

Sovereign Grace Churches Council of Elders Meeting Minutes
Orlando, Florida, October 2, 2017

1. **Call to Order.** Mark Prater (Mark), executive director, called to order the meeting on Monday, October 2, 2017 in Orlando, Florida at 2pm.
2. **New Churches Recognized.** Mark Prater recognized five new churches joining Sovereign Grace: Yuma, AZ; Egg Harbor Township, NJ; Rogers, AR; Drexel Hill, PA; and Cambridge, MA
3. **Roll Call.** Mark held roll call to establish the presence of a quorum. 61 of 80 total delegates were initially present, representing a quorum. By the end of the meeting, 69 delegates were present.
4. **Approval of Agenda.** Mark presented the following agenda, approved by voice vote.
 - a. Recognize new churches (see above).
 - b. Roll Call to confirm a quorum present (see above).
 - c. Motion to approve agenda.
 - d. State of the Union for Sovereign Grace Churches by Mark.
 - e. Recognize Rules Committee.
 - f. Conduct affirmation vote for Polity Committee.
 - g. Conduct affirmation vote for Theology Committee.
 - h. Conduct vote for Executive Committee candidates.
 - i. Discuss and affirm proposed amendments to Book of Church Order.
 - j. Sovereign Grace Music update.
 - k. Discuss and affirm proposed amendments to Book of Church Order.
 - l. Update from Theology Committee regarding the Statement of Faith.
 - m. Leadership Team Strategic Initiatives.
 - n. New Business Motion: Establish Sovereign Grace Church Planting Fund.
 - o. Report from the Executive Committee
 - p. Present and affirm the Sovereign Grace budget for FYE 8/31/2018.
 - q. Other business.
 - r. Motion to adjourn.
5. **State of the Union of Sovereign Grace Churches.** Mark gave the annual State of the Union address for Sovereign Grace Churches.
6. **Recognize Rules Committee.** The Rules Committee is three members from the Polity Committee. The members for this meeting were Marty Machowski, Shawn Powers, and Daniel Baker.
7. **Affirmation vote for Polity Committee members.** The following elders were affirmed by written ballot to be members of the Polity Committee: Daniel Baker, Paul Buckley, Bruce Chick, Marty Machowski, and Phil Sasser.
8. **Affirmation vote for Theology Committee members.** The following elders were affirmed by written ballot to be members of the Theology Committee: Mark Alderton, Josh Blount, Rick Gamache, Jared Mellinger, and Matthew Williams.

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9. **Vote for Executive Committee members.** The delegates voted by written ballot on three open positions for the Executive Committee from the following seven candidates: Paul Buckley, Bruce Chick, Ken Delage, Greg Dirnberger, Jim Donohue, Abelardo Munoz, and Trey Richardson. Elected on the first ballot were Paul Buckley, Bruce Chick, and Abelardo Munoz.

10. **Proposed Amendments to the Book of Church Order (BCO).** Phil Sasser, chair of the Polity Committee, gave an update on the work of the Polity Committee prior to Mark presenting the proposed amendments to the BCO. Amendments to the BCO are governed by Section 15.3.3 and require a simple majority vote to be adopted. **The approved amendments are attached.**
 - a. Phil Sasser proposed that all amendments to be approved today would not be in effect until the minutes for the current meeting are approved by the Executive Committee. This proposal was approved by voice vote.

11. **Sovereign Grace Music update.** Bob Kauflin gave an update on the ministry plans and accomplishments of Sovereign Grace Music.

12. **Theology Committee update.** Jeff Purswell, chair of the Theology Committee, gave an update on their work on the Statement of Faith and explained the process for approval per the BCO. Based on this process, Sections 1-6 (as amended) of the proposed new statement of faith were initially approved. Mark noted that $\frac{3}{4}$ of the church regions must now approve these sections.

13. **Vote to establish Sovereign Grace Church Planting Fund.** Mark presented a new business motion on behalf of the Leadership Team to designate \$250,000 of current operating reserves as restricted for church planting grants and to commit a minimum of \$50,000 per year from future annual operating budgets to increase this Fund. The purpose of this Fund is to keep church planting a priority and ensure plans for future church plants aren't limited by an annual budget. This proposal was approved by voice vote. No votes against were noted.

14. **Executive Committee Report.** Jon Payne, chair of the Executive Committee, reported on the Executive Committee work and commended the Leadership Team and their budget to be presented.

15. **Vote to Affirm Sovereign Grace FYE August 31, 2018 Budget.** Mark presented the budget for affirmation by the CoE. The Executive Committee approved the budget in July 2017. The budget with \$50,000 surplus was approved by voice vote. No votes against were noted.

