

Summary of Proposed Constitutional Changes Voted upon at the Feb. 28, 2023 presbytery meeting

“O” signifies items included in an omnibus motion. **These were approved.**

“S” signifies items considered separately.

Foundations of Presbyterian Polity

22-A — F-1.0302c (p. 3) regarding the catholicity of the Church, affirms that Christ’s embrace “includes **all people** of all times, places, nations, ages, **abilities, genders**, conditions and stations in life.” (substitutes “all people” for “men, women, and children,” and adds “abilities” and “genders” to existing language.) **S Approved**

22-B — F-1.0404(p.5) regarding “openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” the proposed amendment employs language identical to the above to describe the church’s membership as “a community of **all people** of all ages, races, ethnicities, **abilities, genders**, and worldly conditions” **S Approved**

Form of Government

22-C — G-1.0501(p7) adds new section and renumbers sections. (1) Allows for congregations to designate parliamentary authority other than Robert’s Rules in its bylaws. (2) Allows electronic and “hybrid” meetings of congregations and committees at the discretion of their sessions. **O**

22-D — G-1.0503(p9) adds to business proper to congregational meeting “receiving disciplinary decision against a member of the congregation as required by D-9.0102.” **O**

22-E — G-2.0503 (p11) changes “honorably retired” to “retired.” Also strikes “because of age or physical or mental disability.” **O**

22-F — G-2.0505a(1) (p13) adds to existing ability of presbytery to receive as member a new immigrant minister who lacks educational history required of candidates, but states that presbytery should provide educational opportunities. **O**

22-O — G-3.0106 (p 33) Councils’ policies must require **boundary training** including sexual abuse, and child abuse prevention training; training to be provided at least every 36 months. Applies to all **members of councils.** **O**

22-K — G-2.1002 (p 24) requires **boundary training** including, sexual abuse, child abuse prevention training for **commissioned ruling elders** with recertification every 36 months. **O**

22-L — G-2.1103 (26) requires **boundary training** including sexual abuse and child abuse prevention training for **Certified Christian Educators and Certified Associate Christian Educators** with recertification at least every 36 months. **O**

22-G — G-2.0603(p15) requires **boundary training** including, sexual abuse, and child abuse prevention training for **inquirers** with recertification at least every 36 months. **O**

22-H — G-2.0605 (p17) requires congregations of care of inquirers and candidates to report to presbytery “any matters of sexual misconduct.” **S Disapproved**

22-I — G-2.080(p 19) adds requirement that terms of call include minimum of 12 weeks of paid family leave. **S Approved**

22-J — G-2.100(p 22) clarifies that a commissioned ruling elder may be commissioned to serve more than one congregation or validated ministry. **O**

22-M — G-3.0104 (p 29) provides that is appropriate for councils to adopt procedures for electronic session meetings. **O**

- 22-N — G-3.0105 (p 31) allows electronic meetings of councils in accordance with Robert’s Rules of Order Newly Revised. ○
- 22-P — G-3.0106 (p 34) All councils shall adopt and implement a sexual misconduct, harassment, child and youth protection, and antiracism policy. **S Approved**
- 22-Q — G-3.0303c (p36) Regarding minimum compensation standards, adds provision for dissolution terms; also extends minimum compensation standards to those serving in temporary pastoral service. ○
- 22-R — G-3.0401 (p38) Regarding commissioners to synod: Synod may enroll additional commissioners, in part to fulfill principles of participation and representation. ○
- 22-S — G-4.0301 (p 40) Expands language about confidentiality. Confidentiality should not be an excuse to hold secret the knowledge of/risk of harm. In exercise of pastoral care, ministers and commissioned ruling elders must hold in confidence all information except when the person whose confidence is at issue gives permission or when there is reasonable belief of imminent bodily harm. (Does not substantially change current constitutional requirement). ○

Directory for Worship

- 22-T — W-3.0205 p 42) includes Baptism in actions that MAY follow confession and proclamation of forgiveness. **S Disapproved**
- 22-U — W-3.0409 (p43) Current language says an invitation to baptismal preparation and Baptism **SHOULD** be extended when those not yet baptized come to the Lord’s Table. Proposal inserts “when appropriate.” **S Disapproved**
- 22-V — W-3.0414 (p44) removes expectation that a minister of Word and Sacrament will lead the prayer following communion; allows for flexibility in the prayer after communion. ○
- 22-W — W-4.0403 (p 45) **DOES NOT** alter language about the laying on of hands; inserts “Signs *and symbols of blessing may be conferred on the newly installed or commissioned person.*” ○
- 22-X — W-5.0104(p. 47) adds sentence affirming **household worship** as a central and important practice within the Reformed tradition and an important means of faith formation. ○
- 22-Y — W-5.0104(p48) stresses the significance of mealtime prayers in household worship. ○
- 22-Z — W-5.0201 (p 49) Paragraph 1 adds **discipleship** to the description of the Church’s ministry within the community of faith. ○
- 22-AA — W-5.0204 (p51) substitutes “*particular specialized pastoral care ministries*” for “ministries of pastoral counseling or chaplaincy,” thus expanding the understanding of pastoral care ministries. ○
- 22-BB — W-5.0204 (p 53) clarifies purpose of **services of wholeness and healing**; noting that “healing” may be received “*in life and in death, in body, mind, or spirit.*” and comes “*in many forms*” as God’s gift. Provides perspective that wholeness is not necessarily synonymous with physical recovery. ○

Rules of Discipline

- 22-CC — D-3.0106 (p55) allows a disciplinary process to continue after an accused has renounced jurisdiction (Advisory Committee on Constitution advised against.) **S Disapproved**
- 22-DD — D-10.0302 (p 58) grammatical change (“that person” to “they”) **S Disapproved**
- 22-EE — D-10.0303(p60) clarifies that **person accused** as well as the **person making the accusation** are informed if the investigating committee determines that no charges will be filed. ○

22-FF — (p62) changes “**the accused**” in current rules to “**the person accused**” throughout. This change seeks to neutralized what appears to some to be bias against a person who is accused. **S Disapproved**

22-GG — New Church Discipline section (p 64) would replace the entire section currently entitled “Rules of Discipline” with a new section entitled “Church Discipline.” (To be taken up at the May meeting of Presbytery.)

The Bills and Overtures Committee points out that:

- The current Rules of Discipline were last revised in 1996.
- The proposed section entitled “Church Discipline” is the result of the work of the Rules of Discipline Task Force which was appointed by the General Assembly moderators in 2017.
- This revision is intended to make this portion of the *Book of Order* more accessible to the church, so far as possible removing language that is also used in secular judicial proceedings and using language accessible to members not well-versed in church discipline.

Among other things, this revision:

- Clearly defines the steps in each process.
- Allows for the use of electronic communication.
- Preserves rules that have guided the church for generations.
- Emphasizes that those who file complaints, bring allegations, or seek vindication, as well those who are accused or act as counsel must be Presbyterian.
- Mediators, facilitators, and advocates need not be Presbyterian but need to be familiar with Church Discipline.
- Presbyterians can file allegations on behalf of persons who are not Presbyterian.
- Adds an alternative form of resolution based on principles of restorative justice.
- Provides for three forms of alternative resolution: Restorative Justice, Mediation, and Other Negotiated Agreements.
- Allows for mediators who are not certified, but who are “persons known for calm, wise counsel.”
- Provides flexibility in crafting censures and remedies.
- Spells out specific remedies appropriate to each degree of censure.
- Adds language explaining that censure in church discipline is given not with malice or vindictiveness but in Christian love to offer correction in error and to restore the unity of the church when possible.

