

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales

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Incorporating Amendments made in 2000, 2005, 2011, 2013, and 2019.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales –
BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER – DECENTLY AND IN ORDER

DECENTLY and in ORDER

THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales –
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 History

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW)¹ was formed from the interim Presbytery of the Presbyterian Association in England (PAE)² in 1996. It holds as its confession the Westminster Confession of Faith which was drawn up 350 years earlier at Westminster in London.

The English Reformers in the 16th century included those who desired a more thorough reformation than was then politically possible. Some of those who later fled to the Continent from the persecutions under Queen Mary found refuge in Geneva. When these returned to England in the reign of Queen Elizabeth their views soon spread. The influence of these puritans, as they became known, was dominant by the time of the civil war. It was at that period that the Assembly of Divines met (1644 - 1647) and the Westminster Confession was produced. Presbyterianism was the polity favoured by the majority of those present. The Confession was adopted in both England and Scotland, but presbyterianism was only partially implemented in England. The restoration of Charles II brought an end to the widespread use of the Confession. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 forced some two thousand puritan ministers out of the National Church in England and made the practice of presbyterian government impossible.

After the Act of Toleration in 1689, theological controversies and error undermined the possibility of an orthodox Presbyterian church.

In Wales in the 18th Century Methodist Awakening, the leaders were Calvinistic and the churches which arose there took an orthodox presbyterian position.

Presbyterianism was reintroduced in England in the 19th century and in many ways derived from Scotland. It was particularly to be found in the North East (Northumberland and Durham), in Lancashire and in London, areas where it was strong even in the seventeenth century.

As was the case with most of the denominations the higher criticism which came from Germany in the 1880s had devastating effects. By the time of the union of the English Presbyterian and Congregational Churches in 1972, as the United Reformed Church, there were very few evangelical presbyterian congregations left in England.

At the same time the awakening of interest in Reformed understanding of Scripture in the 1950s brought the attention of many to the Presbyterian literature of earlier times. There was associated with this a growing awareness of the problems of the mixed denominations in the 1960s.

In Wales this was accompanied by a remarkable growth of evangelical numbers in the Welsh Presbyterian, the Welsh Baptist, and to a lesser extent, in the Welsh Independent churches. Eventually opposition grew and many seceded from the denominations. There was a proper desire to express evangelical unity and a fear of denominational structures. As a result few retained their confessional position.

In both England and Wales there were those who had a sense that a good heritage and biblical emphases had been or were in danger of being lost. There was a conviction that England and Wales needed an Evangelical Presbyterian Church. One expression³ of this conviction was the London Presbyterian Conference which met in 1986. As a result the Presbyterian Association in England was formed. In 1991 an Interim Presbytery was set up. By 1996 there were five Churches - Blackburn, Cambridge, Chelmsford, Durham and Hull. These constitute the founding members of the EPCEW.

1 EPCEW at the request of Welsh brethren even though no Welsh congregation was at the time part of the connection.

2 The PAE itself arose in 1987 from the London Presbyterian Conference which had been called by the London Presbyterian Conference Committee. Members of that committee are invited as observers to presbytery.

3 The International Presbyterian Church (IPC) is another expression of this desire.

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1.2 Vision

The intention was to establish and maintain a **connectional** and **confessional** reformed church in England and Wales according to biblical principles and appropriate to the contemporary situation in England and Wales. The EPCEW is committed to the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is plainly and fully set out in the Bible.

1.3 The Nature of the Church

The nature of the church as the people of God and the bride of Christ is set out in the Scriptures (Eph 2:19-22 & 5:23-32, 1 Tim 3:15-16, 1 Pet 2:5-10). This teaching is expounded in Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession. Chapter 26 refers to the members of the church as saints who enjoy a communion with one another. The EPCEW is only a small part of Christ's visible and universal church. It seeks to give expression to the oneness of Christ's church under the headship of Christ in its own structure, and wherever possible with other orthodox evangelical churches.⁴

The EPCEW is connectional and confessional and presbyterial in government.

1.4 A Common Order

A distinction is to be drawn between basic biblical **principles of presbyterianism** and the outworking of those principles in **particular practices**. The outworking of the principles has differed according to the needs at particular times and in particular countries. M'Creie in referring to the Second Book of Discipline said "Its leading principles rest upon the express authority of the word of God. Its subordinate arrangements are supported by the general rules of Scripture: they are simple, calculated to preserve order and promote edification, and adapted to the circumstances of the church for which they were intended". This book of order first sets out what the EPCEW believes the basic principles to be and then what it considers appropriate to its needs and what most appropriately expresses the fundamental principles. Part one covers these principles and the specific application of them. Part two covers the procedures currently adopted or gives guidelines as to procedures.

In drawing up this Book of Order the presbytery made use of other books of order.⁵ It also adapted and adopted a set of governing principles, originally prefixed to the "Form of Government" of the PCUSA in 1788, to inform it as it proceeded.⁶

4 The EPCEW is seeking fraternal relations with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland (EPC), the Free Church of Scotland, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and the International Presbyterian Church (IPC) and has a co-operative agreement with the Presbyterian Church in America. It is considering synodical relations with the EPC. It is a constituent body of the British Evangelical Council (BEC), and intends to apply for membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

5 In particular it considered those of the EPC and the PCA and the Free Church of Scotland. This section may be read without reference to them and is self contained. Section 2 is based on the EPC code.

6 See Chapter I2 from the "Forms of Government and Forms of Process of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America as amended 1805-1894.

2. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PRESBYTERIANISM⁷

The fundamental principles of Presbyterianism are held to be

- 2.1 The church is the body of Christ
 - 2.1.1 Christ alone is the **head** of the church
 - 2.1.2 Christ's body is **joined together** and this is to be expressed visibly
 - 2.1.3 Christ's headship of the body is displayed in the fact of **government**, and is seen in:
 - the link between government and witness to the **truth**;
 - the link between government and the sincere use of the **sacraments**;
 - the link between government and **practical godliness**.
- 2.2 The church is to be controlled by Scripture
 - 2.2.1 A positive Scriptural basis is required for what is believed and **taught**.
 - 2.2.2 A positive Scriptural basis is required for **order** or government in the church.
 - 2.2.3 A positive Scriptural basis is required for the pattern of **worship** in the church.
- 2.3 The form of government
 - 2.3.1 The form of government involves
 - **representative elders** freely chosen by all the members
 - **plurality** of elders, as rule involves more than one elder
 - **parity** of elders, as elders rule with equal authority
 - a **distinction** between ministers (teaching elders) and ruling elders, as there is a high value to be placed on the preaching ministry.
 - 2.3.2 The first expression of this government is in the **local** congregation.
 - 2.3.3 The **larger** exercise of this government, as seen in the **wider elderships** of presbyteries and general assembly, is an expression of the unity and community of the body of Christ.

⁷ For a further treatment consult 'The Presbyterian Form of Church Government' John Murray London 1959 republished by the EPCEW (as the PAE) 1993.

3. THE CONFESSION

The word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the **supreme standard** of the church. Chapter 1 of the Confession sets out the teaching of the church with regard to this.

The whole **Westminster Confession** is accepted as a faithful statement and summary of Scripture teaching and is the **subordinate standard** of the church.

Agreement with the Confession is **required of all elders**. The Confession expresses the doctrinal position of the church. It is not expected of all members that they will understand nor necessarily fully assent to all parts of the Confession.

Presbyterians have at various times declared a particular understanding of the Confession at a number of points. The EPCEW **declares**

- that the civil magistrate does not have control over presbyteries in matters religious or moral.
- that the forbidding of marriage to a relative of a deceased spouse any nearer than to those of one's own blood relatives is a matter for the interpretation of individual elders and sessions.
- that though the claims of the bishop of Rome to be the head of the church and his legislating on false worship mean that the papacy should be recognised as part of antichrist, the identification of the antichrist exclusively with the papacy is a matter of individual interpretation.
- that the principle of establishment is a matter for individual elders and sessions.

All elders are required to **subscribe**⁸ to the Confession recognising these declarations of Presbytery. The effect of these declarations is that either the original form or the modified American form may express the position of a subscribing elder.

The confession itself recognises that all councils of men are human and as such are capable of error. It is in the light of this that subscription is made to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Nonetheless subscription is to be to the Westminster Confession of Faith as it stands, with the prevailing declarations. The elders of the churches will not teach what is contrary to the Confession. They will be free to teach within the recognised declarations. Teaching concerning worship is to be within the parameters found in section 4.5.4, 4.5.9, 8.3-8.5 but will not need to teach all the permitted position. Matters of understanding and legitimate theological debate may be brought to the Presbytery and thereby the advice of the brethren be sought. Presbytery may then make statements which clarify understanding, and, where necessary, warn of any danger of departure from the Confession.

The **Larger** and **Shorter Catechisms** are part of the subordinate standards of the church and elders are to recognise them as faithful expressions of Scripture and in accord with the Confession. They are to be employed by the church as an aid to instruction.

The EPCEW recognises the value of the confessions of the early church (the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creed) and the three forms of unity of its sister reformed churches (The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Acts of the Synod of Dort), and the Confession of Faith of the Calvinistic Methodists, and recommends that use should be made of them.

Additional statements may be adopted by particular congregations for their own use or by the whole Presbytery to meet current disputes as long as they are in keeping with the Westminster Standards.

8 see PART two "Form of Government" 10.1.3 and 11.1.2 for wording of the subscription.

4. GOVERNMENT

4.1 The Congregation

The most visible expression of Christ's Church is the individual congregation. Government of the congregation is the most direct and immediate part of church government. Each congregation is governed by its own elders (presbyters, bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors). There should normally be more than one elder. Where necessary Presbytery may be asked to temporarily supply elders (elders acceptable to the congregation) until elders are raised up from within the congregation. All elders must be called and accepted by the clear majority of the communicant members of the congregation. The elders of a particular congregation are referred to as the **congregational elders** or **the session**.⁹ Some elders by virtue of their gifts and calling are recognised and set aside as full-time teaching elders. A teaching elder is commonly known as a minister.

4.2 Presbytery

The presbytery consists of elders from each of the congregations of the presbytery.¹⁰ A **moderator** is appointed every year to chair all meetings. A **clerk** or secretary is appointed every three years to keep records of Presbytery. A **treasurer** is appointed every three years to keep financial records of Presbytery. Presbytery may appoint a **commission** or commissioner to act in its name. The moderator is often in effect called upon to act as a commissioner of Presbytery. Presbytery may also appoint a **committee** to produce reports and advice for its consideration.¹¹

Commission activities are subject to approval by the full Presbytery and committee recommendations are subject to approval by the full Presbytery. Presbytery meetings are normally open to the public. Meetings may be attended by observers except where the Presbytery decides to act in closed session. Other members may be specially invited by the Presbytery and may be co-opted to its committees. Only elders may vote.

4.3 The General Assembly

The General Assembly consists of commissioners from each presbytery.¹² A **moderator** is appointed every year to chair all meetings. A **clerk** and a **deputy clerk** are appointed every three years to keep records of the Assembly. A **treasurer** is appointed every three years to keep financial records of Assembly. The General Assembly may appoint a **commission** to act in its name. The Assembly may also appoint a **committee** to produce reports and advice for its consideration.¹³

Commission activities are subject to approval by the General Assembly, and committee recommendations are subject to approval by the Assembly. General Assembly meetings are normally open to the public. Meetings may be attended by observers except where the Assembly decides to act in closed session.

4.4 The Relationship of Congregational Government and Presbytery

The relationship involves the principles of subsidiarity and of acting in decent and orderly fashion. The individual congregation is not dictated to by the presbytery but there is mutual submission in matters of common concern. The pattern of their relationship may be seen in a summary of their roles:

9 See part two for guidelines in the running of meetings of the session.
10 See part two for current practice for representation at presbytery.
11 See part two for guidelines as to possible committees.
12 See part two for current practice for representation at General Assembly.
13 See part two for guidelines as to possible committees.

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4.4.1 Local Eldership (the Session)

- Spiritual Care of the Congregation
- Admission to membership and sacraments
- Discipline of all members
- Oversight of all meetings, literature work, evangelism
- Providing advice to members on family, social and moral matters.

4.4.2 Wider Eldership (the Presbytery)

- Spiritual Fellowship of the congregations within its bounds and especially of the elders
- Admission to the eldership (ruling and teaching)
- Appeals concerning discipline
- Oversight of matters of mutual concern such as ministerial training, wider diaconal work, missionary endeavour
- Providing eldership in the congregations with advice on questions raised
- rulings on matters of doctrine and discipline
- common financial guidelines
- parameters for biblical worship

4.5 *The Relationship of Sessions, Presbytery, and General Assembly (Church courts)*

4.5.1 Church courts are one in nature, constituted of the same elements, possessed of the same kinds of rights and powers.

4.5.2 Sessions exercise jurisdiction over single congregations, and presbyteries exercise jurisdiction over what is of common concern to the presbyters, sessions, and congregations within their bounds. The General Assembly exercises jurisdiction over such matters as concern the whole Church.

4.5.3 These courts are distinct, but are not separate independent tribunals. Every act of jurisdiction of each court is an act of the whole Church performed by it through that court.

4.5.4 The first place or **primacy** is always given to the session of each church. In the wider expression of the unity of the church, the presbytery is the **radical** court. Different presbyteries may have different procedures.

4.5.5 The principles that affect the relationship between the congregations and the presbytery apply to the relations between the presbytery and the General Assembly.

4.5.6 Although each court exercises original jurisdiction over matters belonging to it, the lower courts are subject to the review and direction of the higher courts.

4.5.7 The acts of a lower court are brought under the supervision of a higher court by way of review, referral, appeal, or complaint. When matters arising in a lower court are referred to a higher court, such referral does not impinge on the authority of the lower court.

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- 4.5.8 It is the right of every court to review the records and acts of the court immediately below, and determine whether the proceedings have been properly recorded; whether they have been regular in accordance with the Constitution; whether they have been wise, just, and equitable; and whether the directions of the higher court have been followed.
- 4.5.9 If in any irregularity or defect is found in the proceedings or the record of the lower court the higher court may correct it.
- 4.5.10 The evidence in a case, properly attested by the clerk of the court by which it has been taken, is held as valid evidence by a higher court to which the case may be appealed.
- 4.5.11 An appellate court forms its judgment from the full record transmitted from the lower court of the evidence that was before it or was tendered in evidence and rejected by it, with due attention to the pleading of the parties at its own bar. If during an appeal new evidence is tendered which in the judgment of the higher court has a bearing on the case it may either refer the case back to the lower originating court, or, with the consent of parties, receive such evidence and determine the case.
- 4.5.12 An appeal or complaint is sustained where the decision of the lower court is
- (i) disapproved, in which case the judgment of the lower court may be modified as the higher court thinks fit; or
 - (ii) defective in process, in which case the higher court without entering on the merit of the decision of the lower court or pronouncing any judgment on it may send back the case to the lower court with instructions to have it taken up again and disposed of in accordance with the laws of the Church.
- 4.5.13 Dismissal of an appeal or complaint implies approval by the higher court of both the decision and the procedure of the lower court. Thereupon the decision of the lower court becomes final.
- 4.5.14 The General Assembly is the highest court in the Church, and represents in one body all its congregations. The Assembly expresses the union, peace, and correspondence among all congregations and church courts.
- 4.5.15 The General Assembly of the EPCEW ('the Church') has powers legislative, administrative, and judicial, which powers shall be supreme with respect to:
- a. Doctrine of the Church;
 - b. Worship of the Church;
 - c. Discipline of the Church;
 - d. The training for service in the Church (including training for the ministry and other training areas as determined by the General Assembly);
 - e. The admission of candidates to the ministry;
 - f. The reception of ministers from other churches;
 - g. Re-admission to the ministry of previous ministers of the Church;
 - h. Overseas missions;

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- i. Home missions;
- j. Relations with other churches;
- k. The publications of the Church;
- l. Addresses to the civil magistrate on behalf of the Church;
- m. Appeals from lower courts.

4.5.16 In ordinary practice the General Assembly exercises its powers of discipline only in cases brought before it by referral or appeal (appellate jurisdiction). However, the Assembly reserves its right to original jurisdiction in disciplinary matters and may remit a case to a lower court, or deal with it by the direct exercise of its own authority.

4.5.17 Matters agreed upon at General Assembly that change the constitution of the EPCEW or address matters to do with the Confession are sent back to presbyteries for acceptance, and are only ratified after debate on all relevant matters raised by the presbyteries.

4.6 *The Role and Responsibilities of the Session*

These are:

- 4.6.1 To oversee the **spiritual life** of the congregation and care for the spiritual welfare of its members.
 - 4.6.2 To **guard** all congregational teaching and worship including preaching, administration of sacraments and singing of praise so that they are biblical, in accord with the Confession and within such parameters as are agreed by presbytery to be biblical.¹⁴
 - 4.6.3 To examine and admit to **membership** believers and their children, on a credible profession of faith or by transfer from a sister congregation.
 - 4.6.4 To administer **discipline** of the members. This, when necessary, will proceed through the following stages,
 - 4.6.4.1 Warning them of those things which are not in keeping with their profession.
 - 4.6.4.2 Rebuking them in private and then in public.
- For matters of unrepented immorality or heresy, suspending and then excommunicating them until they repent.
- 4.6.4.3 Initial self-discipline should also be exercised within the session for ruling and teaching elders as part of mutual care for one another.
 - 4.6.5 To oversee the **financial** affairs of the congregation. This should be within the common guidelines set out by presbytery. In particular the elders should ensure the church faces its financial responsibilities concerning buildings and ministers according to salary scales recommended by presbytery.

14 A session of a congregation which has a distinct position and which is within the parameters set out in Ch 8 of “Decently and in Order” is free to maintain that position according to the constitution of the congregation e.g. a congregation which is psalms only would be free to maintain that position. This would be particularly important in congregations established in England and Wales by Churches from outside these countries.

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- 4.6.6 To encourage material provision to be made in cases of individual hardship in the congregation and oversee the election, ordination and work of **deacons**.
- 4.6.7 To promote **missionary** endeavour, including local church planting.
- 4.6.8 To oversee such **additional teaching** as members of the congregation may need in addition to the regular public preaching and especially of covenant children.
- 4.6.9 To oversee **literature work** including magazines and such publications as the congregation may need.
- 4.6.10 To oversee all **meetings** of the church including any special sections such as Sunday school, youth work and women's meetings.
- 4.6.11 To be alert to the Lord's raising up of **spiritually gifted men** in the congregation; in the light of this to oversee the free elections of such men to eldership and to ensure no elder is imposed against the will of the congregation.
- 4.6.12 To consider all decisions of the presbytery and, where necessary, to **warn of any doctrinal deviation**. If absolutely necessary, by due process elders should be prepared to withdraw the congregation from the presbytery, but only after they have given sufficient evidence of serious doctrinal deviation.

4.7 *The Role and Responsibilities of the Presbytery*¹⁵

These are:

- 4.7.1 To be a means of **spiritual fellowship** and encouragement of the brethren.
- 4.7.2 To guard matters of **doctrine**, especially those affecting the Confession and any additional statements of doctrine that may be needed, and to rule on these matters of doctrine.
- 4.7.3 To **examine and ordain elders** freely chosen by the congregations, including candidates for the ministry, and to record details of their subscription to the Confession. This may be done by the whole presbytery or by commissioners acting on its behalf
- 4.7.4 To receive and **mediate appeals** concerning the acts of the sessions. This would cover the administration of discipline and unresolved questions concerning matters of doctrine, worship or behaviour. Such matters should have previously been raised by members with their local eldership.
- 4.7.5 To control **finance** in matters of common concern (funds raised from congregations according to targets approved by presbytery) and to set out guidelines for the proper management of congregational finances.
- 4.7.6 To promote **links** between congregations, and provide a mechanism for stronger congregations to aid weaker congregations for the financial support of ministers.
- 4.7.7 To promote and oversee matters of **common concern** among the churches within its bounds.