16. **Future CoE Meetings.** Mark announced the planned dates for the following future CoE meetings.
 - a. October 01, 2018, Orlando, Florida.
 - b. October 14, 2019, Orlando, Florida.
 - c. October 12, 2020, Orlando, Florida.

17. **Meeting Adjourned.** The meeting was adjourned at 9.02pm.

APPROVED BCO AMENDMENTS

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AMENDMENT 1

BCO SECTION:19

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE:

We need to correct the mistake made when we transitioned in 2013 from utilizing a *Letter of Intent* to authorize membership in Sovereign Grace Churches to utilizing the *U.S. Churches Partnership Agreement* in the 4th edition of the BCO (2015). This transition left our historic Sovereign Grace global churches with no official document of membership in Sovereign Grace Churches.

BCO Edition 2, section 19.5 provided for full membership in Sovereign Grace Churches provided a church's eldership signed the Partnership Pledge spelled out in BCO Edition 2, Section 19.4.

Additionally, BCO Edition 2, section 19.5.1 Stated:

As soon as the ratification of this Book of Church Order is announced, all previous Partnership Agreements between Sovereign Grace and local churches become null and void. At that point, no churches will be Sovereign Grace churches until they have entered into the new Partnership Agreement articulated in this Book of Church Order.

BCO Edition 2, section 19.5.2 anticipated formal partnership agreements being in place by April, 2015. However, only a U.S. Partnership Agreement was introduced. In April 2015, all previous agreements were made null and void according to BCO Edition 2, section 19.5.1 and 19.5.2. Regrettably, there was no provision for non-US Sovereign Grace Churches to document and authorize their membership in Sovereign Grace Churches until they should have their own country or region-specific partnership agreements. This amendment is intended to address this gap to allow time for future Partnership Agreements to be created for our global partners.

APPROVED WORDING:

19.3 Partnership for Historic Sovereign Grace Churches Outside the United States without a Current Partnership Agreement

All historic Sovereign Grace Churches that previously signed the Letter of Intent/Pledge of Membership in 2013, according to the stipulations outlined in BCO, 2nd Edition, Section 19, shall remain, along with all their ordained elders, members in good standing in Sovereign Grace Churches. This includes the following: (1) sending delegates to the Council of Elders, (2) participating in Sovereign Grace committees, and (3) sharing in the benefits and commitments of a Sovereign Grace church as facilitated by the Leadership Team.

APPROVED BCO AMENDMENTS

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AMENDMENT 2

BCO SECTION: 12

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: There are various matters that pertain to our local church practices that do not neatly fit into other sections of the BCO. The point of BCO-12 will be to capture these in a common location. The proposal for the 7th Edition of the BCO is for these to include our current section on bylaws as 12.1, a new section on membership as 12.2, and a new section on marriage as 12.3.

APPROVED: rename current BCO-12 (Local Church Bylaws) as "Local Church Practices" and change current section on bylaws to BCO-12.1.

AMENDMENT 3

BCO SECTION: 13.2.4.1

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: Language of "Director of Church Planting & Missions and his committee" is problematic. Either this is a standing committee *with* respective authority or it shouldn't be mentioned in the BCO. In other places the BCO allows for ad hoc committees for Leadership Team members (e.g., BCO-18.4.10.3). This amendment is simply addressing a place where a single ad hoc committee is mentioned in an unorthodox manner.

APPROVED WORDING:

Remove the phrase, "and his committee," from BCO-13.2.41.

Proposed language:

Working in conjunction with the Sovereign Grace Director of Church Planting & Missions, the Regional Assembly of Elders will have the responsibility to identify and approve, by a simple majority vote, all locations for Sovereign Grace church plants within the Region.

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AMENDMENT 4

BCO SECTIONS: 13.2.7.2.c; 18.4.10.3

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: The BCO makes provision for ad hoc committees without clearly specifying what authority they might have, leaving opportunity for them to assume or be granted authority not defined in the BCO. This amendment strengthens the current language that restricts them from taking authority assigned to others by the BCO by stating clearly that they serve in an advisory and assistant capacity.

Current wording

13.2.7.2.c Ad hoc committees may not be empowered with authority that has already been allocated to other formal committees or offices of the Region as defined in the Book of Church Order.

Approved wording

13.2.7.2.c Ad hoc committees established within a region serve in an advisory and assistant capacity, not in the stead of the Regional Assembly of Elders or its standing committees, nor can they be empowered with any authority already allocated in the Book of Church Order.

