

# **Purpose, Mission, Vision and Ethos of the Westminster Presbyterian Church**

## **Purpose**

Westminster Presbyterian Church exists to glorify God in congregations of his Church where the restored relationship between God and his people is being realised as a new community which anticipates God's ultimate kingdom.

## **Mission**

Through the establishment of vital, relevant Reformed and Presbyterian churches we seek to bring people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and assist them to spiritual maturity.

We believe God has called us to focus especially on Australasia and South-East Asia in a manner which is sensitive to the ambient culture.

We recognise our responsibility to...

- our God - to love and serve him;
- our church people - to provide the means and the context in which they can know Jesus and follow him;
- our leaders - to recognise and receive their ministry, train and, where necessary, adequately compensate them;
- our world - to demonstrate God's love by proclaiming the gospel, living with integrity, seeking justice, and showing mercy.

## **Vision**

Our vision is to place a vital, relevant, reformed and presbyterian church within reach of every urban Australian and to encourage such churches throughout the world.

To do this we will commit ourselves to

- continuing a method of careful and effective church planting which results in viable congregations
- major on evangelism as the means of growth in new and established congregations
- training and developing leadership for the future.

## **Ethos**

As a church which holds to the Scriptures, the Westminster Confession of Faith and operates with a Book of Church Order, we especially value ...

- commitment to the Scriptures in all of faith and life;
- adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith in a manner which does not compromise submission to the authority of Scripture;
- the indigenous expression of Presbyterian Organisation and Reformed and evangelical spirituality;
- our rich heritage, without being bound by tradition;
- commitment to a common purpose with freedom of expression;
- maintaining our distinctive while demonstrating openness, warmth and understanding towards other churches;

- living in the power of the Spirit in a manner which promotes growth towards godliness in all of life;
- evangelism as a process;
- creative evangelistic strategies within biblical parameters, which incorporate people into churches;
- developing churches which are self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating;
- growth through expansion and consolidation;
- godly, trained leaders;
- open and accountable church government which serves the people;
- parity of elders while preserving the function of Teaching Elders;
- decision making processes based on trust, love, dialogue and a spirit of consensus;
- sessions and presbyteries having primary responsibility for the church;
- pastoral care which honours God and is compassionate to sinners;
- the principle of male headship applied in the church and family;
- privilege and responsibility co-existing in the application of God's covenant to believers and their children;
- a view of Christian service which involves every believer and all of life;
- biblical and authoritative preaching and teaching which helps produce mature and discerning Christians.

# **WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

## **- A brief account of its origin, history, nature, and privileges -**

### **The Beginning.**

The first congregation bearing the name "Westminster Presbyterian Church" came into being in Western Australia in late 1970. Organizationally, therefore, WPC is very young; but in what it believes and teaches it is quite old, for it holds to the old truths of the Bible. No matter how rapidly and radically modern technology changes our society and our daily routine, it cannot change our hearts. It cannot point us to God. It cannot tell us of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: but the Bible can, and does.

### **A Confessional Church.**

Those associated with the founding of WPC in 1970 knew there were other churches that believed the Bible and proclaimed Christ as the only Saviour. The founders did not pretend that WPC was the only true church, or that it was a perfect church. They were convinced, however, that the teaching of the Bible was most accurately expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith. They acted to form a church which would recognize the supreme authority of God's written Word, the Bible, and use the Westminster Confession of Faith as a help in expressing the Bible's teaching about faith and life and in assisting enquirers to understand the church's doctrinal position before committing themselves to association with it. Being a confessional church helps to save people from deception.

### **A Reformed Church.**

In the 1st century A.D., following the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Church in its new organisational form entered upon its long history. It has by no means always been a peaceful and honourable history. Along the way, at various times, significant departures from the Scriptures have occurred. The degree of purity of churches has varied. No church has ever been perfect. Some, in their life and preaching, have been more obedient to God's Word than others, and in some the light of the Gospel of Christ has been largely obscured. The work of Martin Luther in the early 16th Century set in progress the movement known as the Reformation in which there appeared new churches that repudiated the authority of the Pope and the distinctive teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. These new churches sought to be obedient to God's Word. Both the Lutheran and Calvinistic streams of the Reformation carefully formulated their beliefs in confessional statements.

### **The Westminster Confession of Faith.**

In England, in 1643, the Parliament called "an Assembly of learned and godly Divines, and others", and instructed them "to meet and assemble themselves at Westminster, in the Chapel called King Henry the VII's Chapel". This Assembly's task was to deal with matters concerning the liturgy, discipline, government, and doctrine of the Church of England. From its deliberations there came in 1647 the extensive and detailed Westminster Confession of Faith, described as "a part of the covenanted uniformity in religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland". It is immensely important to understand, from this last statement, that the Westminster Confession of Faith does not represent the theological speculation of a tiny and eccentric minority. Westminster Presbyterian Church, by employing the Confession as a statement of Christian truth, makes use of a major ecumenical theological document of the Protestant reformation and, in so doing, affirms its glad submission to the supreme authority of God's Word and to the doctrines inherent in that Word. Therefore, although, as we have said, WPC is organisationally quite young, what it teaches is firmly within the main stream of those truths of the Bible that were revealed afresh, after centuries of obscurity and superstition, in the Reformation.

### **A Presbyterian Church.**

Presbyterian churches are governed by men who are called presbyters or elders. They may also be called bishops, because a New Testament bishop is the same as a New Testament elder. Variations occur within Presbyterian government. Some forms are more centralised than others. Some make a sharp distinction between a "minister" and an elder", and hold to the "three- office" position of minister, elder, and deacon. Others, such as WPC, adopt the "two-office" position, of elder and deacon, while recognising that within the eldership there are men specially gifted of God for the ministry of teaching and preaching. Though elders may differ as to function there is complete parity as to authority.

## **Levels of government**

In Westminster Presbyterian Church, government by elders occurs at three levels: the local church's council of elders (the "session"); the regional council of elders (the "presbytery") consisting of elders from several churches in an area; the national assembly, consisting of elders nominated by the presbyteries to meet as "commissioners". The presbyteries and national assembly are "wider" rather than "higher" assemblies, with a heavy "grass-roots" emphasis. Local churches own their properties. The fundamental principle at work is cooperation, not coercion. Nevertheless, it is understood that all the assemblies of elders – the sessions, the presbyteries, and the national assembly – are parts of the one government, reflecting the unity of the church under Christ the Head.

## **Admission to membership and to office**

The Shorter Catechism, at Question 86, asks, "What is faith in Jesus Christ?" And it answers,

"Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel". A credible profession of such faith is the basic qualification for church membership. Those who seek admission to office, through ordination as elders or deacons, are required also to make a series of vows in which they pledge loyalty to the church's doctrinal standards.

## **Access**

All church members have ready access to any assembly of elders. Any church member who is dissatisfied with a session's treatment of a complaint he might have made may appeal his case to the presbytery for review, and if necessary to the national assembly. A system of checks and balances operates.

## **Agreeable to Scripture**

Westminster Presbyterian Church does not claim biblical justification for every detail of its polity but maintains it is faithful to Scripture in its broad outlines. It points to the forms of government in the synagogues in New Testament times, and the practices in the New Testament, as models.

## **WPC Development.**

### **Western Australia**

Behind the formation of the first WPC congregation in Western Australia in 1970 lay many years of devoted service by Miss Mary Jones amongst Aboriginal people in Brookton and nearby towns. Miss Jones was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister. Though her work was independent of any connection with a church or a mission society she wanted it to be established as an evangelical Presbyterian work. Extensive correspondence with World Presbyterian Missions, the mission arm

of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), in the USA, led eventually to the arrival in 1970 of the Revd David Cross and his wife, Barbara, to commence 10 years of church-planting in W.A. Mr Cross worked in Brookton and other country areas. He also commenced Bible studies in the Perth metropolitan area at the request of several families of mixed denominational backgrounds and took up residence there.. Out of these Bible studies, in late 1970, came the first congregation with the name, "Westminster Presbyterian Church". No rapid spurts of growth occurred in the 1970s, but by 1981 five WPC congregations in Western Australia agreed to form a presbytery and to move to incorporation as a denomination. The elders compiled a Book of Church Order and a denominational Constitution, and on the basis of these documents incorporation was effected in 1982. The inclusion of the Brookton Calvary Presbyterian Church meant that in the fledgling denomination that small church of Aboriginal people was the oldest congregation.

### **Eastern States**

In the 1980s and 1990s WPC, aided by church planters from Mission to the World, mission agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (which the RPCES had joined), was enlarged by the establishment of congregations in Queensland, NSW, and Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory. The Queensland churches formed the Presbytery of Queensland, and the churches in NSW and the ACT followed by forming the Presbytery of South East Australia.

### **National assembly**

Just as the formation of several congregations in three regions had led to the establishment of presbyteries in those regions, so the existence of more than one presbytery made it possible to form a synod, or national assembly, and the First Synod of Westminster Presbyterian Church met in Western Australia in January 1990.

### **Rationale**

It might seem that adding another denomination to the number of Australian denominations (especially Australian Presbyterian denominations) was not the wisest of moves. Why not just attach new congregations to one of the Presbyterian denominations already well-established in Australia? After all, World Presbyterian Missions had instructed the Revd David Cross not to form a new denomination in Australia and he, accompanied by Australian elders, made several trips by road across Australia to see if the new WPC congregations could be added to an existing denomination. The survey proved unsuccessful – but not because the WPC elders were looking for a perfect church. One prominent factor was that most of the people in the WPC congregations in Western Australia did not have Presbyterian backgrounds. WPC had not been born from any major "split" in the Presbyterian Church in W.A. Though some were well-grounded in the Reformed Faith many were not, and the WPC elders finally reached the decision that to do the best for their people they ought to provide ministry to them in a denominational framework that reflected that to which they had already become accustomed in the local congregations. That decision to begin a denominational life as Westminster Presbyterian Church was accompanied by an equally firm decision against assuming a negatively "separatist" stance, and for affirming fellowship with Christians in other denominations. As stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 26, "Of the Communion of Saints", "All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."

### **Westminster Presbyterian Church in the 21st Century.**

#### **Error**

The Church of the 21st century is not sheltered from the errors of doctrine and practice that have attacked it at various times in its history. The most damaging of these errors are those that draw

professing Christians away from the supreme authority of God's written Word, the Bible, and consequently weaken the Church's testimony. Such errors show themselves in different ways. Church leaders in high places make statements that many accept as authoritative, even when contrary to Scripture. Theological speculation embraces paganism. Congregations are swayed by pronouncements purporting to be new revelations of the Holy Spirit. Some professing churches completely repudiate the authority of Scripture. God's Law is opposed. The Lord's Day is dishonoured. Sexual immorality and perversion are viewed as demonstrating Christian love. Entertainment pretends to be worship. Large numbers of the unborn are killed in their mothers' bodies by their mothers' choices. Governments legislate for the murder of the unborn and for the destruction of family life. The list could easily be extended.

### **Truth**

Nothing would seem to be more important for Australia than the prayerful, clear, powerful, teaching and proclaiming of the Word of God by God's people. Officers and members of Westminster Presbyterian Church have the great privilege of being in congregations where God's Word is believed and taught. They also have the privilege, through the Westminster Confession of Faith, of being exposed to those doctrines of God's Word that in the Reformation pulled down strongholds of unbelief and since the Reformation have been prominent in several great religious revivals.

### **Opportunity**

Much is expected of those to whom much is given, and although Westminster Presbyterian Church is a very small denomination by human standards, God has blessed it by equipping it with His Word, and with faith in His Word, and with those doctrines of His Word that show that He is sovereign and that all mankind is accountable to Him, and that the only way of escaping God's wrath and curse due to mankind for sin is through repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. Existing, as it does, in a decentralised and flexible system of local churches linked together under one cooperative government, open to fellowship with other Christians in the "communion of saints", able to adjust itself to local conditions, Westminster Presbyterian Church has a unique opportunity, in the providence of God, to proclaim His truth, to see people turning to Him in saving faith, and to plant more congregations faithful to His Word.

# PART ONE

## DOCTRINE, GOVERNMENT, and OFFICES

### Chapter 1 : DOCTRINE AND GOVERNMENT

#### 1.1 Doctrine

**.01** Westminster Presbyterian Church (which hereinafter may also be called, "this church", or "this denomination", or "WPC") is a branch of the visible Church, Reformed in doctrine and Presbyterian in government.

**.02** The supreme standard of this denomination and the only infallible rule of faith and life by which in every case this denomination as a branch of the visible Church is to exercise its ministry is the written Word of God, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

**.03** The Westminster Confession of Faith (or, WCF) is accepted as expressing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures and is the subordinate standard of this denomination.