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- 4.7.8 To discuss matters of common spiritual concern to the churches within its bounds and to **advise** congregational sessions on any question raised by them.
- 4.7.9 To consider the biblical parameters of worship for the congregations, recognising the diversity that is consistent with our confessional standards.¹⁶
- 4.7.10 To ensure no **elder or minister is imposed** against the wishes of the congregation.
- 4.7.11 To take due care **not to multiply bureaucratic structures** which are either not strictly necessary or not under full presbytery control.
- 4.7.12 To oversee the **orderly dissolution of the relationship** of a congregation and the presbytery where there is a complete breakdown of relationship. This may be either as a result of deviation by a congregation or as a result of withdrawal by the congregation. This would require 18 months of attempts at reconciliation from the time of written notification.

4.8 *The Role and Responsibilities of the General Assembly*

4.8.1 The responsibilities of the General Assembly are

- To evaluate needs and resources for the Church at large.
- To superintend the affairs of the whole Church.
- To promote charity, truth, and holiness throughout all the churches under its care.
- To promote the prosperity and enlargement of the Church.
- To suppress schismatical contention.
- To bear testimony against immorality and error.
- To develop and maintain uniform standards across the churches for the training and admission of presbyters.
- To receive all appeals, complaints and referrals brought before it from the lower courts.
- To decide controversies respecting doctrine and discipline.
- To give advice in cases submitted to it.
- To form, unite, divide, and dissolve presbyteries.
- To relate to and unite with other ecclesiastical bodies.
- To promote and oversee matters of common concern:
 - Church planting undertaken collectively.
 - Conferences
 - Publications, including a common magazine
 - Public comment on moral and social matters

5. ELDERS

Elders are God's provision for the government of Christ's church. They are also known as presbyters, bishops, overseers, shepherds or pastors. There are differing understandings in presbyterian churches as to the nature of elders. Elders holding to these different views would have the right to express their position, but the position taken by the EPCEW as a whole is that all elders are viewed as biblical presbyters.

Ministers are elders who, because of their gifts and calling, are set aside to labour in the word and doctrine. The term '**minister**' is the name commonly applied to a teaching elder. Ministers have a special responsibility for the regular preaching of the word and for the administration of the sacraments. They share with the other ruling elders the responsibility for the government of the church set out in Chapter 4. All are to care for the people as shepherds and in visiting the people.

5.1 Training for the Eldership especially for the Ministry

Ideally all elders would benefit from appropriate training. Churches and presbytery should give thought to the ongoing needs for appropriate training for both teaching and ruling elders. However, special attention needs to be given to assessing a call to the preaching ministry and to initial training for the preaching of the word.

5.1.1 Applicants for the ministry must normally have the support of the elders of the congregation in which they are members. The elders must be able to confirm that there are indications that they are likely in future to display the **qualifications for an elder and minister of the word**.

5.1.2 There must be evidence of **spiritual and Intellectual gifts** suitable for the public ministry of the word.

5.1.3 There must be a conviction of a **call** to the work of the preaching ministry.

5.1.4 An applicant should be a **University graduate** or be helped to become one. In other cases men of mature years or in special circumstances may also be considered by presbytery.

5.1.5 Normally applicants will be required to have undertaken or to undertake **theological study** at a college approved by the General Assembly.

5.1.6 An applicant has to satisfy the presbytery of his theological competence and **preaching gifts**. This may involve interviews, reports of preaching, and where necessary written examination both before and after training.

5.1.7 An applicant will be **formally recognised** by being taken **under care** of the presbytery and the presbytery will seek to guide him through his training for the ministry. The next step is frequently known as **licensing** and is undertaken to make it known that the man is recognised as someone eligible for a call to the ordained ministry. Where there is transfer from a ministry outside the EPCEW the initial formal recognition will not be necessary, though there is wisdom in allowing a period of time between receiving an application and approval. **Ordination** will take place following acceptance of a call to a specific work.

5.2 Calls and Ordinations to the Ministry

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- 5.2.1 The **elders**¹⁷ of a congregation have the responsibility of considering suitable men for a position of a minister within that congregation. They need to be open to suggestions from other members of the congregation, as well as from those outside able to advise it.
- 5.2.2 All elders, including ministers, must be called to serve in a congregation by the **clear vote** of the majority of the members of the congregation.¹⁸ A congregation frequently underlines this by a list of members' signatures of those supporting the call.
- 5.2.3 Ministers from outside the EPCEW can be considered so long as they are able to subscribe to the Confession. Their suitability would need special consideration by the presbytery. Ministers in good standing in bodies committed to the Westminster Confession can also be seconded to the EPCEW without prejudice to matters covered by their subscription within their own denomination, assuming they are prepared to operate within the conditions operating in the EPCEW.
- 5.2.4 The intention of a congregation to issue a formal call to a minister must be taken to presbytery for **approval**, though the minister concerned is to be informed of this beforehand. The call will be conveyed to the minister from the elders of the congregation. If the minister is already serving another congregation which is a member of the EPCEW then its elders should also first be informed.
- 5.2.5 Men whose call has been approved in this way must be given reasonable **time to reflect prayerfully** on all that it implies for them, their families and their existing congregation.
- 5.2.6 Where a call has been accepted, the presbytery, in conjunction with the session, will proceed to ordain and/or **install** the minister.
- 5.3 *Calls and Ordinations to the Ruling Eldership*
- 5.3.1 **Elders** have the responsibility of considering men with the spiritual gifts for eldership. They should be open to suggestions from within the congregation¹⁹ and from those from outside able to advise it.
- 5.3.2 All elders when asked to serve in a congregation must have a calling as indicated by a clear vote in favour by the majority of the members of the congregation.
- 5.3.3 As most prospective ruling elders will not already have been tested as to their suitability and call to the office, suitable **teaching** on the subject should be given to the congregation.
- 5.3.4 **Time** should be allowed for men who are being considered for election to the office of elder to reflect prayerfully on what they believe to be God's calling.
- 5.3.5 Only those men who are considered by the existing eldership to possess the appropriate spiritual **gifts** and who are able, with due encouragement, to speak of a **calling** to the office, should be voted upon. Elders should be considered in terms of their spiritual gifts and not in terms of a set number being required.

17 The elders may ask presbytery to appoint an interim moderator as a commission of presbytery to assist them (where practical).

18 This presupposes the careful maintenance of a membership roll.

19 The way this is done may vary, see part 2 *Form of Government*, 11.3.

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5.3.6 Where a call has been accepted and presbytery has approved the subscription, the presbytery, in conjunction with the session, will proceed to **ordain** the ruling elder.²⁰

20 Suggested forms of service of ordination are given in part 3, *Directory of Worship*, 3.1.

6. DEACONS

- 6.1 Deacons may be appointed to help the elders in the **physical and social needs** of the members and in maintaining the meeting place. Their work is to enable the elders to give their time to the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Particular responsibilities of the deacons will be determined by the elders according to the needs of the congregation.
- 6.2 The New Testament letters to Timothy and Titus set out the **spiritual qualities** necessary for a deacon. Teaching concerning the office and work of deacons is to be provided prior to any elections being held.
- 6.3 Deacons must be freely chosen by a **clear majority vote** of the members on the basis of recommendation by the elders. The elders should be open to the suggestions of the members. The men nominated must be in membership in the congregation and sound in the faith.
- 6.4 Deacons are not assistant elders nor do they exercise rule in the congregation. Though their work is **under the oversight of the elders**, they do not need the immediate involvement of the elders in all their work. There is no necessity that all meetings of the diaconate require the presence of the elders but there is need for some meetings to be with one or all of the elders. A record of their activities is to be kept and to be accessible to the elders.
- 6.5 As they are not members of Presbytery, the oversight of their ordination is in the hands of their own congregation's elders. The form of their examination and length of service is also determined by the session.²¹
- 6.6 Deacons will sometimes require the assistance of women in the social work of the congregation. Each session is free to determine whether a formal office is required and what title best describes the work of these women.

²¹ EPC practice is to have elections every 3-5 years. PCA and Free Church practice is that the office is for life.

7. MISSIONS

7.1 Introduction

All churches are responsible to the Lord to take his **gospel to all men**. In this the glory of God is made known. Without Christ mankind is lost and faces a lost eternity. Particular circumstances affect the opportunities and direction of this gospel endeavour. Each congregation has this responsibility as its week by week concern and as part of its normal life. In addition it is fitting, as opportunity allows, for a congregation to plant a congregation in another area. It is also an endeavour in which congregations can act together and it is one of the many strengths of presbyterianism that congregations can act as one in order to further the cause of the gospel. It is then an act of Presbytery to endeavour to establish congregations in new areas within its bounds. This **church planting** is often referred to as **home missions**. The General Assembly, presbyteries, and individual congregations may also seek to plant churches in other lands or may co-operate with others in doing so. Such gospel work is usually called **foreign missions**.

Congregations not yet able to have their own elected elders are referred to as Mission Churches.

7.2 Co-operation

The EPCEW recognises the many other congregations, denominations and missions engaged in true gospel work. All these gospel endeavours are Christ's work and are worthy of respect. Sadly there are times when the gospel itself is impoverished and where Christ's church is compromised. The EPCEW is unable to support work directly associated with the WCC or with Churches Together because of the confusion of the gospel with ritualism and with liberal theology. It seeks to co-operate with reformed missions such as that of the Free Church of Scotland in Peru and elsewhere. The missions of sister churches and of members of the International Conference of Reformed Churches are recommended as worthy of support. The EPCEW itself has a debt to the London Congregation of the Free Church of Scotland, the Mission to the World (MTW), the mission board of the EPC and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

7.3 Home Missions

7.3.1 Oversight

Mission churches planted by a particular congregation have the elders of the parent congregation as their own. Mission churches planted by presbytery have **temporary elders** appointed by presbytery including the church planter as its temporary minister.

7.3.2 Formal Constitution

Under the guidance of the church planter and the other temporary elders a mission church may ask the presbytery to allow for the election of elders and so **formally constitute** it as a regular congregation with normal representation at presbytery. Presbytery would make full enquiry as to the timeliness of this action, bearing in mind numbers, stability and suitable eldership gifts.

7.3.3 Committee for Church Planting.

Presbytery as a whole has the immediate responsibility for all church planting within its bounds other than that carried out by a single congregation. It is **advised** by its committee for church planting (which includes the church planter for the particular mission church under consideration). That committee offers whatever help it can to members of presbytery labouring with other missionary bodies

7.4 Foreign Missions

7.4.1 The Nature of Foreign Missions.

The chief work of foreign missions is the preaching of the gospel. This requires the same high standards and calling as for other ministers or ruling elders. The distinctive difference is that it involves church planting in another culture and in co-operation with other Christians from that culture.

7.4.2 Other Missionary Work.

Missionary work is often supported by other Christian **diaconal workers** involved in such work as relief, medical and educational work. These are often referred to as missionaries because their work is in another culture and part of the overall mission. This work is not the same as the preaching of the gospel by men called to that work, nor the same as the work of ruling within the church. However, such workers, if men, may also be called to and may be involved in a regular preaching ministry as ministers, or be ruling elders in the church.

7.4.3 Presbytery Responsibility

Presbytery has a collective responsibility to promote foreign missions. It seeks in the light of providence to **identify those geographical areas** where it will be able to make a **distinctive contribution** as well as encouraging a **concentration** of support for existing missionary endeavour. At the same time individual congregations are free to support those with whom they have specific links.

Ministers or elders appointed by presbytery to work in foreign mission churches are responsible to presbytery and should provide reports to it and through it for its congregations. Where the mission church belongs to the presbytery the missionary church planter is supported out of the presbytery's **foreign mission fund**. Missionary ministers of the gospel working for other missions recognised by presbytery may also apply for support as funds may allow. They may be associated with the presbytery when home visits permit, and asked to provide reports and financial accounts.

The wider diaconal work of mission receives financial support as funds permit. These workers have access to such expertise and help as the church planting committee may develop. They are also asked to submit reports.

Ministers and Elders of the EPCEW are free to work in approved missions outside that of the presbytery. All missionary ministers and elders remain under the care of their presbytery.

8. WORSHIP

The EPCEW recognises that there is diversity in the worship carried out in reformed churches and that there is also a need to recognise parameters within which this diversity is acceptable.

8.1 The **regulative principle** distinguishes Reformed from Lutheran or Anglican as well as Charismatic worship. It is accepted as one of the fundamentals of Presbyterianism. It distinguished worship in Geneva at the time of Calvin. It was the guiding principle for the Puritans and for the Scottish Church from the time of Knox on. The regulative principle is the recognition that God has appointed in his word the **way** in which he should be worshipped. Only those things which are **commanded by God** for his present church, either directly or by inference in his word, are to form part of our worship. The church which exists now must recognise that Christ, who is the heavenly pattern of the temple, has now come in the flesh to be the head of the church. It is this, not taste, which determines the characteristic simplicity of reformed worship.

8.2 The **Westminster Confession** works out the principles concerning worship in Ch. 1 section 6 and Ch. 21. The sufficiency of Scripture is stated. The components of worship are given as:

- prayer
- the reading of scripture
- preaching
- singing of psalms
- sacraments
- the keeping of the Lord's Day
- benediction
- and on special occasions
 - religious oaths and vows,
 - fasting, and
 - thanksgiving.

A distinction is drawn between these commanded constituents of worship and the circumstances in which the worship is conducted.

8.3 Reformed churches have shown variation in worship as they have differed in the application of this principle as well as in many of the circumstances concerning worship. For that reason the PAE accepted the vision of unity which embraced such differences. Particularly in mind was the legitimate debate concerning what Scripture precisely commands (and so what is recognised by the Confession). It was such matters as whether our sung praise is to be psalms only or psalms and hymns, whether the singing is accompanied or unaccompanied, whether there should be any responses or none, that was in view. Such differences were accepted as arising from a different application of the regulative principle. It was not recognised that worship was a matter of taste nor merely avoiding what is specifically forbidden. At the beginning of the PAE it was also accepted that there is a

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need to determine the parameters within which there is legitimate debate as to whether a matter is biblical and in accord with our Confession.

8.4 Stating the **parameters** within which variation may occur requires positive and negative consideration. These need to reflect current concerns and will therefore need frequent updating.

8.4.1 Positively we should recognise that

- Worship should seek to show wholehearted delight in glorifying God and in making him the centre of worship
- Praise is to combine awe and joy
- Preaching and reading of the word are at the heart of our public worship
- Discipline must be exercised regarding the sacraments both as to who is to be baptised and who is allowed to the table in communion
- In the singing of praise the use of psalms should form a significant part of worship. They are biblically required, part of the reformed tradition, laid down in the Confession and in both the PCA blue book and the EPC code.
- All that occurs in public worship should always be under the control of the eldership

8.4.2 Negatively, recognising that the whole counsel of God being either set down in Scripture, or deducible from it, and God’s former ways of “revealing his will unto his people being now ceased” (WCF 1:1). we accept that:-

- There is no place for any supposed prophesying, speaking in tongues or organised miracle workings
- The purpose of worship is primarily to glorify God, not to entertain the congregation
- Musical accompaniment, when present, is to aid the singing of praise not to replace it. It should be suitable for the serious, reverential worship of a Holy God.
- Dance and mime have no place in worship.

8.5 **Doctrine and worship** are intimately related. It is important for presbytery to **debate** trends in worship without it being seen as an attempt to impose a uniform pattern. The need is not to provide a prescriptive ‘straitjacket’ but to gain the collective insight of the brethren, as vital matters of substance are often involved.

8.6 The EPCEW offers a number of **alternative** patterns of service and **recommendations** concerning the circumstances of worship as an **aid** to the churches. Variation need not be inconsistent with the desire to see a common ethos in our services. A number of versions of Scripture are already in use in our churches - AV, NKJV, NIV, NASB. However a reliable literal translation should be used and not a paraphrase. A range of suitable Psalters and Hymn Books will be considered and recommended. A range of alternative forms of service will be made available.

9. FINANCE

The present practice of the EPCEW is that each congregation is responsible for the **stipend** of its own minister and for the ownership of its own **buildings**. Recommended **scales** for a minister's stipend have been considered and after further discussion specific recommendations are to be agreed by the General Assembly. It has been agreed that as the EPCEW develops further, attention will need to be given to financial matters to ensure financially stronger congregations help financially weaker ones.

10. ACCESSION OF ESTABLISHED CONGREGATIONS

The EPCEW has arisen at a time when there is turmoil in the older theologically mixed denominations and isolation of many evangelical congregations outside them. It recognises the many legitimate concerns and the wariness of congregations who have a common theological position with it. It is of the essence of its presbyterian position that it welcomes **applications** of congregations for membership of the presbytery. It would seek to be sympathetic to factors arising from the past history of the congregation.

The basis of membership is acceptance of the Westminster Confession. Contact should first be made with the clerk of the presbytery of the bounds. The elders of the congregation applying would be invited to attend presbytery as observers and, when ready to do so, to present their request together with an account of the history of the congregation. A commission of presbytery would visit the congregation. If the request is accepted elders would be asked to subscribe to the confession, but would not be re-ordained. The formal acceptance of the congregation into the presbytery would then be recognised.²²

At the same time the EPCEW would like to maintain **contacts** with likeminded congregations outside the EPCEW.

Any group of believers wishing to become a congregation would be able to approach the presbytery of the bounds in the same way. It would then be treated as a church planting work of that presbytery.

22 See 11.10

11. FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES GOVERNING PROCEDURES

- 11.1 Only God may rule over the conscience, He rules through his Word. We must obey Scripture, but are not bound to believe, or to do in worship, anything men teach or require that is against God's Word or added to it.
- 11.2 We see in Scripture that all believers together form one universal church. There is one body, one temple and one people of God, the bride of Christ.
- 11.3 The general principles of church government are taught in Scripture. The most important principles are these:
- The church is governed by elders who are properly chosen and ordained.
 - Believers are to submit to one another, both within the local congregation and in the wider church.
 - An individual, congregation or lower court has the right to appeal to a higher church court.
- 11.4 Many details of church government are the same as in other human institutions. They are determined by common sense as in other institutions, but must always be based on the fundamental rules of Scripture. Therefore every association of churches or local congregation has the right to decide on what terms it will admit people to the Lord's Supper. It may also decide the qualifications for ministers and members, as well as the whole way the church is governed.
- 11.5 Our Saviour has given the office of elder for the growth of the church. Elders do not only preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, but also shepherd the flock of God by example and encouragement. When necessary, they exercise discipline so that truth and holiness may be preserved.
- 11.6 For the good of the visible Church our Saviour has given the office of deacon so that material needs may be met and physical suffering relieved.
- 11.7 Some doctrines and practices are not essential to the gospel and do not disturb the harmony of the church. They are matters about which spiritual and biblical Christians may disagree. In these areas Christians must be restrained and tolerant towards one another.
- 11.8 The officers of the church are selected by the congregation. They must be men who have the character and qualifications required in Scripture for their office.
- 11.9 Whenever authority is exercised in the church it is done by stating and explaining the truth. This applies whether authority is exercised by the congregation, or by the representative officers in the church session, presbytery, synod, or general assembly. Church discipline must aim for purely moral and spiritual results, so it cannot be enforced by the civil authorities. It is effective as it deals fairly with the case, so that the procedure persuades any impartial observer that justice is being done. Its power comes from Christ's blessing.
- 11.10 Each court (local church session, presbytery, synod, or general assembly) controls the property acquired by that court. No other court shall have any claim upon that property, except as may be contracted through loans or mortgages.