Current wording

18.4.10.3 Committees or teams may not be empowered with any authority that has already been allocated to other formal committees or offices as defined in the Book of Church Order. They serve in an advisory and assistant capacity, not in the stead of any member of the Leadership Team.

Approved wording

18.4.10.3 Ad hoc committees or teams established by the Leadership Team serve in an advisory and assistant capacity, not in the stead of any member of the Leadership Team, nor can they be empowered with any authority already allocated in the Book of Church Order.

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AMENDMENT 5

BCO SECTION: 24.10.2

INTRODUCED BY: POLITY COMMITTEE

RATIONALE: BCO-24.10.2 is redundant with BCO-24.9.5. This amendment removes the current BCO-24.10.2.

Remove 24.10.2 completely

For reference:

24.10.2 Excommunicated

In the case of an elder being excommunicated, the commands of Matthew 18 will be followed, and he will be treated, as anyone in that circumstance, as an unbeliever, in hope that he will come to repentance and be reconciled with the church.

AMENDMENT 6

BCO SECTION: 1.10.1; 13.1.1; etc.

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: There has been confusion for church plants and churches in the adoption process in the US and globally on when exactly the church is considered a member church. BCO sections 1.10.1, 13.1.1 and 13.2.4.3 are affected and a new 13.2.4.5 is added.

APPROVED WORDING:

1.10.1 Every church or association of particular churches is entitled to determine the terms for admission into its communion, the qualifications of its pastors, and the workings of its internal government as long as these are in compliance with the Word of God. Sovereign Grace Churches, based upon mutual love and confidence, has voluntarily determined to approve and appropriate the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith, Partnership Agreement, and Book of Church Order as governing statutes and guidelines ordering their fellowship locally and with other Sovereign Grace churches. This genuine union among Sovereign Grace churches carries with it all the rights and privileges due to each Sovereign Grace local church. This union is in effect for a member

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church once its elders have signed the appropriate Partnership Agreement (cf. BCO-19) and it has been accepted and approved by its Regional Assembly of Elders.

13.1.1 A Region is comprised of five to twenty Sovereign Grace churches within a designated geographical area. Temporary exceptions to these size limits may be made with the permission of the Leadership Team and the majority vote of the respective Regional Assembly of Elders. Sovereign Grace churches are only those churches whose elders have signed the appropriate Partnership Agreement and who have been accepted and approved by their Regional Assembly of Elders.

13.2.4.3 Although the Regional Assembly of Elders must approve every Sovereign Grace church plant (i.e., one utilizing Sovereign Grace funds and intending to become a member of Sovereign Grace Churches from its inception) by a simple majority vote, it may delegate exploratory work to its Regional Church Planting Committee (see BCO-13.2.7.1.c) or to the Sovereign Grace Director of Church Planting & Missions.

13.2.4.5 A church plant becomes an official Sovereign Grace church with all its privileges and responsibilities when its elder/**eldership** signs the appropriate Partnership Agreement (see BCO 19), and it has been accepted and approved by its Regional Assembly of Elders.

AMENDMENT 7

BCO SECTION: 9.7

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: The current guidance for transfer of ordination status in BCO-9.7 does not address ordained men transferring within a region or returning to service as an elder who retain ordination status with Sovereign Grace. Neither does the current guidance highlight the role of the Regional Ordination Committee in the transfer of ordination, as defined during church adoptions in section 13.2.5.4. To accomplish this, we propose expanding BCO-9.7.

APPROVED WORDING:

9.7. Transfer of ordination status within Sovereign Grace Churches

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Ordination and discipline in any Sovereign Grace church are valid and recognized by all other Sovereign Grace churches. A man previously ordained within Sovereign Grace in good standing who accepts a call to serve at another church need not, therefore, re-take the ordination exam or repeat any other part of the ordination process.

Each church eldership has the responsibility and authority to select and install existing ordained men as elders in a manner of their choosing. Each ordained man must be in good standing (cf. BCO-3), subscribe to the Sovereign Grace Churches Statement of Faith, and pledge to adhere to the explicitly mandated practices of the Sovereign Grace Churches Book of Church Order. If he has any exceptions to either the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, he shall submit them for review to the Regional Assembly of Elders.

9.7.1. The elders review the man's qualifications as much as they can determine.

The local eldership bears primary responsibility for confirming that the life and doctrine of any ordained man they seek to install as an elder continues to meet the biblical character qualifications (cf. BCO-3) and continues to agree with the Sovereign Grace Churches *Statement of Faith* and the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order* (cf. BCO 9.3.6 above). Elders will solicit input from those who know the man and pay special attention to his previous service as an elder. Appropriate counsel may be sought from the Sovereign Grace Regional Leader(s), Regional Ordination Committee(s) and other elders across the region(s).