**.04** The form of the Westminster Confession of Faith adhered to is that adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America. This is the same form as the one that was adopted by the first American Presbyterian Assembly of 1789, with two exceptions, namely, the deletion of strictures against marrying one's wife's kindred (XXIV: 4), and of the reference to the Pope as the Antichrist (XXV: 6). The American amendments of Chapter XXIII on the civil magistrate (adopted in 1789), as well as the following minor revisions to remove the powers of the civil magistrate, have been applied to the version of the WCF adopted:

XX: 4 removal of the reference to the power of the civil magistrate;

XXII: 3 removal of the reference to its being a sin to refuse an oath being imposed by a lawful authority;

XXXI: 1 addition of sentences referring to overseers and other rulers of particular churches concerning assemblies as is expedient for the church;

XXXI: 2 omission of this paragraph, with subsequent paragraphs 3-5 renumbered to 2-4.

Other than these changes, this is the WCF as agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster that met from 1643-1647.

**.05** Later sections of this BCO set forth details of the structures and procedures of this denomination.

#### 1.2 Government

**.01** General Concepts in Presbyterian church government.

(1) Only God may rule over the conscience. He rules through his Word. We must obey Scripture.

(2) The church is the body of Christ.

1. Christ alone is the Head of the church.

2. Christ's body is united and this is to be expressed visibly.

3. Christ's headship of the body is displayed in the fact of government.

(3) The church is to be controlled by Scripture

1. A positive Scriptural basis is required for what is believed and taught;

2. A positive Scriptural basis is required for order and government;
  3. A positive Scriptural basis is required for the pattern of worship in the church.
- (4) The form of government involves
1. Rule by presbyters in local, regional, and general assemblies.
  2. Exclusion of civil authority from ecclesiastical matters.

**.02 Fundamental principles of Presbyterian church government.**

(1) The first of these principles is the parity of the eldership. Though there are differences of vocation and function among them, all elders (or, presbyters) are equal in authority and status in the assemblies of the church. There is no hierarchy. In the New Testament the terms "bishop" and "elder" are synonymous.

(2) The second basic principle of Presbyterian order is that in each local church there should be a plurality of elders, or presbyters, a group of men who lead and govern the congregation and are known, collectively, as the session.

(3) The third fundamental principle of Presbyterian order is connectionalism. Local churches are linked together by a system of local, regional, and national assemblies of presbyters comprising one government operating in local and wider spheres. Though this relationship does not destroy the autonomy of local churches it encourages them to see themselves as congregations of one church, and not merely as a collection of individual, independent churches. It helps them to serve each other, opens the way for stronger churches to assist weaker churches, and assists teamwork in such enterprises as church planting, missions, and theological education. The unity of the body of Christ is shown between congregations as well as in congregations (Ephesians 4:1-16) as they live together in a common order, under a common government.

**.03 The Vision Statement and Connectionalism.**

(1) In the Vision Statement approved by the Seventh Synod of WPC, this Church affirms its unity by speaking of "commitment to a common purpose with freedom of expression"; and points to its diversity by speaking of the principles of "sessions and presbyteries having primary responsibility for the church", and of "decision making processes based on trust, love, dialogue and a spirit of consensus".

(2) The Vision Statement further testifies to WPC's wholeness or unity by referring to it as "a church which holds to the Scriptures, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and operates with a Book of Church Order" {thus united in doctrine, government, and procedures}; and to WPC's diversity by identifying a primary aim as, "developing churches which are self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating".

(3) The overall pattern thus approved in the Synod's Vision Statement is one in which each local church of WPC pursues its life and ministry in a context of cooperation with the other local churches, by common consent, in doctrine, government, and procedure, as set out in this Book of Church Order.

(4) In such a relationship, local churches are under obligation to minister to each other; stronger churches to assist weaker churches; the wider assemblies to minister to the lesser assemblies and to local churches; the local churches to encourage and heed the greater assemblies, in obedience to Ephesians 4:1-3.

**.04 The constituent entities of WPC and their scriptural bases.**

NOTE: Presbyterian polity, as set out in this BCO, reflects the organic unity of the church, but faithful church government is completely dependent upon the presence in grace and power of the Holy Spirit.



(1) The local churches, the sessions (local elderships), the presbyteries (regional elderships), the national assembly (national eldership).

(2) Scriptural basis for the organisation of the local church: Christians are enjoined not to neglect local assembly but to counsel, comfort, and encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24, 25; 1 Thessalonians 4:18). Paul directed that elders be ordained in every church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 2 Timothy 2:2). The first day of the week, "the Lord's Day", is regularly the day for local Christian assembly (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

(3) The scriptural basis for the organisation of regional churches: the church at Ephesus had more than one congregation: the church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla is mentioned as a local church (1 Corinthians 16:19), a part of the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17). The New Testament church in Rome also included more than one local church (Romans 16:5).

(4) The scriptural basis for a general synod or national assembly of presbyters representing different regional presbyteries is found in the example of the apostolic church as recorded in Acts 15:1-35 and Acts 16:4-5.

## **Chapter 2 : OFFICES**

### **2.1 Gifts and Offices**

The Scriptures teach that God has given men of differing gifts and offices for the government of the Church. See, for example, Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 7:7; 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:7-16. Some of these ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. Perpetual offices for the Church are those of the presbyter (elder) and the deacon.

### **2.2 The Presbyterate**

Note about terminology: This BCO uses "teaching elder" and "ruling elder" to denote the two vocations in the office of the presbyterate. Where there is no need to indicate a distinction it uses "presbyter". "Teaching elder" is an inclusive term and local churches are free to use "minister" or "pastor" as titles for teaching elders provided such usage corresponds in meaning with that of this BCO.

**.01** The qualifications of presbyters are outlined in the Scriptures, especially in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

**.02** Presbyters are to guard, guide, feed, oversee, and rule the flock of God by teaching, exhortation and godly example.

**.03** The official authority of presbyters is exercised in the assemblies of the denomination – sessions, presbyteries, the national assembly – and by authorization by the appropriate assembly.

**.04** The system of local and wider assemblies is not an hierarchical system but a more general exercise of the office of presbyter in a wider sphere of the church.

**.05** A presbyter who is not at a particular time an active member of any assembly may nevertheless be called upon to serve in a special role and be accountable to the appointing assembly.

**.06** No presbyter may be removed from office except as provided for in this BCO.

**.07** There is complete parity of authority, but not of function, among the presbyters.

**.08** Teaching elders are presbyters with a special gifting and calling in the church to preaching and teaching. Within the vocation of teaching elder are different roles: the role of 'pastor' and the role of 'evangelist'. The role of pastor differs from the role of evangelist in that the pastor's primary role is to care for and promote the health and growth of a fully constituted local congregation, while the

role of the evangelist is to either establish a new congregation or work in evangelistic ministry that is not based in the context of a fully constituted local congregation.

A teaching elder of a congregation has particular responsibility to: faithfully minister the Word, both publicly and privately; conduct public worship (including administration of 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, and provide a Christian example at all times.

An evangelist or church-planter has particular responsibility to: preach the gospel to the lost, seeking to draw people together under the word, and to seek to encourage the nurture of new believers by either establishing a new congregation or grafting them into an established congregation.

**.09** The ministry of the Word and sacraments, and prayer, are the primary functions of the teaching elder. Local churches must recognise this and ensure that other functions do not unduly impact upon this primary role. Teaching elders share with ruling elders the pastoral responsibility for the care and government of the church.

**.10** Ruling elders are presbyters who are not ordained to the special gifting and calling in the church to preaching and teaching, but share with teaching elders the other responsibilities of presbyters in the care and government of the church.

**.11** A local church finding itself without a teaching elder must not be satisfied with its circumstances but must seek God's provision of a teaching elder.

**.12** If a local church is temporarily without a teaching elder, and if no teaching elder is available for a particular occasion, the session and presbytery together may authorize a ruling elder to preach and administer the sacraments on that occasion.

## **2.3 The Diaconate.**

**.01** The qualifications of deacons are outlined in the Scriptures, especially in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6.

**.02** The exact nature of the relationship between the diaconate and the session shall be determined by consultation with the session in the local church in which they serve. The session should encourage the deacons to be creative in their ministries. Deacons are not assistant presbyters nor do they exercise rule in the congregation. Though their work is under the oversight of the presbyters they do not need the immediate involvement of the presbyters in all their work. Some, but not all, meetings of the diaconate require attendance by one or more presbyters. This can be negotiated in each local church. Minutes of meetings of the diaconate must be accessible by the session. The diaconate is to be accountable to the session for the ministries in which it engages.

**.03** Diaconal work, historically, has chiefly been in the field of ministry to the needy and in administration of finances {see, for example, chapter 8 of The Second Book of Discipline (1578)}. Deacons have precedent and scope to develop specific ministries of mercy and administration and stewardship relating to both inside and outside the congregations in which they serve.

**.04** Ministry to the needy need not be understood as fulfilled only by supplying money or goods to people in financial hardship. Physical, social, mental, emotional, and psychological needs of various age groups are concerns for deacons to consider. Deacons should look for untapped resources of skills and willingness, and endeavour to harness them to the ministries of compassion and the building up of the church.

**.05** The functions of the deacon are performed through the diaconate (board of deacons) and not individually except as authorized by the diaconate.

**.06** A deacon not actively engaged in a local church diaconate may be appointed to a special task and be accountable to the appointing body.

**.07** No deacon may be removed from office except as provided for in this BCO.

**.08** It is often expedient that the session of a church should select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the deacons in their work.

## **2.4 Officers' Ordination and Installation Questions.**

**.01** All presbyters, deacons, and licentiates of this denomination shall give affirmative answers to the following questions at ordination, installation, or appointment.

(1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, inerrant in their original writings, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

(2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standard of this church, The Westminster Confession of Faith, as embodying the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, to the maintenance of which this church is bound before God by solemn obligation?

(3) Do you acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Head of this church, and do you accept the presbyterian form of church government as derived from the Holy Scriptures?

(4) Do you promise, by the help of God, such subjection to your brethren as is taught in the Word of God?

(5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the vocation of the (teaching eldership OR the ruling eldership OR the diaconate) from love to God, and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son?

(6) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise toward you on that account?

(7) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be faithful and diligent in your personal and family life, as well as in the public duties of your office, endeavouring to adorn the profession of the Gospel by your life, and walking in exemplary piety before the flock in which you shall serve?

(8) Do you promise, by the help of God, to be conscientious in attending the assemblies of this church and in directing your best attention to the business thereof, doing all in a spirit of faithfulness, brotherly kindness, and charity?

(9) Are you now willing to accept the responsibilities of a (teaching elder OR ruling elder OR deacon OR licentiate) in this congregation as you agreed to do so when you (accepted the call of OR were elected by the members OR (in the case of a licentiate) were appointed to serve here) – and do you promise, by the help of God, to discharge your duties to them in Christian ministry as God shall give you strength?

## **PART TWO**

### **LOCAL, NEW and MISSION CHURCHES**

#### **Chapter 3 : THE LOCAL CHURCH**

##### **3.1 The Local Church – its Nature.**

**.01** A local church of WPC shall consist of a number of professing Christians, together with their children, associated together for the worship and service of God in accordance with the Scriptures and the doctrinal, governmental, and disciplinary standards of this denomination. It shall be self-governing and self-supporting. Being self-supporting does not exclude having a teaching elder or teaching elders willing to engage in remunerative work outside of the congregation, but it is desirable that teaching elders be fully supported by their congregations.

**.02** Constitutions or governing rules of local churches do not have to agree in every particular. It is sufficient if they are consistent with the provisions of this BCO and allow the churches to function without hindrance according to the doctrinal, governmental, and disciplinary standards of this denomination.

**.03** The chief responsibility for the affairs of the local church rests with the session and not with the congregation. The authority of teaching and ruling elders and the assemblies of the church is from Christ as his will is expressed in the Bible, and not from the congregation. Nevertheless those who are communicant members of the church, and 18 or more years of age, choose the teaching and ruling elders.

**.04** All members, whether communicant, non-communicant, or associate, and all adherents, are under the pastoral care of the session, and church rolls should reflect this.

##### **3.2 Communicant Membership.**

**.01** Admission to communicant membership of a local church is by action of the session. It is open to baptised persons who make a credible profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; who are believed to have been regenerated; whose Christian profession is not contradicted by flagrant sin or a denial of fundamental Christian doctrines; who are willing to submit themselves to the government of the local church, and who have presented themselves to its session as a witness thereof.

**.02** The time when young persons come to understand the Gospel cannot be standardised. Their admission to communicant membership is subject to the prudence of the session.

**.03** Those seeking communicant membership are not required to subscribe to The Westminster Confession of Faith, as are office-bearers, but sessions are to ensure that before their reception into communicant membership they are instructed in the doctrinal standards of the denomination according to their level of understanding.

**.04** The receiving session shall determine reception procedures for people transferring from one WPC congregation to another, and for people from other denominations; for those who are denominationally unaffiliated, and for new Christians, who wish to become communicant members. These procedures shall be governed by the stipulations above, in BCO 3.2.01, 3.2.02, and 3.2.03.

**.05** The session, subject in the wider assemblies of the church, shall have the sole power to receive communicant members into the church and to remove names from the communicants' roll.

**.06** The session may remove names from the roll of communicants in the following ways:

- (1) by record of decease;

- (2) by letter of transfer;
- (3) by record of the member's uniting with another church;
- (4) by record of ordination to the ministry
- (5) by disciplinary action:
  - (a) Suspension
  - (b) Excommunication.
- (6) When a member not chargeable with an offence informs the session that he/she does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the church.

