be maintained separately from the Minutes of the court or commission.

C. Copies of the Record:

The court or commission shall make and maintain a transcript or record of the proceedings by written or electronic means. Both parties shall be permitted to make copies (by transcript or electronic recording) of the whole proceedings.

D. Transmitting the Record on Appeal

When a case is appealed,⁶⁰ the lower court shall transmit the Record of the Case to the higher court with the addition of the notice of appeal. The higher court does not re-try the case but shall render its decision based only on that which is contained in the Record. On the final decision of a case by a higher court the decision shall be communicated to all lower courts.

1. Authentication of the Record

The records of a court or commission, or any part of them, whether original or transcribed, if regularly authenticated by the Moderator and Clerk, or by either of them, shall be deemed good and sufficient evidence in any other court. Authentication shall be in writing in the following or similar form:

I, _____ Clerk [or Moderator] of the _____ [name of court] do hereby certify that the foregoing are true, correct, and complete copies of the Record in the Case of _____.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

2. Authentication of Testimony

The testimony taken by one court or commission and regularly authenticated shall be received by every other court as no less valid than if it had been taken by itself.

⁵⁹ See **D.1-2**; **G.8-3**

⁶⁰ See *Book of Discipline* Chapter 13 on the process of appeal.

— 11 —DECISIONS FROM A TRIAL – DISCIPLINARY SANCTIONS

11-1 Exhortation to Meekness

When any person shall be found guilty of an offense, the court shall proceed with all tenderness and shall deal with its offending brother or sister in the spirit of meekness. The members are exhorted to watch themselves, so that they may avoid temptation.

11-2 Disciplinary Sanctions

- A. Disciplinary sanctions which may be administered by church courts or commissions are, in order of severity:
 - 1. Reprimand.⁶¹
 - 2. Suspension.
 - 3. Removal from church office.
 - 4. Excommunication.
- B. If the court finds on trial that the offender is guilty, but the offense may be remedied without hindering the person's ministry, the court shall take all prudent measures to remedy the offense and administer at least the sanction of Reprimand and record the remedy.
- C. Principles for the Administration of Sanctions⁶²

The administration of church sanctions shall be suited to the nature of the offense.

 - 1. Private offenses
Sanctions for private offenses should be administered in the presence of the court or commission alone, or in private by one or more members of the court or commission.
 - 2. Public offenses
The court or commission has sole discretion regarding the degree of sanction and mode of administration for public offenses.
 - 3. Escalation of offenses
When a milder sanction fails to reclaim the offender, it may become the duty of the court to proceed to the administration of a more severe sanction.
 - 4. Severity of offenses
If the charge is one of serious immorality or heresy and the offender persists in rebellion, the court or commission may proceed to administer a higher sanction.

11-3 Sanction of Reprimand

⁶¹ This category was formerly "admonition." Scripture directs us to admonish one another. In this *Book of Discipline*, "reprimand" is used for the situation in which admonishment has not been successful, and the issue rises to the level of trial and sanction.

⁶² Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

- A. Reprimand is the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning of the offender's guilt and danger, and encouraging the offender to be more careful and watchful in the future.
- B. The sanction of reprimand may 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 reprimand shall be administered by the Moderator in the presence of the court and may also be announced in public should the court deem it appropriate.

11-4 Sanction of Suspension

- A. Suspension is the temporary exclusion of church members from the sacraments and/or from other church ministries or activities.
- B. The goal of suspension is to impress upon the offender the evil of the offense and, under God's blessing, to lead the offender to repentance.
- C. Suspension may be either indefinite or definite in duration.
 - 1. Suspension should generally be indefinite in duration, continuing until the person suspended gives such evidence of repentance as may warrant its removal.
 - 2. The good of the offender and/or the church may require that the offender be suspended for a definite length of time, even though the person confesses his/her sin and gives evidence of repentance.
- D. Regarding church members
Suspension is the temporary exclusion of church members from the sacraments and/or from other church ministries or activities.
- E. Regarding Church Officers⁶³
Suspension includes exclusion from office and may include exclusion from the sacraments.
- F. Regarding Teaching Elders
 - 1. Definite or indefinite suspension shall bar the Teaching Elder from all functions of office and places the Teaching Elder on inactive status with the Presbytery.
 - 2. When a Presbytery suspends a Teaching Elder, the Presbytery has sole discretion as to whether the sanction will include the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.
 - 3. The Presbytery may suspend the Teaching Elder from all ministerial functions without dissolving the pastoral relationship if the court anticipates restoring the offender a time that does not unduly bring harm to the congregation. In such a case, the court should assist the congregation in supplying a temporary pastor in order to maintain the regular worship of the congregation.
- G. Administration of the sanction of suspension

⁶³ Church officers are Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, and Deacons.

