

1 **OVERTURE 20** from Philadelphia Presbytery (to CCB, OC)
2 Amend *BCO* 30-3 and 37-1 regarding Definite Suspension
3

4 **Whereas**, definite suspension, as defined by *BCO* 30-1, allows no evaluation of the fruit of
5 repentance at the end of the term of suspension (“...Such censure concludes the
6 judicial process...”); and,
7

8 **Whereas**, growth in holiness is not readily gauged at the time of confession of sin, nor is it
9 pastorally wise to merely set an arbitrary schedule of repentance and removal of
10 censure; and,
11

12 **Whereas**, *BCO* 34-7 is very narrow in scope and only allows for the imposition of definite
13 suspension or deposition from the ministry when a minister is penitent of his sin; and,
14

15 **Whereas**, *BCO* 30-3 calls for the administration of indefinite suspension only in the case of
16 an “impenitent offender” although there may be situations where indefinite suspension
17 from office may be prudent even though the minister exhibits signs of repentance; and,
18

19 **Whereas**, the Philadelphia Presbytery, as has happened in other Presbyteries, has struggled
20 with the exact procedure for definite and indefinite suspension; and,
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22 **Whereas**, in 2013, Overture 14 asked the 41st General Assembly to clarify when Definite
23 Suspension can be imposed only to be answered in the negative; and,
24

25 **Whereas**, the *BCO* is in need of clarity regarding definite and indefinite suspension;
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27 **Therefore**, the Philadelphia Presbytery proposes the following additions to *BCO* 30-3 and
28 *BCO* 37-1 (additions underlined):
29

30 **30-3.** Suspension from Sacraments is the temporary exclusion from those
31 ordinances, and is indefinite as to its duration. There is no definite suspension
32 from the sacraments.

33 Suspension from office is the exclusion of a church officer from his
34 office. This may be definite or indefinite as to its duration. With respect to
35 church officers, suspension from Sacraments shall always be accompanied by
36 suspension from office. But suspension from office is not always necessarily
37 accompanied with suspension from Sacraments.

38 Definite suspension from office is administered when the credit of
39 religion, the honor of Christ, and the good of the delinquent demand it, even
40 though the delinquent has given satisfaction to the court.

41 Indefinite suspension is administered to the impenitent offender or to
42 the offender who willingly confesses to sin of an extended duration, until he
43 exhibits signs of repentance, or until by his conduct, the necessity of the greatest
44 censure be made manifest. In the case of indefinite suspension from office

1 imposed due to scandalous conduct, the procedure outlined in *BCO* 34-8 shall
2 be followed.

3
4 **37-1.** A person who has been definitely suspended from office shall be restored
5 by the court at the end of the term of his suspension after evaluation of his
6 continued repentance and growth in holiness by declaring words of the
7 following import to him:...

8
9 **Rationale:** As currently written, the *BCO* gives no opportunity for the court to evaluate a
10 minister's ongoing repentance at the end of a definite suspension. In shepherding the flock,
11 there may be occasion when the time limit of definite suspension is deemed not adequate to
12 demonstrate the fruit of repentance. The court imposing the censure of definite suspension
13 upon a minister should have the ability to assess if a further definitive time is necessary
14 without bringing further charges.

15
16 As it is now written the *BCO* reserves indefinite suspension only for those who are impenitent,
17 but gives no allowance for a minister who is grieving over sin and appears penitent. However,
18 there are pastoral situations – whether solely by internal conviction of the Holy Spirit or by
19 latent sin being exposed – in which a self-confessed individual should have the censure of
20 indefinite suspension, taking into account the duration of previously unconfessed sin. Thus,
21 the court can observe the fruit of repentance over time, without the automatic “reinstatement
22 to office” as stipulated by definite suspension.

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24 *Adopted by Philadelphia Presbytery at its stated meeting, March 17, 2018*

25 *Attested by /s/ TE Greg Hobaugh, stated clerk*