

Christ Presbyterian Church (PCA)
1230 ROSSVIEW ROAD
CLARKSVILLE, TN 37043
INTRODUCTION TO BYLAWS

Bylaws are designed to help our church operate in a biblically faithful manner. Like most church bylaws, they cover basic issues related to membership, congregational meetings, the responsibilities of church officers, and the use of church property. They also cover issues that are often overlooked in standard bylaws, such as biblical counseling, confidentiality, and conflict resolution. You may wonder why we have gone into such detail and addressed issues that other churches may have traditionally ignored. The primary answer to this question is that the Session believes there has been a significant change in the moral and legal climate of our country.

Twenty years ago, most Americans, whether they were Christian or not, held to a common framework of basic moral values. Honesty, fairness, respect for others, self-discipline, and accountability were generally viewed as commendable qualities. In recent years, however, respect for these qualities has been undermined by a growing emphasis on individualism, a diminished respect for authority, the acceptance of relative morality, and the loss of common norms and values.

Because of this change, it is no longer possible to assume that everyone holds to the same standard of common sense, fairness, and justice, even within the same church. Therefore, what seems to be appropriate to one member might seem to be outrageous to another. This loss of common values even within the church can cause a great deal of confusion and conflict. It can also expose a church to devastating lawsuits. A generation ago, very few people would have even dreamed of suing a church. But the legal climate has changed dramatically in recent years, and today lawsuits against churches are commonplace. Part of the reason for this is that people have differing expectations as to how a church should conduct its affairs or treat its members. When these expectations are not met, a lawsuit often follows, which can ruin a church both financially and spiritually.

As Proverbs 22:3 warns, "A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it." Realizing that the absence of common norms and values can pose a threat to the unity and wellbeing of our church, the Session is developed these Bylaws as a means of establishing commonly accepted standards for how we would treat one another and govern ourselves as a body. In particular, the Bylaws are designed to accomplish these goals:

They help to prevent surprises and disappointed expectations by providing potential members with a thorough explanation of how the church intends to govern and accomplish its mission.

They reduce the likelihood of confusion and conflict within the church by establishing clear operational guidelines.

They prevent the misuse of authority by church leaders by limiting their powers and establishing procedures that protect members from being disciplined or losing rights without due process.

They give our elders protection from being subpoenaed by a civil court to testify regarding information they receive through pastoral counseling, while at the same time giving them guidelines for reporting actual or suspected harm to others.

They reduce the church's exposure to legal liability by satisfying recently developed legal requirements and requiring that potential lawsuits will be resolved through biblical mediation or arbitration rather than through litigation.

Most people would agree that these are worthwhile goals, but some might still be troubled by the amount of detail found in the Bylaws. They might say, "Why can't we live with just a few general rules?" The answer to that question is quite simple: Because we live in a fallen world, we tend to interpret general rules differently and twist them to serve our own selfish ends. Therefore, it is often necessary to develop detailed rules to eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings and mistreatment.

This human need for detailed guidance is clearly reflected in Scripture. Instead of giving us only the two great commandments (love God and love your neighbor), God gave us the Ten Commandments. And he didn't stop there. Realizing our weakness and our sinful tendency to ignore or distort his commandments, God instructed Moses to set forth other detailed laws on how we should behave (see Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). All of these laws are summed up in the two great commandments, but even Jesus taught that until the world is renewed, we will still need the helpful guidance of the more detailed moral principles set forth throughout Scripture (see Matthew 5:17-7:6).

One of the places that we sometimes need this kind of detailed guidance is in the church. Scripture does not tell us exactly how to give notice or establish quorums for congregational meetings, what information should remain confidential and what may be shared with others, how long elders or deacons should serve without re-election, or how to dispose of property. The Bylaws will be designed to answer these types of questions, and will hopefully spare us from unnecessary confusion and conflict, help us to act in consistent and respectful ways, and allow us to devote ourselves to the more important matters of God's kingdom.

Once the Bylaws are complete, and as you read them, we encourage you to look up and study the passages of Scripture that will be cited next to particular provisions. If such study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our pastor or one of our elders, who will be happy to talk with you about the Bylaws.

BYLAWS OF CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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THESE BYLAWS ARE SUBJECT TO ARBITRATION PURSUANT TO THE STATE OF
TENNESSEE UNIFORM
ARBITRATION ACT, SECTION 29-5-301

1. Name

The name by which this organization shall be known in law shall be "Christ Presbyterian Church," referred to herein as "the church."

2. Constitution

The Constitution of the church, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America ("BCO"), comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline, and the Directory for Worship (see BCO Preface §III). Whenever possible, these Bylaws shall be interpreted so as to be consistent with the constitution; should any bylaw be found to contradict a provision of the Constitution, the Constitution shall control (see BCO §11-4; 25-7).

Note: These bylaws are designed to supplement the Constitution of the church, especially our Book of Church Order (BCO). When needed to provide an understandable framework, these bylaws will actually duplicate or repeat what is stated in the BCO. In many places, these bylaws go beyond the BCO and address issues that are not adequately covered elsewhere. To avoid repeating the entire BCO, however, these bylaws do not cover every issue addressed in the BCO, which will be consulted when questions arise about church government. To facilitate cross-referencing between these two documents, these bylaws contain numerous citations to related sections of the BCO.

3. Organization and Incorporation

The church shall be organized as a nonprofit corporation under the laws of the State of Tennessee (see BCO §25-7).

4. Purpose and Limitations

The purposes of the church are:

- a. To bring glory and honor to the Triune God by promoting true worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness;
- b. To operate exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes within the classification of legal charities; and no part of the net earnings of the organization shall be used to the benefit of any private stockholder or individual; and no substantial part of the activities of

the organization, or any receipt of its funds, shall be utilized for any other purpose except those purposes mentioned above;

c. To handle affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by the civil authorities (see BCO §25-7).

d. The church shall not have or issue shares of stock, and no dividends shall be paid. No part of the income or assets of the church shall be distributed to any member or officer without full consideration. The church is prohibited from lending money to guarantee the obligation of a member or officer of the church. No member or officer of the church has any vested right, interest or privilege in or to the assets, property, functions, or activities of the church. The church may contract in due course, for reasonable consideration, with its members or officers without violating this provision.