1. The sanction of suspension shall be administered in the presence of the court or commission alone or in open session of the court, as it may deem best, and public announcement thereof shall be at the discretion of the court or commission.
2. The sanction of definite or indefinite suspension shall be administered by the Moderator of the court or commission in the following or similar words:

“Whereas you, _____[a Teaching Elder / Ruling Elder / Deacon, / member of the Church] are convicted by sufficient proof [or are guilty by your own confession] of the sin of [name the offense], we the Presbytery [or Session] of [name of the Presbytery or church] 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 that the offender would be restored.

11-5 Sanction of Removal from Office

- A. Removal from office is the sanction by which the offender’s ordination is permanently revoked, thus removing the offender from the office of Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon without excommunication. Removal from office may or may not be accompanied by the administration of other sanctions.
- B. When a Presbytery or General Assembly, if it has assumed jurisdiction,⁶⁴ removes a Teaching Elder from office, the pastoral relationship shall be dissolved.
- C. When a Presbytery removes a Teaching Elder from office without excommunication, it shall assign the offender to membership at some local church subject to the approval of the Session of that local church.
- D. Administration of the Sanction of Removal from Office
The Moderator of the court or commission shall administer the sanction of removal from office in the following or similar words:

“Whereas [name], a Teaching Elder of this Presbytery (or a Ruling Elder or Deacon of this Church), has been proved by sufficient evidence to be guilty of the sin of [offense], we, [name of the presbytery or local church] do adjudge you disqualified for the office of Teaching Elder (or Ruling Elder or Deacon), and therefore we do hereby, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, remove you from the office of Teaching Elder (or Ruling Elder or Deacon) of the church and do prohibit you from exercising any of the functions thereof.”

If the sanction includes suspension or excommunication, the Moderator or Chair shall proceed to say the following or similar words:

“We do, moreover, by the same authority, suspend you from the Sacraments, and cut you off from the membership and fellowship of the Church.”

11-6 Sanction of Excommunication

⁶⁴ See D.3-4 and 3-5.

- A. Excommunication is the removal of an offender from the membership and fellowship of the church. Excommunication shall be administered only in cases of offenses aggravated by a continuing refusal to repent.
- B. The purpose of excommunication is to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, to remove offense from the church and to remind the church to “not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord” (Hebrews 12:5b).
- C. When a Presbytery or General Assembly⁶⁵ removes a Teaching Elder from office with excommunication, it should request the Session of a local church to minister to the offender as it would an unbeliever in hope of leading the offender to repentance and eventual admission to membership in the church and the Lord’s table.
- D. Administration of the Sanction of Excommunication
Excommunication may be administered privately or publicly as the court decides. The Moderator of the court or commission shall make a statement of the steps which have been taken with respect to the offender, and of the decision to cut the offender off from the membership and fellowship of the church. The Moderator 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 sanction. The Moderator shall then administer the sanction in the following or similar words:

“ _____ a member of this Church, has been by sufficient proof convicted of the sin of _____ 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 the Church of _____ do pronounce you to be excluded from the Sacraments and the fellowship of the Church.”

⁶⁵ The General Assembly only has authority to remove a Teaching Elder from office if it has assumed jurisdiction under the authority given in D.3-4 and 3-5.

— 12 — REMOVAL OF SANCTIONS

12-1 Court Should Pray for the Offender

After any person has been suspended from the sacraments, it is proper that the Elders of the church should frequently converse with the person as well as pray with and for the person, that it would please God to grant repentance and restoration.