The first four of these ways of removal of names may be delegated to the clerk of session without particular action by the session in each individual case. The session or its agent shall not refuse a letter of transfer for a member in good standing to a church not deemed heretical and not in an unsound denomination.

**.07** Protracted absence from the worship services of the church shall be sufficient grounds for erasure of a name from the roll of communicants, except that extended absence of a member from home, if he/she is known to be maintaining a good Christian testimony, shall not constitute such grounds. In no case shall the name of a member, whose whereabouts are known, be erased from the rolls without that member being notified and given an opportunity to appear before the session in person or by counsel.

### **3.3 Non-communicant Membership.**

**.01** Non-communicant members of the church are children of communicant members or children under the care of communicant members who stand to them as foster parents in the place of parents. One or both parents or foster parents of these children shall be under solemn obligation to bring them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord", and to seek to induce them to accept Christ as their personal Saviour.

**.02** These children are not entitled to vote in any meeting of the church until they become communicant members and meet voting age requirements, nor are they to partake of the communion until they are fully able to obey the command of self-examination as given in 1 Corinthians 11:28.

**.03** These children, though non-communicant and non-voting, are nevertheless members of the church and included in the holy covenant which God has made with his people (Genesis 17:7; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Galatians 3:6-14). The covenantal sign of circumcision has been superseded by the covenantal sign of baptism, which is to be applied to believers and their families (Colossians 2:11-12, Acts 2:39).

### **3.4 Associate Membership.**

**.01** Associate members are believers temporarily residing at too great a distance from their permanent homes to worship and serve regularly in the church of which they are communicant members. Such believers, without ceasing to be communicant members of their home churches, may be received as associate members in local churches of this denomination, and as such may enjoy all the privileges of fellowship, worship, and service, under the care of the session of the church of which they become associate members; except that, associate members may not vote in congregational meetings and may not be members of the session or the board of deacons, unless, if they are ordained presbyters, they are appointed by the presbytery to serve temporarily on the session.

**.02** When associate members are received it shall be the duty of the teaching elder or the clerk of session of the local church receiving them to communicate the fact of their reception to the teaching

elder or clerk of session or corresponding officer of the church of which they are communicant members so that those responsible for the shepherding of the Lord's flock may know of the spiritual care and fellowship of their absent members.

**.03** When children of associate members are baptised a record of the baptism should be sent to the teaching elder or some other responsible officer of the church of which they are communicant members.

### **3.5 Adherents.**

**.01** Adherents are those adults, along with their children, who regularly attend a local church of WPC but have not yet become communicant members.

**.02** Adherents may enjoy the privileges and responsibilities of fellowship, worship, communion, pastoral care, prayer, and Christian service, under the directions, guidance, and limitations stipulated by the session, but they are ineligible to vote in church meetings.

**.03** Adherents should be encouraged by the session to become communicant members – and to enjoy the full privileges and responsibilities thereof – as soon as they are able to fulfil the relevant stipulations of BCO 3.2.

**.04** Adherents may choose not to enter into communicant membership for reasons of conscience. Such adherents remain ineligible to vote in church meetings and their privileges and responsibilities of Christian worship and service continue to remain under the guidance of the session.

### **3.6 Voting members.**

**.01** Voting in congregational meetings on issues with legal ramifications is restricted to communicant members who are 18 or more years of age.

**.02** On issues without legal ramifications sessions may devise voting schemes that enable discernment of the views of communicant members who have not reached the age of 18 years, but not in such a manner as to defeat the will of the majority of communicant members of 18 or more years of age.

### **3.7 The Local Church – Its Meetings and Officers**

#### **.01 Meetings**

(1) The congregation of each local church shall determine its fiscal year and shall hold stated meetings for the transaction of church business at least once a year.

(2) The constitution or governing rules shall make reasonable provision for special meetings.

(3) Every business meeting shall be called publicly from the pulpit and/or by printed notice for not less than two consecutive Sundays prior to the date of the proposed meeting, by the authority of the session. The items of business for any meeting, together with the date, time, and venue of the meeting, must be intimated on each occasion the meeting is called.

(4) All communicant members of a local church shall be entitled to vote in business meetings if they are eighteen or more years of age and are in good standing.

(5) Those who are adherents or associate members shall not vote in a business meeting, but the moderator may grant them leave to address the meeting.

(6) One of the teaching elders in the session shall ordinarily preside as moderator of business meetings. BCO 6.2.01(5) governs the situation if for some reason the usual moderator is unable to preside.

(7) The proper forums for discussion of doctrine and polity are the assemblies of the presbyters of the church. Church members with questions about doctrine or polity may refer

them to the session. If dissatisfied with the session's response members may choose to have their concerns forwarded to the presbytery and if necessary to the National assembly

**.02** Officers (See relevant chapters in Part Four, "Procedures").

(1) Each congregation shall have the power to choose its teaching elders and ruling elders and deacons, and to remove them.

(2) No teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon shall be imposed on a congregation against its will as expressed by orderly ballot according to the provisions of its constitution or governing rules.

(3) Men chosen by congregational vote to be teaching elders of a congregation shall be examined and approved by the presbytery before ordination/installation. Candidates for the ruling eldership shall be examined and approved by the session and at least two other presbyters before ordination/installation.

(4) Teaching elders shall be ordained and installed by the presbytery. Ruling elders shall be ordained and installed by the session.

(5) Men chosen by congregational vote to be deacons shall be examined, ordained and installed by the session.

### **3.8 The Local Church – Its Rights.**

**.01** As stated in Chapter 1 WPC is a connectional church. All its local churches are connected as a whole by the system of local and wider governing assemblies, namely, sessions, presbyteries, and the National assembly.

**.02** In the overall pattern:

(1) local churches function under the oversight and care of their sessions, carrying out their own ministries in conformity with the standards of the denomination;

(2) the wider assemblies consider matters of common interest;

(3) decisions of the wider assemblies are to be made by those assemblies and received by lesser assemblies under the guidance of Scriptures such as Ephesians 4:1-3; Acts 15:30-32; 20:28 – having in mind always the goal of willing agreement.

**.03** The voting membership of a local church shall have sole title to its real property and shall be sole owner of any equity it may have in any real estate. No wider assembly of this denomination shall, as such, have any claim whatever upon any real property or any equity in any real estate, or any funds or property of any kind held by or belonging to any local church, or any board, society, committee, Sunday School, class or branch thereof. The wider assemblies of the church may receive monies or properties from a local church only by free and voluntary action of the latter. Nothing in this BCO shall be construed as preventing the collection of lawful debts or loans by agencies of the wider assemblies.

**.04** Local churches need remain in association with this denomination only so long as they themselves so desire. The relationship is voluntary, based only upon mutual love and confidence, and is in no sense to be maintained by the exercise of any kind of force or coercion whatsoever. A local church may withdraw from this denomination at any time, for reasons that seem to it to be sufficient, by orderly ballot at a legal meeting of its congregation. This portion of this BCO, namely Chapter 3.8.03 and 3.8.04, shall be unamendable forever, and shall constitute a solemn covenant between this denomination and its assemblies and the local churches adhering thereto.

**.05** A presbytery may remove a local church from its rolls for reasons that seem sufficient to the presbytery, but only after careful study of the facts and after representatives of the church have appeared before the presbytery and been fully heard. Removal of the church from the presbytery rolls cannot occur until six months have elapsed from the time the presbytery first notified the

church of its intention. Any member or members of the local church may appeal to the national assembly in accordance with the provisions of this BCO and such action prevents the presbytery's removal of the church before the matter is heard and finally decided by the national assembly.

**.06** A local church unable to support or to govern itself (i.e. having less than two elected elders) may petition the presbytery to grant it the status of "mission church". In such a case the presbytery shall appoint a committee to investigate the circumstances of the local church and recommend to the presbytery actions consistent with the provisions of this BCO.

**.07** If a local church ceases to function the presbytery may declare it extinct and remove it from the rolls. The presbytery may request possession of the records. The disposition of any property shall be governed by the local church's constitution. The local church records shall be transferred to the presbytery and kept by it for at least seven years. Membership of the church shall be held in the name of the church and under the care of the presbytery for up to six months from the closure of the church by declaration of extinction. During this period members should be encouraged to seek a new church home at another WPC congregation or another Bible believing church. The presbytery shall try to assist members during this transition period in any way that is deemed appropriate for their encouragement and transition. Members may request of the presbytery clerk a certificate of transfer and the clerk will issue such a certificate on behalf of the church to which they belonged.

**.08** If a local church withdraws from the denomination, is removed, or ceases to function, the delegation of its presbyters to the presbytery shall lapse and their names shall be removed from the membership roll of the presbytery. If a presbyter of the church concerned has been serving in a post to which he was appointed by the presbytery the appointment shall lapse at the time of the exit of the church.

**.09** If a local church withdraws from the denomination, is removed, or ceases to function, the membership of the teaching elder shall be removed from the roll of full members of that church. In a situation where the teaching elder desires to remain with the withdrawing church his name shall be removed from the rolls of the presbytery. If the teaching elder desires to remain in such a vocation in this denomination his name shall remain on the rolls of the presbytery, subject to the provisions of BCO 9.2.

## **Chapter 4 : NEW CHURCHES AND MISSION CHURCHES.**

### **4.1 Reception of Established Churches.**

The reception into WPC of already organised churches existing outside of WPC shall be conducted as follows.

**.01** Any enquiry from an established and self-supporting congregation interested in joining WPC shall be handled by the presbytery of the area in which the church is located.

**.02** The presbytery shall invite the leaders of the enquiring church to attend presbytery meetings as observers.

**.03** When ready to do so the leaders of the enquiring church shall present to the presbytery the written request of the enquiring church to be received into WPC, and accompany it with a written history of the church.



**.04** The presbytery shall satisfy itself that the request has the support of the congregation of the enquiring church to the degree consistent with the constitution or governing rules of the enquiring church.

**.05** The presbytery shall appoint a commission to visit the enquiring church and to help it understand the provisions of this BCO.

**.06** The commission shall examine the leaders of the enquiring church in terms of the ordination vows required of officers of WPC and shall explain the significance of these vows to the leaders and the congregation.

**.07** The leaders and the congregation of the enquiring church shall affirm in writing their acceptance of the provisions of the BCO and the leaders able to do so shall affirm by signature their acceptance of WPC's ordination standards. The commission shall determine whether an ordination service is necessary and it shall receive the church into WPC.

**.08** As soon as convenient after the commission's reception of the church the presbytery shall conduct a formal service of admission, including an ordination service if the commission has so determined.

## **4.2 Mission Churches**

**.01** A mission church is either:

(1) a group of believers not previously organised as a church and without previous organised contact with WPC but desirous of being organised as a local church of WPC;

OR,

(2) a group of believers gathered by a WPC church-planting ministry and desiring to be organised as a local church of WPC;

OR,

(3) a local church outside WPC, or a group of believers, that is organised to a degree but not self-supporting,

OR,

(4) a WPC local church that has found itself no longer able to govern or support itself and upon application has been granted mission church status by the presbytery.

**.02** Any enquiry or other approach from (1), (3), or (4), above, shall be handled by the presbytery of the area, and the entity concerned must agree to be directed by the officers appointed by the presbytery, and must agree to adhere to the policies they prescribe. In each case the desired aim shall be to have the entity reach full local church status, and the policy of the presbytery must include all steps necessary, consistent with WPC's standards of doctrine, government and discipline, for the attainment of that aim.

In relation to (1), (3), or (4), only the presbytery shall have the power to dissolve a mission church, or break the connection with WPC, but in the case of (4), where presumably a constitution exists, any provision of that constitution governing dissolution affects the process of dissolution by the presbytery.

**.03** The church-planting ministry in (2) above may be initiated and carried on by either a session or a presbytery, through a committee, a church-planter, an evangelist, or some other agency.

**.04** In each case a temporary session appointed by the overseeing session or presbytery shall carry out the duties normally carried out by a session. Any ruling elders elected by the developing congregation must satisfy the requirements for ordination to the ruling eldership set out in Chapter 10 of this BCO, and while the temporary session is still functioning the newly elected ruling elders shall form part of that session and not work independently of it.

**.05** Granting a work the status of mission church or the status of fully constituted church shall be the responsibility of the presbytery and shall only take place when, by means of an objective assessment, the aim of each of three stages of progress is deemed by the presbytery to have been achieved. These three stages are:

**Stage 1. Church Planting work.**

The aim of this stage is to gather a worshipping and serving group of believers, representing at least ten households, who understand WPC distinctives, and who are committed to the establishment of a local WPC congregation.

**Stage 2. Westminster Presbyterian Mission Church.**

The aim of this stage is to bring the mission church to its final level of development and status as a fully constituted local WPC congregation with its own membership, church constitution, ruling eldership, and financial provisions adequate for supporting its own teaching elder (see BCO 3.1.01).

**Stage 3. Fully Constituted Westminster Presbyterian Local Church.**

**.06** The presbytery shall also be responsible to initiate the close of a work that, after a reasonable period of time and effort, evidences little or no spiritual growth and progress toward becoming a fully constituted church.