5. Location of Office

The registered office of the church shall be located within the State of Tennessee at the address of the church's registered agent. The Session or a majority of the members may change the registered agent and the address of the registered office from time to time, upon filing the appropriate statement with the Secretary of State.

6. Membership

a. The membership shall consist of all communing and non-communing members, all of whom have the privilege of pastoral oversight, instruction, and government by the church (see BCO §6). Communing members are those who have made a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table as provided in Bylaw §6.b (see BCO §25-7). Non-communing members are the children of communing members (see BCO §§6-1; 28-5).

b. A person may be received into communing membership by a letter of transfer from another church of like faith and practice approved by the Session, by reaffirmation of faith, or by confession of faith. In order to be received into communing membership, a person must also complete the Inquirers Class, submit a Membership Application, sign a Membership Commitment, and be accepted by the Session.

c. All communing members in good standing in the church shall be voting members (see BCO §25-1). ("Good standing" means that a member is not presently under the censure of suspension or deposition.) Any voting member in attendance at a duly called meeting shall be entitled to one vote on matters brought before the congregation (see BCO §§6-4; 24-3; 25-1). Voting by proxy shall not be permitted.

d. Members may be removed from membership at their own request by informing the Session of their intention to withdraw and the reasons therefore (see BCO §38-3). If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problem or disappointment with the church, the Session shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth. If the Session is unable to resolve those matters, it shall offer to assist the member in locating a church of like faith and practice that can respond more effectively to his or her gifts and needs. If it appears to the Session that a member has requested removal merely to avoid church discipline, that request shall not be given effect until

the disciplinary process has been properly concluded (see Matt. 18:12-20; BCO §§38-3, 46-5; Bylaw §16; Guidelines on Church Discipline §§8, 20-22)

e. Members may also be removed from membership by order of the Session when they: persistently, over an extended period of time, and without adequate reason absent themselves from the stated services of the church; unite with a church of another denomination; cannot be found for a period greater than one year; or are removed by excommunication for persistent impenitence (see BCO §30-4, 46-2; Guidelines and Rules on Church Discipline). Non-communicating members may be removed from membership with their parents or when they reject the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church and neglect the ongoing exhortation of the Session to profess faith in Christ (see BCO §28).

7. Ruling Elders and Deacons

a. Ruling elders and deacons must be male voting members (see BCO §§7-2; 25-7). In order to be eligible for election, a man shall satisfy the qualifications set forth in Scripture (see 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; BCO §§8-1, 2; 24-1). He shall also have been a member in good standing in the church for at least one year, shall have received appropriate training under the direction or with the approval of the Session, and shall have served the church in functions requiring responsible leadership (see BCO §§16;17).

b. Ruling elders, individually and jointly with the pastor, are to lead the church in the service of Christ. They are to watch diligently over the people committed to their charge to prevent corruption of doctrine or morals. Evils that they cannot correct by private admonition they should bring to the notice of the Session. They should visit the people, especially the sick, instruct the uninformed, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant. They should pray with and for the people. They should have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the pastor and help him in his labors (see BCO §§7; 8-3, 8, 9).

c. Deacons shall show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church (see BCO §§7-2; 9-1, 2, 3). As delegated and directed by the Session, they shall minister to the temporal needs of members and friends, manage the church finances, and see to the care and maintenance of church property.

d. Any voting member may propose to the Session nominations for the offices of elders and deacons. The Session shall certify those nominees whom, upon examination, it judges to possess the necessary qualifications for office. An elder or deacon who had been previously certified but who resigned from or was divested of the office must be re-certified. Notice of a meeting to nominate elders or deacons shall be given verbally, in the church bulletin, or by written letter at least one month in advance such meeting. At least one Lord's Day preceding the date appointed for the election, the Session shall announce to the church the names of those it has certified on a slate. Election shall be from those certified on the slate. Voting on the election of elders and deacons shall be done by secret ballot and each vote shall be cast either in favor of or against the slate presented by the Session, the vote of a majority in favor of the slate shall be deemed all elected (see BCO §24-1 to 4; also §§16 and 17).

e. An elder or deacon may be divested of his office by deposition for an offense in doctrine or life (see BCO §24-6). He may also be divested without censure by action of the Session, if a majority of the congregation so requests (see BCO §24-6) or if he cannot or does not for a period of one year perform the duties of his office (see BCO §24-8). An elder or deacon also may resign from his office (see BCO §24-6), or he may be relieved of certain responsibilities at his request

and with the approval of the Session if unable or incapable to perform their duties for age/health issues. The Session will designate these deacons or elders emeritus status (see BCO §24-9).