12-2 Restoration to the Sacraments

When the court shall be satisfied as to the reality of the repentance of a suspended offender, that person shall profess repentance either in the presence of the court alone or publicly, and be restored to the sacraments of the church if such be the judgment of the court. Restoration shall be declared in the following or similar words:

“Whereas, you, _____, have been suspended from the Sacraments of the Church (and/or from the office of Teaching Elder, or Ruling Elder, or Deacon) but have now demonstrated such repentance as satisfies the church, we, the Session (or Presbytery) of _____ do hereby, in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, restore you from the said sentence of suspension, and restore you to the full communion of the Church (and the exercise of your said office, and all the functions thereof).”

After which there shall be prayer and thanksgiving.

12-3 Restoration of an Excommunicated Person

- A. When an excommunicated person comes to repentance and desires to be readmitted to the membership and fellowship of the church, that person may request restoration from the Session.
- B. The Session shall proceed to restore the excommunicated person if it finds sufficient evidence of sincere repentance. This may be done in the presence of the Session or the congregation as seems best to the Session.
- C. If the excommunicated person was a Teaching Elder, the Session may receive him/her into membership and fellowship of the church. The Session shall then report its action to the court that imposed the original sanction.
- D. On the day appointed for restoration, the Moderator shall call upon the excommunicated person and propose the following questions:

“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?” Answer, “I do.”

“Do you acknowledge that you have been in justice and mercy cut off from the communion of the church?” Answer, “I do.”

“Do you now voluntarily profess your sincere repentance and sorrow for your sin and rebellion: and do you humbly ask the forgiveness of God and His Church?” Answer, “I do.”

“Do you sincerely promise, through divine grace, to live in all humility of mind and carefulness to avoid sin, and to attempt to live a lifestyle that will glorify God our Savior?” Answer, “I do.”

Here the Moderator shall give the person being restored a suitable exhortation. Then the Moderator shall pronounce restoration in the following or similar words:

“Whereas you, _____, have been shut out from the membership and fellowship of the Church, but now have demonstrated such repentance as satisfies the Church; in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ we, the Session of this Church, do declare you restored from the sentence of excommunication formerly pronounced against you, and we do restore you to the membership and fellowship of the Church, that you may be a partaker of all the benefits of the Lord Jesus to your eternal salvation.”

After which there shall be prayer and thanksgiving.

12-4 Restoration to Office

A Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon suspended from office for scandalous conduct shall not be restored, even on the deepest sorrow for sin, until the officer has demonstrated an exemplary, humble, and edifying lifestyle for a considerable amount of time, which shall be for not less than one year. Any officer suspended must present to the court compelling evidence that the conduct causing that suspension or removal will not occur again.

12-5 Re-election Required for Exercise of Office

A Ruling Elder or Deacon restored to office shall not exercise that office in the church without re-election by the people.

12-6 Restoration of a Suspended Teaching Elder

- A. A Teaching Elder suspended indefinitely from office shall not be restored unless there is compelling evidence of repentance and growth to justify restoration. In that event restoration shall be pronounced only by the court imposing the sanction or with its consent.
- B. When the Teaching Elder files an application for restoration with the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery, the application shall be forwarded to the Ministerial Committee for consideration.
 - 1. A motion to restore or not restore may be brought before the Presbytery only by its Ministerial Committee. Should the Ministerial Committee choose to recommend restoration, the Presbytery shall consider the recommendation in executive session.
 - 2. The Teaching Elder seeking restoration and the Ministerial Committee will be provided with the opportunity to address the Presbytery.
 - 3. After addressing the Presbytery, the Teaching Elder seeking restoration shall be excused.
 - 4. All votes concerning Teaching Elder restoration are to be by secret ballot.
 - 5. A 4/5 affirmative vote shall be required for restoration to Office.
 - 6. Restoration may be pronounced only by the court imposing the sanction, or with its consent.

12-7 Transfer of Case to More Convenient Forum

When a person under sanction moves to a place remote from the court issuing the sanction, and desires to profess repentance and obtain restoration, the court may, if it deems it appropriate, transmit a certified copy of its proceedings to the Session (or Presbytery) where the person under sanction resides. The court of the person's residence shall then assume jurisdiction over the case and proceed with it as though it had original jurisdiction.