FORM of GOVERNMENT

THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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1.0 THE CHURCH

1.1 THE CHURCH - CATHOLIC AND PARTICULAR

- 1.1.1 The Church of Christ signifies:
 - 1.1.1.1 the whole number of the elect, who, before the foundation of the world, were given by the Father unto the Son that by the Son they might be redeemed; and who, in due time, are called, justified and glorified. This is commonly called the invisible Catholic or Universal Church.
 - 1.1.1.2 all those throughout the world who profess true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are subject to His laws and give obedience to Him, together with their children. In this sense we speak of it as the visible Catholic or Universal Church.
- 1.1.2 A particular Church
 - 1.1.2.1 A particular Church is a branch of the Catholic visible Church and all its members are members of the visible church. Such of its members as are, or are ordained of God to be, savingly united to Christ belong to the invisible Church.
 - 1.1.2.2 A particular Church is a body or community professing and maintaining the saving truths of the gospel. It is formed under Christ's authority and exists for the keeping of Christian ordinances and for the gathering, edifying and perfecting of God's people. It may consist of one congregation or a number of congregations under a common government.
- 1.1.3 The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales was first constituted as a particular Church in 1996.

1.2 THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

- 1.2.1 The Lord Jesus Christ is the only King and Head of the Church and He has revealed in His Word that He has appointed offices, ordained orderly government, instituted ordinances of worship and enacted principles and laws of fellowship in His Church.

2.0 THE STANDARDS OF THE CHURCH

2.1 OUR CREED

- 2.1.1 The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the supreme standard of the Church.
- 2.1.2 The subordinate standards of our Church are the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms; we believe these subordinate standards, as amended in this sub-section, accurately summarize, interpret and apply the teaching of the Scriptures on important points of doctrine and worship.
- 2.1.2.1 Chapter 23 – Of the Civil Magistrate.
We do not receive this Chapter in any sense as to mean that the Civil Magistrate has a controlling power over Synods or Councils with respect to the exercise of their Ministerial authority, or power to persecute any for their religion.
We allow individual elders and sessions to accept or reject the principle of establishment as their consciences dictate.
- 2.1.2.2 Chapter 24 – Of Marriage and Divorce
We accept all the statements of this Chapter except the last sentence of Paragraph 4. Individual elders and sessions are allowed to accept, or not accept, the words, ‘The man may not marry any of his wife’s kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own, nor the woman of her husband’s kindred, nearer in blood than of her own.’
- 2.1.2.3 Chapter 25 - Of the Church.
Individual elders and sessions are allowed to accept, or not accept, the words ‘but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God’ from Paragraph 6.

2.2 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH

- 2.2.1 The Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger and Shorter Catechisms*, together with the *Book of Church Order*, comprising *Decently and In Order*, *Form of Government*, *Rules of Discipline*, *Directory of Worship*, and *Book of Discipline*.
- 2.2.2 Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* not within this section 2.2 *The Constitution of the Church* may only be made in the following manner:
- 2.2.2.1 Approval of the proposed amendment by majority of those present and voting in the General Assembly and its recommendation to the Presbyteries; **and**

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- 2.2.2.2 The advice and consent of two thirds of the Presbyteries; **and**

- 2.2.2.3 The approval and enactment by a subsequent General Assembly by a majority of those present and voting.

- 2.2.3 Amendments to the *Book of Church Order* within this section 2.2 *The Constitution of the Church* may only be made in the following manner:
 - 2.2.3.1 The approval of the proposed amendment by 75% of those present and voting in the General Assembly and its recommendation to Presbyteries; **and**

 - 2.2.3.2 The advice and consent of 75% of the Presbyteries; **and**

 - 2.2.3.3 The approval by a subsequent General Assembly by 75% of those present and voting.

- 2.2.4 If any Presbytery fails to act, or to report action, on any proposed amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, and the response of the Presbytery is not satisfactory to the General Assembly, the General Assembly shall require the delinquent Presbytery to report its judgment at the next Assembly, which shall take action on the proposed amendment.

- 2.2.5 Full organic union of the EPCEW with any other ecclesiastical body can be effected only in the following manner:
 - 2.2.5.1 The approval of the proposed union by 75% of those present and voting in the General Assembly and its recommendation to Presbyteries; **and**

 - 2.2.5.2 The advice and consent of 75% of the Presbyteries; **and**

 - 2.2.5.3 The approval by a subsequent General Assembly by 75% of those present and voting.

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3.0 THE CONGREGATION

3.1 MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1.1 Acceptance to membership is determined by the Session. It is open to all such persons as have made a credible profession of faith in Christ as God the Son, their Saviour and Lord, have been baptised and exhibit a teachable spirit.
- 3.1.2 Members transferring from one congregation to another must obtain a certificate from the Session, confirming that they are members in good standing. Applications for membership from outside this Church should be supported by a disjunction certificate where possible, or a valid reason given for failure to produce such a certificate. Applicants must satisfy the Session that their profession of faith is credible.
- 3.1.3 Children of such members (though not admitted to full communion) are, because of God's Covenantal promise, received as infant members of the congregation in the Sacrament of Baptism. Such children shall be admitted to full communion upon their profession of faith.
- 3.1.4 Members have a responsibility faithfully to attend the means of grace, submit to the authority of the Session, respect and encourage their Elders, promote the peace and prosperity of the congregation, give of their substance as the Lord may prosper them, pray for the work of the gospel at home and abroad and exhibit a Christian spirit at all times.

3.2 OVERSIGHT

- 3.2.1 Each congregation, so far as its membership may justify, should have men elected to the position of Elder (Bishop/ Presbyter/ Overseer or Minister/ Pastor).
- 3.2.2 The Scriptures teach that in each congregation there are a plurality of Elders (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Phil. 1:1). In New Testament times all Elders ruled and some of them also laboured in the Word and doctrine (Tim. 5:17); hence the titles Teaching Elder and Ruling Elder. Teaching Elders are referred to as Ministers in this book.
- 3.2.3 The Elders, including the Minister, comprise the Session, which has to do with the whole spiritual oversight of the congregation, including the admission to, or exclusion from, the Sacraments of the Church, and Church discipline (in necessary cases in conjunction with the Presbytery).
- 3.2.4 We endorse the right of every congregation to call its own Minister(s) and Ruling Elders, subject to the approval of Presbytery.

3.3 BUSINESS MEETINGS

- 3.3.1 Calling of Business Meetings
 - 3.3.1.1 Every business meeting shall be called from the pulpit by the authority of the Session.
 - 3.3.1.2 At the written request of 25% of the members a special meeting must be called by the Session.
 - 3.3.1.3 The congregation must also meet when directed to do so by Presbytery.

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- 3.3.1.4 An Annual business meeting must be held at which there shall be presented reports (including, inter alia, Session, Pastoral and Financial reports) assessing the preceding year and any plans and objectives for the ensuing year; such information and explanation of the reports as may be asked for shall be given.
- 3.3.2 Announcement shall be made of the meeting on the two preceding Sabbaths. Such announcement shall specify the business to be transacted and no business other than that specified may be brought before the meeting.
- 3.3.3 The quorum for a business meeting shall be 25% of the membership.
- 3.3.4 At every business meeting the Minister (or an Interim-Moderator) shall ordinarily preside. The Session may appoint another Elder to preside where the need arises.
- 3.3.5 Only members in full communion have the right to vote or engage in debate.
- 3.3.6 Sessions have the right to restrict attendance at a business meeting to members only.
- 3.3.7 The proceedings and decisions of business meetings shall be recorded in the Session minute books.

4.0 THE SESSION

4.1 COMPOSITION

- 4.1.1 The Session consists of the Teaching and Ruling Elders of a congregation.

4.2 MEETINGS

- 4.2.1 The Minister shall ordinarily preside at meetings of the Session. In his absence another elder may preside; or an Interim-Moderator appointed by Presbytery.
- 4.2.2 The Session shall meet at least bi-monthly for the transaction of ordinary business, public intimation having been given on a previous Sabbath.
- 4.2.3 Any member of Session may request, in case of urgency, a special meeting of Session.
- 4.2.4 A quorum consists of a majority of Session members, with a minimum of two.
- 4.2.5 All Session meetings must be opened and closed with prayer.
- 4.2.6 The Session must appoint a Clerk who shall make a record of the proceedings of each meeting. Any member of the Session may enter his dissent from any part of the proceedings and may require his dissent to be recorded; or he may dissent and complain to the Presbytery as per *Rules of Discipline* 1.3.

4.3 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 4.3.1 The Session must maintain registers of members and of their baptised children.
- 4.3.2 The Session has the responsibility for the administration of the Sacraments and maintain a record of attendance at the Lord's Supper.
- 4.3.3 The Session shall make arrangements for the pulpit supply and essential ministerial services of the congregation during the absence of the minister
- 4.3.4 The Session shall encourage the graces of liberality and concern for the needy among the people
- 4.3.5 The Session shall ensure that all congregational Title and Trust Deeds are in order and preserved in a safe place, together with all official congregational documents.
- 4.3.6 The Session shall present annually a report to the congregation and to the March meeting of Presbytery.
They shall report as follows:
- number of baptised members 1st January / 31st December
 - number of communicant members 1st January / 31st December
 - number of deaths and disjunctions
 - average number of communicant members at Communion services
 - average attendance Morning services

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- average attendance Evening Services
- average attendance Mid-week Services
- number on Sabbath School and Bible Class Rolls at the end of the calendar year
- number of Baptisms
- number of marriages.

4.3.7 In any congregation lacking a Board of Deacons the duties of Deacons shall fall upon the Elders.

4.4 AUTHORITY

- 4.4.1 All Elders, Deacons, members of and workers in the congregation must submit to the authority and decisions of the Session, but any member who disapproves of or feels aggrieved by a decision of Session has the right of petition to Session and appeal to Presbytery.
- 4.4.2 The Session shall conduct all elections to the offices of Minister, Ruling Elder or Deacon. It must decline any person put forward for election whom it regards as unsuited for the office.
- 4.4.3 The Session, in exercising its power of discipline, may call before it members of the congregation and, if necessary, admonish, rebuke, suspend or exclude from the Sacraments those who are found to deserve censure.
- 4.4.4 Members of Session, including the Minister, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Presbytery.

5.0 THE DIACONATE

5.1 COMPOSITION AND APPOINTMENT

- 5.1.1 The Deacons' Board consists of the Deacons and (ex-officio) members of Session of a congregation.
- 5.1.2 Deacons must be members in full communion with the congregation in which they are appointed. They must be men qualified in accordance with 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They must be approved by the Session and be chosen by popular vote.
- 5.1.3 At his ordination and/or installation a deacon must answer affirmatively the following questions:
- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as accepted by this Church, and that they are founded on and agreeable to the Word of God?
 - Do you believe the Form of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and do you promise to adhere to and support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the Courts of this Church?
 - Do you accept the office of Deacon in this congregation and do you undertake through divine grace to discharge its duties, so far as in you lies, with diligence and faithfulness?
- 5.1.4 In exceptional circumstances, in small congregations, when candidates for the office of Deacon are not able to endorse the WCF because of different views on baptism, otherwise suitable men may be eligible for election, at the sole discretion of presbytery.
- 5.1.5 Elections for Deacons shall be held any time after 3 years, but in no case beyond 5 years following the previous election.
- 5.1.6 Deacons shall relinquish their office if:
- they are not re-elected
 - they cease to be members of the congregation
 - their resignation is received and accepted.

5.2 MEETINGS

- 5.2.1 A member of session shall ordinarily preside at all meetings.
- 5.2.2 The Deacons' Board should meet at least four times annually for transacting ordinary business.
- 5.2.3 A special meeting of the Board may be called by the Minister or the session or at the request of two Deacons.
- 5.2.4 Meetings shall be intimated publicly from the pulpit or by notice given to every member.

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- 5.2.5 A majority of Board members, which should preferably include one member of the Session other than the Chairman, constitutes a quorum.
- 5.2.6 All meetings of the Board shall be opened and closed with prayer.
- 5.2.7 The Deacons' Board must appoint a Clerk who shall make a record of the proceedings of each meeting. Any member of the Board may enter his dissent from any part of the proceedings. He may require his dissent with/without reasons to be recorded.

5.3 DUTIES

- 5.3.1 The duty of the Deacons' Board is to assist the Session in administering the social and material affairs of the congregation, e.g.
- ministration to the poor, the needy, the sick, the lonely and any who may be in distress
 - the collection and administration of the finances
 - the preparation of audited annual accounts
 - the maintenance, improvement, insurance and uses of the property
 - devising effective methods of collecting and distributing the gifts of the fellowship as guided by the session
 - giving assistance in organising projects in, or by, the congregation and any other task which the session may assign them.

5.4 AUTHORITY

- 5.4.1 The Deacons' Board shall act under the authority of the session and has no power of discipline.

6.0 THE PRESBYTERY

6.1 COMPOSITIONS AND APPOINTMENT

- 6.1.1 The Presbytery shall consist of
- all Ministers, including retired Ministers of the EPCEW, within its bounds that have been accepted by Presbytery;
 - all ruling (including Assessor/Borrowed) Elders from each Session within its bounds.
- 6.1.2 Each congregation may have up to three voting Elder Commissioners to Presbytery.
- 6.1.3 Each Session shall inform the Clerk as to who their voting representatives are prior to the beginning of business at each meeting.
- 6.1.4 A Minister shall be required to hold his membership in the Presbytery within whose geographical bounds he resides unless there are reasons satisfactory to his Presbytery why he should not do so. Where a minister labours outside the geographical bounds of his Presbytery it shall only be with full concurrence of his Presbytery and the Presbytery within whose bounds he labours.
- 6.1.5 A Minister shall only be received as a member of Presbytery who receives a call to an ecclesiastical work within the bounds of that Presbytery, except in cases where the minister is retired, or where deemed necessary by Presbytery subject to review by the General Assembly.

6.2 OFFICIALS

- 6.2.1 The officials of the Presbytery are the Moderator, Clerk or Clerks and the Treasurer, and shall be appointed by the Court from among its members.
- 6.2.2 The Presbytery shall elect a Moderator annually at the March meeting in accordance with the following rules:
- 6.2.2.1 The Presbytery Arrangements Committee shall, and each congregational Session may, submit in writing the name of the member of Presbytery they wish to nominate to the Clerk at the November meeting for inclusion on the March agenda.
- 6.2.2.2 Where there is more than one nomination there shall be an election by ballot.
- 6.2.2.3 To be elected, a nominee must secure a majority of the total votes cast. Until this is achieved, the nominee with the smallest number of votes is eliminated and another vote taken.
- 6.2.3 The new Moderator shall enter upon his office at the meeting following his election.
- 6.2.4 In the absence of the Moderator the immediate past Moderator shall preside, but if he, too, is absent, the Presbytery shall elect a Moderator for that meeting.
- 6.2.5 The Clerk and Treasurer shall be elected every three years at the March meeting in accord with the same rules as for the Moderator.

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6.3 MEETINGS

- 6.3.1 There shall be a minimum of four ordinary meetings during each calendar year.
- 6.3.2 Presbytery shall determine the date, time and place of each meeting, but shall ordinarily meet the first Saturday of March, and the last Saturday of June, September and November.
- 6.3.3 The dates of all Presbytery meetings shall be known for the next twelve months and appended to the minutes of all Presbytery meetings. The date of the meeting twelve months hence shall be decided at every Presbytery.
- 6.3.4 Commissioner elders should normally be present at all meetings of Presbytery. The quorum for a meeting is one half of the voting members of presbytery.
- 6.3.5 The Moderator and Clerk(s) may call a special meeting.
- 6.3.6 The Clerk shall summon a special meeting on the written request of four members of Presbytery, provided they represent at least two congregations.
- 6.3.7 Any member may express his dissent from any part of the proceedings; he may require his dissent, including reasons, to be recorded.

6.4 COMMISSIONS AND COMMITTEES

- 6.4.1 Presbytery may appoint a Commission or Committee for such purposes as it may determine.
- 6.4.2 In every case the Commission or Committee shall report to the Presbytery through its appointed Convenor. [At the request of Presbytery and following due notice the Convenor of a standing Committee shall produce the Committee Minute Book for inspection].
- 6.4.3 A Commission of Presbytery consists of a minimum of three of its members [one of whom is a Minister and one of whom is its Convenor] appointed to consider matters referred to it by the Presbytery and invested with the powers of Presbytery itself so far as these matters are concerned.
- 6.4.4 Presbytery may authorise temporary co-option of persons from within the Church membership, and note its reasons for doing so in the minutes.
- 6.4.5 The Standing Committees of Presbytery are:
- Committee for Presbytery Arrangements — [CPA]
 - Committee for Ministerial and Eldership Training — [CMET]
 - Committee for Missions — [CM]
 - Committee for Church Planting — [CCP]
- 6.4.6 Special Committees are appointed for special business and are dissolved when that business is completed.
- 6.4.7 All Committees shall consist of not more than five and not less than three members, at least one of whom shall be a Minister, and at least one of whom shall be a Ruling Elder.

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- 6.4.8 Appointments to Standing Committees, other than the Presbytery Arrangements Committee, shall be made annually at the June meeting; members shall ordinarily be appointed to serve for three years.
- 6.4.9 Unless otherwise directed, each Committee shall convene at least once annually, and submit a written report to Presbytery at least once per year.
- 6.4.10 **PRESBYTERY ARRANGEMENTS***
- 6.4.10.1 The Presbytery Arrangements Committee shall consist of the Moderator, who shall act as Convenor, immediate past Moderator, Moderator-elect, and the Clerk.
- 6.4.10.2 The Presbytery Arrangements Committee shall:
- provide members of Presbytery at the March meeting with a list of the members of the Standing Committees, indicated thereon which members are due to retire, and request nominations to be presented at the June meeting
 - submit its nomination for the Moderator-elect at the November meeting
 - provide guidance for the Moderator in situations requiring immediate attention
 - check the representation of congregations at Presbytery.

6.5 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.5.1 The Presbytery shall:
- 6.5.1.1 Assist its congregations in spiritual and temporal affairs by giving advice in cases of difficulty and by receiving and determining petitions, complaints or appeals.
- 6.5.1.2 Check every two years that the session's minute books and register are properly kept.
- 6.5.1.3 See that the ordinances are duly administered and discipline upheld in the congregations, and in any that may become vacant; appoint a Minister as Interim-Moderator, unless declined by the Session, and assist the Church as to filling the vacancy.
- 6.5.1.4 Approve students for the Ministry, receive them under its care, direct their theological training and after trial, license them to preach the gospel.
- 6.5.1.5 Examine, approve, ordain and/or install Ruling Elders.
- 6.5.1.6 Approve the appointment and demission where necessary of any office bearer or paid official of the Church.
- 6.5.1.7 Ordain to the gospel Ministry and watch over all that pertains to the call, ordination, and/or installation of Ministers and to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship within its bounds.
- 6.5.1.8 Try charges against Ministers, Ruling Elders, Deacons, Licentiates and Missionaries

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and, if necessary, administer censure.

- 6.5.1.9 Control the Funds of the Presbytery.
- 6.5.1.10 Receive the views of Sessions regarding altering or abrogating any part of the Book of Church Order.
- 6.5.1.11 Require the Clerk to collate annually the congregational Statistical Reports for circulation to its members at the March meeting, and send them to the General Assembly for review.
- 6.5.1.12 Keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and send them to the General Assembly annually for review. It shall report to the Assembly not less than thirty days before the meeting of each Assembly a detailed report of all important changes that have taken place within its bounds, including *inter alia* licensures, ordinations, unions, divisions, dissolutions and separations of congregations, and the formation of new ones.
- 6.5.1.13 Send to the clerk of the General Assembly not less than thirty days before the meeting of each stated Assembly a duly attested list of all presbyters on the roll of the Presbytery, a list of its commissioners to the Assembly, and the nominations of its representatives to the standing committees of the Assembly.
- 6.5.1.14 Convene for the transaction of designated business when directed to do so by the General Assembly.