8. Pastors

- a. It is the charge of the pastor (teaching elder) to feed and tend the flock as Christ's minister and with the other elders to lead them in all the service of Christ. It is his task to conduct the public worship of God; to pray for and with Christ's flock as the mouth of the people unto God; to feed the flock by the public reading and preaching of the Word of God, according to which he is to teach, convince, reprove, exhort, comfort, and evangelize, expounding and applying the truth of Scripture with ministerial authority, as a diligent workman approved by God; to administer the sacraments; to bless the people from God; to shepherd the flock and minister the Word according to the particular needs of groups, families, and individuals in the congregation, catechizing by teaching plainly the first principles of the oracles of God to the baptized youth and to adults who are yet babes in Christ, visiting in the home of people, instructing and counseling individuals, and training them to be faithful servants of Christ; to minister to the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the dying; and to make known the gospel to the lost (see BCO §§7-2; 8-4, 5).
- b. The congregation may choose to elect an associate pastor (see BCO §22-2), his relationship to the church shall be determined by the congregation. If the Session calls an assistant pastor, his relationship with the church shall be determined by the Session (see BCO §§22-4).
- c. The congregation as required in BCO §20 shall elect the pastor and the associate pastor.
- d. A pastor may resign from his position with the permission of his Presbytery, upon due consideration of the needs and counsel of the church. If the church desires to be relieved of its pastor, it may, through a duly called congregational meeting, ask him to resign. If the pastor agrees to do so, the presbytery shall be requested to dissolve the pastoral relationship as of a mutually agreeable date. If the pastor is not willing to resign, the church may petition the presbytery to dissolve the pastoral relationship and may send representatives to the meeting to support the request. The presbytery may grant the request, but only after giving the pastor opportunity to present his reasons for not concurring, or it may urge the congregation to reconsider its action. The decision of the presbytery shall be final and binding, except when that decision is appealed to the General Assembly (see BCO §23-1; 20-2 to 4).

9. Session

- a. The Session is the governing body of the church and consists of its pastor, associate pastor, and ruling elders (see BCO §§12-1; 22-2; 25-7). The Session shall have the power and authority to make rules and regulations not inconsistent with the laws of the State of Tennessee, the Constitution, and these Bylaws. The Session shall manage the business affairs of the corporation, oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship, and concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss, and exercise discipline over the members of the church, supervise the activities of the Board of Deacons and all other organizations of the congregation, and have final authority over the use of the church property (see BCO §§12-1, 5; 11-1 to 3).
- b. The pastor shall be the moderator (chairman) of the Session (see BCO §§10-3; 12-2 to 4). The Session shall elect its clerk (secretary) annually from among its members (see BCO §10-4). The Session may also choose a vice-moderator from among its members.

c. The Session shall have final authority for affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by civil law for nonprofit corporations (see BCO §25-7 to 8).

**Amendment for weddings and use of CPC property and facilities is inserted below as part of paragraph c., as approved by congregational vote March 16, 2014;*

Your Wedding at Christ Presbyterian Church

The celebration of Christian marriage is a momentous occasion in the lives of all involved, and a time to give praise and thanks to the God who has given marriage to us for our welfare and happiness. To ensure the joy and dignity of such an occasion, the Session of Christ Presbyterian Church has adopted certain policies and directives concerning weddings solemnized in the church.

Participants

Christ Presbyterian Church facilities are ordinarily available for weddings only to members and their children. Either the bride or the groom, or the parents of either the bride or the groom, must be members of Christ Presbyterian Church in order to be married in the church. Exceptions in the case of students, ministry personnel, or members of the military in regular attendance may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Session.

A wedding may be scheduled only after an initial interview with the couple has been performed by a pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church. Once it has been determined that the couple is eligible for marriage in the church, the couple should have the wedding and rehearsal dates placed on the church calendar.

Any pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church shall have the right and privilege of refusing to officiate at any ceremony deemed to be in conflict with his moral and spiritual convictions.

Ministers other than those of Christ Presbyterian Church are to be approved by the Session, and shall be of a denomination and/or of such personal reputation as are compatible with the Presbyterian (PCA) and Reformed faith.

Any request for marriage by someone who has been previously divorced must be reviewed and approved by a pastor or an elder of Christ Presbyterian Church. In questionable circumstances, final approval will rest in the hands of the Session.

d. The church may appoint Trustees, elected by the congregation at a duly called congregational meeting, who shall be responsible for executing any documents required for the acquisition and disposition of church property (see BCO §25-7; Bylaw §11).

e. The Session shall meet at least quarterly and shall convene at the call of the moderator, the presbytery, any two members of the Session, or upon its own adjournment (see BCO §§12-6; 10-3). Either oral or written notice, including the date, time, and place of a meeting, shall be given at least two days before a meeting. If mailed, notice shall be deemed to be effective the day after the letter is postmarked. Notice may be waived either orally or in writing. An elder's or pastor's

attendance at a meeting waives his right to object to lack of notice or defective notice of the meeting, unless at the beginning of the meeting (or promptly upon arrival), he objects to holding the meeting or transacting business at the meeting, and does not vote for or assent to action taken at the meeting.

f. When a church has a pastor, a quorum is two ruling elders, if there are three or more, or one ruling elder if there are fewer than three, together with the pastor. When a church has no pastor, a quorum is three ruling elders, if there are five or more, or two ruling elders, if there are less than five ruling elders. In no case may the Session conduct its business with fewer than two present that are entitled to vote (see BCO §12-1).

g. The act of a majority present at a Session meeting at which a quorum is present (when the vote is taken) shall be the act of the Session. A pastor or elder shall be deemed to have approved of an action taken if he is present at a meeting of the Session unless: (1) he objects at the beginning of the meeting (or promptly upon arrival) to holding it or transacting business at the meeting; or (2) his dissent or abstention from the action taken is entered in the minutes of the meeting; or (3) he did not approve the action and he delivers written notice of dissent or abstention to the presiding officer of the meeting before its adjournment or immediately after adjournment of the meeting.

h. If at any time there are less than three persons on the Session, the congregation may elect from the Board of Deacons and, if necessary, from among the voting members, individuals who will temporarily serve as directors of the church for the purpose of carrying out any required corporate business. The terms of such temporary directors shall expire when sufficient elders have been elected and ordained to bring the number of the Session to three or more. If the Session shall cease to exist or become so small as to prevent it from working effectively, presbytery shall provide for the election and ordination of elders from within the congregation, or, with the consent of the congregation, may appoint ruling elders or ministers, or both, normally from within the same presbytery, to be an acting Session or to augment the existing Session temporarily.

i. The Session may meet by means of a conference telephone call or similar communications equipment, provided all persons entitled to participate in the meeting received proper notice of the telephone meeting, and provided all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other at the same time. A member participating in a conference telephone meeting is deemed present in person at the meeting. The moderator of the meeting may establish reasonable rules as to conducting business at any meeting by phone.