The ordained man must reaffirm in writing the statement in BCO-9.3.6.3. If the man has any reservations with or takes exception to the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, he must inform the eldership calling him. The local eldership shall first investigate the exception before presenting the ordained man to the Regional Assembly of Elders. These exceptions must be submitted in writing, and each elder's exceptions shall be kept on record with the local eldership, the Regional Assembly of Elders, and Sovereign Grace.

9.7.2 If the ordained man is not a current member of the Regional Assembly of Elders or if he is registering a new exception to either the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the *Book of Church Order*, the Regional Ordination Committee must interview him, inquire about any exceptions and make a recommendation to the Regional

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Assembly of Elders about whether these are trivial semantic scruples acceptable among elders or substantive differences that warrant a rejection of the ordination transfer.

9.7.3 The congregation is informed and their input invited.

Once the elders are supportive of installing the ordained man for pastoral ministry, they will notify the congregation as early in the process as practical and involve it appropriately in the process.

9.7.4 Approval by the Regional Assembly of Elders

If the ordained man is not a current member of the Regional Assembly of Elders, the local elders will put forth the ordained man to the Regional Assembly of Elders who, with input from the Regional Ordination Committee, will vote to affirm the transfer of his ordination status with a simple majority.

The Regional Assembly may only reject the transfer of ordination because of either heterodoxy (i.e., deviation from the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith) or scandalous or serious sin (BCO-9.3.6.5)

If the ordained man has registered any new exceptions to either the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, the Regional Assembly of Elders shall determine the significance of the man's scruples. If the exception is a trivial semantic scruple and not a substantive difference with any doctrine in the Statement of Faith or explicitly mandated practices in the Book of Church Order, then the man may sign the above statements and be put forward for a vote on the transfer of his ordination status. However, if it is determined that the candidate substantially disagrees with any of the doctrines of the Statement of Faith or explicitly mandated practices in the Book of Church Order, his ordination transfer may not be approved. The Ordination Committee shall recommend to him a course of study on the relevant doctrines and principles, if the candidate is willing, in the hopes that his scruples might be overcome.

9.7.5 The installation service

Once the ordained man is reaffirmed as qualified for office and the church desires to install him as an elder, the installation service may be carried out as described in BCO-9.3.7 and 9.3.9.

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AMENDMENT 8

BCO SECTION: 9.8

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee and Ian McConnell

RATIONALE: While the BCO provides guidance for the transfer of ordination for the eldership during church adoptions (BCO-13.2.5) there is no guidance for transferring the ordination of an individual elder. Since a church adoption *includes* the transfer of ordination for its elders, this seems a good model for how we can also transfer the ordination of an individual elder. This has special importance for church planting, for sometimes our planters are elders from other denominations who come into SG for the purpose of planting a SG church. To accomplish this, we propose a new BCO-9.8.

APPROVED WORDING

9.8 Transfer of Ordination Status across Denominations

A man ordained as an elder in a denomination other than Sovereign Grace *may be* eligible to have that ordination transferred into Sovereign Grace. The key questions to answer in evaluating this transfer are (1) how equivalent his ordination is to the Sovereign Grace ordination standards and (2) whether he is qualified according to Sovereign Grace standards. This assessment will involve several regional committees and ultimately the entire Regional Assembly of Elders. It is assumed that the candidate has been linked to a specific region through his involvement with Sovereign Grace.

9.8.1 The Regional Church Planting Committee will use their guidelines and best practices document to conduct a full assessment of the candidate's character and compatibility with our theology, mission, values, and polity (cf. BCO-13.2.5.2). They will submit their assessment and recommendations to the Regional Leader.

9.8.2 The Regional Ordination Committee will assess the doctrine of the candidate elder. The Ordination Committee will make a recommendation to the Regional Assembly of Elders for or against the transfer of each elder's ordination status. The Regional Ordination Committee may recommend to the Regional Assembly of Elders that the elder fulfill the Sovereign Grace Ordination Standards and exams if it judges this prudent.

9.8.3. The elder candidate will sign these two statements as an expression of his commitment to the doctrine and polity of Sovereign Grace:

Affirmation of the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith

I declare sincerely before God that I believe that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith fully agree with the Scriptures, and I own that Statement as the statement and

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confession of my faith. These are doctrines I promise to teach and defend in public and in private. I promise further that if in the future I come to have reservations about any of these doctrines, I will share these reservations with my eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

Submission to the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order

If ordained I will submit to the explicitly mandated polity practices of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order. I affirm that the form of government contained in the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order is a wise and suitable application of Scriptural principles.