6.6 AUTHORITY

- 6.6.1 Until such time as a General Assembly is formed the Presbytery is the supreme Court of the Church in legislative, administrative and judicial matters.
(The presbytery remains the radical (*i.e.* most representative) court in the wider affairs of the church even when a General Assembly has been formed).
- 6.6.2 The presbytery is bound to take order that the instructions of the General Assembly of the EPCEW are faithfully observed by ministers, elders, sessions, committees of management and congregations within its bounds.

7.0 THE CONDUCT OF PRESBYTERY BUSINESS

7.1 AGENDA

- 7.1.1 An agenda will be issued to members at least seven days before the date of the meeting.
- 7.1.2 The agenda is to contain sufficient detail to enable knowledgeable preparation. Documentation should be appended where appropriate.
- 7.1.3 Items of business for inclusion on the agenda must be communicated to the Clerk not later than fourteen days before the date of the meeting.
 - 7.1.3.1 Wherever possible the agenda for Presbytery meetings should state what has to be decided under each item of business.
 - 7.1.3.2 Wherever possible specific questions or resolutions should be sent out to church sessions under each item on the Presbytery agenda.
- 7.1.4 Urgent business arising too late for the published agenda may be included at the discretion of the Moderator after discussion with the Clerk.
- 7.1.5 Minor and incidental business only may be raised under ‘any other business’.
- 7.1.6 All business involving the Book of Order of the Church shall require written notice of motion submitted to the Presbytery.
- 7.1.7 Items of business on the agenda may take the form of a proposal, motion (seconded proposal), report, petition, appeal, complaint or referral.
- 7.1.8 The petitions, appeals and complaints procedures give circumstances where those other than Presbytery members can place business on the agenda.
- 7.1.9 In order to deepen fellowship, to encourage elders in the work of the local congregation and to produce guidelines and policy statements where these are necessary, the Presbytery agenda may contain a major item of devotional, pastoral or theological interest. Sessions or committees of presbytery may request such items to be inserted in the agenda by the CPA.
- 7.1.10 The agenda shall ordinarily include a report from one or more of the congregations to encourage prayer among the churches.

7.2 LAWS OF DEBATE

- 7.2.1 All participants in Presbytery business must address Presbytery through the Moderator in whom is vested control of the proceedings.
- 7.2.2 Decisions shall be made by formal motions and amendments, so that, after discussion, responses to questions or motions should normally be ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, or an amendment or counter-motion.
- 7.2.3 A member may put forward a proposal either at the beginning or end of his comments. The item of business can proceed only if the proposal is seconded, making it a motion.

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7.2.4 Discussion on the motion may follow for which the Moderator should allow reasonable time and opportunity for those wishing to contribute.

7.2.5 Discussion of a motion may be facilitated by any of the following procedural motions, other than amendment, for which notice of motion is not required:

- that the question be now put
- that Presbytery pass from the question
- that the business be postponed
- that the meeting, or debate be adjourned
- that the recommendation be referred back to Committee
- that the question be referred to a Committee
- that a counter-motion be considered.

The Moderator has discretion to accept or reject a procedural motion.

7.2.6 DEFINITIONS OF PROCEDURAL MOTIONS

7.2.6.1 ‘That the question be now put’ is to conclude discussion. If successful, a vote is taken at once. If defeated, discussion continues.

7.2.6.2 ‘That Presbytery pass from the question’. If successful, the motion and discussion is discontinued immediately.

7.2.6.3 ‘That the business be postponed’ is to defer discussion because of lack of information or because of untimeliness at that point.

7.2.6.4 ‘That the meeting, or debate be adjourned’.

- In the case of a meeting - because of unfinished business or tension or lack of quorum.
- In the case of a debate - in order to give time for consideration or to deal with a more important item on the agenda.
- The Moderator himself may ask the meeting for permission to adjourn.

7.2.6.5 ‘That the recommendation be referred back’ is for further consideration by a Committee.

7.2.6.6 ‘That the recommendation be referred to a Committee’ applies where it is felt that the nature of the business is such that a concentrated treatment by Committee is the efficient procedure.

7.2.6.7 ‘That a counter-motion be considered’ is to interrupt a debate by laying the original motion on the table to give opportunity for an alternative motion to be considered. If the counter-motion is adopted the original motion automatically falls; but if it is not adopted discussion is resumed on the original motion.

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- 7.2.7 A motion may be subjected to amendment and notice of motion is not required. It must not be negative or substantial; it may include a ‘rider’.
- 7.2.8 Only one amendment can be allowed at any one time. Parties to the original motion or previous amendment cannot propose or second. Any number of amendments may succeed.
- 7.2.9 Amendments to amendments are allowed.
- 7.2.10 All amendments and amendments to amendments should be individually put to the vote in the order in which they affect the motion.
- 7.2.11 All adopted amendments are embodied in the motion and put to the vote as a ‘substantive motion’.
- 7.2.12 If all amendments are lost the motion is put to the vote.
- 7.2.13 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by agreement between the proposer and seconder and with the consent of the meeting. Such should be minuted.
- 7.2.14 When carried, a motion becomes a ‘resolution’.
- 7.2.15 Presbytery may resolve itself into Committee on any occasion it deems fit in which case no minutes shall be recorded of the debate and/or discussion. The following provisions apply:
- a simply majority vote shall normally be sufficient for such resolution; however where changes to the Book of Church Order are under consideration a 2/3rds majority of the membership present shall be required
 - when the business dealt with in Committee has been completed and the Court sits again, the report and/or proposals as completed in Committee may be adopted or rejected but cannot be amended
- 7.2.16 For Presbytery decisions to be reversed a rescinding motion should be put at one meeting but not voted upon until the next.
- 7.2.17 Points of order may be raised to deal with a departure from normal procedure in the following areas:
- behaviour
 - lack of quorum
 - *ultra vires*
 - no question before the meeting
- 7.2.18 Behaviour will be a ground of censure by Presbytery on any of its members after the member has been given opportunity of withdrawal, explanation and apology.

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7.3 VOTING PROCEDURES

- 7.3.1 A formal vote is necessary only when the mind of the meeting cannot otherwise be ascertained, i.e. ‘without objection’.
- 7.3.2 Voting shall be by a show of hands or, on occasions when Presbytery specifically decides, by ballot. The Clerk shall act as teller and may receive assistance for this purpose.
- 7.3.3 The Moderator has a ‘casting vote’ only.
- 7.3.4 For a motion involving an amendment recommended for adoption by the General Assembly to the *Book of Church Order* to be carried, a vote in its favour of two thirds of the members of Presbytery present and voting at the meeting, at two consecutive Presbytery meetings, shall be required. In voting upon the amendment, Presbytery may not divide the parts of the amendment, except as directed by the General Assembly recommending its adoption.
- 7.3.5 Proxy voting shall not be permitted.
- 7.3.6 Voting on a motion to divide a Presbytery into two or more Presbyteries requires a majority vote from each of the proposed new presbyteries, as represented by the members present and voting who would fall under the boundaries of these proposed new Presbyteries. Votes will be taken in turn from each of the proposed new Presbyteries.

For a motion to divide a Presbytery to be carried, a vote in its favour of two thirds of the members of Presbytery present and voting at the meeting, at two consecutive Presbytery meetings, shall be required.

- 7.3.7 All resolutions involving a division of a Presbytery or an alteration in the bounds of presbyteries shall be referred to the General Assembly by petition.

7.4 MINUTES

- 7.4.1 All motions and amendments, with the names of proposers and seconders and the results of all votes, should be recorded in the minutes, together with key arguments in the debate helpful for future reference and not noted in documents appended to the minutes.
- 7.4.2 Minutes should highlight decisions made and action to be taken (indicating by whom and, usually, by when such action should be taken).
- 7.4.3 Minutes should be sent out within seven days after each meeting.

8.0 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

8.1 COMPOSITION AND APPOINTMENT

- 8.1.1 The General Assembly is a permanent court and shall meet at least once annually. Its members comprise the commissioners sent from its presbyteries, consisting of all Teaching Elders in good standing with their presbyteries and Ruling Elders from each

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formally constituted congregation in the ratio of one Ruling Elder for each fifty baptized members, or fraction thereof.

8.2 OFFICIALS

- 8.2.1 The officials of the General Assembly are the Moderator, Clerk, Deputy Clerk and the Treasurer, who shall be members of the Court.
- 8.2.2 The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Treasurer are elected by and hold office at the will of the Court, ordinarily for terms of three years each.
- 8.2.3 The General Assembly shall appoint a Moderator’s Nominating Committee, which shall comprise the Moderator, the Clerk of the Assembly, and three ministers and three ruling elders appointed by and from each presbytery. The Clerk is the Convener of the Committee. The Convener shall circulate to Presbyteries no later than 180 days prior to the stated Assembly a request for a nomination from each for the office of Moderator. The Convener then circulates to members of the Committee the nominations of presbyteries no later than ninety days preceding the Assembly for members to vote thereupon.
- 8.2.4 The person receiving the majority of votes shall be declared to be the nominee of the Committee. Should this procedure fail to provide a single nominee, the Convener shall call a meeting of the members of the Committee to decide the matter no later than sixty days preceding the Assembly.
- 8.2.5 The Convener shall immediately intimate to the nominee advice of his nomination as Moderator.

8.3 EXTRAORDINARY MEETINGS

- 8.3.1 When an emergency shall require a meeting of the General Assembly earlier than the time to which it stands adjourned, the Moderator (or if he is indisposed, the Clerk) shall issue a call for an extraordinary meeting with agreement of the majority of presbytery moderators, or upon the written request of at least two presbytery moderators at the behest of their respective presbyteries.
- 8.3.2 The members of the special meeting shall be the commissioners who sat in the preceding meeting of the General Assembly. A Session shall have the right to appoint an alternate commissioner in the stead of one who has ceased to be a member of the EPCEW since the preceding meeting, or who has notified the Moderator of his Session of his inability to serve.

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8.3.3 Notice of the extraordinary meeting stating its purpose shall be sent to each commissioner and to the moderator of each Presbytery. The timing of the meeting should be determined by the moderator and the clerk based on the urgency of the matter. Consideration should be given to providing 30 days' notice if the matter allows. No other business is to be transacted.

8.4 GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS

8.4.1 The General Assembly's committees serve the Church through the duties assigned by the General Assembly and may not direct any Church judicatories.

8.4.2 The General Assembly's committees are to include proportionate representation of all Presbyteries, each committee being established on the basis of an equal number of Teaching and Ruling Elders.

8.4.3 Any member of the Assembly has a right to attend any of its committees.

8.4.4 The Standing Committees of the General Assembly are:

- Committee for Business — [CB]
- Committee for Training of Presbyters — [CTP]
- Committee for Missions — [CM]
- Committee for Publications — [CP]
- Committee for Inter-church Relations — [CIR]

8.4.5 Special Committees are appointed for special business and are dissolved when that business is completed.

8.4.6 Three members of a Committee shall constitute a quorum.

8.4.7 A member may speak more than once to the same question.

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- 8.4.8 Motions from Committees do not require a second.
- 8.4.9 The Convenor may speak to a question, and may move motions and amendments, and shall have both a deliberative and casting vote.
- 8.4.10 The General Assembly may appoint a Commission with full powers to deal with all matters submitted to it. The Assembly appoints the chairman.

9.0 THE CONDUCT OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY BUSINESS

9.1 GENERAL PROVISIONS

- 9.1.1 No business shall be transacted in the General Assembly except in the presence of at least sixteen members representing at least two Presbyteries.
- 9.1.2 No inferior court shall sit during the sittings of the General Assembly.
- 9.1.3 The General Assembly shall be presided over by a Moderator, duly elected, who shall have a casting vote but no deliberative vote.
- 9.1.4 In the absence of the Moderator for the current term, the chair shall be taken by the immediately previous Moderator, or if he is also absent by any previous Moderator, or a member appointed by the court.
- 9.1.5 When the minutes are submitted for confirmation, no question shall be raised regarding them except such as concerns their accuracy as a record of the proceedings.
- 9.1.6 The items of business arranged by the Business Committee and approved by the Assembly shall constitute the Orders of the Day.
- 9.1.7 The Assembly may vary the Orders of the Day by a motion, without notice and without debate, between items of business.
- 9.1.8 No business shall be introduced to the Assembly by any member until called for by the Moderator.
- 9.1.9 Every committee of the General Assembly shall submit to the Assembly a written report, with recommendations for action (if any) appended; such reports and recommendations shall be circulated among members of the Assembly at least seven days before they are considered.
- 9.1.10 Circulated reports and recommendations shall be held as read unless the Assembly determines otherwise.

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9.1.11 No recommendation in any report shall be held as adopted unless it shall have been definitively set forth and approved by the Assembly.

9.1.12 Questions may be put by any member through the Moderator to the convener of a committee (or his alternate) when the report is before the Assembly and after the deliverance as a whole has been moved and seconded.

9.1.13 No resolution of a court or committee can be rescinded unless notice of motion to that effect has been given at a previous meeting.

9.2 MOTIONS AND AMENDMENTS

9.2.1 A substantive motion refers to business that does not arise from the report of any committee. It shall ordinarily be communicated to the Business Convener at least seven days before it is considered by the Assembly.

9.2.2 Motions shall be amended by inserting, adding or removing certain words, including removing certain words to insert and add other words. A direct negative to a motion shall not be a competent amendment.

9.2.3 An amendment may be moved to an amendment that has been moved and seconded as if the first amendment were an original motion.

9.2.4 When an amendment is before the Assembly, debate shall be strictly confined to such amendment.

9.2.5 Notices of motion shall ordinarily be written and communicated to the Business Convener at least seven days before the matter to which they are related is before the Assembly. A motion of amendment may be moved without notice, if in the opinion of the Moderator it arises in the course of the debate and does not alter the substance of the motion. Should the Moderator rule that the proposed amendment affects the substance of the motion, it shall require the leave of the Assembly.

9.2.6 No change shall be made in the terms of a notice of motion unless made at least seven days before the matter comes before the Assembly.

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- 9.2.7 If the member who gave notice of the motion is absent when called for by the Moderator, another member may move the motion, failing which the motion lapses.
- 9.2.8 A motion or amendment shall be seconded before it can be debated or put to the vote, except in Committee of the Whole. When the mover of the motion or amendment has finished his speech, his motion or amendment shall forthwith be seconded, failing which it lapses and shall not be recorded in the minutes.
- 9.2.9 A motion or amendment, duly made and seconded, shall not be withdrawn except by leave of the Assembly and at the request of the mover with the consent of the seconder.

9.3 LAWS OF DEBATE

- 9.3.1 A member speaking in the Assembly shall address the Chair only, and shall not speak until called on by the Chair.
- 9.3.2 Except in Committee of the Whole, no member shall speak more than once to the same question other than in explanation, or raising a point of order, or in reply at the close of the debate if he is the mover of the original motion.
- 9.3.3 A member who has spoken to the main question shall not afterwards move an amendment to it, but he may second or speak to an amendment moved by another member.
- 9.3.4 A mover of an amendment shall not afterwards speak to the main question.
- 9.3.5 Before the speech in reply, the Moderator shall declare that it is to be a reply on the debate, and that thereafter the debate shall be closed. Any member entitled to speak may then speak to the main question before the speech in reply has begun. After the speech in reply, which shall introduce no new matter, there shall be no further debate.
- 9.3.6 When it shall appear to the Moderator or Chairman that the motion, or any amendment to it, has been adequately debated he may so inform the Assembly, distinctly stating whether it is to the debate on the amendment only or to the debate on the amendment and motion that closure is to be applied. The Moderator or Chairman shall forthwith put the motion that the question be now put, and if the same be carried by at least two thirds, he shall

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forthwith put to the vote the motion, or the amendment, or the amendment and the motion, as the case may be, without further debate.

9.3.7 The Moderator or Chairman shall endeavour to put the question at every convenient opportunity. He shall state the motion or amendment or shall cause it to be stated by the Clerk. Any member not distinctly hearing the motion or amendment so stated may require it to be stated again. The Moderator or Chairman shall give way to any member who still wishes to speak to the question and is entitled to do so, except when the debate has been closed by a speech in reply or by the application of the closure.

9.3.8 The Moderator or Chairman of the Committee of the Whole shall not take part in any debate. He shall leave the chair if any case arises of which he is a party, or if he wishes to speak to any question, or give in a report of a committee.

9.3.9 No member shall interrupt a speaker except for one of the following purposes:

- To raise a point of order and ask for a ruling from the Chair on it.
- To make a personal explanation.
- To object to language deemed objectionable or reflecting on character.
- To move that the Assembly sit in closed session.
- To move that the question be now put.
- To move the adjournment of the debate.

9.3.10 Motions lost relating to the above do not preclude their being moved again during the same debate.

9.3.11 Points of order must refer strictly to the order of proceedings of the Assembly and may be raised to deal with a departure from normal procedure in the following areas:

- Behaviour
- Lack of quorum
- *Ultra vires*
- No question before the meeting

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- 9.3.12A member raising a point of order shall simply state it and no other member shall speak.
- 9.3.13The Moderator shall then rule on the point; or ask certain members whom he selects to state their views on it and thereafter rule on the point; or refer it to the Assembly for decision by debate and vote.
- 9.3.14A member who challenges the ruling of the Chair shall be heard for not more than five minutes and, the Moderator or Chairman having been heard in reply, a vote shall be taken without further discussion.
- 9.3.15The General Assembly may at any time close its doors and sit in closed session in consequence of a ruling by the Chair, or of a motion made, seconded and put to the vote without debate.
- 9.3.16In dealing with cases or questions which have been discussed in closed session in a lower court, or which have been declared by the Chair to affect character or partake of the nature of personal disputes or misunderstanding, the Assembly shall deliberate in closed session unless a motion to the contrary duly made, seconded and put to the vote is carried.
- 9.3.17If a member makes an explanation in debate, it shall refer exclusively to some statement or statements made by himself that, in his opinion, one or more speakers in the debate have misapprehended.
- 9.3.18When language used in debate seems to any member to be objectionable, he may forthwith, but not later, ask for a ruling concerning it from the Chair. Language ruled objectionable shall be withdrawn and apologized for forthwith by the speaker in a manner satisfactory to the Assembly. The member raising the point of order may also demand that the words be taken down, whereupon the Moderator or Chairman shall, without debate, put the question that the words objected to be taken down, and if this is resolved in the affirmative he shall direct that the Clerk take them down as grounds for such further action as the Assembly may think fit to take.
- 9.3.19No member may reflect on any decision of the Assembly except for the purpose of moving that it be altered or rescinded.

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9.4 VOTING

9.4.1 The Moderator or Chairman shall first take the vote by voices, calling for 'Ayes' and 'Noes' to the question, and advise the Assembly whether in his opinion the Ayes or the Noes have it. If his opinion is acquiesced in by the silence of the Assembly, the motion shall be passed or lost accordingly. If no 'Noes' were heard he may direct the Clerk to record a unanimous vote. If his opinion is challenged by one or more members, the vote shall be taken by a show of hands 'for' or 'against' and the numbers recorded in the minutes.

9.4.2 In the case of equality of votes the Moderator or Chairman shall have a casting, but not a deliberative, vote, and shall vote wherever possible so as to leave the matter voted on open for further consideration.

9.5 COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

9.5.1 By a motion put to the vote the General Assembly may resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole with a Chairman appointed by the Assembly.

9.5.2 In a Committee of the Whole

- All members of the Assembly shall be members of the Committee of the Whole.
- Separate minutes shall be kept of proceedings.
- A motion need not be seconded, and a member may speak more than once to the same question.
- No member may dissent from any resolution of the Committee.

9.5.3 Proceedings shall be closed by the carrying of a resolution to report to the Assembly on the matter committed, or to report progress and ask leave to sit again; whereupon the Assembly shall forthwith resume, and the report of the Committee shall be given in.