**.07** The purpose of objective assessments is to ensure that observable spiritual progress is being made in the work and that the stated aims of each stage have been reached. These objective assessments are to be seen as benchmarks in the development of the church. Each one assists the deliberate decision to proceed and persist, or not, in the church planting effort.

**.08** The assessment, to be properly objective, must be conducted by a committee of which none of the members are to be persons directly involved in the work being assessed.

**.09** Frequency of assessments may be determined by the presbytery and/or those engaged in the work. In any case, the presbytery shall request the assessment of a church planting work twelve months after its commencement, and of a mission church after two years in that status. It is most desirable that members of the assessment committee also make informal visits to the developing church from time to time. Assessment must always precede, and validate, any change in status.

**.10** Information for the making of assessments should be derived through church planting team progress reports, attendance at church meetings, and discussions with adherents and members of the new church, preferably by way of pastoral visits to their homes.

**.11** Observable marks of spiritual progress to be noted are to include:

(1) Growth in individual and corporate spiritual maturity, evidenced in the people's united participation in church activities, the practice of hospitality, deeds of love and Christian service, and commitment to WPC and its distinctives;

(2) Numerical growth, evidenced in converts resulting from evangelism, and the adding of families and individuals to the church.

**.12** A church-planting work that has reached a stage consistent with being a local church of WPC should be encouraged by the overseeing session or presbytery to petition the presbytery to be granted the status of fully constituted local church. If it does so, and if the presbytery after careful examination grants the petition, the presbytery shall conduct a formal service of admission as soon as convenient.

## PART 3

# THE GOVERNING ASSEMBLIES

## Chapter 5 : AN OVERVIEW

### 5.1 The Session

**.01** The most visible expression of Christ's Church is the individual congregation. Government of the congregation by the session, the local assembly of presbyters, is the most direct and immediate aspect of church government.

**.02** Each congregation is governed by its approved officers. In Scripture and church history these officers have been given various titles, such as elder, presbyter, bishop, overseer, shepherd, minister, or pastor.

**.03** Individual congregations shall be free to use their own terminology. All the above may be described as elders. For purposes of convenience of identification, however, the following terminology applies in this BCO:

(1) Ruling elder is the term used for a presbyter who is not ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

(2) Teaching elder is the term used for a presbyter who is ordained to the ministry of the Word and sacraments;

(3) Presbyter is the term used for either of the above when no distinction needs to be made.

### 5.2 The Presbytery.

A presbytery of this denomination is a regional assembly of presbyters whose chief responsibilities include oversight of the churches and ministries in a region. It includes:

(1) teaching elders of local churches, and teaching elders approved by the presbytery as genuinely engaged in other works of the ministry; and

(2) all presbyters delegated by sessions or appointed by the presbytery to positions in the presbytery or its churches, or its mission works or cooperative ministry efforts.

### 5.3. The National assembly.

**.01** The National assembly consists of presbyters appointed as commissioners by the presbyteries in consultation with their sessions and the clerk of the National assembly.

**.02** While it is desirable that as many presbyters as possible attend the National assembly as commissioners it is also imperative that the National assembly shall always be a genuinely deliberative body, which would be impossible if it were too large.

**.03** As far as possible all teaching elders, and at least one ruling elder from each congregation, should attend as commissioners.

**.04** No presbyter shall attend the national assembly as a commissioner except by appointment by his presbytery.

### 5.4 The Relationships of the Assemblies of Presbyters.

**.01** Chapter 1 describes the governing principle of the denomination as the practice of cooperation, with determination to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3). This principle applies to

life in the local churches, in the local and wider governing assemblies of presbyters, and in the relationships between the governing assemblies.

**.02** Neither an hierarchical chain of command nor deliberately neglectful disregard of the resolutions of the wider assemblies shall characterize the life of this denomination.

**.03** The pattern of the relationship between the local and wider assemblies may be seen in the following summary of their roles:

**(1) The Local Assembly (the Session).**

Spiritual care of the congregation; admission to membership and sacraments; discipline; oversight of worship, all meetings, all committees, literature work, education, evangelism, church-planting, finances, property, ministry to families and individuals.

**(2) The Regional Assembly (the Presbytery).**

Spiritual fellowship of churches and presbyters in the presbytery; examination of candidates for the presbyterate; ordination and installation of teaching elders; hearing appeals from sessions and congregations; receiving communications properly transmitted by members through their sessions; oversight of matters of mutual concern, such as ministerial training, wider diaconal work, missionary endeavour, theological education, receiving and dismissing churches, church-planting; providing sessions with advice on questions raised, rulings on matters of doctrine and discipline, common financial guidelines, parameters for biblical worship; shepherding the church of God, as enjoined upon the presbytery of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38), and in general caring for the spiritual welfare of the churches in the presbytery, always respecting the liberties of individual congregations and persons guaranteed in this BCO.

**(3) The National assembly.**

The National assembly is the bond of union and fellowship among the presbyteries and shall promote peace and confidence among the presbyteries and their constituent churches; it hears appeals and communications properly transmitted by members through their sessions and presbyteries; it advises concerning, or resolves, all matters of doctrine or practice properly brought before it; it deals with matters common to the presbyteries, such as training for the ministry, missions, publications, addresses to the civil government and other authorities; it establishes the boundaries of presbyteries, forms new presbyteries, and may dissolve a presbytery under specified conditions. The National assembly is the sole agency for determining formal relations with other churches and with parachurch organizations.

## **5.5 Communication.**

**.01** For any communication to be seriously considered as the business of any assembly of this denomination it must be conveyed through orderly channels and with due regard to our presbyterian system of graded assemblies, of which the national assembly is the widest.

**.02** Communicant members may confer directly with their individual ruling elders and their teaching elders or with their sessions in any and all matters of Christian doctrine or practice about which they are concerned. Communicant members, or groups of members, convey all of their overtures, petitions, complaints, appeals, and other communications to the presbytery through the sessions of their local churches. All communications from or through sessions of local churches, or from individual presbyters or groups of presbyters, addressed to the National assembly, shall be conveyed through their presbyteries. The sessions communicate directly with their presbyteries and the presbyteries with the National assembly.

**.03** Sessions and presbyteries are obliged to transmit all communications properly addressed through them to the next wider assembly, but they have power to attach to such communications, when transmitted, their own recommendations, comments, or records of relevant action.

**.04** The wider assemblies shall not be obliged to take cognisance of communications brought before them through other than regular channels, unless it be alleged that the assembly through which the communication should properly have been conveyed has been delinquent in the transmission thereof.

**.05** The national assembly shall be the sole agency in this denomination for communication and transaction of business with other denominations or branches of the church, and with interdenominational agencies in which other branches of the visible church function as denominations. Local churches shall not be prevented from participation in such activities as local Bible conferences, evangelistic programmes, or interdenominational associations of local churches free from apostasy; but for local churches of this denomination to associate themselves so as to assume, singly or together, any of the functions peculiar to a denomination or branch of the church among other denominations or branches, shall be regarded as divisive and censurable.

## **Chapter 6 : THE SESSION: ITS COMPOSITION, RESPONSIBILITIES, and AUTHORITY**

### **6.1 Composition**

**.01** Normally several presbyters including at least one teaching elder exercise government in the congregation. They are equal in authority, though their functions may differ. Together they constitute the session, the local assembly of presbyters.

**.02** Ruling elders and teaching elders shall be appointed by the majority of communicant members according to the conditions specified in the constitution or governing rules of the local church and in conformity with the requirements of this BCO.

**.03** Ruling elders acceptable to the congregation may be appointed temporarily from other congregations by the presbytery when the session lacks adequate numbers.

**.04** When a church is without a teaching elder the moderator of the session may be either a teaching elder appointed for that purpose by the presbytery, with consent of the session; or, with the consent of the presbytery, a teaching elder invited by the session to preside on a particular occasion, or one of its own members elected to preside. In judicial cases the moderator shall be a teaching elder of the presbytery to which the church belongs.

**.05** Since the presbytery is the assembly that installs teaching elders and in which the essential membership of teaching elders is located, it is the body that deals with matters concerning teaching elders. No action shall be taken by a local church to remove a teaching elder from office, or to terminate his financial support, before a written submission is made to the presbytery explaining the reasons why the teaching elder should be removed from office, and before the presbytery (or a committee thereof) has duly consulted with the local church. At all times in this process there must be full compliance with .07 (below). Given that the presbytery cannot impose an unwanted teaching elder on a congregation the outcome of such consultation may well be that the presbytery shall be obliged to remove the teaching elder from his position. It is open, however, for the presbytery, if it so chooses, to record in its minutes that in its opinion the reasons given by the congregation for removing the teaching elder were unsatisfactory and to investigate whether the congregation should be removed from the denomination.

**.06** Since the session is the assembly that installs ruling elders and deacons and since the essential membership of these officers is in the local church, the session is the body that most properly has priority in dealing with matters concerning them. No action shall be taken by a local church to remove a ruling elder or deacon from office or to terminate any financial support he might have been receiving unless there has been the fullest possible consultation with the session. Given that an

unwanted ruling elder or deacon cannot be imposed by any assembly on a local church the outcome of such consultation may well be that the session shall be obliged to remove the ruling elder or deacon from his position. It is open, however, for the session, if it so chooses, to record in its minutes that in its opinion the reasons given by the congregation for removing the ruling elder were unsatisfactory.

**.07** Presbyteries and sessions can take note only of honourable expressions of dissatisfaction with a teaching elder or a ruling elder or a deacon. Honourable expressions include personal approach to the man concerned, consultation with other officers, a written communication to the session, or other ways consistent with Scripture and the provisions of this BCO. It is essential that officers be protected from damaging gossip.

**.08** In all cases of dealing with an officer the vows made by him and by the congregation, at his installation, and also his history of service, shall be given due weight.

**.09** If any officer has openly acted improperly the appropriate assembly of presbyters must deal with him as church discipline requires.

## **6.2 Responsibilities.**

### **.01 Meetings**

- (1) The session shall meet at least monthly to attend to pastoral and business matters.
- (2) Any member of the session may request, in a case of urgency, a special meeting thereof.
- (3) The presbytery may request a special meeting of the session.
- (4) Unless the full session shall rule otherwise the moderator and two ruling elders, or one ruling elder if there be less than four ruling elders on the session, shall constitute a quorum.
- (5) The teaching elder who is normally the moderator of session shall preside at session meetings. However, at the request of its teaching elder, and with the concurrence of the presbytery, a session may appoint one of its ruling elders as the moderator of its session and congregational meetings. When its moderator is unable to attend a meeting the session may elect one of its other members to preside on that occasion. Should prudential reasons at any time make it advisable for another teaching elder of the presbytery to preside, the moderator, with the concurrence of the session, shall ensure that this is done.
- (6) The session shall appoint the ruling elders who are to be members of the presbytery and commissioners at the meetings of the national assembly.

### **.02 Records**

- (1) The session shall elect as its clerk one of its own presbyters as competent as possible in the keeping of records.
- (2) The session shall keep an accurate and clear record of its meetings and of congregational statistics. The statistics shall include:
  - names of communicant members;
  - names and dates of birth of non-communicant members;
  - names of associate members and their home churches;
  - names of adherents.
  - details of any removals from rolls.
- (3) Records and rolls shall be open to the presbytery or its appointed representatives if required.

### **.03 Pastoral responsibilities.**

Session roles set out in BCO 5.4.03(1) and those deducible from the Vision Statement shall be fulfilled through ministries and activities including the following:

- (1) firm and persevering development of the understanding in the congregation that all presbyters – teaching elders and ruling elders alike – are called to pastoral ministry and to responsibility for the spiritual life, worship, and Gospel ministry of the congregation;
- (2) promoting the best measures for the edification of the congregation;
- (3) oversight of the ministry of the Word and sacraments – especially by the teaching elder/elders;
- (4) encouragement of prayer;
- (5) promotion of evangelism and church planting;
- (6) Christian education for all ages;
- (7) the ministry of music;
- (8) oversight of all meetings, committees, and organisations;
- (9) open and accountable government;
- (10) family ministry;
- (11) spiritual growth of individuals
- (12) in consultation with the presbytery, arrangement of regular preaching in the absence of a teaching elder;
- (13) promotion of wholesome Christian fellowship;
- (14) general pastoral care that honours God and is compassionate to sinners;
- (15) application of the principle of male headship in church and family;
- (16) encouragement of a view of Christian life and service that involves every believer and all of life;
- (17) functioning as the sole authority for receiving people into membership and for removing people from membership;
- (18) regular review (preferably quarterly) of the Vision Statement, and of resolutions of the presbytery and the National assembly;
- (19) ongoing, proactive stance and actions aimed at developing the benefits of being part of a connectional church;
- (20) inculcating joyful awareness of our distinctives;
- (21) inculcating openness, warmth and understanding towards other churches.

### **6.3 Authority**

**.01** Since the session is the assembly of presbyters having oversight and care of the local church all members of the congregation, including ruling elders and deacons, must abide by its decisions.