If the elder candidate has any reservations about or takes any exceptions to these two statements, he must communicate these in writing to the Regional Leader and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

These reservations and/or exceptions will be investigated by the Regional Ordination Committee, who will then make a recommendation to the Regional Assembly of Elders about whether these are trivial semantic scruples acceptable among elders or substantive differences that warrant a rejection of the ordination transfer.

9.8.4 The Regional Assembly of Elders receives from the Regional Leader the relevant reports from the regional committees regarding the elder candidate 30 days prior to taking a vote on the candidate. Once these are received the Regional Assembly can vote on whether to transfer the elder's ordination into Sovereign Grace or not. A vote by simple majority is required to transfer the ordination.

9.8.5 If the Regional Assembly votes in favor of the ordination transfer, the Regional Leader will notify the Executive Director and send a written copy of the affirmation statements in 9.8.3 to the Regional Leader and the Executive Director.

9.8.6 After the vote by the Regional Assembly, the elder may be installed for service in a local church through a service modeled after BCO-9.3.7-9.3.9.

AMENDMENT 9

BCO SECTION: 9.3.6.3 et al

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: During the ordination processes, the BCO allows the elder candidate to register exceptions to the Book of Church Order, but does not give sufficient guidance on what to do with those exceptions. It needs to be made clear that exceptions can be made with respect to the Statement of Faith or the BCO and regions need clear

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guidance for how to process the exceptions, with consistent language across relevant sections. This impacts BCO sections 9.3.6.3, 9.6, 13.2.1.6, 13.2.5.4.

APPROVED WORDING:

9.3.6.3 After the candidate has passed the ordination exams, he must affirm in writing the statement below. The candidate will sign two copies of this statement and make two additional photocopies (one signed statement kept by candidate and one sent to Sovereign Grace; one photocopy given to Regional Ordination Committee and one to the Director of Church Development):

“I declare sincerely before God that I believe that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith fully agree with the Scriptures, and I own that Statement as the statement and confession of my faith. These are doctrines I promise to teach and defend in public and in private. I promise further that if in the future I come to have reservations about any of these doctrines, I will share these reservations with my eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

If ordained, I will submit to the explicitly mandated polity practices of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order. I affirm that the form of government contained in the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order is a wise and suitable application of Scriptural principles.”

If the candidate has any reservations about or takes any exceptions to either the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, he must inform his local eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders. These exceptions must be submitted in writing, and each elder's exceptions shall be kept on record with the local eldership, the Regional Assembly of Elders, and Sovereign Grace.

The local eldership shall first investigate the exception before presenting the candidate to the Regional Assembly of Elders. If required the Regional Assembly of Elders shall then determine the significance of the candidate's scruples. If the exception is a trivial semantic scruple and not a substantive difference with any doctrine in the Statement of Faith or explicitly mandated practices in the Book of Church Order, then the candidate may sign the above statements and be put forward for a vote on his ordination. However, if it is determined that the candidate substantially disagrees with any of the doctrines of the Statement of Faith or any explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, he may not be approved for ordination. The Ordination Committee shall recommend to him a course of study on the relevant doctrines and principles, if the candidate is willing, in the hopes that his scruples might be overcome.

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9.6 Taking New Exceptions to the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order.

Any time that an elder registers new exceptions to the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, the Regional Assembly must examine them and rule upon them as described in BCO-9.3.6.

13.2.1.6 As per BCO-9.7, when a Sovereign Grace elder from outside the Region is called to serve at a local church within the Region, the Regional Assembly of Elders must review the elder's exceptions to the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order and determine their significance.

13.2.5.4 Role of the Regional Ordination Committee: The Regional Ordination Committee, facilitated by the Regional Leader, will assess the doctrine of the candidate church elders. The elder(s) of the candidate church must be reviewed for transfer and confirmation of ordination by the Ordination Committee. The Ordination Committee will make a recommendation to the Regional Assembly of Elders for or against the transfer of each elder's ordination status. The Regional Ordination Committee may recommend to the Regional Assembly of Elders that the elder(s) of the candidate church pass the Sovereign Grace Ordination Standards and Exams if it judges this prudent. The candidate church elder(s) must each sign the following statements:

"I declare sincerely before God that I believe that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Sovereign Grace Statement of Faith fully agree with the Scriptures, and I own that Statement as the statement and confession of my faith. These are doctrines I promise to teach and defend in public and in private. I promise further that if in the future I come to have reservations about any of these doctrines, I will share these reservations with my eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

If ordained, I will submit to the explicitly mandated polity practices of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order. I affirm that the form of government contained in the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order is a wise and suitable application of Scriptural principles."