9.5.4 The report may be adopted with or without amendment, rejected, postponed, recommitted, or otherwise dealt with as the Assembly thinks fit. At this stage any member may exercise his privilege of dissent.

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9.6 OVERTURES

- 9.6.1 An overture is a written proposal submitted by a committee or presbytery to the General Assembly for the enactment of any alteration to the Constitution or rules of the Church; for a declaration of the interpretation of the law of the Church; for a declaration of the practice of the Church; or to have an action done for the general benefit of the Church.
- 9.6.2 That the Assembly has procedures to receive an overture does not prejudice the right of the Assembly to declare what it understands the law of the Church to be on any point within its jurisdiction.
- 9.6.3 When considering an overture, the Assembly is not exercising a judicial function, and no members are excluded from participating and voting in the proceedings.
- 9.6.4 An overture shall include in the recitals the authority pursuant to which the Assembly may give effect to the overture, and must specify what is desired in the very words it would stand if granted.
- 9.6.5 An overture shall not be moved unless notice of it has been given at a previous meeting of the Assembly, or in the papers submitted to members of an Assembly prior to sitting.
- 9.6.6 Only members of the Assembly may state an overture. If no member appears to state the overture it falls without motion.
- 9.6.7 After the overture has been stated, members of the Assembly may put questions through the Moderator to the person(s) stating the overture. After questions have been answered the person(s) stating the overture may move that the overture be sustained.
- 9.6.8 An overture is either (i) sustained by the Assembly in its original or an amended form and sent down to presbyteries for consideration and report, or (ii) dismissed.

9.7 PETITIONS

- 9.7.1 A petition is a written request made to the General Assembly praying for something that is within the jurisdiction of the Assembly to grant which cannot be otherwise obtained constitutionally. A petition to review the judgment of a lower court that could be effected with due process constitutionally is thus irregular as a petition and cannot be received.

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- 9.7.2 Any person within the jurisdiction of the courts of the Church, and any congregation, committee, or organization of the Church, and any lower court of the Church is competent to approach the Assembly by petition.
- 9.7.3 Sessions and Presbyteries should provide assistance to petitioners in preparing petitions to prevent their being rejected on the ground of informality or another defect.
- 9.7.4 A petition shall be read by the petitioner. A member cannot present the petition of others.
- 9.7.5 Relevant questions may be put by any member through the Moderator to the petitioner after the petition has been read.
- 9.7.6 The Assembly shall determine whether the petition can competently and with propriety be received.
- 9.7.7 If the petition is received the Assembly proceeds to consider its answer to the prayer of the petition.

9.8 REFERRALS

- 9.8.1 A referral is a written request for opinion or advice by the Assembly on matters of difficulty or importance, referred by a lower court in the form of a properly attested extract minute of the resolution of that court, and accompanied by all relevant documents.
- 9.8.2 The referral shall be stated by a member of the court from which it has come, and the statement shall outline the subject matter, why it has been referred, and how it is within the jurisdiction of the Assembly.
- 9.8.3 If a referral is informal the Assembly may dismiss the reference without entering upon the consideration of the substance of the reference.
- 9.8.4 The Assembly may sustain the referral such that the matter is properly before the Assembly, or it may decline to entertain the referral if it appears that the lower court has

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not exhausted its resources in the matter, and advise the lower court to adjudicate the matter in accordance with the laws of the Church.

- 9.8.5 Members of the lower court who are members of the Assembly retain their right to deliberate and vote.

9.9 APPEALS AND 'DISSENT AND COMPLAINTS' COMING BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

- 9.9.1 An appeal is a signed document given in by a person who is or was a party at the bar in a case before the court.

- 9.9.2 A 'dissent and complaint' is a signed document given in by a member of a court who neither is nor was at its bar in a case before the court. It contains his reasons for complaining against a decision of the court on which the complainant has voted in the minority and is designed to bring that decision under review by a higher court.

- 9.9.3 Reasons of appeal or 'dissent and complaint' must charge a lower court either with delinquency (having failed to do what it was responsible to do) or with error (for having acted contrary to its responsibilities).²³

- 9.9.4 In hearing appeals or 'dissent and complaint' the General Assembly shall proceed as follows:

- Read the decision appealed/complained against.
- Read the reasons of appeal/complaint.
- Read the record of the proceedings of the lower court in the case including any of that court's answers to the reasons adduced.
- Hear and question the appellant/complainant.
- Hear and question the lower court concerned through its appointed representatives.

- 9.9.5 The General Assembly shall then direct the parties to the appeal/complaint, including each member of the lower court concerned, to withdraw, and shall proceed to consider the case and come to a decision on the matter as it seems right.

- 9.9.6 Parties are called in and the judgment of the Assembly intimated to them.

²³ Such would include irregularity in the proceedings of the court; reception of irrelevant evidence, or refusal to receive relevant evidence; judgment against evidence or the weight of evidence; mistake or injustice in judgment; undue haste in proceeding to judgment; denial of natural justice.

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- 9.9.7 An appeal or ‘dissent and complaint’ is sustained where the decision of the lower court is
- i. disapproved, in which case the judgment of the lower court may be modified as the Assembly thinks fit; or
 - ii. defective in process, in which case the Assembly without entering on the merit of the decision of the lower court or pronouncing any judgment on it may send back the case to the lower court with instructions to have it taken up again and disposed of in accordance with the laws of the Church.
- 9.9.8 Dismissal of an appeal or ‘dissent and complaint’ implies approval by the higher court of both the decision and the procedure of the lower court. Thereupon the decision of the lower court becomes final.

9.10 PRESBYTERY BOUNDS

- 9.10.1 The General Assembly shall take no action relative to a proposed alteration to the bounds of presbyteries until all the presbyteries affected by the proposed change have been consulted and afforded opportunity to set forth their views.
- 9.10.2 New presbyteries (whether by division of an existing presbytery or otherwise) are formed and named and their boundaries defined by the General Assembly, and a resolution of the Assembly constituting a new presbytery shall specify the time and place of first meeting of each presbytery formed, and appoint one of its ministers to convene, constitute and preside over the first meeting of Presbytery until the commissions of elders have been sustained, the roll of members has been fixed, and a moderator has been elected. The extract minute of the General Assembly constituting the new presbytery is inserted in the first minute.

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10.0 THE RULING ELDER

10.1 GENERAL

- 10.1.1 Ruling Elders must be members in full communion with the congregation in which they are appointed. They must be men qualified in accordance with 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. They must be chosen by popular vote and submitted to Presbytery in accordance with FOG 13.3.
- 10.1.2 In a congregation not having two Ruling Elders, the Presbytery shall, at the request of the congregation, appoint one or more of the Elders under its jurisdiction to that congregation as Assessor or Borrowed Elders for an interim period.
- 10.1.3 At his ordination and/or installation a Ruling Elder must answer the following questions:
- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as accepted by this Church, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such, do you subscribe them as the confession of your faith?
 - Do you believe the Form of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and do you promise to adhere to and support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the Courts of this Church?
 - Are you resolved through divine grace firmly and constantly to adhere to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as accepted by this Church, and to teach the same and defend it to the utmost of your power against all error so long as you remain an Elder of this Church?
 - So far as you know your own heart, have you been induced to undertake the work of the Eldership in this place from love to God and from a sincere desire to promote His glory and to win souls to Christ?
 - Do you promise through divine grace to make full demonstration of your ministry among this congregation by: visiting the people, instructing the young, visiting the sick, aiding in the government of the Church and discharging all other duties incumbent upon you as an Elder of the Church of Jesus Christ?
- 10.1.4 Ruling Elders are elected for life in the congregation appointing them. An Elder may not of himself demit the duties of his office; but he may ask Session to relieve him of them and his request, if sustained by satisfactory reasons and approved by Presbytery, shall be granted. The granting of such relief shall automatically extend to the duties of Assessor or Borrowed Elder and other Presbytery appointments.

10.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

- 10.2.1 The Ruling Elders shall join with the Minister(s) in the government, nurture and discipline of the congregation. Upon them, equally with the Minister(s), devolves the responsibility of caring for the spiritual welfare of the people and the superintendence of all meetings and organisations within the congregation. It is the responsibility of Ruling Elders to pray with, and for the congregation and to seek fruit among them. They are to visit the people,

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paying special attention to the sick, and to irregular attendees, and also to instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, warn the careless and nourish and guard the children of the Church.

11.0 THE MINISTER

11.1 GENERAL

11.1.1 Ministers are Elders who rule and also labour in the Word and Doctrine. They shall be members of the congregation and, together with other Ruling Elders, have the responsibility for its Spiritual oversight.

11.1.2 At his ordination and at every installation, the Minister must answer affirmatively the following questions:

- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as accepted by this Church, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such, do you subscribe them as the confession of your faith?
- Do you believe the Form of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and do you promise to adhere to and support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the Courts of this Church?
- Are you resolved through divine grace firmly and constantly to adhere to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as accepted by this Church, and to teach the same and defend it to the utmost of your power against all error so long as you remain a Minister of this Church?
- So far as you know your own heart have you been induced to undertake the work of the ministry in this place from love to God and from a sincere desire to promote His glory and to win souls to Christ?
- Do you promise through divine grace to make full proof of your ministry among this people, preaching the Gospel of the grace of God, administering the Sacraments, visiting the people, instructing the young, visiting the sick, aiding in the government of the Church and discharging all other duties incumbent upon you as a Minister of Jesus Christ?

Substitute Questions to be put to Missionaries:

- Are you resolved through divine grace firmly and constantly to adhere to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as accepted by this Church, and to teach the same and defend it to the utmost of your power against all error?
- So far as you know your own heart, have you been induced to undertake this work for the Lord from love to God and from a sincere desire to promote His glory and to extend His Kingdom on earth?

11.1.3 Ministers are subject to the jurisdiction of their Presbytery.

11.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

11.2.1 The Minister has particular responsibility to:

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- faithfully minister the Word both publicly and privately
- conduct public worship and administer the Sacraments
- care, as a Pastor, for his people
- visit the people, especially the sick
- instruct the young
- conduct marriages and funerals
- aid in the government of the Church
- provide a Christian example at all times

11.3 DISSOLUTION OF THE MINISTERIAL RELATIONSHIP

- 11.3.1 When any minister shall submit a resignation of his ministerial charge to his Session:
- 11.3.1.1 The Session shall notify Presbytery and call for a meeting of the congregation in accordance with FOG 3.3. If possible, the meeting should be moderated by a member of presbytery, invited by the session, from another congregation.
- 11.3.1.2 The Presbytery shall require the church to appear by its commissioners, to show why the Presbytery should or should not accept the resignation.
- 11.3.1.3 If the church fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining its minister be deemed insufficient, his resignation shall be accepted and the ministerial relation dissolved.
- 11.3.2 If any church desires to be relieved of its minister:
- 11.3.2.1 The Session (having exhausted all reasonable means to resolve any disputes, including mediation by the presbytery) shall notify Presbytery and call for a meeting of the congregation in accordance with FOG 3.3. The meeting shall be moderated by a member of presbytery, invited by the session, from another congregation.
- 11.3.2.2 The Presbytery shall require the church to appear by its commissioners, to show why the Presbytery should or should not dissolve the ministerial relationship.
- 11.3.2.3 If the church fails to appear, or if its reasons for dissolving the relationship with its minister be deemed insufficient, his ministerial relationship to the church shall be retained.
- 11.3.3 In either case, the minister must not physically leave the field until the presbytery or its commission empowered to handle uncontested requests for dissolution has dissolved the relation.

11.4 DEMISSION OF OFFICE

- 11.4.1 Ministers who, resign their charges in order to engage in other recognised Christian

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ministry, that is, for work other than designated work for presbytery, may be moved to a list of those under the care of presbytery, but without voting rights.

11.4.2 The Minister may offer his resignation when he reaches the age of 65; if it is accepted he shall have a seat on the Session should he continue to worship with the congregation.

11.4.3 Where it appears that the Minister has become - through illness, infirmity or other reason - permanently unfit for his work Presbytery may, after consultation with the Session, require him to retire and declare the office vacant.

11.5 DEPOSITION OF OFFICE

11.5.1 A Minister shall be deposed by Presbytery if convicted of heresy or immorality.

12.0 THE MINISTRY: TRAINING AND ADMISSION

12.1 GENERAL PRINCIPLES

12.1.1 Final authority in regard to ministerial training, the examination of candidates for ministry and admission to the ministry of the EPCEW is vested in the General Assembly.

12.1.2 The Presbytery may use any theological training schools approved by the General Assembly, but the completion of such courses shall not be deemed equivalent to approval by Presbytery.

12.1.3 The stages of progress toward the ministry, as recognised by the EPCEW are:

- **Under Care:** This stage usually applies to students who are preparing at a theological college under the direction of the Presbytery, but may also be applied to men whose training has been completed outside of the direction of the EPCEW, and then apply to the Presbytery to be examined for licensure.
- **Licensure:** This is a stage at which the candidate has satisfied the Presbytery as to his character and suitability for the ministry, as well as his knowledge of the required academic subjects.
- **Ordination:** This is the stage at which the Licentiate has received a call from a congregation to serve as its minister, or a call to serve as a teacher in a theological hall or college or as a missionary at home or abroad, which the presbytery deems consistent with a calling to the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

12.2 COMMITTEE FOR MINISTERIAL AND ELDERSHIP TRAINING (CMET)

12.2.1 The Committee shall consist of not more than five and not less than three members, at least one of whom shall be a Minister, and at least one of whom shall be a Ruling Elder.

12.2.2 Presbytery shall decide all appointments for training and admission to the Ministry after considering reports and recommendations from the Committee. It shall delegate to the Committee the implementation of its decisions and the administration of procedures.

12.2.3 The Committee shall convene twice annually and additionally as occasion may demand, submitting a report to Presbytery of each meeting.

12.2.4 Business at regular Committee meetings shall include:

- student progress
- applications
- an evaluation of the need for students for the Ministry

12.3 CONDITIONS RELATING TO COMING UNDER CARE

12.3.1 A candidate wishing to be taken under care of Presbytery should have been a member of a

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congregation of the EPCEW within that Presbytery for at least six months, and have the written recommendation of his session. (See also 12.3.4).

- 12.3.2 Normally applicants for training or for admission to the Ministry shall be University graduates but those of more mature years or whose circumstances are exceptional may apply to Presbytery. In these cases great stress will be placed on the examinations required in sections 12.4.2, 12.4.3, and 12.4.6. (See note under 12.4.9).
- 12.3.3 Admission to training or to the Ministry shall be subject to the satisfaction of the Presbytery as to the applicant's foreseeable commitment to the Ministry of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales.
- 12.3.4 Applications shall be submitted to the CMET and shall include: a full C.V., a written reference and completed questionnaire from the applicant's Session.
- 12.3.5 The Committee shall:
- interview the applicant, first providing him with a copy of the Book of Church Order to assist his preparation for the interview.
 - submit a written recommendation to Presbytery for its consideration.
- 12.3.6 The applicant must appear before Presbytery in person and give a testimony of his personal experience of grace and call to the ministry.
- 12.3.6.1 The Presbytery may examine him regarding these testimonies.
- 12.3.6.2 A decision to accept shall require a 60% majority of those present and voting.
- 12.3.6.3 If approved, the moderator shall ask the candidate the following questions:
- Do you promise in reliance upon the grace of God to maintain a becoming Christian character, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for the sacred ministry?
 - Do you promise to submit yourself to the proper supervision of the Presbytery in matters that concern your preparation for the ministry?
- 12.3.6.4 If these questions are answered in the affirmative, the moderator, or someone appointed by him shall lead in prayer for the candidate. The applicant shall then be entered on the roll of candidates for the ministry.
- 12.3.6.5 The Presbytery shall require every candidate for the ministry on its roll to make a report to it at least once per year; and it shall secure from CMET an annual report upon his department, diligence and progress in study.
- 12.3.6.6 The Presbytery may issue a certificate of dismissal to another Presbytery, upon application of the candidate. The approval of both Presbyteries will be required if the candidate is not also to transfer his church membership to a congregation in the other Presbytery.
- 12.3.6.7 A candidate shall, at his request be allowed to withdraw from the care of Presbytery. The Presbytery may, for sufficient reasons given to the candidate and the Session of his church, remove the candidate from its roll of candidates.

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12.4 LICENSING

12.4.1 The Committee shall maintain sufficient contact with the students in training, to ensure effective communication and the monitoring of training progress in particular.

12.4.2 Each candidate for licensure shall sit three Presbytery examinations. Ordinarily they shall be one in each year of Theological training. The areas of examination shall be as follows, or as otherwise directed by the General Assembly:

Year 1

- Scripture Genesis - Song of Solomon
- Shorter Catechism Questions 1-31
- Larger Catechism Questions 1-68
- Confession of Faith Chapters 1-12

Year 2

- Scripture Isaiah - Malachi
- Shorter Catechism Questions 32-62
- Larger Catechism Questions 69-121
- Confession of Faith Chapters 11-22

Year 3

- Scripture Matthew - Revelation
- Shorter Catechism Questions 63-127
- Larger Catechism Questions 122-196
- Confession of Faith Chapters 23-33
- History of Presbyterianism in the U.K. including the history of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales.

12.4.3 Each candidate for licensure shall submit during the last two years of theological training a critical study of a prescribed passage of Scripture from each of the Old and New Testaments; the passages may be those prescribed by his Theological College.

12.4.4 Each student shall complete his Theological College's Syllabus and sit the final examinations in those subjects required by the Committee.

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- 12.4.5 Each student shall gain a minimum of six months' practical experience either as a summer assistant under a serving Minister of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales or in secular employment (depending on the recommendation of the CMET) before becoming eligible for licensure.
- 12.4.6 Presbytery shall require a candidate for licensure, on completion of his theological training, to preach a trial sermon on an occasion when a Commission of Presbytery is present or at a meeting of Presbytery.
- 12.4.7 When the student has completed his training and the Committee has considered in interview with him his:
- College and Presbytery results
 - College Principal's Report
 - Critical Studies and Trial Sermon
 - Practical experience Report
 - Appreciation of the questions to Licentiates

the Committee shall submit a final training report in writing to Presbytery with recommendation as to licensing, after which the presbytery may ask the candidate questions from the floor.

- 12.4.8 A 60% majority of those present and voting shall be required to approve the candidate for licensure, whereupon the Moderator shall ask the candidate the following questions:
- Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
 - Do you believe the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as accepted by this Church, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such, do you subscribe them as the confession of your faith?
 - Do you believe the Form of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and do you promise to adhere to and support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the Courts of this Church?
 - Are you resolved through divine grace firmly and constantly to adhere to the doctrine contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as accepted by this Church, and to teach the same and defend it to the utmost of your power against all error?
 - So far as you know your own heart, have you been induced to seek the office of Teaching Elder from love to God and from a sincere desire to promote His glory and to win souls to Christ?

Then he, or someone appointed for the purpose, shall give the candidate a brief charge and conclude in prayer.

- 12.4.9 Presbytery shall not omit any part of these requirements and trials except in extraordinary*

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cases. Whenever Presbytery does make an exception, a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority of those present and voting is required and the reasons shall be recorded in the minutes.

**Extraordinary cases should be limited to extraordinary circumstances of the church and a man of proven gifts, or the extraordinary circumstances of a man of proven gifts. Presbyteries should exercise care in the use of these provisions so as not to ordain or accept from other denominations anyone who is inadequately prepared for the ministry.*

- 12.4.10 No candidate shall be eligible to be ordained until he becomes a Licentiate.
- 12.4.11 Licensure shall remain valid for one year after which it shall be reviewed by Presbytery to determine whether it should lapse or be renewed for a further specified period not exceeding twelve months.
- 12.4.12 Licensure may be withdrawn at any time if Presbytery deems such a course to be prudent, necessary, and/or in the best interests of the Church. Licentiates shall be given a copy of the notice of motion proposing such withdrawal and shall have the right of attending the relevant meeting to put their case to the members.
- 12.4.13 A 60% majority of those present and voting at Presbytery shall be required to withdraw or renew licensure.
- 12.4.14 Should a licentiate desire to remove from the bounds of his Presbytery into those of another, the latter Presbytery shall procure proper testimonials from the former and may repeat any part of the previous Presbytery's examination it desires.