j. The moderator shall be subject to the control of the Session, and shall in general supervise and control, in good faith, all of the business and affairs of the church. The moderator shall, when present, preside at all meetings of the members and of the Session, and shall conduct such meetings so as to facilitate free and respectful debate and decision-making. The moderator may sign, with the secretary or any other proper officer of the church that the Session has authorized, corporation deeds, mortgages, bonds, contracts, or other Session authorized instruments (see BCO §12-2; 10-3; 24-2).

k. The Session may appoint a vice-moderator (vice-chairman), who may perform, in good faith, the moderator's duties if the moderator is absent or is unable or refuses to act, and if any emergency should arise requiring immediate action (see BCO §12-2). In addition, associate or assistant pastors may substitute for the pastor as moderator of the Session at the discretion of the pastor and Session (see BCO §12-4). A vice-moderator or substitute moderator shall have all of the powers of and be subject to all the restrictions upon the moderator. When the church is without a pastor, the moderator of the Session may be either a minister appointed for that

purpose by the Presbytery, with consent of the Session, or one invited by the Session to preside on a particular occasion, or one of its own members elected to preside. In judicial cases, the moderator shall be a minister of the Presbytery to which the church belongs (see BCO §12-3).

l. The clerk of the Session shall be the secretary of the church and shall in good faith: (1) create and maintain one or more books for the minutes of the proceedings of the Session; (2) provide that all notices are served in accordance with these bylaws or as required by law; (3) be custodian of the church and corporate records; (4) subscribe the minutes of all meetings of the Session; (5) when requested or required, authenticate any records of the church; (6) keep a current register of the post office address of each member; and (7) in general perform all duties incident to the office of secretary and any other duties that the moderator or the Session may assign to the secretary (see BCO §10-4).

m. The treasurer shall: (1) have charge and custody of and be responsible for all funds and securities of the church; (2) receive and give receipts for moneys due and payable to the church from any source, and deposit all moneys in the church's name in banks, trust companies, or other depositories that the Session shall select; (3) submit the books and records to a Certified Public Accountant or other accountant as directed by the Session; and (4) in general perform all of the duties incident to the office of treasurer and any other duties that the moderator or Session may assign to the treasurer. If required by the Session, the treasurer shall give a bond for the faithful performance of the treasurer's duties and as insurance against the misappropriation of funds. If a bond is required, it shall be in a sum and with the surety or sureties that the Session shall determine.

n. The Session may establish such committees, as it deems necessary for the work of the church.

10. Board of Deacons

The Board of Deacons shall oversee the ministry of the deacons. The Board of Deacons shall elect a chairman and a secretary from their number. It shall meet separately at least once a quarter, and whenever requested by the Session. The Board of Deacons shall determine the number necessary for a quorum (see BCO §9-4).

11. Congregational Meetings

a. An annual meeting of the church shall be held each year at a date, time, and place to be determined by the Session (see BCO §). At the annual meeting, the voting members shall adopt an annual budget and transact any other business as may be designated for the meeting.

b. Special meetings of the church shall be called at a date and location to be determined by the Session whenever the Session deems it to be in the best interests of the church or when requested in writing by appropriate numbers of the voting members (see BCO §25-2).

c. The date, time, and location of all congregational meetings must be announced orally or in the church bulletin at least one week prior to the time set for the meeting, or by letter mailed at least eight days prior to the meeting (see BCO §25-2). If the voting members adjourn any congregational meeting to a different date, time, or place, notice of a new date, time, and place need not be given if the new date, time, and place is announced before adjournment. A member entitled to a notice may waive notice of the meeting (or any notice required by the laws of the State of Tennessee or these bylaws), by signed letter. The member must send the notice of waiver

to the church (either before or after the date and time stated in the notice) for inclusion in the minutes for filing with the church records.

d. The purpose of a meeting shall be announced in advance if it involves: a proposed amendment to the bylaws or articles of incorporation; the election or removal of officers; the calling or removal of the pastor; the acquisition or disposition of real property; the dissolution of the church; or a question regarding the church's denominational affiliation. When a meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice (see BCO §25-2).

e. A member's attendance at a meeting: waives the member's right to object to lack of notice or defective notice of the meeting, unless the member at the beginning of the meeting objects to holding the meeting or transacting business at the meeting; and, waives the member's right to object to consideration of a particular matter at the meeting that is not within the purpose or purposes described in the meeting notice, unless the member objects to considering the matter when it is presented.

f. The Clerk of Session will establish and inform the moderator of the voting members necessary to constitute a quorum at least one day prior to each congregational meeting (see BCO §25-3). Unless provided otherwise in these Bylaws, a majority vote of those in attendance, a quorum being present, is sufficient to decide any matter.

g. The pastor shall be the moderator of congregational meetings by virtue of his office. If it should be impracticable or inexpedient for him to preside, or if there is no pastor, the Session shall appoint one of their number to call the meeting to order and to preside until the congregation shall elect their presiding officer, who may be a minister of the Presbyterian Church in America, or any male member of that particular church (see BCO §25-4).

h. A clerk shall be elected by the congregation to serve at that meeting or for a definite period, whose duty shall be to keep correct minutes of the proceedings and of all business transacted and to preserve these minutes in a permanent form, after they have been attested by the moderator and the clerk of the meeting. He shall send a copy of these minutes to the Session of the church (see BCO §25-5).

12. Church Records

a. The Session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; (3) rolls of the members in the congregation (communing, non-communing, and voting), with the dates of their reception (see BCO §); (4) resolutions adopted by the Session; (5) appropriate accounting records; (6) its articles or restated articles of incorporation and all amendments to them currently in effect; and (7) its bylaws or restated bylaws and all amendments to them currently in effect (see BCO §12-7 to 8).

b. A member shall be entitled to inspect and copy, at a reasonable time and location specified by the Session, any of the church records described above, provided the Session finds that the member has a proper purpose and is acting in good faith. The Session may limit access to any records that contain confidential information about a particular person or persons.