**.02** Any member of the congregation who disapproves of or feels aggrieved by a decision of the session has the right to petition the session, and, if still dissatisfied, to appeal to the presbytery and, if necessary, to the national assembly. In such cases, petitions, appeals, etc., must pass in orderly fashion from the session to the wider assemblies.

**.03** The session does not have jurisdiction over a session member who is a teaching elder, because his essential membership is in the presbytery. The session, however, may petition the presbytery

about a teaching elder should it become concerned about his ministry or his life, provided that it has first endeavoured to work together with him to resolve the issues causing concern.

**.04** The session shall conduct all elections to the offices of teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon. It must decline any person nominated for election whom it regards as unsuited for the office.

**.05** The Session, in exercising its power of discipline, may call before it members of the congregation and, if necessary, admonish, rebuke, suspend, dismiss from office (in the case of an officer) or excommunicate, those found to deserve censure. (More details of Church Discipline are located in Chapter 12.)

## **Chapter 7 : THE PRESBYTERY: ITS COMPOSITION, RESPONSIBILITIES, and AUTHORITY.**

### **7.1 Composition**

**.01** The membership of a presbytery of this denomination consists of both teaching elders and ruling elders. It is a regional assembly of presbyters. (See BCO 5.2.01.)

**.02** The essential membership of teaching elders is in the presbytery, to which they are accountable in all matters concerning their calling; but teaching elders may also be counted as members of the local churches in which they serve and their names be shown on the roll of communicant members.

**.03** The essential membership of ruling elders is in the local church, but ruling elders delegated or appointed to the presbytery are also to be counted as members thereof and their names shall appear on the membership roll of the presbytery.

**.04** Presbytery may also include in its membership teaching elders who retain concurrent membership in a fraternally-connected presbytery (as described in 9.2.10 and 9.5.01).

### **7.2 Responsibilities - organisational**

**.01** Sessions may delegate all their ruling elders to be members of the presbytery and they may all vote in presbytery meetings. Before any vote is taken, however, any two presbyters may call for a restricted vote. When this occurs the presbytery shall accede to the call, allowing each session two votes (normally one by the teaching elder and one by a ruling elder) on the motion before the presbytery and allowing two votes to the group of presbyters not serving in local WPC churches.

**.02** The presbytery shall appoint a moderator, a clerk, and a treasurer: the moderator to be elected annually to serve for a term of one year, and the clerk and treasurer to be elected to serve for a term of three years. It is open to the presbytery to decide whether any of these officers should serve more than one term consecutively. Assistants to these officers may be elected if desired.

**.03** The presbytery shall consider the advisability of accepting nominations for the positions of officers well in advance of the stated meeting at which officers are to be appointed. New officers shall enter upon their offices at the meeting following that of their election.

**.04** In the absence of the moderator or clerk at any meeting the presbytery shall appoint a moderator or clerk for that meeting, using assistants if they have been elected.

**.05** There shall be a minimum of four stated meetings during each calendar year and the dates and venues of all stated meetings shall be made known during the previous calendar year.

**.06** Special meetings of the presbytery shall be called by the moderator and clerk, or by four presbyters of whom at least two must be teaching elders from different churches, and notified to every moderator and clerk of session at least ten days in advance. The names of those calling the



meeting; the time and place of the meeting, and the particular business of the meeting, shall be clearly stated.

**.07** The quorum for a meeting of the presbytery shall be at least four members eligible to vote in a restricted vote, at least two of whom shall be ruling elders and two teaching elders.

**.08** The boundaries of presbyteries and the creation of new presbyteries shall be determined from within and between presbyteries and recommended to the National assembly for ratification.

**.09** Each presbytery shall keep accurate and clear records of all its proceedings in meetings; of its teaching elders, ruling elders, deacons, ministerial candidates under care, licentiates, ordinations, and of actions by which additions to or removals from its rolls are made.

**.10** Presbytery rolls and records shall be available to authorized representatives of the National assembly for examination should the need arise.

**.11** Teaching elders and ruling elders in good standing in other presbyteries of this denomination or other denominations of like faith; and teaching elders and ruling elders of a presbytery who are honourably retired yet continue to fulfil recognised ministry in the life of the church, may be invited to sit with the presbytery, to deliberate and advise, but not to moderate, propose or second motions, or vote. Other Christian friends, especially members of WPC congregations, may be welcomed as visiting brethren and may be given the floor for a specific purpose by special action of the presbytery, but otherwise may not deliberate or advise and may not moderate, propose or second motions, or vote.

**.12** The presbytery may appoint a commission for such purposes as it may determine.

**.13** A commission consists of a minimum of three of its members, including at least one teaching elder. It appoints its own convener. Its task is to deal with matters referred to it by the presbytery and it is invested with the powers of the presbytery itself so far as those matters are concerned.

**.14** The presbytery may appoint a committee for such purposes as it may determine. Preferably a committee should not number more than five or less than three. At least one of its members should be a teaching elder and at least one a ruling elder.

**.15** Special committees are appointed for special business and dissolved when that business is completed.

**.16** A small number of standing committees shall be established by the presbytery to handle such matters as missions, church planting, Christian education, finance, candidates. One of the standing committees shall be the moderator's committee, consisting of the moderator, the immediate past moderator, the clerk, and the treasurer. It shall have a general administrative function as well as carrying out tasks assigned to it by the presbytery and shall provide guidance for the moderator in situations requiring immediate attention. A record of its meetings and actions must be presented to each stated meeting of the presbytery.

**.17** The presbytery is responsible for its own finances and debts.

**.18** A presbytery shall consider incorporating if incorporation would be legally advantageous.

### **7.3 Responsibilities - pastoral**

**.01** Presbytery roles set out in BCO 5.4.03(2) and those deducible from the Vision Statement shall be fulfilled through ministries and activities including those that are shown below.

**.02** The primary duty of the presbytery shall be to "care for the church of God", as Paul instructed the presbytery of Ephesus (Acts 20:28), and it shall have authority to do whatever is necessary for the churches and persons under its oversight, always respecting the liberties guaranteed to individual congregations and persons in this BCO.

**.03** General summary of pastoral duties

- (1) Guard matters of doctrine, especially those affecting the Westminster Confession of Faith.
- (2) Examine candidates for the teaching eldership
- (3) License, ordain, and install teaching elders.
- (4) Receive and mediate appeals.
- (5) Control finance in matters of common concern.
- (6) Promote links and fellowship between the churches under its care.
- (7) Provide a mechanism for stronger congregations to aid weaker congregations, especially for the financial support of teaching elders.
- (8) Promote and oversee matters of common concern, such as:
  - training of teaching elders and ruling elders
  - devising ways in which approved men can be prepared for the role of "accredited preachers" under the authority of the presbytery church planting undertaken collectively in Australia or overseas
  - conferences
  - publications
  - public comment on moral and social matters
  - informal relations with other churches and other bodies
  - such other matters as may be agreed.
- (9) Discuss matters of common spiritual concern to the churches and advise sessions on any matters raised by them.
- (10) Consider the biblical parameters of worship for the congregations, recognizing diversity that is consistent with our confessional standards.
- (11) Ensure no teaching elder is imposed against the wishes of the congregation.
- (12) Take due care not to multiply bureaucratic structures that are either not strictly necessary or not under full presbytery control.
- (13) Oversee the orderly dissolution of the relationship of a congregation and the presbytery where there is a complete breakdown of relationship.

## **7.4 Authority**

- .01** As part of its work of shepherding, the presbytery shall have authority to respond pastorally in word and deed to situations of need within local churches adhering to it, and shall offer pastoral care and support in consultation with the sessions of the churches. Such offers of pastoral care and support shall include willingness to provide for regular ministry of the Word and sacraments.
- .02** Though the presbytery solely has the power to install and remove teaching elders it shall neither install a teaching elder against a majority vote of the congregation as expressed by orderly ballot in a validly called meeting nor refuse to dissolve a pastoral relationship if requested to do so by a majority vote of the congregation as expressed by orderly ballot in a validly called meeting.
- .03** BCO Chapters 6.1.05 and 11 MUST be consulted for further details about installation of a teaching elder, and removal of a teaching elder by dissolution of the pastoral tie.
- .04** The presbytery shall have the power to receive new churches in accordance with the provisions set out in BCO 4.

**.05** The presbytery shall have the power to remove churches from its roll, and to unite two or more churches, but neither removal nor union shall be carried out without full consultation with the sessions and congregations concerned and the concurrence of each of the congregations in a valid majority vote, as defined by the local churches' constitutions or governing rules. When the union of two churches is contemplated and only one of the congregations approves the union; or when a church does not wish to be removed from the roll, the presbytery shall consider other options consistent with the provisions of this BCO. It shall always be the aim of all concerned to maintain the unity of the Spirit and to further the health of churches and the preaching of the Gospel.

**.06** The presbytery shall not defer removing a church from its roll if that church, in the opinion of the presbytery, declines to conform to the doctrinal standards of this denomination. A church facing removal for such reasons may request stay of action until its case has been heard by the National assembly.

**.07** The presbytery shall have authority to examine the rolls and records of the local church sessions should the need arise.

**.08** The presbytery has original jurisdiction over the official ecclesiastical care, licensing, and ordination of candidates for the teaching eldership. It examines candidates for the teaching eldership ordains and installs teaching elders, examines terms of calls.

**.09** The presbytery shall have authority to hear and resolve all questions of doctrine and procedure, and all administrative and judicial matters, brought before it by its members, by sessions of local churches, and by communications from church members through sessions; and to condemn opinions or practices that are injurious to the spiritual life of WPC; and to declare the great doctrines and principles of the Scriptures and our standards.

**.10** The presbytery is the assembly of original jurisdiction over the teaching elders who are among its members; and it is the next wider assembly beyond the church session in jurisdiction over all communicant members who are not teaching elders.

## **Chapter 8 : THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: ITS COMPOSITION, RESPONSIBILITIES, and AUTHORITY.**

### **8.1 Composition.**

**.01** The National assembly shall be composed of teaching elders and ruling elders appointed by their presbyteries as commissioners.

**.02** Clerks of presbyteries shall certify the names of commissioners to the clerk of the National assembly.

**.03** Only presbyters appointed as commissioners shall vote in National assembly meetings.

### **8.2 Responsibilities - organisational**

**.01** The regular officers of the National assembly shall include a moderator who shall serve as such from the close of the National assembly by which he is appointed to the end of the next regular National assembly. The National assembly shall also elect a vice-moderator to serve for the same term. A special meeting of the National assembly may, if necessary, elect its own moderator, who shall serve for that special meeting only.

**.02** Other officers shall include a clerk and a treasurer, both of whom shall serve, preferably, for a term of three years. It is desirable that a competent clerk and a competent treasurer each be elected to succeed himself for as many terms as possible. Assistants to these officers may be elected if desired.

- .03** A National assembly meeting may extend over several days and may include any number of sittings.
- .04** Stated meetings of the National assembly shall occur at least once every two years, or more frequently if the National assembly so decides. Each meeting shall be at a time and place designated by the previous regular meeting or at least three months in advance by a duly authorized committee.
- .05** At the first sitting of a regular meeting of the National assembly the moderator appointed at the close of the previous regular meeting shall conduct or arrange for a worship service in which the Word is preached and the Lord's Supper celebrated.
- .06** Special meetings of the National assembly shall be called at least thirty days in advance by the moderator or clerk at the written request of presbyters not all from the same presbytery and numbering at least one third of the number of commissioners at the previous regular National assembly meeting. The call shall state clearly the time, place, and business of the meeting.
- .07** No meeting of the National assembly shall bind the actions of any subsequent meeting except in amendments to the Doctrinal Standard and the BCO (carried out as prescribed in Chapter 13) or in matters of liabilities and obligations legally and properly incurred.
- .08** Incorporation should be effected if legally advantageous.
- .09** One-third of those eligible and appointed from each presbytery, rounded up to the next whole number, to be members of the national assembly, met at the time and place designated for a meeting of the national assembly, shall constitute a quorum.

### **8.3 Responsibilities – pastoral**

National assembly roles set out in BCO 5.4.03(3) and those deducible from the Vision Statement shall be fulfilled through ministries and activities including those that are shown below.

- .01** Function as the bond of union and fellowship among the presbyteries.
- .02** Promote peace and confidence among the presbyteries and the churches adhering to them.
- .03** Hear all judicial and administrative matters properly brought before it and decide the same in accordance with the Scriptures and the BCO.
- .04** The National assembly shall have powers of general review of the records and proceedings of any presbytery should such review be necessary.
- .05** The National assembly shall take cognisance, through all honourable channels of knowledge and evidence, of situations within the presbyteries that require correction, and shall cause whatever administrative and judicial cases that may be necessary for correction to be initiated and resolved in the proper assemblies.
- .06** The National assembly shall advise concerning, and resolve if necessary, all questions of doctrine or practice properly brought before it.
- .07** The National assembly shall promote and sustain the scriptural functions of the church wherever it is able to do so.
- .08** The National assembly shall deal with matters common to the presbyteries.