If the candidate has any reservations about or takes any exceptions to either the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices of the Book of Church Order, he must inform his local eldership and the Regional Assembly of Elders. These exceptions must be submitted in writing, and each elder's exceptions shall be kept on record with the local eldership, the Regional Assembly of Elders, and Sovereign Grace.

The local eldership shall first investigate the exception before presenting the candidate to the Regional Assembly of Elders. The Regional Assembly of Elders shall determine the significance of the candidate's scruples. If the exception is a

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trivial semantic scruple and not a substantive difference with any doctrine in the Statement of Faith or explicitly mandated practice in the Book of Church Order, then the candidate may sign the above statements and be put forward for a vote on his ordination. However, if it is determined that the candidate substantially disagrees with any of the doctrines of the Statement of Faith or the explicitly mandated practices in the Book of Church Order, he may not be approved for ordination. The Ordination Committee shall recommend to him a course of study on the relevant doctrines and principles, if the candidate is willing, in the hopes that his scruples might be overcome.

The report of the Committee, which will include the recommendations of the Regional Ordination Committee, the signed statements from the candidate elder(s), and any exceptions discovered in this process, will be delivered to the Regional Leader and the Regional Church Planting Committee.

AMENDMENT 10

BCO SECTION: 12.2 (added after 12.1)

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: While the BCO assumes membership, it does not specifically require a formal membership. This could result in a Sovereign Grace church that does not keep a formal membership, creating challenges regarding the care of church members. Someone in discipline could rightly claim s/he is not a member.

APPROVED WORDING:

12.2 Official Membership

12.2.1 In accordance with the teaching of Scripture, converts to the church universal are added to a particular local church (Acts 2:41). It is within the context of that local church that they submit to specific local elders, who watch over their souls and must give an account (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:3).

12.2.2 The identification of a believer with a specific local church and eldership requires a defined local membership. As a result, each Sovereign Grace church will actively maintain an official membership to which new members are added when they willingly join.

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AMENDMENT 11

BCO SECTION: 13.1.4 (Add two subsections to the current 13.1.4)

INTRODUCED BY: Leadership Team

RATIONALE:

When we transitioned to our new polity regional lines were drawn based on (a) existing regions and (b) common sense state lines. This map was approved by the Executive Committee in 2013. However, there will be times when it makes sense either geographically or relationally for a church in a city in one region to be in another region. The BCO is currently unclear regarding a church switching regions:

BCO 13.1.4 – “Any realignment of a Region or additions to Regions must be approved by a majority vote of the pastors within the current region.”

Does the current region mean the one that is gaining a church/city by the realignment or the one that is losing one?

Germane to the proposed amendment is the role of the Director of Church Development as defined in BCO-18.3.4.3, "To coordinate activities and ministry between Regions"

APPROVED WORDING OF SUB-SECTIONS:

BCO 13.1.4.1 An existing church or a church in an area where a plant or adoption is being proposed or is in process may switch regions by a simple majority vote of both Regional Assembly of Elders involved. The appropriate Leadership Team member will work with the respective Regional Leaders prior to any vote to facilitate such transfers.

BCO 13.1.4.2 Transfers of areas and/or churches from one region to another will be restricted to areas which border the region receiving that area.

AMENDMENT 12

BCO SECTIONS: 13.2.5.1; 13.2.5.6

INTRODUCED BY: Executive Committee

RATIONALE: The present BCO specifies shared responsibility for coordination of the adoption process between 3 standing regional committees and the Regional Leader. This confuses the roles played in the process and doesn't distinguish between coordination and evaluation. In at least one situation this has contributed to confusion

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at RAE meetings during an adoption vote. The proposed amendment seeks to clarify that the RCPC, RJRC and ROC have responsibility for evaluation, and positions the Regional leader on point for coordinating those activities and in communication between the parties of the process.

CURRENT WORDING:

13.2.5.1 Overview: The Regional Leader, the Regional Church Planting Committee, the Regional Ordination Committee, and the Regional Judicial Review Committee, have the joint responsibility to coordinate church adoptions according to the guidelines of The Book of Church Order.

13.2.5.6 Reports to the Regional Assembly of Elders: The Regional Church Planting Committee will gather the assessment reports of the Regional Church Planting Committee, the Regional Ordination Committee, and the Regional Judicial Review Committee and then submit these to the Regional Assembly of Elders. These must be submitted at least 30 days prior to a vote on the ordination(s) and adoption of the candidate church.