13. Biblical Counseling

a. All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (see Rom. 3:23; 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God commands that he should seek assistance from other members, and especially from the pastor and elders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Rom. 15:14; Gal. 6:1-2; Col. 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-4:2; Heb. 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession to and seek counsel from each other and especially from our pastoral counselors.

b. We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, our counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Neither the pastoral nor the lay counselors of this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

c. Although some members of the church work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or lay counselors within the church they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities. Therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical or other technical questions should seek advice from independent professionals. Our pastoral and lay counselors shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and help members to consider their advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

14. Confidentiality

a. The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (see Matt. 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Prov. 16:28; 26:20), invites confession (see Prov. 11:13; 28:13; James 5:16), and encourages people to seek needed counseling (see Prov. 20:19; Rom. 15:14). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our pastor and elders shall carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

b. Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when the pastors and elders of this church believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances: (1) When a pastor or elder is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other pastors or elders in this church or, if the person attends another church, from the pastors or elders of that church (see Prov. 11:14; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; Matt. 18:15-17). (2) When the person who disclosed the information or any other person is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (see Prov. 24:11-12). (3) When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings (see Matt. 18:15-20 and Bylaw §16) or seek the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church (see, e.g., Rom 13:1-5). (4) When required by law to report suspected child abuse.

c. The pastors and elders may, but need not, provide counselees with written notice of these confidentiality provisions, but these provisions shall be in effect regardless of whether such notice is given.

15. Conflict Resolution

a. This church is committed to resolving in a biblical manner all disputes that may arise within our body. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (see Matt. 5:9; John 17:20-23; Rom. 12:18; and Eph. 4:1-3) and that when disputes arise, Christians should resolve them according to the principles set forth in Holy Scripture (see Prov. 19:11; Matt. 5:23-25; 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Gal. 6:1). We believe that these commands and principles are obligatory on all Christians and absolutely essential for the well-being and work of the church. Therefore, any and all disputes in this church shall be resolved according to biblical principles, as provided in this bylaw.

b. When a member of this church has a conflict with, or is concerned about the behavior of another member, he shall attempt to resolve the matter as follows. (1) The offended or concerned person shall prayerfully examine himself and take responsibility for his contribution to a problem (Matt. 7:3-5), and he shall prayerfully seek to discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked (Prov. 19:11; see also Prov. 12:16; 15:18; 17:14; 20:3; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 4:8). (2) If the offense is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall go, repeatedly if necessary, and talk to the offender in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately, having first confessed his own wrongdoing (Matt. 18:15). (3) If the offender will not listen and if the problem is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall return with one or two other people who will attempt to help the parties resolve their differences (Matt. 18:16); these other people may be members or officers of the church, other respected Christians in the community, or trained mediators or arbitrators (conciliators) from a Christian conciliation ministry. At the request of either party to the dispute, the church shall make every effort to assist the parties in resolving their differences and being reconciled.

c. Conflicts involving doctrine or church discipline shall be resolved according to the procedures set forth in the Bylaws on Church Discipline and in Part II of the Book of Church Order. If any party to such a dispute is dissatisfied with a decision reached by an official judicatory (court or ruling body) of this church, he or she may appeal that decision to our Presbytery or General Assembly as allowed in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 40.

d. If a dispute arises within the church or between a member and the church and cannot be resolved through the internal procedures described above, it shall be resolved as follows:

(1) The dispute shall be submitted to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the *Rules of Procedure* of the Institute for Christian Conciliation, and judgment upon an arbitration award may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction.

(2) All mediators and arbitrators shall be in agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith and our basic form of government, unless this requirement is modified or waived by all parties to the dispute.

(3) If a dispute submitted to arbitration involves a decision reached by an official judicatory (court or ruling body) of this church or of our presbytery or general assembly, the arbitrators shall uphold the highest judicatory's decisions on matters of doctrine and church discipline.

(4) This section covers the church as a corporate entity and its agents, including its pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers with regard to any actions they may take in their official capacities.

(5) This section covers any and all disputes or claims arising from or related to church membership, doctrine, policy, practice, counseling, discipline, decisions, actions, or failures to act, including claims based on civil statute or for personal injury.

(6) By joining this church, all members agree that these methods shall provide the sole remedy for any dispute arising against the church or its agents, and they waive their right to file any legal action against the church in a civil court or agency, except to enforce an arbitration decision.

(7) If a dispute or claim involves an alleged injury or damage to which the church's insurance applies, and if the church's insurer refuses to submit to mediation or arbitration as described in this section, either the church or the member alleging the injury or damage may declare that this section is no longer binding with regard to that part of the dispute or claim to which the church's insurance applies.

16. Church Discipline

Church discipline shall be carried out according to Part II of the Book of Church Order, as explained in the Guidelines for Church Discipline developed and approved by the Session in consultation with the Board of Deacons.