— 13 — APPEALS

13-1 Definition

An appeal is a request made to a higher court to review a judgment made by a lower court in an action for discipline (cases of heresy, immorality, and/or contempt).⁶⁶ An appeal cannot be made to any court other than the next higher court, unless the higher court directs and authorizes that the appeal be heard in another court or by a commission created for the express purpose of hearing the appeal and rendering a decision thereupon.

13-2 The Right to Appeal

- A. Only an accused party found guilty and sanctioned by a lower court has the right to appeal the lower court's decision to a higher court.
- B. The party bringing the appeal shall be known as "Appellant." The party against whom the appeal is taken shall be known as "Appellee."

13-3 Newly Discovered Evidence

- A. Newly discovered evidence is evidence that a party did not know, nor should have known, existed during the lower court proceedings.
- B. In the prosecution of an appeal, the party seeking to introduce newly discovered evidence shall file a motion with notice to all other parties demonstrating justification for its introduction. Upon approval of the motion, the appellate court shall remand the case to the lower court for a new trial.

13-4 Grounds for Appeal

The grounds for appeal are:

- A. Any misapplication of the EPC Constitution.
- B. Any irregularity in the proceedings of the lower court.
- C. Receiving improper evidence or declining to receive proper evidence.
- D. Rendering a decision before all the testimony is reasonably heard.
- E. Manifestation of prejudice in the case.
- F. Mistake or injustice in the judgment or sanction.

13-5 Notice of Appeal

Written notice of appeal⁶⁷ shall be filed no later than thirty days after the entry of judgment of the lower court. The filing of the Notice of Appeal with the Clerk of the appellate court places the appeal before that court. A copy of the Notice of Appeal also shall be filed with the lower court from which the appeal is taken.

13-6 Statement of Grounds for Appeal

⁶⁶ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

⁶⁷ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

Written statement of grounds for appeal shall be filed no later than fifteen days after the Notice of Appeal is filed. The statement must state the factual or constitutional bases forming the issues on appeal.

13-7 Filing the Record

Within thirty days after receipt of a Notice of Appeal, it shall be the duty of the Clerk of the lower court to prepare and file with the Clerk of the higher court the Record of the Case.⁶⁸

13-8 Stay of Lower Court Action Pending Appeal

The filing of a Notice of Appeal does not stay the judgment of the lower court. If, however, the sanction is suspension, excommunication, or removal from office, the sanctioned party may, for sufficient reasons provided in writing, petition the higher court to stay the sanction until the case is finally decided. The higher court in its discretion may stay the sanction or later modify the stay. In the case that a stay is imposed or later modified, the higher court will notify the lower court. The lower court will confirm receipt of the stay and its compliance with it.

13-9 Procedures on Appeal

After a higher court has decided that an appeal is in order and should be considered, the following procedures shall be followed:

- A. The court shall read the complete Record of the Case as submitted by the lower court. The higher court shall provide the Record to the Appellant. Before sending the Record to the Appellant, the higher court may, at its discretion, redact the Record in order to protect confidential or sensitive information that is not relevant to the appeal.
- B. The Appellant shall file a written statement which sets forth the issues on appeal and the arguments in support thereof within thirty days of the receipt of the Record of the Case by the higher court. In addition, a copy of the written statement shall be delivered to the Appellee. Appellant shall also provide to the higher court a certificate of delivery of its written statement to the Appellee.
- C. The Appellee may file a written response within fifteen days of the receipt by the higher court of the Appellant's written statement. In addition, a copy of the written response shall be delivered to the Appellant. Appellee shall also provide to the higher court a certificate of delivery of its written response to the appellant.
- D. The Appellant may file a written reply to the Appellee's written response within fifteen days of the receipt by the higher court of the Appellee's written response, if any. In addition, a copy of the written reply shall be delivered to the appellee. Appellant shall also provide to the higher court a certificate of delivery of its written reply to the Appellee.
- E. The Appellant or Appellee may file a written request for oral argument, explaining why it is necessary and should be permitted. In response to such a request, or at its own discretion, the Higher Court may allow oral argument. If oral argument is allowed, the court will advise both parties of the date, time and place of oral argument, and the time allotted to each party.

In the alternative, the higher court may determine the issues on the appeal based solely on the Record of the Case, the written statements, responses, and replies.