APPROVED WORDING

13.2.5.1 Overview: The Regional Church Planting Committee, the Regional Ordination Committee, and the Regional Judicial Review Committee, have the joint responsibility to ensure that a church and eldership being recommended for adoption in a region conforms to the guidelines of *The Book of Church Order*. The Regional Leader will take responsibility to coordinate the work of the committees and in communication between the candidate church and the region and its committees.

13.2.5.6 Reports to the Regional Assembly of Elders: The Regional Leader will gather the assessment reports of the Regional Church Planting Committee, the Regional Ordination Committee, and the Regional Judicial Review Committee and then submit these to the Regional Assembly of Elders. These must be submitted *at least 30 days prior to a vote on the ordination(s) and adoption of the candidate church*.

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AMENDMENT 13

BCO SECTION: 13.2.7.1.e

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: Current regional budgets warrant the assistance and accountability provided by a Regional Budget Committee to the Regional Leader and the Regional Assembly of Elders.

APPROVED WORDING:

13.2.7.1.e Regional Budget Committee (at least three members): Assists the Regional Leader in proposing and presenting a yearly budget to the Regional Assembly of Elders for discussion and a vote of affirmation. Affirmation requires a simple majority. This committee will follow best practices established in cooperation with the Leadership Team. The term of service for this committee is three years. There are no limitations on the number of terms that an elder may serve. If a committee member resigns his position or is removed from his position, then, after recommendations from the Regional Nominating Committee, the Regional Assembly will elect another elder to serve the remainder of the term as needed.

AMENDMENT 14

BCO SECTION: 18.4.1.4; 15.2.1

INTRODUCED BY: Jon Payne, Nick Swan, Aaron Law

RATIONALE: The proposed change would allow the Executive Director to delegate the role of Chair of the CoE to someone else. Right now, we have an Executive Director that does a great job chairing the CoE. There may be elders who could serve Sovereign Grace well as an executive director who are not best suited as a Chair. Right now the BCO requires that the Executive Director be the Chair and this would allow flexibility at his discretion.

CURRENT WORDING:

15.2.1 The dates will be suggested by the Executive Director (the Moderator of the Council of Elders) based on the most amenable date for the next Pastors Conference....

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18.4.1.4 Serve as moderator for the Council of Elders, overseeing official meetings and coordinating all its key functions;

APPROVED WORDING:

15.2.1 The dates will be suggested by the Executive Director based on the most amenable date for the next Pastors Conference....

18.4.1.4 Serve as Chair for the Council of Elders, overseeing official meetings and coordinating all its key functions. He may temporarily appoint a Special Chair of his choosing to serve in his stead;

AMENDMENT 15

BCO SECTION: 1.13 (a new section, to be added after 1.12)

INTRODUCED BY: Jon Payne, Nick Swan, Aaron Law

RATIONALE: We currently don't have a statement in our BCO that succinctly defines the philosophical purpose of the BCO and what it is intended to accomplish. As a result, confusion exists among the elders in Sovereign Grace. For example, some elders think in terms of doing only what the BCO permits and others of having freedom to do whatever the BCO doesn't prohibit. All elders have committed to "submit without exception to the explicitly mandated polity practices of the Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order" (BCO-9.3.6.3), but that has taken different forms. This amendment is intended to clarify the philosophical purpose of our BCO in a way that promotes leadership among Sovereign Grace elders so they have the freedom to apply biblical wisdom and do whatever the BCO doesn't prohibit in a way that promotes and strengthens our shared values and mission.

Additionally, how one defines the philosophical purpose of the BCO affects the kinds of amendments made to it. In recent years many amendments have been written to give permission (Example: Last year we granted the Leadership Team the ability to make committees and teams; cf. 18.4.10). If the BCO must give permission to functions within Sovereign Grace then we will be regularly adding such allowances in the form of amendments. But if, "subscription to the *Book of Church Order* requires elders to comply with what it explicitly mandates and refrain from what it explicitly forbids," as this amendment states, then we don't need amendments that grant permission.

APPROVED WORDING:

A new BCO-1.13 which says the following:

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The Book of Church Order defines the structure and key values of our gospel partnership together in Sovereign Grace Churches. Subscription to *The Book of Church Order* requires elders to comply with what it explicitly mandates and refrain from what it explicitly forbids, while operating in Biblical wisdom according to Sovereign Grace values in all other matters. *The Book of Church Order* does not provide detailed direction for every action we take in the normal course of our life together, but it does provide values that guide us and specific direction for some crucial decision points.

AMENDMENT 16

BCO SECTION: 12.3

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: Given the significance of issues connected to marriage, it seems important to add clear language in our most important policy document about it. This does not cover all issues connected to marriage, many of which are covered by the Statement of Faith. Instead, it seeks to draw a clear line about marriage ceremonies.