12.5 TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY FUND

- 12.5.1 The Fund shall be administered by the Treasurer of the General Assembly.
- 12.5.2 All grants and disbursements shall be made by the Assembly considering the recommendations of the Committee for Training of Presbyters (CTP) and the Treasurer.
- 12.5.3 Presbyteries shall be requested to make an annual collection for the Fund, the Committee ensuring that each Presbytery is aware of current need.
- 12.5.4 Applicants for training who will be considered for financial support must be members in full communion of at least two years' standing with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, and the applicant must be willing to study at one of the Theological Colleges approved by the General Assembly at its last evaluation.
- 12.5.5 Each applicant for financial assistance is required to make application for a grant to his Local Education Authority before commencing training. When evidence of the grant or grants awarded is received, the General Assembly will consider the need to further supplement income up to the level determined by the Assembly from time to time.

12.6 ADMISSIONS FROM OUTSIDE THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND AND WALES

- 12.6.1 It is permissible for a vacant congregation to call a Minister or Licentiate from outside the

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- 12.6.2 Whenever a candidate comes under consideration, he should first be provided with the relevant Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales literature by the session.
- 12.6.3 The Session (or a committee of the congregation appointed for the task of seeking out a minister) shall ask the candidate for a full C.V. and that he complete the standard EPCEW questionnaire. The Session shall then interview the candidate and take up references.
- 12.6.4 When the session (or committee) is satisfied that the candidate should be presented as a candidate to the congregation, it shall present the candidate together with the assembled documentation, *i.e.* C.V. questionnaire and references, to the Presbytery's Committee for Ministerial and Eldership Training (CMET), together with a written request for the candidate to be approved for presentation to the congregation.
- 12.6.5 The CMET shall review the documentation, interview the candidate and make a recommendation to the presbytery. Presbytery may also examine the candidate on the floor of Presbytery.
- 12.6.6 If the Candidate is not ordained, the above procedure shall be deemed as the basis of licensure in the EPCEW providing all licensing requirements have been fulfilled. The Presbytery may accept the licensure of another denomination, provided it believes it is equivalent.
- 12.6.7 A decision to approve the candidate shall require a 60% majority of those present and voting.
- 12.6.8 Confidentiality where other denominations are involved is to be recognised and permission obtained from the applicant before any approach is made to his present employers.
- 12.6.9 Should the parties intend to create a contract of employment, Sessions shall acquaint themselves with current employment legislation and Codes of Practice and conform to them throughout the procedure.
- 12.6.10 Where an approach is made to Presbytery regarding appointment to our Ministry which is not in response to the interest of a particular vacant congregation, Presbytery shall consider it. Acceptance of such a candidate shall be pending a call.
- 12.6.11 Where appointment is made from another denomination that denomination should be formally advised.

13.0 THE REGULATIONS FOR ELECTIONS AND CALLS

13.1 GENERAL

- 13.1.1 All members of a congregation in full communion, and only such, shall be eligible as qualified voters for the purpose of electing Ministers, Ruling Elders and Deacons.
- 13.1.2 Two months before a call or election the roll of communicant members shall be checked by the Session, lodged in the hands of the Minister/Interim-Moderator, and a copy made available for the members of the congregation.
- 13.1.3 Any member of the congregation claiming to be a qualified voter may make an objection regarding any name on the roll, or omitted from the roll; he shall lodge the objection, with reasons, in writing with the Moderator/Interim-Moderator of Session within two weeks of the publication of the roll, and the Session shall give its decision thereon or refer the matter for decision by Presbytery.

13.2 ELECTION AND CALLS OF MINISTERS

- 13.2.1 When a vacancy occurs in the Pastorate of a congregation, the Session shall seek to bring suitable candidates to the attention of the congregation.
 - 13.2.1.1 The Session may form a committee from members of the congregation to aid in the search for a suitable candidate.
 - 13.2.1.2 Any member in full communion may propose a candidate to the Session or its committee.
- 13.2.2 When the Session believes that the congregation may be prepared to elect a Minister, they shall call a meeting for the purpose in accordance with FOG 3.3; the day specified for the meeting should normally not be a Sabbath.
- 13.2.3 At the Meeting the following steps shall be taken:
 - 13.2.3.1 Should more than one candidate be proposed and seconded, a vote shall be taken of the qualified voters and repeated until only one candidate remains.
 - 13.2.3.2 A vote shall be taken on this candidate, for and against. If he be approved by not less than 2/3 of those present and voting, the call shall be drawn up and signed by the communicant members of the congregation concurring (persons not qualified to vote, but closely associated with the congregation may sign on a separate list). The Moderator of the meeting and the Clerk of Session shall certify the signatures.
 - 13.2.3.3 The call may be left in the charge of the Session until the succeeding Sabbath to receive further signatures in the presence of and attested by one Elder.
- 13.2.4 The Session shall notify the Clerk of Presbytery of its intention to lay the call before Presbytery at its next meeting.
- 13.2.5 Where the call is to a Minister presently in charge of a congregation of the EPCEW, the Clerk of Presbytery shall notify his Session so that representatives may be given the opportunity of attending and speaking to the issue.
- 13.2.6 Presbytery shall consider any dissents and representations under 13.2.5 above, determine

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whether the call is regular and valid and whether, in all the circumstances, it should be sustained.

- 13.2.7 If the call be sustained Presbytery shall take steps to present the call to the Licentiate or Minister concerned.
- 13.2.8 A call may be accepted, declined or retained for consideration; if retained an answer must be given at a time specified by Presbytery.
- 13.2.9 Following acceptance of a call, Presbytery shall take steps to ordain and/or install the Minister-elect normally on a day other than the Sabbath.

13.3 ELECTION OF RULING ELDERS

- 13.3.1 The Session shall normally determine when an election is to take place and the number of Ruling Elders to be chosen.
- 13.3.2 The Minister shall explain to the congregation the duties and qualifications of Ruling Elders.
- 13.3.3 In the election of Ruling Elders two principles must be secured:
- The men elected must be adjudged by the session to be fit for the office of the eldership
 - They must have the support of a clear majority of the communicant membership in a free election.

There is no single mandated method of electing ruling elders. The Session exercise their discretion in determining which method will be most generally acceptable locally and occasion least tension and difficulty. The following are some of the methods which honour both the principles stated above. The order of listing is not significant.

- 13.3.3.1 The session may call a meeting of communicant membership of the congregation for the purpose of electing a specified number of new elders. At this meeting names will be proposed and upon subsequent voting those securing the required majority identified. From these the session selects the required number and ascertains their willingness to accept office.
- 13.3.3.2 The session may, at a duly called meeting of the communicant membership, propose certain names to them and upon securing a clear majority agreement proceed to invite those named to accept office.
- 13.3.3.3 The session may submit to the communicant membership a list of names of all male communicants over the age of 21 and ask for the election of a specified number. From the number securing the support of a clear majority of the communicants the session then elects the names of those they deem most suitable.
- 13.3.3.4 The session may submit to the communicants a list of those whom they deem suitable for office and ask for the election of all or a specified number.
- 13.3.3.5 The session may issue to qualified voters, voting papers, identifying male communicant members. The names of those they wish to choose, up to the number required, shall be marked and the papers returned to the Session by or before the day appointed. Those receiving the highest number of votes shall be elected.

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13.3.4 No person can be admitted as a Ruling Elder if:

- he does not receive 2/3 of the votes cast or receives less than 51% of the total communicant membership.
- the Session are dissatisfied with his qualifications notwithstanding the votes received.

13.3.5 The names of every Ruling Elder-elect willing to accept office shall be read to the congregation on the Sabbath following the election making it clear that their formal appointment is subject to Presbytery approval; one week shall be allowed to give opportunity for the lodgement (in writing, with reasons) of any objections with the Moderator of Session.

13.3.6 Should the objection be not sustained or should there be no objection, the Ruling Elders-elect shall appear before Presbytery or a Presbytery Commission which shall satisfy itself of their suitability.

13.3.7 Presbytery shall make arrangements to join with the Session to ordain and install Ruling Elders-elect approved by them. The day appointed may be a Sabbath.

13.4 ELECTION OF DEACONS

13.4.1 The election of Deacons shall take place in the same manner as in the case of Ruling Elders excepting that:

- Deacons-elect are not required to appear before Presbytery for examination and approval
- They may be ordained and/or installed by the Session
- The Clerk of Session shall report in writing of any election, ordination and /or installation of Deacons to the Presbytery Clerk before the next regular meeting of Presbytery.

14.0 ACCESSION AND SEPARATION OF CONGREGATIONS

14.1 Accession of Established Congregations

14.1.1 The Purpose of this procedure is:

- that the confessional nature of the EPCEW is maintained
- that a welcoming spirit is displayed.

14.1.2 Initial Enquiry

14.1.2.1 An existing congregation which develops an interest in the EPCEW shall first apply through the Clerk of the presbytery of the bounds.

14.1.2.2 The clerk shall refer the matter to the Committee for Church Planting

14.1.2.3 The Committee for Church Planting shall prepare a report for the presbytery based upon its meeting(s) with the church's leadership. The report shall include:

- The commitment of the leadership to Scripture and the Westminster Standards.
- The likely acceptability of the minister as a Teaching Elder in the EPCEW.
- The relationship of the congregation to any other bodies.
- The level of congregational support for the leaders.
- Any historical factors or traditions which could affect the relationship with the EPCEW.
- Any practices the congregation wishes to retain which are not part of EPCEW regular practices.
- Whether the church should be considered for fully organised status or mission status.
- Whether elder training and/or elections need to be held.

14.1.2.4 Upon receipt of the report, the presbytery may:

- extend an invitation to the church to attend presbytery as observers.
- refer the minister and/or elders to the Committee for Ministerial and Eldership Training for further study.
- encourage the church to make formal application for reception into the presbytery.
- indicate to the church that it is unlikely that they would be received into the EPCEW on specified theological grounds.

14.1.3 Formal Application

14.1.3.1 Should the church wish to proceed in joining the presbytery, the congregation should petition the presbytery for acceptance. The petition should include the details of the congregational meeting at which the decision was made and include:

- The number of members present (and percentage this is of the total membership).

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- The numbers of the vote - For, Against, and Abstentions.
- The wording of the motion that was passed.
- The signatures of those who voted in favour.

14.1.3.2 Upon receipt of the petition, presbytery shall appoint a commission to deal with the examination of the elders, if necessary to assist with elections, answer the questions of the congregation concerning the EPCEW and receive the church into the presbytery.

14.1.4 Unorganised groups of believers may apply through the clerk to the Committee for Church Planting for assistance in starting a mission church.

14.2 Separation of Congregations

14.2.1 Where the elders of a congregation consider that the presbytery as a whole has departed from a biblical position or to the extent that they can no longer remain in the presbytery; or where the presbytery considers that a congregation and its elders have departed from a biblical position to such an extent that such elders may no longer remain in meaningful fellowship; and where attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted; then separation may be effected by the procedures listed in 14.2.3.

14.2.2 This procedure is intended to be an assurance that the lessons learned in leaving mixed denominations are not forgotten and that once a congregation has agreed to enter the EPCEW that it could leave again if the gospel was in jeopardy. It is not intended to be used as a negative veto to ensure a minority can get its own way, nor is it intended that different presbyteries should be set up to maintain a particular party's view on a point of variation within Presbyterian principles.

14.2.3 CONGREGATIONAL PROTEST

14.2.3.1 The session shall first express their concerns to the presbytery in writing.

14.2.3.2 If, after debate, the concerns are rejected the session may lodge a further protest.

14.2.3.3 Should this, after debate, also be rejected there shall follow a suitable period of silence on the matter, not to exceed one year.

14.2.3.4 The session should pursue their concerns within presbytery for as long as conscience allows.

14.2.3.5 If the issue is of such gravity that the session believes it to be wrong to remain in the presbytery, they must call a meeting of the congregation to inform them of the matter and invite the presbytery to send representatives to the meeting, giving those representatives the privilege of the floor. If the proposal to separate from the presbytery has the support of 70% of the membership, the session shall give written notice to presbytery of the church's intention to leave the presbytery.

14.2.3.6 Upon receipt of the notice of the church's intention to leave, the presbytery shall appoint a commission to meet with the congregation to argue the case of the presbytery.

14.2.3.7 The session shall call a second meeting of the congregation, which shall not be less than six months after the first meeting, to vote on the matter of separation. A 70% majority of the membership is required to carry a motion to leave.

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14.2.3.8 If the required majority is reached an orderly separation shall be arranged. This should include:

- Repayment of any outstanding loans from the presbytery.
- Provision for any minority which wishes to remain linked to the presbytery, provided that minority is more than 10% of the membership. This shall include a proportional division of all assets above liabilities.

14.2.4 PRESBYTERY PROTEST

14.2.4.1 A concern as to doctrine, practice or moral position prevailing in a particular church may be raised by any member of the presbytery, in writing, through the clerk.

14.2.4.2 If presbytery chooses to consider the protest, it must make an initial inquiry to determine whether the matter is one of advice or ruling then debate the issue, and if it is not an issue which can be referred back to the session, draft a statement of its concerns.

14.2.4.3 Presbytery may ask the session to respond to its concerns in writing.

14.2.4.4 If the presbytery considers the response to be unsatisfactory it shall appoint a commission to visit the congregation. The commission shall, in conjunction with the session, arrange a congregational meeting at which both the presbytery's concerns, and the session's position, will be explained.

14.2.4.5 The commission will report to the presbytery so that the matter may be further debated in the light of the facts and with the informed representation of the session.

14.2.4.6 A further meeting of the congregation is to be arranged. If the congregation votes at this meeting, by a 70% majority of the communicant membership, to continue its position; and is unable to persuade the presbytery of the rightness of its position, the presbytery may then proceed to separate the congregation from the presbytery.

14.2.4.7 The same safeguards for a minority position shall be applied as in the case of a Congregational protest, (14.2.3.8).

15.0 CHURCH PLANTING

15.1 Exploratory Works

- 15.1.1 Exploratory works are church planting Bible studies and/or occasional worship services.
- 15.1.2 The aims of exploratory works are:
 - 15.1.2.1 to assess a church planting opportunity in a specific area, and
 - 15.1.2.2 to establish a mission church.
- 15.1.3 A Session or Presbytery may initiate an exploratory work. When undertaken by a Session, Presbytery is to be made aware of the work.
- 15.1.4 Oversight.
 - 15.1.4.1 An exploratory work is under the immediate oversight of the court which initiated it.
 - 15.1.4.2 When undertaken by Presbytery, it may task nearby elders with responsibility to support the church planter during the exploratory work period.

15.2 Mission Churches

- 15.2.1 Mission churches are churches which are governed by a temporary, provisional Session.
- 15.2.2 The aim of a mission church is to provide worship, fellowship, and pastoral care of members of the mission church with the goal of becoming an organised congregation.
- 15.2.3 Establishment.
 - 15.2.3.1 Presbytery appoints a provisional Session and provides for a commission to declare a group of professing Christians and their children to be a mission church within the bounds of Presbytery. This may be the same commission appointed to commission the church planter. (cf. 15.4.4.1).
 - 15.2.3.2 Presbytery's action can be of its own initiative, in response to a proposal from a Session, or in response to an overture of a group of believers outside the EPCEW.
 - 15.2.3.3 This declaration is one of recognition of the work of God, and is according to the Word of God and the standards of the EPCEW.
- 15.2.4 Membership.
 - 15.2.4.1 Members of mission churches are communicant or non-communicant members of the EPCEW with the same privileges and responsibilities as members of organised churches.
 - 15.2.4.2 The provisional Session keeps a roll of membership of the mission church.
 - 15.2.4.3 Records are to be kept concerning births, baptisms, deaths, etc.
 - 15.2.4.4 Members are received, transferred, and removed as in organised churches.
 - 15.2.4.5 If the mission church is overseen by a sending Session rather than Presbytery, the mission church membership roll and records are distinct from the roll and records of the sending congregation.
- 15.2.5 Congregational meetings.
 - 15.2.5.1 The mission church will hold at least one annual congregational meeting adhering to the provisions in *FOG* 3.3 (“Business Meetings”).

15.3 Provisional Session

- 15.3.1 Presbytery appoints officers, including any church planting minister(s) and assessor elders, to serve on a provisional Session to govern a mission church.
- 15.3.2 The provisional Session is directly accountable to Presbytery.

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- 15.3.3 The provisional Session has the same duties towards the mission church as a Session of an organised church.
- 15.3.4 Composition.
 - 15.3.4.1 Presbytery may appoint assessor elders to the provisional Session from within the presbytery, from other EPCEW presbyteries, or from elders of fraternally related churches who meet the Standards of the EPCEW.
 - 15.3.4.2 The church planter is a member of the provisional sessional and serves as its moderator.
 - 15.3.4.3 If a mission church is without a church planting minister, Presbytery shall appoint an interim moderator.
- 15.3.5 In the case of a sending session.
 - 15.3.5.1 When Presbytery approves a mission church proposed by a Session, this act also appoints the members of the sending Session as members of the provisional Session.
 - 15.3.5.2 The provisional session is a distinct court from the sending Session. Its meetings and records are distinct from the sending Session.
 - 15.3.5.3 The church planting minister serves as the moderator of the provisional Session by virtue of his office in relation to the mission church.
 - 15.3.5.4 The Presbytery, with the advice of the sending Session, may appoint a church planting minister to the provisional Session who is not a member of the sending Session. In such a scenario, the church planting minister will have pastoral responsibility only for the mission church and not the sending church.
- 15.3.6 Representation in Presbytery.
 - 15.3.6.1 A provisional Session is represented to Presbytery by commissioning its church planting minister(s).
 - 15.3.6.2 The provisional Session is dissolved when the church is organised or the mission is closed.

15.4 Church Planter

- 15.4.1 A church planter is a minister appointed by Presbytery to labour in the gospel with the aim of developing a mission church into an organised church.
- 15.4.2 Appointment.
 - 15.4.2.1 Presbytery may appoint a church planter to initiate or continue an exploratory work or to develop a mission church.
 - 15.4.2.2 In the case of a Session seeking to plant a mission church, the Presbytery shall give careful consideration to church planter candidates recommended by the Session.
- 15.4.3 Employment and legal matters.
 - 15.4.3.1 The church planter may be employed by Presbytery, a sending session, or an approved partner (such as a denominational mission agency).
 - 15.4.3.2 The Presbytery or the sending Session shall be responsible for legal matters pertaining to the employment of the church planter, including visa sponsorship.
- 15.4.4 Commissioning.
 - 15.4.4.1 When Presbytery appoints a church planter to undertake an exploratory work or to plant a mission church, it shall appoint a commission of Presbytery to (ordain and) commission him.
 - 15.4.4.2 If a provisional session has already been appointed, this commission also declares the recognition of a mission church in the same service (cf. 15.2.3.1).