⁶⁸ See D.10-4 regarding the Record of the Case.

- F. In every case in which oral argument is heard, a record of the oral argument shall be kept. The recording of the oral argument may be transcribed and the recording or copy of the transcription maintained by the Stated Clerk of the higher court. In the case of an appeal to the next higher court, a party may request a copy of the transcript. The cost of transcription shall be borne by the requesting party.
- G. The members of the higher court, in their deliberations, shall express their opinions, deliberate upon and vote on the issues raised.
- H. The vote shall be taken on each ground for appeal set forth in the statement⁶⁹ filed in this form: “Shall this ground for appeal be sustained?”

13-10 Decision on Appeal

- A. The higher court may
 - 1. Confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the judgment of the lower court,
 - 2. Remand the case to the lower court for the purpose of amending the Record of the Case, should it appear incorrect or defective,
 - 3. Remand the case to the lower court with instructions.
- B. If the higher court deems it wise, it may also render a written opinion which shall become a part of the Record of the Case.
- C. Any and all persons, including members of the higher court who were involved with, have intimate knowledge of, or otherwise participated in the underlying judgment of the lower court, are precluded from involvement with the higher court in its determination of the issues on appeal.

13-11 Counsel

Both parties shall have the right of counsel.⁷⁰

13-12 Abandonment of Appeal

Absent extenuating circumstances made known to the higher court beforehand, the Appellant shall be deemed to have abandoned the appeal if the Appellant does not comply with the procedures set forth above. In such cases, the judgment of the lower court will stand, unless the higher court determines that the subject matter of the appeal is so serious that the peace and purity of the church is at stake. In such a case, the higher court, in its discretion, may nonetheless decide the appeal.

13-13 Conduct of the Parties

If a member of either party willfully fails to comply with these rules or demonstrates a litigious or otherwise unchristian attitude in the appeal process, that person may be subject to appropriate discipline by the higher court.

13-14 Failure to File the Record

If the Clerk of a lower court neglects or willfully fails to file the Record of the Case, or any part of it, the Clerk may be subject to appropriate discipline by the higher court. Until the complete Record of

⁶⁹ See D.13-6.

⁷⁰ See D.10-3

the Case is filed with the higher court, the judgment of the lower court may be stayed at the discretion of the higher court.

If the lower court shall file a portion of the record by electronic means, the Appellant shall have the right to prepare a written transcript of it at the Appellant's expense.

— 14 — COMPLAINTS

14-1 Complaint Defined

- A. A Complaint is a written contention signed by an eligible member^{71 72} to a higher court challenging some non-judicial⁷³ act or decision made by the lower court and seeking a remedy.
- B. A Complaint may be filed with the higher court only after attempts to obtain a remedy at the lower court have been unsuccessful.⁷⁴

14-2 Eligibility to File a Complaint

- A. It is the right of any member on the active roll of the church to file a Complaint against any act or decision of a Session to whom the member is subject provided the Complainant is not under sanctions.
- B. It is the right of any Teaching or Ruling Elder to file a Complaint against an act or decision taken by a Presbytery provided that:
 - 1. The Teaching Elder is an active or Associate member of the Presbytery,
 - 2. The Ruling Elder:
 - a. Was a duly elected Commissioner at the meeting at which the action was taken or the decision was made. Or,
 - b. Is in active service on the Session of a church in the Presbytery, provided the Ruling Elder, the Session, or the church was substantially impacted by the act or decision
- C. A Complaint shall only be made to the next higher court, except with the consent of that court.

14-3 Initiation of Complaint

A Complaint initiates a case against a court in the following manner:

- A. A complaint shall only be made when the action or decision of the court is alleged to be procedurally irregular and/or in clear violation of the EPC Constitution.
- B. A complaint shall set forth with particularity all of the facts and reasons why the action or decision of the court is being challenged. This includes reference to the specific provisions of the EPC Constitution, or any applicable bylaws or rules alleged to have been violated.
- C. A complaint shall state the specific remedy being sought.
- D. Once a complaint has been filed, the provisions for *ex parte* communications apply⁷⁵

14-4 Designation of the Parties

⁷¹ See eligibility requirements in D.14-2.

⁷² A person filing a complaint should use the appropriate “Form for Discipline.” A signed copy transmitted electronically is considered a “written contention.”