17. Ownership and Distribution of Property

a. The church shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided in these Bylaws (see BCO §25-9 to 11). Should the church decide to withdraw from the Presbyterian Church in America as provided in BCO §25-11, the church shall retain ownership of its property. Such withdrawal shall not be considered to be dissolution.

b. "Dissolution" means the complete disbanding of the church so that it no longer functions as a congregation or as a corporate entity. Upon the dissolution of the church, its property shall be applied and distributed as follows: (1) all liabilities and obligations of the church shall be paid and discharged or adequate provision shall be made therefore; (2) assets held by the church upon condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance, which condition occurs by reason of the dissolution, shall be returned, transferred, or conveyed in accordance with such requirements; (3) assets received and not held upon a condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance by reason of the dissolution, shall be transferred or conveyed to one or more domestic or foreign corporations, societies, or organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the responding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), and are engaged in activities substantially similar to those of the corporation; this distribution shall be done pursuant to a plan adopted by the Session, provided that no assets are distributed to any organization governed by a member of the Session.

c. If a church is dissolved by the Presbytery at the request of the congregation and no disposition has been made of its property by those who hold the title to the property within six months after such dissolution, then those who held the title to the property at the time of such dissolution shall deliver, convey and transfer to the Presbytery, all property of the church; and the receipt and acquaintance of the Presbytery, or its proper representatives, shall be a full and complete discharge of all liabilities of such persons holding the property of the church. The Presbytery receiving such property shall apply the same or the proceeds thereof at its discretion, provided the conditions set forth in Bylaw §17.b. are satisfied (see BCO §25-12).

d. Any assets not otherwise disposed of shall be disposed of by a court of competent jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the corporation is then located, for such purposes and to such organizations as said court shall determine, provided such organizations are part of the Presbyterian Church in America.

18. Indemnification of Officers

- a. The Session may choose to indemnify and advance church-related expenses of any elder, deacon, employee, or agent of the church.
- b. The church shall indemnify any elder or deacon or former elder or deacon of the church against expenses actually and reasonably incurred by him in connection with the defense of any action, suit or proceeding, civil or criminal, in which he is made a party by reason of being or having been such elder or deacon, except in relation to matters as to which he shall be adjudged in such action, suit or proceeding to be liable for negligence or misconduct in the performance of his duty.

19. Rules of Order

All meetings of the church, the Session, and its various boards and committees shall be conducted pursuant to the latest edition of *Roberts Rules of Order*.

20. Amendment of Bylaws

These Bylaws may be amended or repealed only by the affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the voting members present at a duly called meeting of the church called for such purposes.

CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH INTRODUCTION TO GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

These Guidelines were developed to provide a clear biblical framework for carrying out church discipline. We believe that loving discipline is one of the greatest blessings and privileges of belonging to a Christian church. This view is reflected in the following letter, which was written by a person who recently joined a Presbyterian church partly because of its commitment to biblical church discipline:

Becoming a member of a church that exercises biblical discipline is very exciting to me. I have much to learn about church disciplinary procedures and I have been teased that I'll be in favor of it until it intersects my life! Nonetheless, for some basic reasons I believe church discipline is a necessity for the health of a church body. Personally, I know the trouble of taming and training my own sinful nature to walk obediently under the lordship of Christ. Therefore, to be placed under the authority of leaders who take seriously my need for accountability is both a tremendous growth opportunity and a blessing. When I do fall into sin out of ignorance or even outright rebellion, I would like to know that there would be consequences-- consequences such as confrontation of my sin, guidance in dealing with it biblically and then support while I work to correct my behavior. Embarrassing as that all may be, it serves the greater purpose of enabling me to walk closely with Christ. Secondly, part of my zeal for church discipline comes from having attended churches that needed to exercise discipline but did not take on the responsibility.

In those churches I watched marriages and families break up without the church's acknowledgment. Terrible, infectious feuds between families developed into division within the congregation. Also, individuals' sinful habits grew while church leadership appeared to merely shake its head. It seems the church shied away from intervening so as not to complicate matters or trouble the involved parties. However, I believe the most loving act would have been to confront each situation and help in resolving the conflicts. Proper administration of discipline would have possibly given opportunity for restored health to the troubled parties and to the church that was looking on.

Finally, I believe people need standards from which to operate. Ideally those standards would be developed by God's Word and modeled by the church. I remember my family floundering as my parents sought for such disciplinary standards. My sisters had struggled terribly as they were drawn into adolescent curiosity with drugs, alcohol and sex. We needed wisdom, loving support and biblical truth to be spoken into our situation. Our church was uninvolved, seemingly unprepared and as helpless as we were. The family found outside standards from which to operate; they were shame and the advice of 80's media and psychology. The resulting decisions have left each of us with regret and hurt.

Administering church discipline seems like a frightening and difficult task. After all, who would like to be the one carrying out disciplinary action on his brother? However, the worth of such a program is immeasurable. It only makes sense to me that this would be a part of God's plan in creating a body of believers who are refined and committed to His ways.

The primary purpose of these Guidelines and our denominational rules for discipline is to make sure that church discipline is carried out with *due process*, which prevents the church from misusing its authority and insures that a person who has been accused of wrongdoing will be treated fairly. For example, under these Guidelines, a person accused of an offense has the right to receive at least ten days notice before a hearing may be held to consider the charges against him or her. He or she also has the right to be accompanied by an advisor at all hearings, as well as the right to appeal the church's decision to a higher authority. These rights serve to protect every person in the church from arbitrary actions and help to provide a process that will be just, constructive, and honoring to God.

It should be noted that these Guidelines serve as a supplement to our denominational Book of Church Order ("BCO"). They summarize key principles of the BCO and provide additional guidance on matters that are not fully addressed in the BCO. They were developed so that members of the church could more easily understand our disciplinary procedures, which should help to prevent later confusion, misunderstandings, or disappointed expectations. Such clarification also helps to reduce the church's exposure to potential legal liability, which is a growing problem in a society where people reject biblical concepts of accountability and often sue those who confront them with their wrongs.

As you read these Guidelines, we encourage you to look up and study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. If such study does not answer all of your questions and concerns about our disciplinary policies, please do not hesitate to approach our pastor or one of our elders, who will be happy to talk with you about these matters.

CHRIST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH GUIDELINES FOR CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. Church discipline shall be carried out according to these Guidelines, within the limitations established by our Bylaws and the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America ("BCO").

2. Mutual accountability and discipline within the church is commanded by God in Scripture and is one of the most important responsibilities of a true church of Jesus Christ (see BCO §27-1, -4; Matt. 18:12-20; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 6:14-16; Gal. 2:11-21; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Titus 3:10; Heb. 3:12-15; 10:24-30; 12:5-17; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; 1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 7-11; Jude 4, 8-23; Rev. 2:2-6, 14-16, 20; 3:19).