### **8.4 Authority**

- .01** When necessary, in consultation with the presbyteries the National assembly shall determine the boundaries of presbyteries, and form new presbyteries.
- .02** The National assembly shall have power to dissolve a presbytery if it appears that the presbytery is unable to function or if it departs from the doctrine or procedure of this denomination

and refuses to repent after extensive fraternal counselling. Notice of the intended dissolution must be sent to the clerk of the presbytery two calendar months prior to the regular meeting of the National assembly in which the proposed act of dissolution is to occur. Any request from the presbytery to delay the dissolution shall be granted, but unless the presbytery declares, no later than three months after the regular National assembly meeting, its repentance and willingness to abide by the standards of the denomination, or at least its genuine desire to receive further help to amend its ways so that it may be able to remain in the denomination, the clerk of the National assembly shall notify the clerk of the presbytery that the dissolution has become effective.

**.03** Dissolution of a presbytery does not dissolve any local churches nor depose presbyters. If a presbytery is dissolved the National assembly shall inform sessions how they may remain in this denomination if they so desire. They may be assisted to form a new presbytery or assigned to existing presbyteries.

**.04** The National assembly may exercise any of its powers by its officers or by its commissions, committees, or boards, but it shall not delegate any of its powers beyond its own recall.

**.05** The National assembly shall have no power to coerce or in any way compel the local churches or the people to support its own or other enterprises or agencies, although it may commend its own and other enterprises to the churches and the people for their support.

## **PART 4**

### **PROCEDURES**

#### **Chapter 9 : STEPS TO THE OFFICES OF PRESBYTER AND DEACON**

##### **9.1 Steps to Ordination to the Vocation of Teaching Elder in the Office of the Presbyterate.**

**.01** Final authority for the preparation of men for ordination to the vocation of teaching elder is vested in the presbytery. It may recommend any theological schools or other training schemes or remediation it considers appropriate but the successful completion of courses of study shall not be deemed equivalent to approval, by the presbytery, for ordination.

**.02** Though presbyteries may differ in the details of procedures the following provisions must be observed.

Three stages of progress.

##### (1) Being taken under care.

1. The presbytery has to be satisfied as fully as is humanly possible that God has called the candidate to be a teaching elder and that the candidate's motives for seeking ordination in WPC are valid. In reaching its decision the presbytery shall take into account the man's church membership, personal testimony, formal education, doctrinal position, and comments by mature Christians about his character, his aptitude for the teaching eldership, and his experience in Christian work.
2. The presbytery must also establish strategies to ensure -
  - 2.1 that an accepted candidate is officially enrolled as under its care;
  - 2.2 that adequate pastoral oversight and counsel is provided for him for his general encouragement and in respect of theological and other education, and opportunities for supervised Christian service;
  - 2.3 that he is thoroughly instructed in the doctrinal standards of this denomination;
  - 2.4 that he knows the contents of this Book of Church Order and the Constitution of WPC.
  - 2.5 that there are clearly understood guidelines to which he must conform if his candidature is not to be terminated.
3. If a candidate under care wishes to transfer to another presbytery of WPC a full statement of his status must be sent to that presbytery by the presbytery in which he is enrolled and under whose care he must remain until transfer of enrolment is completed.

##### (2) Licensure

1. A candidate for licensure shall have finished at least two years of his theological training, or the equivalent thereof.
2. His conduct and his progress in studies shall have satisfied the presbytery.
3. The presbytery shall require the candidate for licensure to prepare these papers:
  - 3.1 a sermon, which the presbytery may ask to be preached in its presence;
  - 3.2 an essay on a theological theme;

3.3 an exegesis of an assigned passage of Scripture, normally from the Hebrew or Greek;

3.4 a history of Westminster Presbyterian Church.

4. The candidate shall be examined by the presbytery in English Bible; the inspiration of the Scriptures; systematic theology; church history; Hebrew; Greek.

5. The candidate shall read a brief written statement of his beliefs before the presbytery and the clerk shall file it.

6. Though in certain cases (such as that of an evangelist) the presbytery at its discretion may make allowances that lessen the demands of examinations in Hebrew and Greek it is desirable that candidates have a working knowledge of these languages, or at least an ability to use exegetical helps which employ the use of original languages.

7. If the presbytery is satisfied with the examination it shall proceed to license the candidate. The moderator shall pray for him and require him to answer questions 1 – 7 of the Ordination Questions in BCO 2.4. Upon receiving the candidate's satisfactory answers the moderator shall declare the candidate licensed to preach the Gospel for a period of two years and shall ask for God's blessing upon him. The clerk shall record the details of the licensure and provide a statement of it to the licentiate.

8. If the licentiate is not ordained within the stated period of two years the presbytery may extend the licensure by one year at a time, but if it becomes evident that the services of the licentiate are not edifying the church or winning the lost the licensure shall not be extended indefinitely.

9. A presbytery shall make appropriate arrangements for a candidate for licensure who moves to another presbytery during the period of his examination.

10. A licentiate who moves to another presbytery shall present to its clerk a copy of the record of his licensure and a recommendation from the presbytery he leaves.

### (3) Ordination

1. A candidate for ordination shall normally be a licentiate who has completed an acceptable theological course of at least three years duration, or its equivalent, and an acceptable internship of not less than six months with an experienced teaching elder. Exceptions to these requirements must be approved by at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the presbyters at a meeting of the presbytery dealing with the application for ordination, and the reasons for the exception must be recorded in the minutes. Exceptions to the requirements will be valid only in the presbytery where the exceptions are approved. If the candidate transfers to another presbytery and seeks ordination there, any exceptions to the requirements must be dealt with there in the same manner as in the presbytery to which the candidate first made application for ordination.

2. The examination for ordination shall include examinations in systematic theology, church, sacraments; apologetics; the Book of Church Order, the history and constitution of the denomination, and, at the discretion of the presbytery, any of the subjects covered in the examination for licensure. The extent and depth of the candidate's theological knowledge should be appropriate to the service to which he is called.

3. The presbytery shall make sure that the candidate, if ordained, shall begin his service in the vocation of teaching elder with due appreciation of the importance of the system of doctrine taught in Scripture and set forth in The Westminster Confession of Faith.

4. If the examination is sustained and the presbytery authorises the ordination of the candidate, the time, date, and circumstances of the ordination shall be arranged at the conclusion of the examination.

5. If a successful candidate is expected to serve as a teaching elder in a particular church it is preferable that his ordination be postponed until the church's call to him has been processed, and that he be ordained and installed in the one service.

6. If a successful candidate has a call to service in a field other than that of teaching elder in a particular church the presbytery shall examine the call as to the need and appropriateness of ordination for the field of service specified. If the presbytery verifies the need and appropriateness of the ordination it shall clearly identify, and record in its minutes, the details of the call. It shall ordain the candidate in an ordination service and, if any form of installation is required, carry out such installation. A teaching elder shall not labour as such outside the bounds of his presbytery without its full concurrence.

7. An ordination service shall include:

an appropriate sermon or address;

explanation of the nature and importance of ordination to the vocation of teaching elder;

affirmative answers by the candidate to the questions in BCO 2.4;

the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, with the ordination prayer;

the charge to the newly ordained teaching elder.

And if the newly ordained teaching elder is to be installed as a teaching elder in a particular church in the same service the following shall be included:

affirmative replies by the congregation to the questions in BCO 11.12;

declaration of installation;

a charge to the congregation;

welcome by members of the presbytery;

welcome by the congregation.

8. Presbyteries should refrain from ordaining men when no clear call exists and when there is no foreseeable field of service for the candidate in the short term.

## **9.2 Status of Teaching Elder**

**.01** When a man is ordained to the vocation of teaching elder he becomes a member of the presbytery in whose bounds he resides and the clerk shall enrol him as such. If he is called to a particular church his name may also be added to the church's roll of communicant members but from the point of view of jurisdiction he is a member of the presbytery.

**.02** If a teaching elder desires to leave his vocation he shall notify the presbytery and the presbytery shall allow a year for appropriate counselling. If after a year the teaching elder still desires to leave his vocation the presbytery shall record the facts of the case in its minutes and erase his name from the roll of teaching elders.

**.03** A teaching elder may properly engage, if necessary, in remunerative employment outside of church structures. If, however, he should pursue such employment for five years (or a period decided by his presbytery), and fail, for reasons other than age or disability, to exercise the functions of the teaching eldership, the presbytery shall determine, after counselling, whether he should remain in the teaching eldership, and deal with him accordingly.

**.04** The presbytery has the right to transfer the name of a teaching elder from its roll of members to its non-voting associate members' roll if, for more than one year, he is not genuinely engaged in the work of the ministry. Removal of a teaching elder's name from all the rolls of a presbytery shall occur if he transfers to another presbytery, or moves to the oversight of another ecclesiastical body,



or if he voluntarily demits the teaching eldership, or declares himself independent of the presbytery, or if he is deposed by judicial process according to chapter 12 of this Book of Church Order, or if he dies.

**.05** Teaching elders who are not teaching elders of local churches but are genuinely engaged in the work of the teaching eldership in roles, such as in teaching, evangelism, church-planting, chaplaincy, Christian educational or missionary administration, shall have the same status as other presbyters in the assemblies of the church.

**.06** A teaching elder who is not a called teaching elder of a local church should be careful to set an example by attendance at regular services for worship and prayer. Such men are encouraged to attend a local WPC congregation for regular worship and fellowship. Exemptions to this requirement, or selection of the local church, should be made in consultation with the presbytery. The teaching elder's name may properly be recorded on the roll of members of the church, but he should refrain from voting in congregational meetings. He must exercise great care not to undermine the installed teaching elder or be party to any disaffection. He is eligible for appointment as a ruling elder, if approved by the congregation and the session. He may serve in any way deemed helpful by the session. The essential membership of a teaching elder appointed as a ruling elder and not engaged in another work of the teaching eldership shall be the same as that of a ruling elder (see BCO 7.1.02, 7.1.03). Since he is ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament, however, he may preach and administer the sacraments if asked, and in these activities he is accountable to the presbytery.

**.07** An ordained teaching elder is at liberty to preach the Gospel in any community, with due respect for the legally constituted authorities responsible for the premises in which he may preach. He shall not preach or teach in any church contrary to the orders of the session thereof. All teaching elders shall carefully avoid stirring up dissension in the flocks of other teaching elders, and a teaching elder shall not receive secret accusations against other presbyters, since to do so is explicitly forbidden in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:19). If a teaching elder has reason to fear that a fellow teaching elder is in error, he shall proceed in obedience to Scripture (Galatians 6:1) and shall carefully avoid the sin of the talebearer or of the busybody.

**.08** If a teaching elder intends to move to another presbytery of WPC he shall request formal transfer and shall not be admitted to the presbytery to which he wishes to transfer until he has sustained its examination of his doctrine and life.

**.09** When an officer of another denomination seeks admission to this denomination as a teaching elder he shall be examined by the presbytery to which he applies in exactly the same way as a candidate for ordination and he shall also present to the presbytery testimonials from the denomination in which he previously served.

**.10** If the other denomination in 9.2.09 is a fraternally-connected denomination or presbytery (as defined in 9.5.01), then the prospective teaching elder is not necessarily required to sever his ties with his original presbytery, but may hold concurrent membership of both presbyteries with principal accountability in matters of life and doctrine remaining with his original presbytery. Realms of responsibility of each presbytery and the means of resolving any conflict should be mutually agreed between the two presbyteries in advance.

### **9.3 Steps to Ordination to the Vocation of Ruling Elder in the Office of the Presbyterate.**

Nomination and examination.

(1) The authority and responsibility for preparing a man for the vocation of ruling elder rest with the session of the church in which it is intended he shall serve. The session may, at its discretion, invite one or more presbyters from other sessions to assist in the work of preparation.

(2) When the congregation of a local church nominates a man it thinks suitable to be a ruling elder, the session, together with other invited presbyters, shall interview him, taking into account his church membership, Christian experience, Christian service, Bible knowledge, doctrinal understanding, desire to be a ruling elder, gifts and abilities, and general biblical requirements.

(3) Consequent upon this interview the session shall prescribe a course of preparation for ordination. This course shall include both practical and theoretical elements.

(4) Although a ruling elder is not required to have the extent or depth of theological knowledge required of a teaching elder he must understand, approve, hold to and be able to teach and apply the doctrines of Scripture as expressed in The Westminster Confession of Faith.

(5) Since some suitable men bar themselves from being ruling elders because they deem the standards to be beyond their attainment it is desirable that the presbytery, by an appropriate committee, should prepare a guidebook for ruling elders and potential ruling elders. This guidebook should be of an encouraging nature and should include sections dealing with practical issues and personal spiritual development. It should also include teaching material on English Bible, The Westminster Confession of Faith, the church and sacraments, elementary apologetics, presbyterian polity, and this Book of Church Order. Sessions preparing men for the vocation of ruling elder could use this guidebook for their orderly development and examination.

(6) In any case men preparing for the vocation of ruling elder must satisfactorily pass examination in the subjects mentioned in the foregoing paragraph and must have demonstrated biblically required pastoral gifts and abilities.

(7) Examination of men for the vocation of ruling elder shall be carried out by the session together with at least two other presbyters.