15.5 Organization

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- 15.5.1 A mission church may become an organised church when Presbytery is satisfied that the church is suitably stable. This includes the ability to meet its financial needs on a predictable basis and the ability to elect elders.
- 15.5.2 A church is organised by a declaration of Presbytery in association with the (ordination and) installation of congregationally elected ruling elders. This declaration is one of recognition of the work of God, and is according to the Word of God and the standards of the EPCEW.
- 15.5.3 Election of Ruling Elders and Petition of the Mission Church.
 - 15.5.3.1 Under the supervision of the provisional Session, the mission church shall elect ruling elders.
 - 15.5.3.2 The mission church shall send a petition to Presbytery for formal constitution as an organised church, appending the signatures of communicant members and the provisional session. The mission church will include with the petition a list of names of the elders-elect.
 - 15.5.3.3 The above will be accomplished at a congregational meeting following the procedures in the EPCEW Standards.
- 15.5.4 Presbytery Commission to Examine, Install, and Organize.
 - 15.5.4.1 Presbytery may respond to the petition by appointing a commission to interview those elected as elders per *FOG* 11.3.6. The same commission may proceed to arrange for an organizing service where the (ordination and) installation of ruling elders will be carried out in conjunction with the organization of the church.
 - 15.5.4.2 The commission shall administer the following congregational vow:

Do you, in reliance on God for strength, solemnly promise that you will walk together as an organised church of the Lord Jesus Christ, adhering to the faith and order of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, and that you will be zealous and faithful in maintaining the purity and peace of the whole body?

- 15.5.4.3 A member of the organizing commission shall then say:

In recognition of the work of God, I now declare that you are constituted an organised church according to the Word of God and according to the faith and order of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

- 15.5.5 The church planting minister will continue his pastoral relationship with the organised congregation. The formation of this pastoral relationship to church members, and their acceptance of it, is implied in their having taken membership vows upon joining the mission church.

15.6 Church Revitalization

- 15.6.1 The Presbytery may act to recognize an organised congregation as a mission church during a period of revitalization.

15.7 Committee for Church Planting

- 15.7.1 Members of the Committee are appointed by Presbytery, but the committee also includes church planters who participate as committee members.
- 15.7.2 All church planters have a responsibility to provide reports to the Committee.

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- 15.7.3 All members of Presbytery may visit the Committee as a guest with voice.
- 15.7.4 The Committee advises Presbytery through communication of information and recommendations.

DIRECTORY OF WORSHIP

THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

1. PRINCIPLES OF WORSHIP

Recognising that the whole counsel of God being either set down in Scripture, or deducible from it, and God's former ways of revealing his will unto his people being now ceased (WCF Ch. 1.6) we accept that:

- The purpose of worship is primarily to glorify God, not to entertain the congregation.
- The canon of Scripture is now closed and complete and that there is therefore no place for new or continuing revelation, speaking in tongues, or “organised miracle working” in the church.
- There is no place for visual representations of Christ or other objects for veneration or worship.
- Musical accompaniment, when present, is to aid the singing of praise not to replace it. It should be suitable for the serious, reverential worship of a Holy God.
- Dance and mime do not have a place in worship.
- Presbytery will recommend a range of hymn books and Psalters to the churches.
- The reading of Scripture should be from a reliable literal translation and not from a paraphrase. (The following versions are used in EPCEW Churches: KJV, NKJV, NIV, NASB).
- There being no biblical requirement to keep the traditional religious festivals, their observance should be left to the discretion of each local session.
- We recommend that ministers exercise discretion in the use of ministerial garments and reject the use of those vestments that reflect a sacerdotal practice.

2. SACRAMENTS

2.1 Baptism

2.1.1 Baptism shall be administered:

- to those adults who, not having previously been baptised, wish to join in membership upon credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- to the infant children of members in full communion, and to infant children where only one parent is a member in full communion.
- by a Minister in the presence of the congregation assembled together in the regular place of worship.

2.1.2 In exceptional circumstances Baptism may be administered elsewhere in the presence of a congregation but only when the Session is satisfied a valid reason exists, public intimation having been made beforehand where possible and the preaching of the Word accompanies its administration. In all such cases a report must be submitted to Presbytery at its next meeting.

2.1.3 The Session must be satisfied that the persons requesting Baptism understand the nature of the ordinance, the doctrine which it exhibits and the special duties which it involves.

2.2 The Lord's Table

2.2.1 The Session shall admit to the Lord's Table any baptised person who, in their opinion, makes a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is not being disciplined by a church. The session needs to be sensitive and flexible in individual situations.

2.2.2 Persons proposing to take communion for the first time should ordinarily do so after they have received suitable instruction, been examined by the Session as to their knowledge, understanding and soundness in the faith, and been received into full communicant membership.

2.2.3 The administration of the Lord's Supper must be accompanied by the preaching of the Word. It is not necessary to administer the Sacrament in any particular place provided its administration is by a Minister in the presence of a congregation following public intimation. Each time it is observed outside the regular place of worship a report must be submitted to Presbytery at its next meeting.

2.2.4 Each Session determines the frequency of observation. It is recommended that the frequency be not less than four times annually.

3. APPENDICES — SUGGESTED FORMS OF SERVICE

3.1 THE ORDER OF SERVICE FOR ORDINATIONS AND INSTALLATIONS OF TEACHING AND RULING ELDERS

The (Commission of) Presbytery shall be constituted.

Praise, prayer and the reading of appropriate Scriptures.

The Moderator shall declare (in these or like words): ‘In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church, who being ascended on high, has given gifts unto men for the edifying of the Church, the Body of Christ, we are met here as (a Commission of) the Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales to:

- ordain and/or installas Minister in this congregation’
- ordain and/or installas Ruling Elder(s) in this congregation’
- commission to the work of home/foreign missions.’

Ministers and Ruling Elders: The Clerk of Session or Minister shall give a brief narrative of the history of and steps taken to fill the vacancy and/or the reason for adding to the Session.

Missionaries: The Convenor, Missionary Committee, shall give a narrative of his/her application, acceptance and training for the work.

The Clerk shall put the prescribed questions as per the Form of Government for the appropriate office.

Ordination shall be with prayer and the laying on of hands; and Installation and Commissioning with prayer. Ordinands shall kneel during the prayer of ordination.

The Moderator shall declare: ‘In the Name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, we the (Commission of the) Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales declare you to be duly:

- ordained and/or installed as Minister/Ruling Elder(s) in this congregation and as such we give you the right hand of Fellowship’
- commissioned to the work of home/foreign missions: and may the Spirit of the Lord rest upon you and make you sufficient for the work to which you are appointed.

Suitable charges shall be given to the Minister/Ruling Elder(s) or Missionary and congregation.

3.2 FOR ORDINATIONS AND INSTALLATIONS OF DEACONS

Ordinations and installations of Deacons shall follow the same order as that for Ruling Elders with suitable wording adaptation having regard to the fact that the local Session, not the Presbytery ordains and installs Deacons.

BOOK of DISCIPLINE

THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

EPCEW BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

Preamble

1. What is the purpose of church discipline?

- 1.1** Church discipline, in its widest sense, entails the maintenance and development of Christian discipleship. This comes through the work of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer. It is fostered by the fellowship of the church, in which members exhort one another to love and good works. The session has the task of encouraging those under its charge to progress in faith, hope, love and obedience.
- 1.2** Administrative discipline is exercised by sessions of local congregations when they admit or erase persons from membership, whether these be communicant or non-communicant members. It is important for the session to keep its membership lists current so as to provide the most beneficial oversight and pastoral care.
- 1.3** Where serious sins occur that are unable to be corrected by these means, judicial discipline enters the picture. Its procedures and censures are all to be seen as serving the end of recovering the erring brother or sister and re-establishing him or her on the path of discipleship. Judicial discipline is to be restorative in its ultimate aim. At the same time it is necessary to preserve the peace and purity of the church, and to promote the honour of Christ, its head.
- 1.4** Judicial discipline must not only be fair and just but it must be seen to be fair and just. All courts of the church must be transparent. Just as each individual member is accountable to the church, so the courts of the church owe a mutual accountability to one another in any Reformed and Presbyterian system of government. While no system of church government is better than the people who run it, and all are sinners, a form of procedure to which all branches of the church are accountable will help to hold in check our own sinful propensities.
- 1.5** Church discipline cannot of itself guarantee that a church will remain faithful to Christ and pure. Only the grace of God can secure that. From the human side, constant vigilance is needed.

2. What are the extent and limits of church authority?

- 2.1** The Lord Jesus Christ alone is the head of the church. He rules through his Word and by his Spirit. He has entrusted to the officers of the church the authority to govern in such a way as to promote the advancement of the gospel and the well-being of his body.
- 2.2** Ministerial power is purely declarative. The officers of the church are entitled to govern on the basis of the Word of God alone. Their decisions cannot be made the rule of faith and practice, nor can they require implicit obedience to their word.²⁴
- 2.3** Ministerial power can only be exercised collectively. No ministers or elders have the right to act as individuals, for their ministerial power is vested not in themselves but in the session, presbytery, or General Assembly, as the case may be.²⁵
- 2.4** Ministerial power is limited to matters of the church and Christian discipleship. The officers of the church have no right to involve themselves in their ecclesiastical capacity in matters of the State, nor have they any power to dictate to families other than according to the teaching, express or entailed, of Holy Scripture. Each session is accountable to the presbytery to which it belongs; each presbytery is accountable to the General Assembly. All are accountable to act in submission to the voice of the Holy

²⁴ WCF 31.4

²⁵ WCF 31.1

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Spirit speaking in Scripture.²⁶

- 2.5** Jurisdiction over all members rests with the session of the local congregation. In a judicial process involving an elder, if the complexity of the case warrants it, a session may refer the matter to the presbytery.

SECTION ONE
JUDICIAL DISCIPLINE

3. *What is an offence that should be subject to judicial discipline?*

A matter that justifies judicial discipline is related to the person concerned.

- 3.1** For a communicant member, it must be established that there has occurred an offence that, if proven, disturbs the peace, purity and unity of the church; or an offence that, if true, would undermine the credibility of the member's profession of faith.²⁷
- 3.2** In the case of an ordained officer both the above situations also apply. However, there are additional circumstances that may require judicial discipline that do not necessarily question the credibility of his profession of faith but rather relate to his ordination vows. Here, disciplinary action is justified for an offence in doctrine or practice that, if true, would entail the repudiation of his vow to uphold the subordinate standards of the church.²⁸
- 3.3** The distinction between a complaint and a charge should be noted. A complaint concerns administration, whereas a charge relates to morality or doctrine. A complaint is directed towards an action of a judicatory, while a charge concerns the conduct or doctrine of an individual. A complaint, if sustained, requires the judicatory to make amends by rescinding or altering its contested action. A charge, if sustained, is intended to lead the individual to repentance.

4. *What are the Steps to be taken in initiating judicial discipline?*

- 4.1** No matter can be considered as justifying judicial discipline unless there are at least two or three independent witnesses to the occurrence or circumstance.²⁹
- 4.2** A charge may be brought by a member, whether an injured party or not, or by the session. Particular care should be taken when a charge is brought against an elder.³⁰
- 4.3** No matter can become the subject of judicial discipline unless first every possible attempt has been made to resolve it privately, in accordance with Matthew 18:15-20 and Galatians 6:1. In such private meetings it is right that a minor or a woman can be assisted or represented by an appropriate adult in the initial approach to the alleged offender. In cases where an allegation is made of grave sin against a woman or a minor, who may not be capable of making such an approach, the process should be undertaken by two members of the session.
- 4.4** No charge shall be admitted by the session if it concerns matters committed over two years' previously.³¹ However, there are exceptional cases, in which the alleged offence is particularly grave, where this rule should be suspended.³² Other exceptions may involve circumstances in which an abundance of written evidence exists so that the passage of time is not as significant a deterrent to the case proceeding.

²⁶ WCF 31.5

²⁷ The session's jurisdiction extends to the oversight of members' Christian discipleship, concerning which the credibility of their profession of faith is the crucial element.

²⁸ The church's discipline over what is preached and taught is crucial to its adherence to the biblical gospel.

²⁹ Deut. 19:15, Matt. 18:16, 1 Tim. 5:19.

³⁰ 1 Timothy 5:19.

³¹ This is because as time passes the details of events become less clear in people's minds.

³² Cases of alleged physical or sexual abuse come into this category.

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- 4.5** Where serious allegations are made, and the law requires it, the matter must also be reported to the relevant civil authorities.³³
- 4.6** When a case of judicial discipline is initiated it must be recorded in writing exactly how the matter has been handled beforehand, as described in 4.3. Only in the most exceptional cases, requiring urgent attention, can this be avoided. If such is the case, the matter must be recorded in the minutes of the case and the circumstance reviewed by presbytery.³⁴
- 4.7** If a matter is considered to require judicial discipline, the alleged offence must be set forth in writing as to its nature, the circumstances surrounding it (including the date, place and time), and the witnesses to it. The written statement must always include clear Biblical support for the serious nature of the offence, together with references to applicable portions of the subordinate standards. No disciplinary process is ever valid without these factors taking place.³⁵ As soon as the session has determined that the accusation, if proved to be true, would justify disciplinary proceedings, it must provide a full and complete copy of all these details to the person who is alleged to have committed the offence.
- 4.8** If the person bringing the charge needs help in writing these details, an appropriate member of EPCEW can provide assistance and can accompany the person to any meeting of the session.³⁶
- 4.9** The accused person is to be notified of a date, place and time at which he or she is expected to attend a disciplinary meeting, to which witnesses will also be summoned. This meeting cannot be less than 10 days after the accused has received the above written request of the meeting, as well as the details of the charges and specifications, unless it is agreed otherwise by all involved, including accuser(s), accused, witnesses, and the judicatory.³⁷

5. *How is the disciplinary process to proceed?*

- 5.1** When a member of EPCEW is about to present a charge he or she shall be solemnly warned by the session that a censure may be given if it is found that grounds do not exist for proceeding with the trial of the case *and in addition* it appears that the charge has been brought with malice.³⁸ No censure stronger than a rebuke may be given without a trial.
- 5.2** The session³⁹ must consider in each case whether there is sufficient evidence to warrant a trial; the accuracy and appropriateness of the specifications from the Word of God and the confessional standards; and whether the alleged offence is serious enough for a trial in terms of 3.1 and/or 3.2 above. Upon these considerations it may proceed with a trial in accordance with the provisions of 4.9 above, or else dismiss the charge.

6. *WHAT GENERAL PRINCIPLES AFFECT THE TRIAL?*

6.1 *General factors*

- 6.1.1** At the start of every trial the moderator shall pronounce:

³³ This provision assumes that the law concerned is not hostile to the legitimate exercise of religious freedom.

³⁴ A written record is essential for the protection of the one accused, so that he or she may know what the offence is, together with its seriousness. It is also essential for the just process of the case, otherwise additional charges may creep in without warning and to the detriment of the accused.

³⁵ No judicial discipline is ever justified unless, if true and upheld, it would constitute a violation of membership vows, the subordinate standards of the church, and – pre-eminently – holy Scripture.

³⁶ It is essential that EPCEW provide all help necessary to vulnerable persons. This may also be necessary in the case of a woman who may require to be accompanied to a meeting with the session.

³⁷ The accused must be given every chance to be able, if appropriate, to answer the charges by bringing evidence to bear, including witnesses, that establishes that he or she has not been in violation of their vows.

³⁸ Deut. 19:16ff.

³⁹ All references to the session in this book are also applicable to a presbytery or General Assembly in a case referred to those courts, or in an appeal from a verdict by a session.

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The session is about to sit in a judicial capacity. I exhort the members of the session to remember your solemn duty to minister the Word of God faithfully and to submit all your judgments to its infallible rule.

This announcement shall be repeated at each sitting of the session in the course of the trial. A sitting shall end when the session recesses. A meeting is ended by adjournment.

- 6.1.2** When in a judicial capacity, the session or presbytery shall normally be in open session. This shall always be the case when a charge of false doctrine is brought. In other cases, where the needs of discipline or the delicacy of the charge warrants it, the trial can proceed in closed session.
- 6.1.3** At no stage in the trial shall anyone be prevented from setting forth the provisions of the Word of God or the secondary standards of the church.
- 6.1.4** In unusual circumstances, a session may deny an accused person the right of participating in the Lord's Supper or the exercise of the functions of his office until the case is concluded. On such unusual occasions, it shall be the duty of the session to conclude the case as soon as possible, consistent with a thorough examination of its details.
- 6.1.5** If the accused fails to appear at the trial and does not have a satisfactory reason for his absence, he shall be cited again, and warned that if he does not appear the trial will proceed without him.

6.2 *The Clerk and the record of the trial*

- 6.2.1** The clerk shall keep an accurate roll of the members attending each sitting of the trial judicatory. The session shall preserve a complete and accurate record of the trial. In the minutes the following must be included: (1) the charge and specifications; (2) objections made and exceptions taken; (3) a list of witnesses who testified and a summary of their testimony; (4) all rulings and decisions of the session; and (5) the minutes of any private deliberations. Reproductions of either part or the whole of the trial may be incorporated into the minutes of the trial judicatory. These minutes, together with all relevant papers, shall be certified by the trial judicatory and must be transmitted to the presbytery if there is an appeal.
- 6.2.2** All citations shall be served in person, but if that is not possible, they shall be sent by certified mail.

6.3 *The accused*

- 6.3.1** The accused shall be entitled to the assistance of an advisor and must be permitted to have someone to accompany him or her. The advisor must be a member in good standing of EPCEW. Where the accused does not identify an advisor the session may appoint one.
- 6.3.2** The accused may not sit in judgment on his own case at any stage, including the preliminary investigation. No advisor may sit in judgment on the same case in any stage following the preliminary investigation. A member of the trial session who has a personal interest in the case must not sit in judgment on the case, may not speak in the trial, and must not vote at any stage in the proceedings.
- 6.3.3** The accused may take exception to any and all rulings or decisions made by the session.
- 6.3.4** The accused shall be allowed one copy of the minutes at the session's expense. Additional copies may be obtained by him at cost.

6.4 *The witnesses*

- 6.4.1** Any person may be a witness in a judicial case if the trial judicatory is satisfied that he has sufficient competence to make the affirmation required of witnesses.
- 6.4.2** The moderator shall require each witness before he testifies to make the following affirmation: "I solemnly swear, that by the grace of God, I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning the matters on which I am called to testify."
- 6.4.3** If it becomes necessary to obtain testimony from witnesses who are under the jurisdiction of another session, such testimony may be obtained either by the taking of depositions, or by having

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- the session, at the request of the trial session, issue citations directing such persons to appear and testify before the trial session.
- 6.4.4** The trial session can direct the taking of testimony of witnesses by a commission it appoints if unusual circumstances require it. This commission could be another session of an EPCEW congregation. A representative of the session and the accused, or his advisor, may examine and cross-examine such witnesses, and make objections concerning (1) the admissibility of any oral testimony, (2) the competency of the witnesses, (3) the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any documents, records, and recordings identified by the witnesses. The commissioners must be communicant members of EPCEW. They shall record such testimony and objections as may be offered, and, without ruling upon the objections, shall transmit to the trial session a complete transcript of the proceedings.
- 6.4.5** If a witness who is a member of the church fails to obey a lawful citation, he shall be cited again and warned that if he does not appear, or give satisfactory reason for his absence, he may be charged with contempt. The time allowed for appearance on a citation shall be determined by the session bearing in mind the circumstances and should ordinarily be not less than two weeks after receipt of the citation.
- 6.4.6** If a member of the church under the jurisdiction of another session has been cited as a witness, and refuses to appear, the trial session will communicate the facts to the session having oversight over him.

7. WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR EVIDENCE?

- 7.1** Evidence must be factual in nature. It may be direct or circumstantial. Great caution should be exercised in giving weight to circumstantial evidence, so as to rule out hearsay.
- 7.2** The accused may object to the competence of any witness and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevance of any testimony or evidence produced in support of the charge and specifications. The trial session shall decide on all such objections *after* allowing the accused to be heard.
- 7.3** A specification presented in support of a charge may be established by the testimony of witnesses or by validly authenticated documents. The testimony of one witness shall be insufficient to establish the truth of any specification. Certain allegations must be reported to the civil authorities.
- 7.4** No witness, unless a member of the trial session, called to witness regarding facts in support of any specification shall testify in the presence of another witness who is to testify concerning the same specification.
- 7.5** The trial session shall appoint one of its members to conduct the examination of witnesses on its behalf, but other members shall also have the right to take part in the examination.
- 7.6** Witnesses produced in support of the charge and specifications shall testify in the presence of the accused unless the accused has failed to present himself after citation. Witnesses named in the specifications shall first be examined by the session. The accused may then cross-examine. If the session asks any further questions, the accused shall be able to cross-examine again. Witnesses summoned at the request of the accused shall first be examined by the accused. If the session cross-examines, the accused shall be able to conduct a redirect examination. Leading questions shall be permitted only under cross-examination.
- 7.7** Certified records of a trial session shall be received in evidence in any other court of the church if their relevance is first established.
- 7.8** All questions concerning the competence of any witness and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevance of any testimony or evidence taken by a commission shall be determined by the trial session after the accused has been given an opportunity to be heard.
- 7.9** New evidence discovered during the trial may be offered, but, if such evidence is produced against the accused, he shall be given reasonable time to investigate it and to supplement his defence and to consult with his advisor.
- 7.10** If new evidence is produced by the accused after he has been found guilty, the trial session shall examine the proposed evidence. If it is satisfied that there was good reason for not producing it at the

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trial, it shall grant a new trial, or, in case an appeal has been lodged, it shall certify these facts to the presbytery and the record of the case shall then be returned to the session for the purpose of a new trial.

8. (8) HOW SHOULD THE TRIAL PROCEED?

8.1 *First Meeting of the Trial*

8.1.1 At the first meeting of the trial only the following actions shall be taken:

- (1) The charges and specifications shall be read and formally presented to the accused together with the names of any witnesses and copies of any documents which may be presented against him.
- (2) The session shall fix the time, date, and place for the second meeting of the trial, which shall not be less than ten days later, and shall issue citations directing all relevant persons to appear at that time.
- (3) The accused shall be granted citations in which he may insert the names of the witnesses whom he wishes the session to summon.

8.1.2 No meeting of the trial held prior to the time at which it proceeds with the previously mentioned actions shall be considered the first meeting of the trial.

8.2 *Second Meeting of the Trial*

8.2.1 At the second meeting of the trial the accused may interpose objections concerning (1) the regularity of the proceedings up to this point and (2) the form of the charge, the form and relevance of the specifications, the competence of the witnesses named in the specifications, and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevance of any documents, records, and recordings submitted in support of the charge and specifications. The session shall determine the validity of any objections. If the accused requests the session to do so, it shall determine whether the proof of the charge and specifications would show the commission of an offence serious enough to warrant a trial. It may dismiss the case, or permit amendments of the charge and specifications, providing they do not alter their essential nature. If the session decides that the trial should proceed, the accused shall be required to plead "guilty" or "not guilty," and his plea shall be entered upon the record. If the accused pleads "guilty," the session shall treat him as coming before it as his own accuser, and shall determine the censure, bearing in mind that he has confessed his sin. If the accused pleads "not guilty," or refuses to plead, the trial shall proceed. The following proceedings may extend over as many meetings as needed for their completion.

8.2.2 Absence from any sitting of the second or of a subsequent meeting of the trial shall disqualify a member from voting and from being counted in the computation of a quorum, but shall not deprive him of any other right as a member of the trial session. If there is not a quorum, the trial shall either recess or be adjourned.

8.2.3 When all the evidence against the accused has been presented and he has had an opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses testifying against him, the accused shall have the right to move for the dismissal of the charges. If this motion is denied by the session, the accused may then present the evidence in support of his defence.

8.3 *Conclusion of the Trial*

8.3.1 After all the evidence has been presented, the accused may make his final argument with respect to the evidence and the law of the church. The session, after deliberating, shall vote on each charge and each specification separately. If the trial judicatory decides that the accused is guilty, it shall proceed to determine the censure.

8.3.2 In order for a guilty verdict to be pronounced on any charge or specification, the evidence must be such as to put the conclusion beyond reasonable doubt.

8.3.3 When the session has completed its deliberation, the moderator shall announce its decision on each charge and each specification. If the accused has been found guilty, the session shall state what censure it will pronounce against the accused. The censure shall not be pronounced before the expiration of the time in which the accused may file notice of appeal. If notice of appeal is

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filed and an appeal is taken within the time prescribed in this Book of Discipline, the session may not issue the censure unless and until its verdict is affirmed by the court of the church to which final appeal is taken.

8.4 Trial in Absentia

8.4.1 If the session proceeds with the trial in the absence of the accused, a representative shall be appointed at the first meeting of the trial to present a case to the session in defence of the accused. Such a representative, although not acting directly in behalf of the accused, shall be entitled to present evidence, interview witnesses, interpose objections, and otherwise act in his defence. The session shall deliver copies of the charge, specifications, and names of witnesses either personally or by certified mail to the accused along with notification that the trial is proceeding without him and the time, date, and place of the second meeting of the trial judicatory. The second meeting of the trial judicatory shall proceed as though the accused had pleaded "not guilty." The trial shall then proceed according to the provisions of this chapter. When the session has completed its deliberations, the moderator shall announce its decisions according to this chapter, and shall communicate such decisions to the accused in writing, either personally or by certified mail.

[A suggested form for citing a witness is found below]

9. WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN WHEN A MEMBER COMES BEFORE THE SESSION AS HIS OWN ACCUSER?

- 9.1** When a person comes before the session as his own accuser, confessing a sin that would warrant judicial discipline according to the criteria listed in 3.1. and/or 3.2. above, the session may proceed to judgment without full process.
- 9.2** The session must determine what sin, if any, has been committed. If a serious sin has been committed, it must decide what censure shall be pronounced. Bearing in mind that the purpose of judicial discipline is the restoration of a fallen member, the session must evaluate to what extent repentance has occurred and how far the confession of sin demonstrates it. Its censure should be guided by these considerations.

10. WHAT CENSURES CAN BE PRONOUNCED?

- 10.1** In judicial discipline there are five degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. Censures shall be pronounced in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an act of the whole church, by the moderator on behalf of the trial judicatory.
- 10.2** If a person who has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present himself for censure at the time appointed, the trial judicatory shall cite him to appear at another time. If he does not appear after this citation, the censure shall be pronounced in his absence.

10.3 DEGREES OF CENSURE

10.3.1 Admonition

Admonition consists in tenderly and solemnly confronting the offender with his sin, warning him of his danger, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

10.3.2 Rebuke

Rebuke is a more severe censure than admonition. It consists in setting forth the serious character of the offence, reproving the offender, and exhorting him to repentance and to more perfect faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

10.3.3 Suspension

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a. Suspension is a form of censure by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church, of office, or both. It may be for a definite or an indefinite period. Suspension of an officer from the privileges of membership shall always be accompanied by suspension from office, but the latter does not necessitate the former.

b. An officer or other member of the church, while under suspension, shall be the object of prayer and earnest counsel with the aim of repentance and restoration. When the judicatory which pronounced the censure is satisfied of the offender's penitence, or when the time of suspension has ended, the censure shall be removed and the offender restored. Restoration shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition. Restoration to membership may take place without restoration to office.

c. When a minister has been indefinitely suspended, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.

10.3.4 Deposition

a. Deposition is a form of censure more severe than suspension. It consists in a solemn declaration by the trial judicatory that the offender is no longer an officer in the church.

b. When a minister is deposed from his office, the presbytery shall erase his name from the roll of the ministerial members of the presbytery.

c. Deposition of a pastor or his suspension for an indefinite time entails the dissolution of the pastoral relationship. The declaration of deposition or suspension shall be read before the congregation, and the pulpit shall be declared vacant. Where suspension is for a definite period the presbytery, after giving the session an opportunity to be heard, shall decide whether the pastoral relation shall be dissolved.

d. When a minister has been deposed, the judicatory shall immediately notify all the presbyteries of the church.

10.3.5 Excommunication

Excommunication is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of offences aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration by an ecclesiastical judicatory that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ.

10.4 PROCEDURAL CONSIDERATIONS

10.4.1 Pronouncement of Censure

The indefinite suspension, deposition, or excommunication of an officer or other member of the church shall be announced to the church in which the officer holds office, or in which the member holds membership. All communicant members of that congregation, *and only those*, shall be informed. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God that he may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

10.4.2 Review of Suspension

a. In case of indefinite suspension, the original judicatory shall review the suspension, within twelve months after imposition of censure, to determine whether or not the offender has shown repentance and may be restored.

b. When, in its review of suspension, the original judicatory is not satisfied that the offender has shown repentance, it shall decide if the suspension should be continued or increased to deposition, or excommunication, or both.

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c. If, in the case in 10.4.2.b, the indefinite suspension is continued, it shall be reviewed again within twelve months of the conclusion of the previous review.

10.4.3 Increase of Censure

a. No further trial is necessary to increase the censure of indefinite suspension from office to deposition, or the censure of indefinite suspension from church membership to excommunication.

b. If an increase of censure is imposed without further trial, the judicatory is obliged to record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. The judgment to increase censure shall in all cases be subject to appeal.

11. WHAT STEPS ARE TO BE TAKEN IN RESTORING A REPENTANT SINNER?

11.1 An officer deposed because of a commonly known offence shall be restored when the judicatory has assured itself that the restoration will not be attended by injury to the cause of the gospel.

11.2 A deposed officer can resume his former office only after again being ordained.

11.3 Restoration shall always be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his redeeming grace.

**SECTION 2
COMPLAINTS**

12. What is a Complaint?

12.1 A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency (having failed to do what it was responsible to do) or error (for having acted contrary to its responsibilities). It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject, by one session against another session, by a session against the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, or by one presbytery against another presbytery.

13. How should a complaint be presented?

13.1 A complaint shall first be presented to the judicatory which is alleged to be delinquent or in error, and this judicatory shall be asked to make amends. The complaint shall be presented as soon as possible after the alleged delinquency or error, and always within three months, unless it is shown that it could not have been presented within that time.

14. What if the judicatory maintains it has not been delinquent or erred?

14.1 If, after considering a complaint, the judicatory alleged to be delinquent or in error is not convinced that it has been delinquent or has erred, and refuses to make amends, the complainant may appeal to the next higher judicatory having jurisdiction. The appeal shall carry the complaint to that judicatory. Appeal shall be entered at the earliest possible time. Before this action is taken, notice of intention to appeal must be given to the judicatory against which the complaint is directed. The complaint carried to the higher judicatory must be the same complaint presented to the lower judicatory.

14.2 When a complaint has been carried to a higher judicatory, the clerk of the judicatory which is charged with delinquency or error shall submit to the clerk of the higher judicatory the relevant papers, including a statement of the facts of the case arranged by date in the form of a chronology, and a certified copy of any minutes or other documents evidencing the alleged delinquency or error. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall give the complainant and the judicatory against which the

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complaint is directed reasonable notice of the time, date, and place fixed for the hearing of the complaint by the higher judicatory. Neither the complainant nor any member of the judicatory whose alleged delinquency or error is complained of shall propose or second motions, or vote in any decisions concerning the matter.

14.3 If a complaint against a session has been carried to the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, and the presbytery has rendered a decision, either the complainant or the session may appeal the decision to the general assembly. The appeal shall carry the complaint against the session to the general assembly and the general assembly shall adjudicate the case as constituted by that complaint. Appeal shall be entered at the earliest possible time. Notice of intention to appeal, and copies of the appeal itself, shall be given to both lower judicatories, and the clerks of those judicatories shall submit the relevant papers to the clerk of the general assembly. Reasons may be appended to the appeal. These reasons may include alleged delinquencies in the presbytery's handling of the case and other matters germane to the issues of the case as constituted by the complaint against the session.

15. *What verdicts are possible?*

15.1 A complaint, carried by appeal to a higher judicatory, may be sustained; or, denied; or, remanded, with grounds, to the next lower judicatory. A decision to remand shall state whether jurisdiction in the matter is being returned to the lower judicatory, or retained by the higher judicatory.

15.2 If a judicatory is adjudged delinquent or in error by a higher judicatory, the higher judicatory shall determine what amends are to be made.

**SECTION THREE
GRIEVANCES**

16. *What is a Grievance?*

16.1 A grievance is a claim by an individual that a member or members of the session have behaved in a manner contrary to the standards laid down in Scripture. A grievance relates to conduct of lesser gravity than would warrant a charge. It may involve overbearing behaviour towards the congregation or its members, or requiring actions that fall within the bounds of Christian liberty or are the province of the family.⁴⁰

16.2 A grievance must refer to conduct that is verifiable, whether by documents or at least two or three independent witnesses. In no circumstances can it be held to be a valid grievance if the subject cannot be substantiated in this manner; attitudes, body language, hurt feelings, or phrases in a sermon are not appropriate bases for such claims.

17. *What processes should be followed with a grievance?*

17.1 In each case, before a judicatory can consider a grievance, the aggrieved person must deal with the matter in accordance with the requirements of Matthew 18:15-20. He or she must approach the person(s) concerned privately, point out the conduct that warrants such action and seek amends, remembering the Biblical requirements laid down in Galatians 6:1-2. If this fails, the aggrieved person must repeat the process accompanied by one or two witnesses. On no account can a grievance be addressed if this procedure has not been followed.

17.2 If private attempts to resolve the problem, such as those mentioned in 17.1, are ineffective, the grievance may be brought to the judicatory. In this case, the general procedures outlined in section one

⁴⁰ Matt. 20:24ff, Ezk. 34:1ff, 2 Cor. 4:1ff, Ti. 1:7ff, 1Pet. 5:1ff.

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(from 3.1. onwards) relating to judicial discipline should be followed. This does not make the grievance a case of judicial discipline; rather, it provides a framework for the case to be heard in a way that protects the rights of all parties.

18. *What outcomes are possible?*

18.1 If the judicatory considers the grievance to be without foundation it will dismiss the case. If it considers the grievance to be malicious it can bring judicial charges against the aggrieved person. On the other hand, the aggrieved person has the right of appeal against the rejection of the case to the presbytery and the General Assembly in turn.

18.2 If the judicatory considers the grievance to be genuine, it should call on the person(s) who have occasioned it to repent and be reconciled to the offended party. If such repentance is not forthcoming, it will consider whether to bring judicial charges against the person(s) who occasioned the grievance.

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SUMMONING OF A WITNESS

The trial of [NAME] is to be held before [Presbytery, Session],at [place] on [date] at [time].

The court hereby calls you to attend in order to give evidence on [date] at [time]

Please confirm that you will be present.

Signed

Clerk

Moderator

Date

RULES of DISCIPLINE

THE
EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ENGLAND AND WALES

1. PROCEDURES

1.1. PETITIONS TO SESSIONS AND PRESBYTERIES

- 1.1.1. Any member of a congregation may present a petition to the Session regarding:
 - 1.1.1.1. Any matter affecting the congregation's welfare and the advancement of the Gospel.
 - 1.1.1.2. A proposed amendment of the BCO.
 - 1.1.1.3. A review of its decision(s) in any matter.
- 1.1.2. The Minister or Session Clerk shall advise the petitioner of procedure.
- 1.1.3. It is competent for the Session itself or a Minister or any elder to petition Presbytery on grounds similar to 1.1.1 above.
- 1.1.4. Any person whose application for the Ministry (whether as a student or a Minister) has been declined by Presbytery may petition it to review his case. This right belongs also to a student whom Presbytery has decided not to license on the recommendation of the Committee for Ministry and Eldership Training. In both cases the grounds for a review must be stated.
 - 1.1.4.1. All petitions shall be presented in writing to the Clerk at least 3 weeks before the meeting of Presbytery/Session; the Court has discretion regarding the time limit in cases it considers exceptional.
 - 1.1.4.2. In the case of students for the Ministry petitions to Presbytery shall be forwarded through their own Session.
 - 1.1.4.3. Where a Minister petitions Presbytery upon a matter affecting his congregation or Session, he shall send a copy to the Session Clerk.
- 1.1.5. The Presbytery/Session may require a petitioner to appear before them, due notice being given him. Should a petitioner refuse or fail (unless through unavoidable hindrances) to so appear the petition shall fall without further consideration.
- 1.1.6. Should the Session not grant the petition the petitioner may appeal to the Presbytery in which case the whole matter comes before the higher court for determination.

1.2. APPEALS IN THE CASE OF FAILED PETITIONS

- 1.2.1. A member whose petition to Session has failed may appeal the decision in question to Presbytery.
- 1.2.2. The appellant
 - 1.2.2.1. The appellant must give notice of appeal, with reasons, to the Session within one calendar month of notification of the failure of the petition.
 - 1.2.2.2. The appellant shall forward his appeal in writing to the Clerk of Presbytery together with a copy of his reasons and any other relevant documents within one month of his notice of appeal.
- 1.2.3. An outstanding appeal does not have the effect of suspending a Presbytery.
- 1.2.4. The Clerk of the Session concerned shall submit on the request of the Presbytery Clerk the minutes of its proceedings in the case and all other relevant documents and evidence together with any answers to the reasons adduced.
- 1.2.5. The Clerk of Presbytery shall, at least two weeks beforehand, inform the appellant and the Clerk of the Session concerned of the date, time and place at which the appeal is to be heard.
- 1.2.6. The appellant must prosecute the appeal in person; if he fails to do so the appeal shall fail. Presbytery may re-convene the hearing if it is satisfied that his failure to prosecute it was unavoidable and not intentional.
- 1.2.7. In hearing appeals Presbytery shall proceed as follows:
 - 1.2.7.1. Read the decision appealed against.
 - 1.2.7.2. Read the reasons of appeal.
 - 1.2.7.3. Read the record of the proceedings of the Session in the case including any of that Court's answers to the reasons adduced.
 - 1.2.7.4. Hear and question the appellant(s).
 - 1.2.7.5. Hear and question the Session concerned through its appointed representatives.

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- 1.2.7.6. Presbytery shall then direct the parties to the appeal, including each member of the Session concerned, to withdraw and proceed to consider the case and come to a decision on the matter, affirming, reversing or varying the original decision as it deems right.
- 1.2.7.7. Parties are called in and the judgement of the Presbytery intimated to them.
- 1.2.8. If anything in the conduct of the appellant or the Session concerned be found culpable Presbytery shall admonish, censure or otherwise deal with them as the case may require.

1.3. DISSENT AND “DISSENT AND COMPLAINT”

- 1.3.1. Any member of a Court may enter his dissent from any part of the procedure. He may require his dissent, with or without reasons, to be recorded in the minutes.
- 1.3.2. In order to be received, the dissent must be intimated immediately the decision dissented from is made.
- 1.3.3. The effect of a dissent is to save the dissenter from any censure that may arise out of the procedure, but it does not free him from obligation to submit to the decision until it has been reversed or altered.
- 1.3.4. A member of Session may also dissent and protest for leave to complain to the Presbytery concerning a decision of Session. In this case notice of ‘dissent and complaint’ to the Presbytery must be lodged, with reasons, with the Clerk of Presbytery, within two weeks of the decision dissented from being pronounced.
- 1.3.5. Procedure on ‘dissent and complaint’ is similar to the procedure for Appeals.
- 1.3.6. The purpose of a ‘dissent and complaint’ is to enable a member of Session to have his dissent considered by Presbytery and its effect is to suspend procedure on the matter to which the complaint relates until Presbytery's decision is taken or the complaint is withdrawn.

1.4. REFERRALS BY SESSIONS TO PRESBYTERY

- 1.4.1. A Session, which finds itself in perplexity over any matter, may refer it to the Presbytery for investigation, advice and/or adjudication.
- 1.4.2. The subject referred ought to be transmitted to the Clerk of Presbytery along with all relevant particulars sufficient to make the referral thoroughly understood.
- 1.4.3. Presbytery shall either:
 - 1.4.3.1. Accept the referral and investigate, advise and/or adjudicate on the matter, or
 - 1.4.3.2. Refuse to accept the referral and may administer censure if they find there was no occasion for it.