3. Church (ecclesiastical) discipline is the exercise of that authority that the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to the visible church for the preservation of its purity, peace, and good order. All members of the church, both communing and non-communing, are under the care of and subject to the discipline of the church (see BCO §27-2; 28-5; 46-4). The ultimate goal of all discipline is to train Christians to be self-disciplined so that they may share in the holiness of God (see Heb. 12:7-13).

4. Discipline may be either administrative or judicial. Administrative discipline is concerned with the whole government, inspection, training, guardianship and control, which the church maintains over its members, officers, and its courts (see BCO §27-1). Judicial discipline is concerned with the prevention and correction of offenses, an offense being defined as anything in the doctrine or practice of a member of the church that is contrary to the Word of God (see BCO §29-1). The purpose of judicial discipline is: (1) to guard and preserve the honor of God (see Rom. 2:24; 1 Cor. 10:31); (2) to protect the purity of the church and to guard other Christians from being tempted, misled, divided, or otherwise harmed (see 1 Cor. 5:6); and (3) to restore fallen Christians to usefulness to God and fellowship with his church (see BCO §27-3, 4; Matt. 18:12-14; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 7:8-10; Gal. 6:1-2).

5. Discipline involves three components or phases: (1) God commands all Christians to make every effort, with his help, to discipline themselves and lead godly lives (see Eph. 4:25 - 5:6; 2 Tim. 1:7; 2 Pet. 1:5-11); (2) if a Christian fails to discipline himself and is trapped in a sin, God commands other brothers and sisters in Christ to lovingly confront, counsel, and encourage him toward repentance (see Bylaw §15.b; Matt. 18:15-16; Gal. 6:1-2; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24-25); (3) if these personal and informal efforts do not correct an offense, God commands the church leaders to intervene and exercise their ecclesiastical authority to resolve the matter, protect the church, and, if possible, restore the offender (see BCO §27-5; 31-5, -7; Matt. 18:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Tim. 4:2; Heb. 13:17). This third phase, which may be referred to as judicial or formal discipline, involves a judicial proceeding (trial) before the Session. Such a trial shall be carried out according to the following procedures, which are designed to provide due process for the offender and promote a just resolution.

6. When an offense is personal and known only to a few individuals, discipline may not be instituted until there has been a good faith effort to resolve the matter privately and informally (see Bylaw §15.b; BCO §29; 31-5, 7). No charge may be accepted if it is filed more than one year after the commission of the alleged offense, unless it appears that unavoidable impediments have prevented an earlier filing of the charge (see BCO §32-20). Every charge must be submitted to the Session in writing (see BCO §32-3). A person may be censured for filing a charge that the Session determines to be without merit (see BCO §31-8, 9; Deut. 19:16-21).

7. An offense that is serious enough to warrant judicial discipline and a trial is: (1) an offense in the area of conduct and practice that seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church; (2) an offense in the area of doctrine for a non-ordained member that would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith as reflected in their membership vows; or (3) an offense in the area of doctrine for an ordained officer that would constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures as that system is set forth in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms (see BCO §29-1). When the Session convenes to determine whether an offense has occurred and to administer censure, it shall be referred to as a "court."

8. Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock (Matt. 18:12-14; Ezek. 34:4, 8, 16), so shall the elders and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline. Therefore:

a. Discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the Session determines that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing person to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and the responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person's membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged (see BCO §46-5). In doing so, the Session, at its discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure as provided in sections 20, 21, and 22.

b. If a member renounces the communion of this church by joining some other evangelical church and formally submitting to its jurisdiction, and if charges are pending against him at the time he joins the other church, those charges shall be communicated to the other church as provided in Guideline §22, and further disciplinary proceedings shall be terminated (see BCO §38-3).

9. A person accused of an offense shall be given a written citation to appear before the court at a specific time and place (see BCO §32-3, 4). The citation shall, if possible, set forth the times, places and circumstances of the alleged offense, so that the accused may have an opportunity to make their defense (see BCO §32-5). Ordinarily all citations shall be served in person, but in case that is not possible, citations shall be sent by certified mail to the person cited.

10. The first meeting of a court shall deal only with procedural matters, unless by consent of the parties, which include: (1) appointing a prosecutor; (2) ordering the indictment drawn and copy, along with the names of witnesses then known to support it, served on the accused, and (3) arranging for all parties and their witnesses to be cited to appear and be heard at another meeting

which shall not be sooner than ten days; after such citation is received (see BCO §32-3). The moderator or clerk shall also issue citations to such witnesses as the prosecutor or any party shall nominate to appear on his behalf (see BCO §32-4).

11. If an accused refuses or fails to appear without satisfactory reason for their absence at the time appointed for the trial of the case, they shall again be cited, with the warning that, if they do not appear at the time appointed (unless providentially hindered, which fact they must make known to the court), or that if they appear and refuse to plead, they shall be dealt with for their contumacy, as hereafter provided (see BCO §32-6). The time allowed for the appearance on citation shall be determined by the court with due consideration for the circumstances (see BCO §32-7). When an accused person, having been twice duly cited, shall refuse to appear before the Session, or appearing, shall refuse to plead, the court shall enter upon its records the fact, together with the nature of the offense charged, and the member shall be suspended from the Lord's Table for their contumacy. The censure may be made public, should this be deemed expedient by the Session, and shall in no case be removed until the offender has not only repented of their contumacy, but has given satisfaction in relation to the charges against them (see BCO §33-2). If the charge is one of gross crime or heresy, and the accused persist in their contumacy, the court may proceed to inflict the highest censure (see BCO §32-3).

12. If unusual circumstances require it, a court may deny an accused person the right of participating in the Lord's Supper, or of performing the functions of his office, until a case is concluded (see BCO §33-4).