## **9.4 Steps to Ordination to the Office of Deacon.**

Nomination and examination.

(1) The authority and responsibility for preparing a man for the office of deacon rest with the session of the church in which it is intended he shall serve.

(2) When the congregation of a local church nominates a man it thinks suitable to be a deacon the session shall interview him, taking into account his church membership, Christian experience, Christian service, Bible knowledge, doctrinal understanding, desire to be a deacon, gifts and abilities, and general biblical requirements.

(3) Consequent upon this interview the session shall prescribe a course of preparation for ordination. This course shall include both practical and theoretical elements.

(4) Although a deacon does not rule and is not required to have the extent or depth of theological knowledge required of a teaching elder or ruling elder he must understand and approve the doctrines of Scripture as expressed in The Westminster Confession of Faith.

(5) It is desirable that the session should prepare a guidebook for deacons and potential deacons. This guidebook should be of an encouraging nature and should include sections dealing with practical issues and personal spiritual development.

(6) In any case men preparing for the office of deacon must satisfy the session as to their suitability.

## **9.5 Interpretation**

**.01** A “fraternally connected denomination or presbytery” is a denomination or presbytery that has been formally acknowledged by National assembly as holding to substantially the same understanding of Scripture, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Presbyterian polity as WPC holds, to enable us to cooperate in a fraternal relationship.

## **Chapter 10 : ELECTION AND INSTALLATION OF RULING ELDERS AND DEACONS**

### **10.1 Ruling Elders.**

**.01** The session shall commend to the congregation men who have sustained their examinations for the vocation of ruling elder.

**.02** Election of ruling elders from among those commended by the session shall be by orderly ballot of the local church in accordance with the principles of Scripture and the local church constitution.

**.03** Elected ruling elders, if not previously ordained to that vocation, shall be ordained as set out beneath. Although the session is the ordaining and installing body it is desirable that at least two other presbyters appointed by the presbytery should assist the session.

**.04** An ordination service shall include:

- (1) an appropriate sermon or address;
- (2) explanation of the nature and importance of ordination to the vocation of ruling elder;
- (3) affirmative answers by the ruling elder-elect to the questions in BCO 2.4
- (4) affirmative answers by the congregation to these questions:
  1. Do you, the members of this congregation, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder?
  2. Do you promise to give to him all that honour, obedience, and encouragement, in the Lord, to which he, according to the Scripture, the constitution of this church, and the denominational Book of Church Order, is entitled?
- (5) The laying on of hands by the session and other presbyters present, with the prayer of installation and ordination;
- (6) The charge to the newly ordained and installed ruling elder;
- (7) The charge to the congregation;
- (8) Welcome by the session and congregation.

**.05** In cases where a previously ordained ruling elder is to be installed the elements in the above service outline should be suitably modified.

### **10.2 Deacons.**

**.01** The session shall commend to the congregation men who have sustained their examinations for the office of deacon.

**.02** Election of deacons from among those commended by the session shall be by orderly ballot of the local church in accordance with the principles of Scripture and the local church constitution.

**.03** Elected deacons, if not previously ordained to that office, shall be ordained as set out beneath, by the session.

**.04** An ordination service shall include:

- (1) an appropriate sermon or address;

(2) explanation of the nature and importance of ordination to the vocation of deacon;

(3) affirmative answers by the ruling elder-elect to the questions in BCO 2.4

(4) affirmative answers by the congregation to these questions:

1. Do you, the members of this congregation, acknowledge and receive this brother as a deacon?

2. Do you promise to give to him all that honour, obedience, and encouragement, in the Lord, to which he, according to the Scripture, the constitution of this church, and the denominational Book of Church Order, is entitled?

(5) The laying on of hands by the session and other presbyters present, with the prayer of installation and ordination;

(6) The charge to the newly ordained and installed deacon;

(7) The charge to the congregation;

(8) Welcome by the session and congregation.

**.05** In cases where a previously ordained deacon is to be installed the elements in the above service outline should be suitably modified.

## **Chapter 11 : TEACHING ELDERS: CALLS; INSTALLATION; RESIGNATION; DISMISSAL.**

### **11.1 Call and Installation of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** When a local church desires to appoint a teaching elder the session shall seek to bring suitable candidates to the attention of the congregation.

**.02** The session shall form a committee from communicant members of the congregation to aid in the search for a suitable candidate.

**.03** Any communicant member may propose a candidate to the session and its committee.

**.04** When the session and its committee are persuaded of the suitability of a certain licentiate or teaching elder; and when they have reasonable assurance that he would be available if called; then a proper and legal meeting of the congregation shall be called in accordance with chapter 3, for the purpose of issuing a formal call.

**.05** Determination of the percentage of voters deemed desirable for issuing a call is a matter for the local church, but a call ought not to be issued if a large minority of voters opposes it after sincere attempts have been made to secure their agreement.

**.06** When the congregation agrees to issue a formal call it shall be prepared by the session in consultation with the congregation, approved by the congregation, signed by those communicant members who support it, or by a committee acting for the congregation. If the latter, the presiding officer shall certify that the persons signing have been appointed by the congregation to do so.

**.07** The call shall include:

(1) a statement of the call;

(2) terms of the call (remuneration, vacation, utilities, accommodation, other necessary items).

**.08** Copies of the call must go simultaneously to the candidate concerned, to the presbytery, and if the candidate is from another presbytery a copy should also go to that presbytery. The presbytery in

which the candidate will serve must also be informed of the circumstances leading up to the issuing of the call.

**.09** The call becomes effective in securing the teaching elder or licentiate called, after

- (1) the presbytery of which he is a member has ascertained that he wishes to accept the call;
- (2) the presbytery has examined and approved him for this particular sphere of ministry;
- (3) any existing pastoral relationship has been dissolved;
- (4) any necessary change of presbytery membership has occurred;
- (5) the recipient of the call, if a licentiate, has been examined and ordained;
- (6) the teaching elder has been officially installed by the presbytery in the church that called him.

**.10** No church shall issue a call to a teaching elder from another denomination until he has been examined and approved by the presbytery.

**.11** At the service of installation the new teaching elder shall answer affirmatively the questions in BCO 2.4

**.12** The people of the congregations shall also answer affirmatively the following questions:

- (1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue in your readiness to receive ..... whom you have called to be a teaching elder in this church?
- (2) Do you promise to give him all that honour, encouragement, and obedience, in the Lord, to which he, according to the Scriptures, the Constitution of this church, and the denominational Book of Church Order, is entitled?
- (3) While he serves as your teaching elder will you continue that material provision for him which you have promised?

**.13** The moderator shall declare the installation effected and the session shall take appropriate steps to welcome the new teaching elder.

### **11.2 Resignation of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** If a teaching elder desires to leave the position in which he has been installed he shall notify the session and the presbytery simultaneously at least three months before the date of his intended departure.

**.02** If, after discussion with the session, the teaching elder continues in his desire to resign, the session shall advise the congregation.

**.03** The congregation may appoint representatives to appear on its behalf at the next stated presbytery meeting or a special presbytery meeting called to deal with the resignation.

**.04** If the congregation fails to appear, or if its reasons for retaining its teaching elder are deemed insufficient by the presbytery, the presbytery shall give the teaching elder leave to resign from his position, and due record shall be made by the clerk of the presbytery.

### **11.3 Dismissal of Teaching Elders.**

**.01** Dissatisfaction with a teaching elder for non-disciplinary reasons must not be allowed by members to become an item of gossip or character assassination or an excuse for their leaving the church. It must be dealt with in obedience to the Scriptures and that entails, at the very least, prayerful, open, frank, and honourable discussion, with all participants remembering their relationship in Christ, and the necessity, even at such a difficult time, of making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit.

**.02** The session shall devise procedures by which members can, without embarrassment, raise concerns and enter into discussion that is constructive. Presbyters from other sessions may be called upon for help and advice, and assistance may be sought from the presbytery.

**.03** If, after extensive discussion, it appears that a significant number of members have made sincere, but unsuccessful, efforts to accept the continuance of the teaching elder, and if it seems that the peace of the church would be better served by the dissolution of the pastoral tie, the session shall call a meeting of the congregation to request the presbytery to effect the dissolution.

**.04** BCO 6.1.05-6.1.08 shall be taken into account by the presbytery in its dealing with the congregational request.

**.05** If procedures result in the dissolution of the pastoral tie the congregation must provide materially for the teaching elder for a period of at least three months from the date on which the dissolution becomes effective. Such material provision shall include payment of the teaching elder's stipend and of any other monies to which he is entitled by his terms of call and any subsequent provisions.

**.06** The presbytery has the right to depose teaching elders guilty of heresy or immorality. Due process must be followed to ensure the teaching elder receives a fair hearing. The principle of "innocent till proven guilty" shall be enforced and there should be zero tolerance of gossip. (See BCO 12, CHURCH DISCIPLINE.)

## **Chapter 12 : CHURCH DISCIPLINE.**

It should be carefully noted that, although this chapter contains adversarial procedures, priority must be given to pastoral ministry in resolving conflicts. Only after such ministry has been exhaustively conducted, without satisfactory outcomes, should adoption of more formal methods be contemplated.

### **12.1 Nature and Purpose of Discipline.**

**.01** Discipline is the exercise by the church of those commands enjoined in Scripture, or clearly inferred therefrom, for the correction or prevention of evil within the church.

**.02** Discipline is included within the broader concept of edification and its purpose is the preservation of the purity and good order of the church (Acts 5:1-11; 15:1-31), the spiritual welfare of its members, including the reclamation of offenders (1 Corinthians 5:5), and the strengthening of its witness to the world (Romans 12:17; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25; John 13:35).

### **12.2 Scriptural Principles in the Exercise of Discipline.**

**.01** The underlying principles in the exercise of discipline are chiefly set forth in the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 18:15-17, and in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6. However, the Scriptures in their entirety must be observed without neglect of any relevant passage (c/f Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 1 and 9).

**.02** From Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 17:3, and 1 Corinthians 5:1-3; 6:1-4, the steps in the exercise of discipline can be inferred as follows:

- (1) a private meeting between the individuals concerned;
- (2) if such a meeting fails, or is impossible, a conference between the persons involved, or one or more witnesses, competent counsel, if desired, and any other person who, in the circumstances, ought to be present;
- (3) finally, if such a conference fails, the matter is to be taken before the appropriate court.

**.03** The following scriptural principles are directly related to the exercise of discipline:

- (1) All persons concerned should examine their own hearts in the light of Matthew 5:43-45; 6:12, 14, 15; 7:12; 18:21-22; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:32-36; Ephesians 4:32. Unforgiveness or

desire for revenge must not be allowed to influence the persons exercising discipline. (It can be inferred from this principle that those who are involved in exercising discipline and especially those who sit in judgment should, if their personal interests are involved, disqualify themselves.)

(2) The Lord has commanded in Matthew 5:23-24 that when a person is conscious that a brother has a charge of wrongdoing against him he should not engage in formal worship before doing his part toward a reconciliation. (It can be inferred from this principle that those who are involved in exercising discipline and especially those who sit in judgment should, if they are conscious of any offence held against them, rightfully or wrongfully, by the person being charged, before discipline proceeds, make every reasonable effort to achieve reconciliation.)

(3) Certain passages, such as Matthew 5:39 and Luke 6:29, indicate that in some circumstances wrongdoings should not be cause for grievance and should be tolerated in love. (From this principle it can be inferred that there are cases where no disciplinary action should be taken by the party offended. In such cases the glory of God is more clearly manifested by taking no action.

(4) Although in the Jewish Commonwealth God ordained an elaborate system of jurisprudence, in the exercise of discipline the church must guard against the extremes of:

1. the mere external observation of such a system;
2. the denial of the principles of grace and equity contained therein which express God's holy and gracious character.

(5) Before proceeding, those individuals or assemblies who believe discipline necessary shall carefully consider the scriptural principles relating to the exercise of discipline.

(6) At any stage of discipline only evidence of a factual nature should be received.

(7) It is also recognised that there are some cases in which appeal to the civil courts is a proper procedure, but such a step should only be taken after every effort has been made to follow the principles set out above.

### **12.3 Jurisdiction of Church Assemblies.**

**.01** In the exercise of discipline this church does not have jurisdiction over persons outside the church.

**.02** In the church the appropriate bodies before which matters involving the exercise of discipline are brought are the session, the presbytery, and the National assembly, any of which may appoint a judicial commission or a court to hear the matter.

**.03** Nature and extent of jurisdiction:

(1) The session of a local church has original jurisdiction over communicant members (including ruling elders, and deacons), non-communicant members, associate members, and adherents insofar as matters that affect the church are concerned.

(2) The presbytery has original jurisdiction over the teaching elders who are members thereof. Further, as an appeal court it may hear and rule on matters brought before it.

(3) The National assembly has appellate jurisdiction only and may hear and rule on any matters brought before it.

**.04** Notwithstanding the above, the assemblies of this church have a general and continuing obligation to exercise pastoral oversight of this church as a whole and of each part of it.

**.05** Members dismissed to other local churches, or teaching elders dismissed to other presbyteries of this church, shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the local churches, or the presbyteries, that dismissed them, until they are received by the other local churches, or presbyteries.