⁷³ Judicial decisions may be appealed following the processes in D.13.

⁷⁴ See D.14-6.

⁷⁵ See *Book of Discipline* Chapter 6 for provisions regarding *ex parte* communications.

The party filing the complaint shall be designated as the “Complainant.” The court shall be designated as the “Respondent,” even if the action or decision being challenged is the action or decision of a commission appointed by the court.

14-5 Filing a Complaint

- A. A complaint challenging an act or decision of a court or a commission appointed by the court shall be filed with the Clerk of the next higher court.
 - 1. A complaint challenging an act or decision taken by a Session or by its duly appointed commission shall be commenced by filing a complaint with the Presbytery in which the church is located or is otherwise aligned.
 - 2. A complaint challenging an act or decision taken by a Presbytery, or by its duly appointed commission, shall be commenced by filing a complaint with the General Assembly.
- B. A copy of the complaint shall be served upon the lower court by providing its Clerk with a copy thereof at the same time that the complaint is filed with the Clerk of the next higher court.

14-6 Time Period for Filing a Complaint

- A. A complaint may be filed with the next higher court only after the eligible member of the church or court⁷⁶ has attempted to resolve the issue forming the basis for the complaint with the lower court and
 - 1. The response of the lower court has not satisfied the concern of the member, or
 - 2. The lower court has failed to respond by the close of its next stated meeting.
- B. A Complaint shall be filed with the next higher court no later than thirty days after the lower court’s response or failure to respond.
- C. Exceptions to this time period may be allowed in cases when
 - 1. The Complainant legitimately had no knowledge of the lower court action or decision within the thirty-day period, or
 - 2. The Complainant petitions the higher court to file an untimely complaint to avoid a miscarriage of justice.
 - 3. Decisions on such exceptions are solely within the discretion of the higher court.

14-7 Stay Pending Hearing on the Complaint

- A. Reception of the complaint by the higher court temporarily stays the action of the lower court. If the higher court determines that the complaint is properly filed, the stay continues until the matter is finally decided.
- B. If the higher court determines that the complaint is not properly filed, the stay will ordinarily be lifted. If the matter concerns the purity or peace of the church, the court may, either on its own

⁷⁶ See D.14-2B for eligibility requirements

motion or in response to an application filed by a party to the action and for sufficient reasons duly recorded, stay the action of the lower court until the case is finally decided.

14-8 Court Procedures upon the Filing of a Complaint

- A. When a Complaint is filed with the higher court, the court shall determine whether the Complaint cites constitutional or procedural grounds⁷⁷ on which relief may be granted. If the court determines the Complaint does not cite such grounds on which relief may be granted, it may:
1. Dismiss the Complaint in its entirety.
 2. Strike portions of the Complaint and proceed forward. Or,
 3. Order the Complainant to provide a more specific statement of the grounds on which relief may be granted.
- B. Abuse of Process
- If the court determines in good faith that the filing of a complaint is a clear abuse of process, the court may dismiss the complaint. To constitute a clear abuse of process, the complaint must be:
1. Frivolous on its face.
 2. Substantially duplicates a prior complaint that has been finally decided.
 3. Part of a demonstrated pattern of repetitive, unmeritorious filings. Or,
 4. Primarily filed for a purpose other than obtaining the relief requested.
- The court shall state the specific ground(s) for its determination, including the basis on which the complaint constitutes a clear abuse of process. Any such dismissal shall itself be subject to complaint to the next higher court, where applicable.
- C. When a Complaint is filed with the next higher court and it is determined by the court that the Complaint cites constitutional or procedural grounds on which relief may be granted, the higher court has authority:
1. To void the whole or any part of the lower court action against which the complaint has been made.
 2. To send the matter back to the lower court with instructions for further consideration or action.
 3. To direct the lower court to appoint one or more representatives to answer the Complaint against it.
 4. To direct the appointed representative(s) to file an answer to the Complaint no later than thirty days from the order of the higher court.
 - a. The lower court may request a one-time extension of fifteen days to file its answer.