13. If the accused appears at the second meeting of the court, they shall be called to plead "guilty" or "not guilty" to the charges. If the plead is "not guilty," the court shall proceed to receive evidence (see BCO §32-3). No person shall be deprived of the right to set forth, plead, or offer into evidence the provisions of the Word of God or of the subordinate standards. If subsequent meetings of the court are required, the accused and all witnesses shall be cited to appear as provided above.

14. The accused shall be entitled to assistance of counsel, who shall be a member in good standing of the church (see BCO §32-19). No professional counsel shall be permitted as such to appear. The accused shall be allowed one copy of the minutes at the expense of the court (see BCO §32-18).

15. The oath or affirmation to a witness shall be administered by the moderator in the following or like terms: "Do you solemnly promise, in the presence of God, that you will declare the truth, the whole truth, according to the best of your knowledge in the matter in which you are called to witness, as you shall answer it to the great Judge of the living and the dead?" If, however, at any time a witness should present himself before a court, who for conscientious reasons prefers to swear or affirm in any other manner, he shall be allowed to do so (see BCO §35-6).

16. Evidence must be factual in nature. It may be direct or circumstantial. Caution should be exercised in giving weight to evidence that is purely circumstantial. Witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused, or at least after the accused shall have received due citation to attend (see BCO §32-13). All persons of proper age and intelligence are competent witnesses,

except such as do not believe in the existence of God, or a future state of rewards and punishments. The accused party may be allowed, but shall not be compelled to testify; but the accuser shall be required to testify, on the demand of the accused. Either party has the right to challenge a witness whom they believe to be incompetent, the court shall examine and decide upon their competency. It belongs to the court to judge the degree of credibility to be attached to all evidence (see BCO §35-1). The testimony of more than one witness shall be necessary in order to establish any charge, yet if, in addition to the testimony of one witness, corroborative evidence were pronounced, the offense could be considered proved (see BCO §35-3). If the accused so requests, no witness, unless a member of the court, shall testify in the presence of another witness who is to testify concerning the same specification (see BCO §35-4).

17. At the conclusion of the trial, the accused may make a final argument with respect to the evidence and the law of the church. The court, after deliberation, shall vote on each charge and each specification separately. If the court decides that the accused is guilty, it shall proceed to determine the censure. Notice of appeal shall have the effect of suspending the judgment of the lower court until the case has been finally decided in the higher court. If, however, the censure is suspension from the sacraments, and/or office, or excommunication from the sacraments, or deposition from office, the court may, for sufficient reasons duly recorded, put the censure into effect until the case is finally decided (see BCO §42-6).

18. Notice of an intention to appeal a decision of the court must be filed in writing with both the clerk of the lower court and the clerk of the higher court within 30 days after the judgment has been announced (see BCO §42-4).

19. If a person who has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present him or herself for censure at the time appointed, the court shall cite the person to appear at another time. If the person does not appear after this citation, the censure may be pronounced in them in their absence.

20. When any member or officer of the church shall be found guilty of an offense, the court shall proceed with all tenderness and shall deal with its offending brother or sister in the spirit of meekness, the members considering themselves lest they also be tempted (see BCO §36-1). The following censures may be pronounced by the court in the manner prescribed in BCO §36-2 to 5:

a. Admonition consists of the formal reproof of an offender by a church court, warning them of their guilt and danger, and exhorting them to be more circumspect and watchful in the future (see BCO §30-2).

b. Suspension from Sacraments is the temporary exclusion from those ordinances, and is indefinite as to its duration (see BCO §30-3).

c. Suspension from office is the exclusion of a church officer from his office, and may be definite or indefinite in its duration (see BCO §30-3).

d. Deposition is the degradation of an officer from his office, and may or may not be accompanied with the infliction of other censure (see BCO §30-5).

e. Excommunication, also referred to as disfellowshipping, is the excision of an offender from the communion of the church. This censure is to be inflicted only on account of gross crime or heresy and when the offender shows him/herself incorrigible and contumacious. The design of this censure is to operate on the offender as a means of reclaiming them, to deliver the church

from the scandal of their offense, and to inspire all with fear by the example of their discipline (see BCO §30-4; 1 Cor. 5:6; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 2 Thess. 3:14-15).

21. Since the church is a Body made up of many parts (see 1 Cor. 12:12-30), what happens to one member of the church necessarily affects and is of legitimate concern to other members (see Rom. 12:15-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 12:12-30). Therefore, admonition for a public offense, suspension from office, deposition, or excommunication of a member may be announced to the church so that its members will be able to pray for, encourage, and exhort the accused as opportunities arise, as well as be on guard against any gossip or divisiveness that might arise from the offense or censure (see BCO §36-2 to 7; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; Titus 3:10). Prayer that God will graciously use the discipline for his own glory, the restoration of the offender, and the edification of the church shall always accompany the public announcement of censure. This announcement may be made during a regular worship service, at a special meeting of the congregation, or by letter.

22. If an accused leaves the church during the disciplinary process or while a censure is still in effect, and if the Session learns that they are attending another church, the Session may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of their sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom they have offended (see BCO §38-3). Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of their sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

23. If a person who has been censured through suspension, deposition, or excommunication comes to repentance, the church shall warmly and lovingly restore them to fellowship within the Body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:11-32). Once the Session is persuaded that the person has sincerely confessed their wrongs and sought forgiveness from God and the person or persons they offended, it shall announce their restoration (see BCO §37-1 to 6). That announcement shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition to the congregation that the restored person's offenses have been forgiven and are not to be held against them or otherwise hinder their fellowship within the church (see 2 Cor. 2:5-11). When deemed appropriate by the Session, however, the restored person may be restricted from certain responsibilities within the church until they have demonstrated the requisite qualities for those responsibilities (see, e.g., 1 Tim. 3:2, 8; Titus 1:6).