#### **12.4 Formal Exercise of Discipline – Preparation for Trial.**

**.01** Formal judicial hearings by a court appointed by an assembly shall proceed in a formal manner according to the rules of procedure and evidence and shall be initiated by the laying of a charge.

**.02** A charge may be laid by a communicant member of this church or by any assembly or duly appointed committee thereof.

**.03** A charge is laid when:

(1) notice is given in writing to the clerk of the appropriate assembly setting out the nature of the offence; and

(2) within four weeks thereafter the appropriate assembly meets and issues a statement in writing containing the details of the charge to the parties involved.

**.04** In considering whether to issue a statement containing the details of the charge, the assembly should have regard to:

(1) whether the scriptural steps in the exercise of discipline have been or are being observed;

(2) whether the alleged offence is of such a nature that the matter should be heard in a formal manner; and

(3) whether the matter should be referred to a judicial commission.

**.05** No charge shall be laid if it is brought more than two years after the alleged commission of the offence, unless there is evidence of repetition or similar offences and the offence is unrepented of and uncorrected.

**.06** Once a charge has been laid the appropriate assembly shall decide either to appoint a court composed of the assembly as a whole or of certain members thereof or to refer the charge to another assembly. If a court is appointed the appropriate assembly shall also appoint a moderator and clerk who shall keep a full record of all proceedings.

**.07** Within two weeks of the charge being laid the assembly shall inform the accused of the court that will hear the charge and convey to him/her details of the charge together with a list of witnesses and the time and place of the trial.

**.08** Each party shall be entitled to the assistance of counsel. No person who is counsel in a particular hearing may sit in judgment at any stage of the trial.

**.09** In a trial initiated by an assembly the assembly shall appoint one of its members as prosecutor. He shall have no part in the deliberations or decisions of the court.

#### **12.5 Formal Exercise of Discipline – Procedure During Trial.**

**.01** Every trial involving a charge of heresy shall be open. All other trials shall be open unless the court determines at its own discretion and at any stage of the trial that it shall be closed.

**.02** Before every trial the moderator shall exhort the court to bear in mind its responsibility in accordance with the Word of God.

**.03** At the beginning of the trial the parties may challenge the right of any member of the court to sit in such a case. Such challenge shall be decided by a majority of the other members of the court.

**.04** The charge shall be read and the accused shall be asked to plead guilty or not guilty.

(1) If the accused pleads guilty the court shall determine the appropriate action which should be taken.



(2) If the accused pleads not guilty or refuses to plead and if the accused makes no objection the trial shall proceed. If the accused does object the court shall adjourn for a minimum of fourteen days unless the accused desires an earlier date.

**.05** The accused may at any stage of the trial object to either the regularity of the proceedings or the legal sufficiency of the charge.

**.06** The court shall allow the parties to call such witnesses as they desire.

**.07** Any person may be a witness in a trial if he/she makes the following promise and the court is satisfied that he/she understands the effect:

I solemnly promise in the presence of the all-knowing and heart-searching God that I will speak the whole truth concerning the matters on which I am called to testify, as I shall answer to Almighty God.

**.08** If the accused requests, witnesses shall give evidence separately.

**.09** The accused shall be entitled to be present during the trial.

**.10** If an accused refuses to appear before the court, the court may appoint counsel to represent him/her and may try him/her in his/her absence.

**.11** In order to establish the truth or falsity of a charge the court shall not rely on the evidence of one person alone.

**.12** The court may at its discretion hear third parties who may appear either personally or by counsel.

**.13** Each party may sum up its case at the end of the trial.

**.14** The court may reach its decision immediately or reserve its decision until a later date.

**.15** Only members of the court who have been present during the whole of the trial shall be allowed to participate in a decision.

**.16** If the court finds the accused guilty the court shall determine the appropriate action to be taken.

**.17** The court shall not put into effect its decision if its decision is appealed from unless and until its decision is affirmed by the court of appeal.

**.18** Any member of the court who dissents from the decision is entitled to have his dissent recorded.

## **12.6 Formal Exercise of Discipline – Forms of Censure.**

If the accused is found guilty, the court, in deciding what action ought to be taken, shall have regard for the following forms of censure:

(1) Admonition, which is the solemn addressing of the accused, placing his/her sin before him/her, and exhorting him/her to exercise greater care in his/her life and doctrine.

(2) Rebuke, which is setting forth the serious nature of the offence, the formal reproof of the accused, warning him/her of his/her guilt and danger, and exhorting him/her to repentance.

(3) Suspension, which is the temporary withholding of all the privileges of membership in a local church or presbytery, as the case may be, and in the case of an officer the temporary removal from office.

(4) In the case of an officer, dismissal from office.

(5) Excommunication, which is the exclusion of the accused from the fellowship of the church. (This form of censure should be regarded as a last measure in the reclamation of the accused and should be resorted to only in extreme cases.)

## **12.7 Restoration.**

**.01** A teaching elder, ruling elder, or deacon who has been dismissed, cannot again take office without being ordained.

**.02** Persons who have been subjected to censure and who have been duly restored ought to be received by the church with thanksgiving.

## **12.8 References, Referrals, and Appeals.**

**.01** A case may be moved to a wider assembly by either:

(1) Reference, which is the request for determination of or opinion concerning some point arising in the trial.

(2) Referral, which is the handing over of the entire case.

**.02** Once a decision has been reached both parties have the right of appeal.

**.03** Where an appellate court decides to hear an appeal it shall give reasonable notice of the hearing of the appeal to all parties.

**.04** An appellate court may either:

(1) dismiss the appeal;

(2) allow the appeal;

(3) after making a determination on a particular point request the lower court to re- hear the case.

**.05** In any appeal, a member of the lower court shall not be a member of the appellate court.

## **Chapter 13 : AMENDMENTS**

### **13.1 Book of Church Order.**

Amendments or alterations to the Book of Church Order (except as provided for in Section 2 of this chapter) may be made only in the following manner.

The National assembly, after due discussion, may propose changes to the presbyteries, but they shall not be regarded as having constitutional validity until they have been approved in writing by a majority of presbyteries before the next ensuing National assembly; and it shall be the duty of that National assembly to ensure that such changes have been adopted and are in effect. This does not apply to Chapter 3.8.03, 3.8.04 of this Book of Church Order, which are unamendable. Presbyteries may overture the National assembly to send down suggested amendments to the Book of Church Order.

### **13.2 The Westminster Confession of Faith.**

Amendments or alterations to The Westminster Confession of Faith and to the forms of subscriptions required of teaching elders, licentiates, ruling elders, and deacons, as these forms are found in the Book of Church Order, shall not be regarded as having constitutional validity unless sent down to the presbyteries by a two-thirds vote of the National assembly, approved by two-thirds of the presbyteries in writing, and finally adopted by a two-thirds vote of the National assembly next ensuing. Before any of the changes described in this section are proposed to the presbyteries, the National assembly shall appoint a committee to consider the proposed changes and to report to the next National assembly.

### **13.3 Restriction of Right to Amend.**

No assembly has the right to set aside any part of the Book of Church Order unless and until the majority of the presbyteries have voted to set aside that particular part.

## **APPENDIX 1. Subscription to the Subordinate Standard.**

Presbyteries and sessions shall be vigilant in upholding the subordinate standard of this church as embodying the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. To this end an assembly shall require candidates for the offices of deacon and presbyter to submit in writing to the clerk of the appropriate assembly the points of doctrine (if any) at which they diverge from the subordinate standard of the church. The assembly shall then consider any professed exceptions as follows.

1. Exceptions to form, where the candidate professes the doctrine of the subordinate standard, but in words other than those of the standard.

An exception to form, if judged by the majority of the assembly to be an essentially faithful expression of the standard's teaching, may then be freely taught.

2. Exceptions in sense, where the candidate supposes he understands the standard in some sense differently from how the standard has been historically understood by the assembly.

An exception in sense, if judged by the majority of the assembly to be in essential agreement with the standard's teaching, may then be freely taught.

3. Exceptions of substance, where the candidate disagrees with the standard's teaching, credibly believing the Scriptures teach otherwise.

In this case no exception shall be permitted by which any chapter of The Westminster Confession of Faith may be rejected in its entirety or in respect of its main features.

If the exception is found permissible the candidate shall be approved only on condition that:

(1) He shall not be permitted to teach in opposition to the standard.

(2) He must be able and willing to teach the doctrine of the standard with sympathy and deference, and bring his practice into conformity with the standard's teaching.

(3) He shall be permitted to express his own conscience on the matter in the course of his teaching on the subject.

(4) He shall be permitted to advocate his views peacefully and respectfully before the assemblies of the church in order to try to persuade the church to modify its standard.

4. No assembly shall permit any exceptions of substance except as set forth above, and then only with the approval of  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the members of that assembly, subject always to the review of the wider assemblies.

5. Whenever an exception of substance is permitted the assembly concerned shall make a full record of the exception, including a citation of the portion of the standard excepted, and a brief statement of the candidate's views.

6. These provisions may only be amended by the same method as prescribed for the amendment of The Westminster Confession of Faith.

# CONSTITUTION OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

## ARTICLE 1 The Name

The name of this branch of the visible church of Jesus Christ shall be: "Westminster Presbyterian Church", hereinafter called "this church".

## ARTICLE 2 Objects

The objects for which this Church is established are to witness to all men every of the redeeming grace of God set forth in Christ and to glorify God through the preaching of His Word as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to edify Christians, to promote godly worship and defend the "faith once for all delivered to the saints", in co-operation with churches and groups functioning in harmony with God's holy Word, until Christ comes again.

## ARTICLE 3 Doctrine

The Church is bound by solemn obligation to God to a belief in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the inerrant, infallible Word of God in their original writings, and as the only rule of faith and life. This Church will adhere to the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures and expressed in the subordinate standard - The Westminster Confession of Faith. The recognised edition of The Westminster Confession of Faith shall be that adhered to by this Church on the date of adoption of the Book Of Church Order of this church.

## ARTICLE 4 Members

The members of this Church shall be those persons who are members in good standing of any local congregation which has affiliated with this Church in accordance with the Book Of Church Order adopted by this Church and also all members of any Presbytery in this church.

## ARTICLE 5 Government

**Section 1 :** In accordance with the Scriptures this Church recognises Jesus Christ alone as the supreme Head of the Church.

**Section 2 :** In accordance with the Scriptures this church shall practise the presbyterian system of church government which is characterised by the rule of elders functioning in local, regional and general assemblies.

**Section 3 :** In matters of procedure, government and discipline the Book of Church Order of this Church shall be followed.

## ARTICLE 6 Powers

**Section 1 :** The authority of the elders of this Church shall be defined by the Book of Church Order of this Church.

**Section 2 :** This Church shall have the power to establish, amend or revise the Book of Church Order as may be necessary, provided that nothing therein conflicts with this constitution.

**Section 3 :** This Church shall have the power to establish and direct agencies through which ministries of missions, education, social concern, or other activities, may be conducted. Members of the Boards of Directors or Controlling Committees for the administration of these agencies shall be elected and removed by the assembly which established them and to which they shall report. Each agency shall establish legal identity and shall be wholly responsible for its own indebtedness.

**Section 4 :** The presbyteries of this Church shall have power to receive and dismiss congregations as provided for in the Book of Church Order. Local congregations shall remain in association with this Church only as long as they themselves desire, as provided for in the Book of Church Order.

**Section 5 :** This Church shall not have the power of ownership of the property of local congregations. It shall own only those properties conducive to the work of its own assemblies.

**Section 6 :** The assemblies of this Church may appoint trustees to hold their properties.

### **ARTICLE 7 Finances**

**Section 1 :** The income and property of this Church whencesoever derived shall be applied towards the promotion of the objects of this Church as herein set forth and no portion thereof shall be paid or transferred directly or indirectly by way of dividend, bonuses or otherwise howsoever by way of profit to any member of this Church provided that nothing herein contained shall prevent the payment in good faith of remuneration to any officers or servants of this Church in return for any services actually rendered to this Church nor the payment to any member for occasional services.

**Section 2 :** Records of receipts and expenditure shall be kept and books audited annually by an auditor appointed for that purpose.

**Section 3 :** The members or trustees of this Church shall not be personally liable for any indebtedness incurred by this Church.

### **ARTICLE 8 Common Seal**

This Church shall have a common seal which shall be in the custody of three seal holders to be appointed from time to time as required by this Church. All deeds, instruments or writings required to be executed by this Church shall be signed by or executed by the common seal being affixed thereon by at least two of the seal holders who shall also place their signatures thereon.

### **ARTICLE 9 Dissolution or Discontinuance**

If upon dissolution or discontinuance of the functions of this Church for a period of not less than three years any funds or property remain on hand the same shall be transferred to such church or mission body as may be designated by the highest assembly of this Church or by the Public Trustee.

### **ARTICLE 10 Amendments**

This Constitution may be amended by a proposal approved by two-thirds of the membership of the highest assembly of this Church and by majorities of the local, regional and general assemblies respectively. Amendments shall be valid when approved by two-thirds of the membership of the highest assembly in a second vote taken at least six months after the first.