⁷⁷ See D.14-3A

- b. The answer shall respond to each allegation in the Complaint and shall set forth with specificity all defenses on which the lower court relies.
- D. The Record of the Case

The lower court shall file the record of the case concurrently with its answer to the complaint. The Record of the Case shall consist of any and all documents in the lower court's possession relating to the complaint made against it. In every case a full record shall be made, and a copy of it shall be sent to the Complainant. If the Complainant, on motion duly filed, contends that the Record is incomplete or incorrect, the Complainant may file a proposed supplement to the Record of the Case within fifteen days of the filing of the Record of the Case.
- E. Reviewing the Record

Upon receipt of the full and complete record of the case as determined by the higher court, the higher court shall then review the Record in its entirety, except any part of it that may be omitted with the mutual consent of both parties and the higher court.
- F. The higher court may seek clarification of matters or direct questions to the Complainant and/or Respondent in writing.
- G. Oral Argument and Notice of Hearing

The higher court may permit oral argument. If the higher court determines oral argument will be allowed, it shall provide both parties with reasonable notice of the time and place of the hearing on the complaint. This notice may be provided in person or by other means establishing proof of service.
- H. If Oral Argument is allowed, either party may file a written summary of their Argument with the higher court no later than fifteen days before the date of the hearing. The Complainant shall have the right of opening and closing the argument.
- I. Deliberations of the Court

Upon conclusion of the arguments, the members of the higher court shall convene in private, all members shall be given an opportunity to express their opinions, deliberate upon, and vote on the question.

14-9 Voting upon a Complaint

- A. Specification of the vote

In voting upon a complaint, the vote shall be either to sustain, to sustain in part, or not to sustain.
- B. Effect of a vote to sustain or not to sustain
 - 1. A vote to sustain shall be to sustain each and all of the items or counts of the complaint. A vote not to sustain shall be to deny the relief sought by each count of the complaint.
 - 2. A vote to sustain in part shall be to sustain one or more specific items or counts of the complaint.
- C. A majority vote of those members of the court present is required to sustain, not to sustain, or to sustain in part the counts of the complaint.
- D. Written opinion

The court may issue a written opinion explaining its decision, which shall become part of the Record of the Case in the lower court.

E. Right to Vote

No member of the lower court who participated in the action or decision made the basis of the complaint shall hear, deliberate upon, or vote on the allegations of the complaint being heard by the next higher court.

14-10 Abandonment of Complaint

If a Complainant does not appear before the higher court in person at the time set for the hearing, the complaint shall be considered abandoned. In such cases the act or decision of the lower court will stand, unless the Complainant can provide the court with a satisfactory explanation for failure to appear or the higher court chooses to act upon the complaint in the interests of the Church.

14-11 Unchristian Attitude

If any party willfully fails to comply with these rules or demonstrates a litigious or otherwise unchristian attitude, that party may be subject to appropriate discipline by the higher court.

14-12 Failure to File the Record

- A. If a lower court neglects to file the Record of the Case or any part of it, to the harm of the Complainant, it may receive a proper rebuke from the higher court.
- B. If the lower court files a portion of the record by electronic means, the Complainant shall have the right to prepare a written transcript of it at the Complainant's expense.

— 15 — DISSENT AND PROTEST

15-1 Dissent

A dissent is a statement on the record by members of a minority of a court objecting to what they believe to be an ill-advised or erroneous act or decision of a court. Any expression of dissent shall be made before adjournment of the meeting and a written statement for the reasons should be sent to the Clerk of the court within thirty days.⁷⁸

15-2 Protest

A protest is a more solemn and formal statement on the record by members of a minority of a court, strenuously objecting to what they believe to be an ill-advised or erroneous act or decision of a court. Any expression of protest shall be made before adjournment of the meeting and a written statement for the reasons should be sent to the Clerk of the court within thirty days.⁷⁹

15-3 Record of Protest or Dissent

If a protest or dissent contains temperate language and is respectful to the court, it shall be placed in the record of the court. If the court believes it is necessary, it may respond to the protest or the dissent. The matter shall be ended unless the persons protesting obtain permission to withdraw or amend their protest.

15-4 Right to Vote Required

None can join in a dissent or protest against a decision of any court except those who had a right to vote in the case.

⁷⁸ Use the appropriate *Form for Discipline*.

⁷⁹ Ibid.