APPROVED WORDING:

12.3 Solemnization of Marriage

12.3.1 Marriage is an institution ordained of God though not a sacrament of the church.

12.3.2 Marriage is a covenant between one man and one woman.

12.3.3 No Sovereign Grace Church or its elders may endorse gender changes, nor approve or officiate same sex marriages or unions, nor polygamous marriages or unions.

AMENDMENT 17

BCO SECTION: 15.4.2.1 (and other sections referring to *Robert's Rules of Order*)

INTRODUCED BY: Jon Payne, Nick Swan, Aaron Law

RATIONALE:

In the four years that we have been using Robert's Rules, it seems that they are not best suited for our assembly. While they provide a framework for democratic process, they seem unnecessarily complex and they stifle the voices which are most needed to help guide our family of churches into the future. Here are some

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of the benefits we see to adopting *The Modern Rules of Order*:

- *The Modern Rules of Order* are simpler than *Robert's Rules of Order*. They are a short 59 pages in comparison to the 716 pages of *Robert's Rules*. The language used is more common sense language.
- *The Modern Rules of Order* accentuate the leadership role of the Executive Director, inviting his voice into our deliberations, where as *Robert's Rules* requires him to be remain impartial.
- For those who are put off or confused by *Robert's Rules*, this change could encourage more of our elders to participate in debate and conversation.

The Modern Rules of Order provide a simpler framework for the CoE to continue making decisions in a democratic fashion. Consider how this might look when it comes time to amend the *Book of Church Order*.

- The Chair would signal that the CoE is now considering ammendments to the BCO. A formal motion would not be required to discuss and or even debate (Rules 9-10).
- The Chair would, "*assure sufficient discussion and consideration of issues so that all pertinent points of view are considered*" (Rule 8).
 - The Chair could allow someone to speak multiple times if he thought it would be most beneficial to the discussion.
 - The Chair could speak to the issue or invite someone to speak who he thinks has input on the matter at hand.
 - The Chair might recognize that most are in favor and therefore call only for those who are opposed to speak.
- When it comes time to vote, the Chair or any member of the Council would then propose a motion to be voted on (Rule 10).
- The Chair would then move the CoE to vote at his discretion. Any Council member who thinks that the Chair closed debate too soon could motion to extend the limits of debate (Rules 1, 12).

The Chair has authority to conduct the meeting, while any member of the Council may appeal by simple vote (Rule 1). In this way the meeting would have a more natural feel going at a pace that the Chair deems is in the best interest of the CoE.

CURRENT WORDING:

15.4.2.1 All Council of Elders meetings will be governed by the *Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order* and the most recent edition of the *Robert's Rules of Order*

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except where the *Roberts Rules of Order* is inconsistent with the *Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order*.

APPROVED WORDING:

15.4.2.1 All Council of Elders meetings will be governed by the *Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order* and the most recent edition of *The Modern Rules of Order* except where *The Modern Rules of Order* is inconsistent with the *Sovereign Grace Book of Church Order*.

AMENDMENT 18

BCO SECTION: 20.3

INTRODUCED BY: Polity Committee

RATIONALE: There should be general principles about what happens when a church within Sovereign Grace dissolves or separates. Further, in special circumstances it seems that a Regional Assembly should be able to separate a church that is no longer viable (i.e., not a church plant but a church in extreme decline). Because the Regional Assembly is responsible for admitting a church into Sovereign Grace, it is also necessary that the Regional Assembly be responsible for determining the status of a church when it departs from Sovereign Grace.

APPROVED WORDING:

20.3 When local church elder(s) and the Regional Leader agree that an existing Sovereign Grace church should be dissolved, the Regional Leader or his delegate shall make a recommendation to the Regional Assembly of Elders regarding the potential dissolution of a church within the region.

20.3.1 In order for a local church to be dissolved, the Regional Assembly of Elders must affirm by a two-thirds vote.

20.3.2 In the event a local church is dissolved, the Regional Leader should ensure the Regional Assembly of Elders is extending care to the elder(s) of the dissolving church.

20.3.3 When it has been decided that a local church will be dissolved, the elder(s) should provide a 60-day notice to the members of the local church that intends to dissolve. During this time, the local elders should assist members with their transition to another church.

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20.3.4 The dissolution of local church assets must be in accord with the local church bylaws and civil law.

20.3.5 The Region Assembly of Elders and Sovereign Grace Churches have no rights to the assets of a dissolving church unless it is gifted by the local church elder(s) and the dissolution is in accordance with state law and the local church bylaws.